Eating Out
Relations between Spaces and Food

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   The way we work forces us to use canteens, self-service restaurants, bars. The way we spend our free time means we use pizzerias, wine bars, restaurants, *osterias*. Sometimes we travel in search of a particular restaurant because of a review by a renowned food blogger. Eating out is a quick and easy way of consuming our food, be it as a social practice, a way of spending free time or an all-encompassing life experience. Whatever the motivations, however frequently we do it, no matter what kind of establishment we visit, the fact remains that a dinner or lunch eaten out has become a fairly deep-rooted habit for many of us. We often end up growing fond of the places we choose to visit, because we partly identify with them, and because they identify us.

   In this chapter we will attempt to investigate the diverse world of restaurants from a particular perspective: that of spatiality. It is, in fact, the initial way in which the restaurant's environment is perceived that leads customers to anticipate a particular kind of restaurant. It is this first impression that either encourages them to stop, or makes them want to leave. If I visit a restaurant where the tables are very close together, the tablecloth is checked with large white

and red squares, there is a wine bottle standing on the table and the cutlery is placed in a heap at the centre, I can assume I am in an *osteria*, a place that aims to create an informal, unassuming ambiance and whose spartan décor almost functions as a guarantee of the food's quality, not to mention its low price. If I find myself in a restaurant where the tables are set far apart, the cutlery is silver and the tablecloth is damask, I can assume I am in a high-quality restaurant where I will be able to taste sought-after dishes and pay a high price for the privilege. These are, of course, rather banal examples but they help us intuitively understand how space can be a real language capable of communicating.

In this chapter we will consider how spaces devoted to the consumption of food are structured, and how their articulation tells us a great deal about the chef, their way of understanding food culture, the potential customers and their interests. The restaurant's location, the way in which its entrance is structured, the layout of the tables inside it, the way it is decorated and its *mise en place*, the relationship between dining space and kitchen: none of these things are exclusively aesthetic choices, they are also ways in which the spaces speak about the food philosophy that lies behind them.

1 HOW THE RESTAURANT WAS BORN

Restaurants are generally places open to the public, visited by those willing to pay in exchange for a meal. Within them move a number of actors (maître, chef, waiters, sous-chefs, dishwashers, customers), various objects are present (tables, chairs, cutlery, crockery, kitchen equipment), and different zones are designated for carrying out particular functions (entrance, dining area, kitchen, payment area, possible smoking area, toilets). The restaurant, as we know it today, is, in other words, a complex device orchestrated to offer a gastronomic experience, in which spaces, subjects and objects interact. But this has not always been the case. Before entering into our investigation into how a restaurant is constructed today, we would do well to take a step back and briefly consider its history.

The first meals eaten out of the house, which we can date back to Roman times, were the result of practical demands by men who, because of their work, had to stay away from their place of residence for some days at a time. During their time away, these travellers tended to eat in taverns and inns where they would also often spend the night. So it would seem a kind of proto-business travel helped found the modern restaurant, though its early characteristics were very different to the ones we recognise today. The first customers would choose from a fixed menu at a fixed price, and they ate their meals with strangers, on benches or at shared tables. Even when it became more common in Europe for people of the area (and not just travellers) to frequent these places in order to eat, they were crowded, chaotic and loud. Women were barred and, in France at least,

these taverns were often controlled by corporations (innkeepers, butchers, bakers, etc.) who had a monopoly on the distribution of certain foods.

The official birth of the modern restaurant in Europe is usually dated at the French Revolution, which had the effect (among others) of leaving chefs without work, who up until that point had been employed by the nobility. Chefs at that time had to reinvent themselves, and they decided to go out into the world, opening spaces for a discerning clientele. With the passing of time, the variety of dishes on offer grew, the habit of paying a price that reflected what had been consumed (rather than a fixed price) became common, and the tables were assigned to groups of acquaintances. The birth and diffusion of the restaurant is linked to myriad reasons, some predating the Revolution, in step with social and economic changes, changes in production (the establishment of the middle classes, the birth of shops, the experimentation with new forms of cultivation, etc.), changes that paved the way for the establishment of the modern restaurants that gradually spread throughout France in the second half of the 1700s and the first part of the 1800s. And even before the Revolution, the chef Boulanger opened a public house that offered his customers ‘*bouillons restaurants*’, hot broths that would ‘restore’ the customers.

So, from those first taverns and inns — simple, informal, with few airs and graces, created for clients with specific practical demands (travellers far from home who needed to eat) —, we move progressively towards a real restaurant, a more structured space that gradually shakes off the characteristics of a commercial exercise in order to take on those traits typical of noble domestic environments (large mirrors on the walls, chandeliers, quality crockery). The first restaurants of this kind were often characterised by a standardised style, aimed at enticing people (for the first time, women are also permitted) ready to spend money on both a gastronomic experience and a public declaration of their social status.

Since then, the restaurant market has expanded even further, enriching itself and transforming over time, with the kinds of restaurants on offer multiplying and diversifying, becoming hyper-specialised in the food they offer (oriental, Thai, Chinese, French), in the kind of consumption they offer (lounge bars for drinks, self-service for quick lunches, bakeries for appetising snacks), and in the kind of dietary needs they meet (vegetarian, gluten-free, and so on). Today there is such a broad offering that any attempt to catalogue all kinds of restaurant becomes an almost impossible exercise.

2 OUTSIDE

A restaurant's communication begins with its location. Establishments placed outside the urban context, for example, require an effort to be made by the customer in order to eat there, whilst at the same involving the customer by stimulating in them a sense of discovery and surprise. Conversely,

establishments in town and city centres, perhaps with outside tables, encroach on our vision, they call out to the customer, who might choose to stop there simply because they happened to be passing. Places like this become places of spectacle where you can watch what is happening around you whilst being watched by passers by. Similarly, a McDonald's located inside an airport aims to entice travellers on the move, whilst one located next to a city's major tourist attractions is aimed at travellers who intend to visit the area. The same restaurant, with the same kind of décor, the same gastronomic offering, takes on different meanings depending on the wider context in which it is situated and, by so doing, appeals to different kinds of customers. In other words, a restaurant's location is one of the primary indicators of what that place wants to tell us. It is one of the first ways in which the restaurant owner is able to build up their client base. It is clear that the choice of one location over another is due to several, varied factors, but it is also true that, whether they are taken consciously or otherwise, these decisions have rather pronounced communicatory effects. Location can then be emphasised or masked by other elements. There are 'shouty' signs, large and illuminated, that aim to attract attention perhaps from a certain distance (these play a classic function in calling out to customers). Other signs are chameleon-like, almost blending in with the environment in which they are displayed and camouflaging the establishment's existence, they show a certain indifference towards whether or not they are seen, as if speaking to a restricted circle of customers, those who know and recognise that barely visible place.

Another crucial element is the entrance, a fundamental area of passage that marks out the boundaries of the gastronomic experience, which begins as soon as the threshold is crossed and ends the minute the customer leaves. It distinguishes the inside from the outside, the urban space from that of the restaurant. Let's look at a number of Michelin-starred restaurants by way of example. Here, crossing the threshold means passing from normality (that of everyday life) to the exceptional (the experience that is about to be had). This passage, however, can be marked out in very different ways. *El celler de can roca*, named the second best restaurant in the world in 2018, greets its customers with a wall made of large strips of wood in which the entrance is hidden (fig. 1). The limit of the outside world is strongly demarcated and the inside of the restaurant is invisible from the street. This way of understanding the space cannot help but emphasise the exclusive nature of the establishment, seducing and piquing curiosity on the one hand ("I wonder what that restaurant is like inside"), but at the same risking putting potential clients off ("It's so exclusive it's almost too much"). Conversely, the prevalence of transparent surfaces at the *Madonnina del Pescatore* in Senigallia demonstrates an open restaurant, one that wants to be seen, effectively abolishing the separation between the inside and the outside (fig. 2). The

customer is reassured by the fact that they can already have a good idea of what to expect when they go in from outside. However, this can backfire as they might be irritated by the fact that they will be watched as they eat by passers-by. There are also intermediary examples. For instance, the partial barrier in Paris' *L'Astrance* allows you to take a peek at the restaurant's dining area (fig. 3); the frosted glass obscures the inside of the *Osteria Francescana*, but not entirely, so that from the street it is possible to make out outlines and movements inside (fig. 4). In this way the restaurant judged to be the best in the world in 2018 seduces and intrigues, showing shadows and silhouettes but not actually revealing anything happening inside to the gaze of the passer-by. There is not, therefore, a single winning recipe for organising a restaurant entrance (otherwise they would all be the same!), but a multiplicity of possible solutions, each with its own pros and cons, each one associated with different communicative effects on potential customers. Each restaurant pursues different strategies, constructing their own identity not least through the way in which they differentiate themselves from potential competitors.

Fig. 1. (on the left) El celler de can roca, entrance
Fig.3. (on the left) Madonnina del Pescatore, entrance
Fig. 2. (on the left) L'Astrance, entrance
Fig.4. (on the right) Osteria Francescana, entrance

3. INSIDE

When we observe a space, and therefore also when we observe a restaurant, it is always worth asking ourselves: what communicates the fact that this space has been conceived and articulated in this way? What effects does it produce? This is what we have done in the previous section, in our consideration of the various ways of separating/ connecting the restaurant's external and internal spaces, and it is a consideration that we can make once more with regards to the play on visibility created between kitchen and dining area.

Today, we increasingly find restaurants that expose the customer to the place where the dishes are being prepared. We can therefore ask ourselves: what effects of meaning does a restaurant with an open kitchen produce? It gives us the idea that whoever has created that space wants to highlight the care and hygiene standards involved in preparing the food (transparency becomes both a visual and a 'moral' trait). At the same time, it brings to mind a curious customer who enjoys participating (even simply with their gaze) in the food's preparation. Furthermore, in these cases cooking becomes a moment of exhibition, a sort of 'show-cooking', to which we have become accustomed thanks to television programmes dedicated to food. The chef, on the other hand, becomes a performer who demonstrates their culinary abilities for all to see, an artist who brings their work and the dressing of the plate to life in a spectacular way.

Other restaurants, instead, continue to prefer the more traditional solution of keeping the kitchen and the dining area separate. A spatial configuration of this kind aims to hide, as if part of a magical ritual, the cooking process and creation of the dishes, preferring the surprise involved in revealing the plate to the customer. Cooking becomes a behind the scenes activity, in which perhaps, at the end of the dinner, the chef will come out to talk to the diners. Not unlike choreographers at the end of a ballet, directors at the end of a play, or designers at the end of a catwalk show, the star chef comes out of their own space (the kitchen) at the end of the meal, to take responsibility for what has taken place. The chef is there to receive compliments from the customer, but also to confirm that what has taken place in a fluid and natural way up until that point is, in fact, the result of complex direction and editing. The meal, with its rhythms, its alternating dishes, its contrasting flavours, its wine pairings, has in reality been carefully orchestrated by the chef and brought to life by the restaurant 'cast', who have followed their orders.

Again there is no lack of intermediary solutions. McDonald's, for example, has a 'semi-screened' kitchen that can be partially seen, but not fully observed. In some restaurants there are television screens in the dining area that stream images directly from the kitchen, once more aiming for an effect of spectacularisation, creating a sort of culinary reality show. At the opposite end of the spectrum is a recent trend among a

number of Michelin-starred restaurants: a single table in the kitchen, which the chef can choose to assign to one or more customers. This is a 'privileged' position from which the customer can watch the star-chef of the moment at work, live and up close. An extraordinary experience that is not available to just anyone. The chef decides whether or not, how much and to whom they will show themselves, demonstrating their power and confirming how precious their work is, a privilege that is not for the enjoyment of the many but that is 'given' to those who, for some unknown reason, deserve it. Eating in the kitchen also allows the customer not simply to observe the 'creation' of the dishes, but to recreate a familiar setting even in a place that is usually formal.

All restaurants base their work on the coordination of these two spaces: the dining area and the kitchen. Once rigidly separated, today, as we have seen, they are increasingly hybrid, both at home and in restaurants, and in television programmes (CFR: CAP:????). *Hell's Kitchen* reveals everything that goes on behind the scenes in a restaurant; *Masterchef* and many others illustrate the processes that go into preparing the dishes. In modern houses the kitchen space is increasingly found at the centre of the living space. Unlike in the past, the kitchen has now become something to be seen, if not flaunted. Over time, we have seen an almost complete inversion of means and ends, and, consequently, a re-modelling of the spaces traditionally associated with it, as well as a parallel reconsideration of the role of the chef. Cooking is no longer a way to provide another person with a gastronomic experience, but has become a performance in itself. The kitchen is no longer a place of preparation, the remote space in which manual work is carried out, but a real organisational linchpin, the fulcrum and centre (both physical and metaphorical) of the experience. The cook is not the helper who places their abilities at the service of the customer, but a star-chef, a subject/protagonist. In short, the relationship between what happens behind the scenes and onstage is, in a certain sense, turned on its head, so that the theatricality increasingly lies not in the meal but in its preparation, a practice that inevitably passes from the private sphere into the public one.

4 IDENTITY, VALUES, PASSIONS

We must make it clear that the choices to reveal the kitchen or screen it, to opt for a glass entrance or one that does not allow any glimpse of the restaurant's interior, to use one material rather than another, are not positive or negative in themselves. They are stylistic choices that should be examined and evaluated one by one, according to their specific case. Every architectural choice will become a defining characteristic of a given place if it manages to be successfully incorporated with the establishment's other features, if it is capable of transmitting values and meaning that are compatible with the restaurant's identity, and able to communicate the chef's cu-

linary philosophy. If one wants to plan a restaurant with its own concept of cooking and its own coherent theme, it becomes fundamental to understand if and how the gastronomic discourse and the spatial discourse reference one another and are capable of finding an equilibrium: a well planned restaurant space is one in which the architecture anticipates the food, without overpowering it, and vice versa — a well designed dish is one that integrates well with (and invokes) the place in which it is served. If, for example, the restaurant wants to be seen as an informal space, and wants to communicate an idea of cooking linked to socialising, it would work well to have a 'social table', a table where groups of people who do not know each other can sit together. In these cases, the dishes can become a pretext for speaking to one another, perhaps helping to form social relationships. If, on the contrary, the restaurant intends to propose an intimate atmosphere, perfect for a romantic meal, it would be better to offer small tables set well apart, perhaps accompanied by soft lighting.

It is generally important then, both in analytical and planning terms, to identify those traits that best represent the identity of the restaurant and that guarantee it a certain level of coherence. In the Armani restaurant in Dubai, the minimalist architecture and furnishings are entirely in keeping with the equally elegant dishes on offer (fig. 5). Space and food combined reference a classical aesthetic that refuses excess in the name of sobriety, typical of and coherent with the values that have always been embraced by the Armani brand. Conversely, on cruise ships customers are usually immersed in sumptuous, richly decorated environments that integrate equally well with the abundance of dishes on offer, often laid out as a buffet in an explosion of colours and variety (fig. 6). In this case, an opposite logic of addition, of abundance, is pursued, typical of a baroque aesthetic.

Fig. 5. The Armani restaurant (Dubai).   **Fig. 6.** Food on cruises.

It is also interesting to explore how food and space work together to communicate particular passions. On one hand are places that embrace an aesthetic of nostalgia, with traditional décor and typical dishes that celebrate, in somewhat rhetorical

terms, an emphasis on the past, a past that is by definition supposedly authentic and genuine, just like the dishes on offer. On the other hand, we find an opposite aesthetic that looks to the future and is based around avant-garde furnishings, and unusual and innovative dishes that aim to astonish the customer. This is the case with *Aurum*, a restaurant in Singapore that is very clearly inspired a medical environment, with its prevalence of aluminium surfaces (reminiscent of operating theatres) and wheelchairs instead of normal ones (fig. 7). Here, the dishes on offer are inspired by molecular gastronomy, a form of cooking where the dishes are prepared according to the principles of physics and chemistry. The food, much like the décor, suggests a 'scientific' world. The spatial and culinary discourses once more reflect one another, producing a clear coherence. If nostalgia harks back to the past, celebrating tradition, astonishment looks to the future, focussing entirely on modernity. The resulting customers are radically different. In the first case, the client will be interested in safeguarding typical dishes (cfr. Cap ??) and characterised by food neophobia, whilst in the second case we will have an enthusiastic adventurous eater, characterised by a certain neophilia. Also, while the emphasis on a hyper-artificial and culturalised food preparation process seems to be driven, as with *Aurum*, by loading the space with objects and décor that emphasise the artifice, at the other extreme, a restaurant such as *Noma* — former world number one and renowned for its culinary philosophy inspired by minimal human intervention and maximum respect for natural ingredients — presents us with an extremely simple environment, dominated by natural materials such as wood and where tables are not set with tablecloths (fig. 8). In short, there is minimal intervention in both the space and the dishes.

A search for balance between flavours (tradition) or experimentation with outlandish pairings (innovation), a combination in which fusion prevails or an exhibition of marked contrasts, a desire to either surprise or confirm expectations. There are many diverse trends in the contemporary world of gastronomy that, if coherently translated, give rise to expert analogies between the discourses of food and space, analogies that contribute to the creation of authentic brands, where the chefs, and even the brands themselves, are the testimonials.

Fig. 7. Aurum   **Fig. 8.** Noma

5. TIME TO TASTE

One criteria that is particularly useful when it comes to classifying restaurants is that linked to temporality/aspectuality, as the dimensions of space and time are closely bound. In this sense we can distinguish between those spaces, singulatives, visited occasionally, and those, iteratives, which, in a certain sense, articulate the passing of time because they are visited more or less constantly (for example, a workplace canteen).

Meals eaten out (and the spaces associated with these) articulate the various phases of the day: you have breakfast in the same coffee shop every morning and this signals an inchoative moment, the phase of the beginning of a new day; you go to the usual canteen for lunch, for a meal that differentiates the morning work time from that of the afternoon; you often go to a tea room in the afternoon, marking a moment of rest; you go to a bar for a drink to find yourself in a terminative phase, after work. Conversely, there are places whose fundamental characteristic is precisely that of being open all day, as is the case with street food, typically consumed from morning until night.

There are spaces that we could call interstitial, like a bar located on along a main road where the practice of eating, considered simply a means to an end, is subordinate to another more important objective (reaching a destination). There are also prioritary spaces, which become the aim of our action, and other practices often revolve around these (like when you take a journey in order to visit a particular winery, a particular chef, and so on).

Even the temporality of consumption radically changes depending on the kind of restaurant involved: some places are set up for a long stay, others expect any visits to be brief. The former is the case with those restaurants, often those offering haute cuisine, where we go to 'taste', to savour good food and a good atmosphere. Time here is dilated, just as the environments themselves can be (the density of bodies diminishes), care is taken over details in order to put the customer at ease. The latter, however, we find with those bars where there are no seats or in which tables are nothing more than something to lean on. Usually we visit these places in order to grab something to eat, something to 'wolf down', to satisfy a need for nutrition when we are pushed for time and unable, as such, to pay attention to the quality of the food or the space.

6 CULINARY CULTURES AND SPATIAL SETTINGS

Debates on the globalisation of taste, on what typical dishes are, on how to identify culinary traditions are very much *de rigueur* (cfr. Chap. ??). With regards to the theme dealt with in this chapter, we can ask ourselves if and how the restaurant's space connects with a particular geographical area. We will consider at least four cases that form a useful typology with which to analyse or plan new restaurant spaces.

On the one hand, we have two cases in which the places openly manifest a bond with a particular territory, and in which the spatial language is strongly pronounced:

The *typicalised* restaurant is one in which space is concerned with reiterating its belonging to a particular culture. Here we find flags, souvenirs, typical objects, characteristic table linen, serving staff dressed in traditional costume and, obviously, a menu made up of traditional local dishes (fig. 9);

The *exoticised* restaurant is that in which belonging to a culture different to our own is emphasised (fig. 10). In these restaurants we might find, for example, multi-coloured awnings that call to mind the *souk* in a Tunisian restaurant, or floor cushions and chopsticks for a Japanese restaurant.

In both cases, we are in fairly traditional positions and find ourselves faced with a space that is excessively full, an almost caricature-like exhibition of elements based on broadly recognised stereotypes (whether their own or those held by others). One thing we should note is that the typical and the exotic do not emerge in opposite terms, as we might expect, but follow the same logic. To define something as typical rather than exotic depends on the perspective of the observer (a Tunisian restaurant in England would be an exotic restaurant, whereas a Tunisian restaurant in Tunisia would be a typical one!).

In other cases, however, any belonging to a particular culture is, in a certain sense, denied: the spatial language in these cases tends not to be defined by territory in order to hide any definite cultural ties:

Globalised restaurants, led by McDonald's, are spaces in which the décor may be neutral, but branding proliferates (fig. 11): those logos are unchanging identifying signs that we find all over the world and that are almost universal symbols (that certainly do not belong to a certain culture). Unchanging spaces, for unchanging dishes that declare the 'global' scope of the place in question.

Glacialised restaurants are instead places in which the space is placed at service of the dishes, with an emphasis on being minimalist, ascetic (fig. 12). There is no attempt here to declare any belonging to the entire world (as with the previous case), but rather a care to neutralise any element that might reveal a bond to a specific place. These are restaurants that could be in New York or Dubai, Beijing or Sydney. Transparency, neutral colours and sobriety characterise these kinds of places.

There are then cases that straddle the two categories: for example, those chains that propose the 'standardisation' of a culture, where the stereotype of the typical becomes a 'global brand' that can be considered both typicalised (local) and globalised. Take the *Fratelli La Bufala* chain. Born as a typical Neapolitan pizzeria, it has become a chain that has spread all over the world. Its spaces are standardised and there is an abundance of logos and emblems that refer to traditional Nea-

politan pizza, and, more generally, being Italian. There are also cases where exoticisation is, as it were, glacialised, softened, as is the case with Japanese restaurants in which there are no explicit references to Japanese culture. In these cases it is as if the space wishes to declare itself beyond the stereotype: signs that refer to the exotic are, in a certain sense, neutralised in favour of an appeal to internationalisation.

Fig. 9. Typicalised restaurant
Fig. 11. Globalised restaurant

Fig. 10. Exoticised restaurant
Fig. 12. Glacialised restaurant

FOCUS 1

Fast Food and Its Evolutions

One of the world's most widespread, as well as the most debated, forms of restaurant are undoubtedly fast food outlets, whose origins date back to the early 1900s in America, but which were consecrated somewhere in the mid-20th century. Fast food derives from the concept of providing a quick, affordable meal. Increasingly pressurised work timetables and the post-war economic boom were undoubtedly fundamental in the expansion of these places, which favour the democratisation of the practice of eating out. They mean that going to a restaurant was no longer exclusively the prerogative of the middle classes, but an accessible, consistent practice.

As we can tell from the name, this kind of restaurant aims to shorten meal times and the space is called upon to support, encourage this objective. Furthermore, the standardisation of the food on offer (almost identical in all outlets) runs parallel to the standardisation of spaces (the same décor, the same cuisine, the same junctures be-

tween the dining area and kitchen). By way of a format, every local version of the *concept* presents a series of recurrent elements. For example, the practice of consumption follows a ritual series of steps: anyone frequenting a fast food restaurants knows they have to queue up, collect their meal, pick up all necessary objects (cutlery, napkins, cups), help themselves to a drink, pay, find somewhere to sit, and so on. The space is meticulously organised, pre-defined, and often planned in such a way as to support this rigid order of sequences.

Fast food restaurants have been the subject of harsh criticism, accused of gaining efficiency through the substitution of human labour with machines (for example, the fryer is programmed in such a way that it turns itself off when the chips are ready), of saving on service costs by making the customer do the work (they have to queue up to order, and empty their trays at the end of their meal). But are we sure that this way of understanding consumption should necessarily be interpreted as a way of constricting and 'exploiting' the end-user? In truth, the opposite may be true: fast food restaurants can be seen as a place where staff and customers activate a form of cooperation in order to ensure a successful eating experience, in a communicative pact based on equality (the customer acts as if they were in their own home and works because they feel at ease in a familiar environment).

Furthermore, only if we interpret the rigidity of the space's organisation as a source of potentially positive value for the client can we explain the success and progressive spread of robotic and automated restaurants, places where there are no serving staff, where meals can be ordered through apps or computers, the dishes arrive at the table thanks to a platform system that connects the dining area to the kitchen, and automated systems provide the bill and allow the customer to pay with their credit card.

Fast food restaurants, historically accused of standardisation, have been adept at reinventing themselves, responding to criticism levelled at them and producing some interesting results. McDonald's increasingly offer menus tailored to local customs, using ingredients with certified provenance, and even offering kosher meals in Jerusalem. Some fast food restaurants have specialised in particular kinds of products suited to particular moments of the day: Dunkin' Donuts, for example, has based its entire business on the sale of doughnuts and drinks, making breakfast a moment of privileged consumption. And we are increasingly seeing the emergence of fast food outlets that aim to redeem themselves name by offering fast but quality food. Here, despite it closed, we must cite Fast Good, the brainchild of the very famous chef, Ferran Adrià, that aimed to combine the logic of fast food with haute cuisine.

FOCUS 2

Spectacular Restaurants

The proliferation of restaurants, the multiplication of possible formats and menus has pushed restaurant owners to keep finding new formulas, often depending on hyper-specific themes in order to attract new customers. This has led to the birth of places where the space tends to be more important than the food: environments that are exceptional, bold, cinematographic, like, for example, those of the Hard Rock Cafès, underwater restaurants, places that have become legendary thanks to films and TV series. If we want to give a few specific examples, we could cite Modern Toilet restaurant in Taiwan (where the seats are made from toilets, the plates are shaped like bedpans, the tables are washbasins and napkins are replaced by rolls of toilet paper), the ABQ bar in London (inspired by the cult TV series Breaking Bad), the A380 in China whose spaces simulate the inside of an aeroplane. Having fun becomes a must, as does focussing on a specific customer who seems to appreciate the extravagant ambiance rather than the taste of the dishes on offer. In these cases, eating well or not does not seem to be as important as having an extravagant and unique experience.

In other examples we find places that do not so much aim for enjoyment but to provoke reflection, but always through the offer of an unusual experience. Just think of the phenomenon of dinners in the dark and the restaurants that offer them. *Dans le noir* is a chain of restaurants where the dinners are held in an entirely dark room. Guests are accompanied by visually impaired waiting staff, and all possible light sources (such as lighters or mobile phones) must be left outside. *Dans le noir* offers an ethical discourse as it pushes the customer to immerse themselves and experience what it is like for the visually impaired, but it also offers an aesthesic discourse that plays on the rhetoric of sensory compensation: obscuring sight in these cases means magnifying the sense of taste, playing on how anaesthetising one sense can cause the hyperesthesia of the others. In these cases, for a limited period of time the customer is projected, catapulted into 'another place', from which they will perhaps return to the 'normal world' altered, precisely because the restaurant has, in a certain sense, forced them to rethink their daily lives.

FOCUS 3

Restaurant-markets and Multifunctional Formats

Restaurants are increasingly not only restaurants but blend their traditional duty (offering a range of different foods to a customer) with other functions. So, there are *osterie* were you can buy the furniture or objects that decorate the space, restaurants where you can buy clothes, bars and Laundromats where you can eat whilst you wait for your washing. If the two functions manage to find a common denominator, then the communicative efficacy of the offer is augmented: for example if an antiques dealer also offers the opportunity to taste vintage wines (here we have the joint promotion of two products — antiques and wine — whose value grows over time), or similarly, if a florist also functions as a tea room.

Very often, the function of restaurant goes well with another function that is in some way connected with food. There are more and more butchers that are becoming restaurants specialising in meat dishes, fishmongers that offer fish-based dishes, delis where gourmet sandwiches can be eaten, and so on. These are places that exploit the myth of contraction: the food chain is shortened (the restaurant and the supplier of raw materials are one and the same), and the effect of meaning is that the functions of the product's authenticity and freshness are consolidated.

In a similar way, another contemporary trend seems to be the re-definition of markets in a restorative sense. In many cities, both European and further afield, places where people would traditionally shop for food have also become places for meeting up and socialising, spaces in which to taste a glass of wine accompanied by a tasty snack, or where a quick yet authentic meal can be enjoyed. Again, the typical characteristics of the market (fresh products, affordable prices) are reflected in the meal, whose value is inevitably increased. It is interesting to note how this process is often set in motion rather spontaneously, tending to crystallise and become institutionalised over time. For example, initially the function of the market prevails, accompanied by the opportunity to consume something on the spot (perhaps very quickly whilst standing). If the practice of going to eat at the market then spreads and takes root, the sellers can think about providing more 'permanent' areas, perhaps with tables and chairs, whilst in the meantime broadening their culinary offer with the addition of slightly more elaborate dishes. When taken to the extreme, this mechanism will lead to places in which the function of the restaurant prevails, with spaces that look increasingly less like markets and more like restaurants.

One such example is *Eataly* (fig. 13), found the world over, which is simply a kind of market conceived as a place with a dual purpose: a place where typically Italian products of quality can be bought and various delicacies can be eaten.

Fig. 13. Eataly, Brazil.