

## **New Nordic Rurality**

### **Enacting terroir as rootless American innovation or soiled European tradition**

In this paper I would like to share some considerations about use of rurality and the nature of value-adding geographical claims made in the US and in Europe. And I would like to propose a crude model for differentiating American and European enactments of terroir based on investigations into the world of cheese.

My 2 cents:

- 1) When considering value-adding geographical claims – enactments of terroir in the US differ from those in EU.
- 2) The US versions seem to gain momentum – also in a New Nordic foodscape.

## **Methodology**

In order to denaturalize geographical terms and biases I wish to evoke a 'performative view' on terroir in which the 'naturally included notions' are "unsettled" and investigated as 'doings', 'enactments' and ongoing accomplishments in practice. So in STS-lingo I wish to deploy a modest post-ANT attitude in which

The natural must be made to look surprising

In my earlier work I have been looking at the multiple ways in which the props and furniture of fictional worlds might be orchestrated. In this work I have found possible world semantics quite helpful.

Possible world theory is both a quite confusing and mindboggling philosophical discourse that centers around modal logic and a more manageable narrative framework used by literary critics in order to address taxonomies of fictional possibilities, notions of literary truth, the nature of fictionality, and the relationship between fictional worlds and reality.

From this vocabulary I have found inspiration to my partition of terroirs.

## **Terroir**

When investigating geographical claims, the polysemic notion of terroir seems ever present and relevant. Historically, terroir refers to a small area or terrain, where soil and microclimate somehow give distinctive, unique and not least unreproducible qualities to food products. Terroir is in particular associated with the production of wine, and might be defined narrowly as the total environment of any viticultural site. However, the term is more frequently taken to reflect volatile or spiritual aspects such as the joys, the heartbreaks, the pride, the sweat, and the frustrations of the land as well as a specific and measurable ecosystem.

As a value-adding marketing label, terroir may enhance a cheese's cultural capital and price per pound through promoting place-based distinctions.

In Europe the European Commission seeks to promote and protect names and quality of agricultural products and foodstuff through – amongst other initiatives – geographical designated labels:

The protected designation of origin (PDO), protected geographical indication (PGI), and traditional specialty guaranteed (TSG).

In the US, notions of terroir seem enacted differently. In general, cheese producers in the United States find the collective European model far too bureaucratic and controlling.

Unfettered by tradition or concern for "old-school" authenticity, U.S. cheese makers enjoy the freedom to "fool around" with milk and novel bacterial cultures.

Where can this be observed?

### **Empirical work**

One place is in the catalogue for the American Cheese Society's annual competition. In 2012 the competition was quite tellingly subtitled: *'Owning our future'*.

From this catalogue we can gather some significant information.

First off - the title strikes a humorous pose and a non-distinguished tone: Cheese Rally in Raleigh. Got it?

Furthermore we learn that more than sixteen hundred cheeses are judged. And that they are divided into 23 genres and 105 subgroups.

2 of these groups are interestingly entitled: American originals and American made / international style.

We also learn that the US cheese community couldn't care less about European protected names such as Feta, Parmesan, and the like. They proudly compete in these disciplines and make absolutely no effort to mask or hide the use of internationally protected labels.

Skipping my intermediate calculations we can establish the following crude model for differentiating European and American enactments of terroir.

### **The model**

When terroir is part of the dairy-strategy in the US, the geographical claims are made with reference to:

When terroir is part of the dairy-strategy in the EU, the geographical claims are made with reference to:

## **US**

Creative non sense names.  
Driven by personal competence.  
No geographical designated labels.  
Trademarked  
Includes enactments of innovation and artisanal skills  
Independent  
No affiliation-initiated control tests  
Highlights labor and stewardship  
Name owned  
Market entrusted quality  
Freestyling

***US slogan "Behind every great cheese stands a great cheese producer".***

When terroir is part of the dairy-strategy in the EU, the geographical claims are made with reference to:

## **EU**

Geographically recognizable names.  
Community driven effort  
Geographical designated labels.  
No trademarks.  
Includes enactments of tradition and history  
Highly regulated  
Synchronized affiliation-initiated tests  
Highlights the nature of pasture, soil and microclimate  
Name attributed  
Government entrusted quality  
Traditional

***EU slogan "Underneath every great cheese is a great soil"***

To sum up: US terroir rests on manmade innovation while EU rests on traditional soil!

I find that if you are to unfold these different geographical claims – possible world theory can come I handy.

## **Possible World Theory**

Possible world theory deals with the constituents of narrative worlds. One of the fundamental tools in the possible world theory toolbox is modal restrictions. With this tool we can consider what kind of restrictions are dominant in fictional worlds.

So – and this is the key to what I have called a possible world induced STS-attitude - if we think of the geographical claims as narrative world creating enactments we can utilize the modal vocabulary from PWT. I believe that the following 2 modalities are central to geographical claims

- 1. Alethic modalities: possibility, impossibility, and necessity**
- 2. Deontic modalities: permission, prohibition, and obligation**

I find that geographical claims in the US version in general highlight alethic modalities.

In the US a positive deviation from the norm is an alethic enhancement, it is above standard, it is hypernormal. Alethic modalities are about creating divides between here and there – us and them.

On the other side of the pond geographical claims in the European versions in general highlight deontic modalities.

The deontic domain centers on accepted conventions, customs of culture, explicit rules, laws and regulations. In the European versions a positive deviation from the norm is a deontic enhancement, it is within the standard, it is typical.

Deontic modalities are about creating divides between right and wrong.

If we take this information and make a classic 2 by 2 diagram we get 2 “pure” domains of geographical claims and 2 mixed domains.

On this scale it is possible to place different dairy products and create correlations. With this model or scale we are thus able differentiate between enactments of terroir in an American and European dairy strategies.

And finally: I find that the US versions of making geographical claims are gaining momentum in Europe. In the south the wine market is slowly steering towards brand names in favor of geographical names and in the North new terroir strategies are very US-like in enacting rurality.

## **SUM**

I believe that geographical claims in the US are ‘uprooted’ and generally highlight alethic modalities – centerstaging individual stewardship and innovation.

Geographical claims in EU, on the other hand, steers towards communal practices and deontic modalities grounded in soil and tradition.

I find that the once “frozen” ground of the cold north is beginning to ‘thaw out’ and, as an element in the ‘New Nordic’ trend, northerners has begun to utilize American terroir-based strategies in order to meet global demands.