

How '*il caffè sospeso*' became 'suspended coffee'

The neoliberal re-'invention of tradition' from Bourdieu to Bourdieu

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Abstract

This article analyses the way in which *il caffè sospeso*, an old Italian tradition giving needy people a free coffee, has become 'suspended coffee', a current trend in the United States.

Theoretically, firstly, this study explains the Italian phenomenon through Bourdieu's 'classic' theory linked to food as provider of social distinction, distance from reality and culinary capital; secondly, to explain the new American model, this article builds on Bourdieu's later work on neoliberalism.

This double theoretical approach enables a double methodological approach. The old Italian practice is investigated through Bourdieu's historical field analysis; instead, the American, neoliberal model is studied through political economy analysis of websites owned by the companies supporting suspended coffee.

The results show that in Italy *il caffè sospeso* was an opportunity for the donor to gain social distinction thanks to distance from reality, not providing the poor with something more necessary than a coffee. In the United States, private companies have taken hold of this old tradition and alter the old relationship between donor and receiver. Giving is not spontaneous anymore. Companies advise/force the clients to donate and confer culinary capital to 'elected' customers on their websites, with texts aiming to advertise rather than to inform. In conclusion, neoliberalism exploits old traditions for commercial reasons.

Introduction

This article analyses the way in which *il caffè sospeso*, an Italian tradition of the first half of the twentieth century (originally from Naples) has become 'suspended coffee', a current trend in the United States. The focus of the study is on whether and how this social practice has changed in its move from one model to the other.

In Italy, in the period between 1900 and 1960, *il caffè sospeso* was a philanthropic practice. When entering a caffè or a bar, some customers used to ask the barista for one-more-coffee. If they were alone, they used to ask for two coffees; if there were two people, they used to ask for three coffees, and so on, adding that one coffee was *sospeso*, suspended. The suspended coffee was not served, but re-served for a needy person entering the bar in the near future. Clearly, many homeless people in Naples used to enter the bars asking for a *caffè sospeso*, being aware of this tradition.

Pazzaglia (2004) suggests that the tradition originated in the many numerous groups of friends in Naples and in their uncertainty on how many coffees had been consumed. If some extra coffees had been paid for, the person paying the bill used to tell the barman to leave them for future, needy customers, and this emphasized his/her refinement. Thus, the barista or the owner of the cafe did nothing to encourage customers to give, and had no interest in doing some.

This tradition arrived in the United States at the beginning of the 2010s thanks to charities and non-profit organizations (Duin 2013). Moreover, many cafes are adopting it in the United States (and in some European countries) and even Starbucks is trying to enter the field (Robbins 2013).

Theoretical Framework: Giving and Receiving in Two Different Ages

The act of giving has always fuelled the theoretical debate in sociology, and many scholars have tried to understand why human beings often feel the need to donate to others. In his seminal work *The Gift*, Mauss (2002) argued that no gift is totally disinterested and gratuitous, but that those who give gifts expect a reward. Thus, any act of gift-giving implies reciprocity, and humans feel a kind of social obligation to giving, because generosity produces respect. Two other of Mauss's points are really important for this research: firstly, gift exchange does not regard individuals but groups; and secondly, gift-giving structures societies, affecting political, social and cultural relationships among humans, and also producing and altering power relationships; in the end, by giving (and receiving) a gift, people re-arrange societies.

More specifically, this study also centres on the role of food in society. Bourdieu (1984) points out

that food may provide exclusivity and social distinction, a kind of cultural capital that Naccarato and LeBesco (2012) define as 'culinary capital'. Specifically on coffee, Barthes (2008) advances that advertisers underline pleasure and a non-existing relaxing role of the coffee, caffeine actually being a stimulant. This happens because food is no longer a 'substance', but a 'circumstance'.

However, the shift from the Italian *il caffè sospeso* to the US suspended coffee could never be understood without Bourdieu's interesting shift from social distinction (Bourdieu 1984), to neoliberalism and political economy (Bourdieu 2003 and 2005). Specifically, this work argues that the shift from the Italian social practice to the American one perfectly mirrors Bourdieu's trajectory.

In fact, in his most celebrated work, *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) focuses on differences in society not necessarily linked to money. It is culture, for him, that creates distinction, and culture and wealth may also not lie in the same person. Usefully for this study, in *Distinction* Bourdieu (1984) also reflects on how social difference is created by distance from reality. In short, people are more highly considered and rewarded when they show off that they do not need to care about reality and 'vulgar' everyday practices.

Instead, in his late, underrated, studies *Firing Back* (Bourdieu 2003) and *The Social Structures of the Economy* (Bourdieu 2005), the French sociologist analyses the neoliberal society since the 1980s and considers money and the longing for it as the main elements enacting the mechanisms of society. Over this period, culture and the elegant way of standing out from the crowd have been relegated to the background. These studies describe neoliberalism as the social landscape which has been homogenising the Western world and in which money has been becoming the only reason for any venture. Even though cultural capital is still present in these pages, other forms of capital such as the economic and the commercial ones are seen as more decisive and often mixed up with the cultural one (Bourdieu 2005: 194). The monopolies (Bourdieu 2005: 201), economic and commercial concentration of big companies (Bourdieu 2003: 9) and globalization (Bourdieu 2003: 90; 2005: 223-224) are the main strategies that are shaping the new, neoliberal world, which may be epitomised by two phenomena: firstly, the subdued role of the media, never challenging dominant ideologies (Bourdieu 2003: 68-70); and secondly, the intrusive power of companies that construct their wealth on the powerful seduction exerted on consumers, who are ever more unaware and hypnotized by conformist messages (Bourdieu 2003: 71). Following Bourdieu's shift, this study argues that even the act of giving has strongly changed from one period to the other, and that the transformation from *il caffè sospeso* to suspended coffee may be an interesting case to uncover the nature, ways and implications of this change.

Finally, Bourdieu's disciples have introduced the concept of the tastemaker. Tastemakers impose “a

canon of rules and standards, establish an aesthetic trend and determine what is legitimate taste” (Lane 2013: 343). By deciding who 'deserves' cultural capital and who does not, and by conferring this form of power, tastemakers hold a great amount of symbolic power (Lane 2013). Today, celebrity chefs are considered to be amongst the most influential tastemakers, who legitimize taste and, in so doing, accumulate capital. However, even journalists, critics, and private companies (through PR campaigns, advertising, websites and influence over the media) may become tastemakers, and confer cultural capital. Stringfellow et al. (2013) argue that tastemakers operate between the opposite poles of legitimization and popularization, which may be meant as corresponding to Bourdieu's cultural and economic capital. Thus, in order to gain and maintain their power, tastemakers need popularity, in order to spread their power over a large amount of people; moreover, they need legitimization, in order to demonstrate their expertise in the field and defeat their competitors.

Methodology

The twist in Bourdieu's theory refers to the change occurring in the western world with the spread of neoliberal policies since the 1980s. When society undertakes such strong changes, the old theorizations are not capable of catching the new scenario, and new perspectives must be adopted. Bourdieu's later work may be seen in this sense. Related to this, new theories imply new methodologies. For this reason, what has been happening in the neoliberal age needs new tools. In the case of this study, this means that *il caffè sospeso*, the Italian social practice, has been analysed with different methods from the approach adopted to analyse suspended coffee, even though both approaches belong to Bourdieu's work.

More specifically, to analyse *il caffè sospeso* this research draws on Bourdieu's historical field analysis, which is strongly connected to *Distinction* and its theories. Bourdieu and Wacquant argue that a field shapes itself in two ways: first thanks to its internal relationships, and second in relation to other “fields of power” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 104-5). Thus, people (or agents, as Bourdieu says) may acquire power in two ways, either within the field they inhabit, or in relation to other fields. For Bourdieu, cultural activities are among the means through which agents acquire power, and thus “field analysis calls attention to the social conditions of struggle that shape cultural production” (Swartz 1997: 119).

Social practices are phenomena in which power is gained or lost, and “field analysis provides an attractive structural mapping of arenas of struggle over different types of capital for power and

privilege” (Swartz 1997: 293). This kind of analysis particularly fits into Bourdieu's framework, as “Bourdieu uses it to make many perceptive observations on political relations between culturally rich intellectuals and economically subordinate groups” (Swartz 1997: 293). In the end, this study analyses historical accounts of *il caffè sospeso* and considers this social practice as an arena in which early 1900s Italians struggled to acquire power. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), this part of the study focuses on whether the donor acquired culinary capital in relation to his/her peers (within his/her field) or in relation to the receiver (from one field to another). Related to this, the first part of this investigation is based on the analysis of the historical accounts and representations of *il caffè sospeso*.

The approach to the American version of this old Italian tradition is methodologically different, but remains within Bourdieu's theory. In fact, in this part the approach mostly draws on political economy analysis, which plays a relevant role in the later Bourdieu studies on neoliberalism. Political economy analysis is 'a crucial element of any comprehensive examination of the relationship between neoliberalism and media' (Phelan 2014: 89). For Fenimore (2012: 147), political economy investigates how media owners, PR campaigns and advertising in general, and political interests affect media representations. The later, aforementioned Bourdieu studies often build on this method, for example when Bourdieu shows concern for the fact that neoliberalism concentrates various forms of capital (cultural, economic, etc.) in the same hands, and that analysing this overlap is decisive in understanding the new scenario (Bourdieu 2003). Political economy analysis has continued to be relevant even among the most important of Bourdieu's disciples. Among the various, Warde encourages to investigate 'professional and commercial interest involved in the establishing of value' (Warde 2008: 333).

The new media have added interesting elements to these theories about the concentration of different forms of capital in the same hands. In analysing traditional media such as television or magazines, in fact, political economy investigates the cosy relationships between those who own the media and those who own the companies. In analysing the new media, instead, we may find that they are often the same person. In fact companies also own their new media, such as websites, Facebook pages or Twitter accounts. These are therefore relevant objects to be studied in order to understand how companies represent themselves directly and pursue commercial interests without the intermediation that is instead necessary with the traditional media. Thus, these new forms of media perfectly embody the concentration of different forms of capital prefigured by Bourdieu. In relation to this, the present research has exclusively analysed representations of suspended coffee on websites and Facebook pages owned by companies which support this practice.

The last methodological point regards sampling, that is, the strategy adopted to select the analysed elements. This article has selected a purposive sampling of both historical accounts of *il caffè sospeso* and internet representations of suspended coffee. Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling technique in which the researcher selects elements supporting a particular theory or presenting specific characteristics. The items selected in this study have been sampled because they offer the researcher clear links to Bourdieu's theories. Thus, the historical accounts of *il caffè sospeso* have been selected because they consider it as a distinctive practice, while the neoliberal representations of suspended coffee have been chosen because they show evidence of the neoliberal overlap between the different forms of capital theorized by Bourdieu.

The Analysis

Il Caffè Sospeso

There are many historical accounts of *il caffè sospeso*, but little theory has been applied to this Italian social practice. Descriptions (especially by foreign visitors and researchers) often indulge in stereotypes and easy shortcuts that extoll the generosity of the Italians and that place *il caffè sospeso* within the love of the Italians for food (Kostioukovitch 2006: 258-259; Hes and Du Plessis 2015: 222). This work puts forward that reality is more complex and aims to bridge the gap in the theoretical analysis of this phenomenon. It considers *il caffè sospeso* to be a social practice which has relevant links to social theories and power relationships. Interestingly, it is these historical accounts that suggest this reading, but the clues that clearly links to Bourdieu's distinction have never been interpreted before.

For example, there are many reports about the fact that *il caffè sospeso*, in its Italian version, was a practice benefiting the donor rather than the receiver. De Crescenzo (2008: 11) argues that in Italy the tradition of *il caffè sospeso* died out not only because those who used to offer the coffee gave up doing so, but also because those who used to accept the gift started to refuse it. This did not happen because of a sudden enrichment of the Italian poor, but because the trick was somehow unveiled. De Crescenzo, in fact, tells the story of a man who was in need of new friends and used to pay five *caffè sospesi* at a time. Thus, the social habit of paying a coffee for needy people was actually a strategy to be socially successful, and receivers were upset by this discovery. Related to this, the historical accounts of *il caffè sospeso* (Pazzaglia 2004; De Crescenzo 2008) focus on the donor rather than on the receiver. We know everything about those who used to pay one more coffee, and nothing about those who used to drink it. The 'main character' of this social practice, therefore, is

the donor, while the receiver seemed to be the sparring partner who contributed to the donor's social growth.

This study argues that there are two interesting elements to be highlighted about the Italian version of *il caffè sospeso* and through which the donor acquired culinary capital: the first is that the receiver would have benefited much more from other products rather than from coffee; the second is that the donor never met the receiver.

The first element, which underlines that needy people should be given other foods rather than coffee, leads us to understand that the real aim of this practice was not humanitarian. As in Barthes, coffee, especially in the Italian tradition, is a product which is often linked 'to the good life', relaxation and sensuality, and these are three objectives that any human being aims to achieve. However, it is also true that the poor have other priorities, and that suspended bread or meat would have helped them much more, as on the charitable Facebook page Suspended Bread (2015).

Italy in the first half of the twentieth century was a country seriously affected by poverty. In 1931, more than 46 per cent of houses needed refurbishing, and 15 per cent of houses were caves, basements and hovels (De Spirito 2005: 54). In 1950, a survey demonstrated that more than 22 per cent of families lived in poverty, and in Southern Italy the poor accounted for 50.2 per cent of the population (De Spirito 2005: 54). Naples was particularly needy: at the beginning of the twentieth century one third of people living in Naples were poor (Cotugno and Pugliese 2002: 104), in the 1950s poverty was tragically widespread and even in 1973 there were about twenty cholera deaths in the city (Mieli 2009).

Related to this, it may be said that giving a needy person a coffee and not a slice of bread or a steak as a present meant ignoring reality. This is strongly linked to that 'distance from reality' that Bourdieu theorized in the first part of his work, and that has been summarized in the theoretical framework of this article. The donors ignored the real needs of the receivers, behaving as in a famous phrase from the past, which said to give the poor brioches when bread ran out.

Bourdieu has always linked the distance from reality to the acquisition of cultural (in this case culinary) capital. Thus, through the social practice of *il caffè sospeso*, the donor acquired this kind of capital. Power, and not charitable giving, was the first consequence of buying one more coffee. But who are the people involved in this power relationship? To understand this, it is necessary to analyse the second element that has been mentioned above, that is, the fact that the donor never met the receiver.

This 'blind' link between the donor and the receiver meant that the receiver was not able to

recognise the donor, to say 'thank you' to him/her, and to acknowledge his/her culinary capital. Not only did this happen on a personal level, but also on a social one. In fact, the donor might have been a member of the bourgeoisie or of the higher class, a man or a woman, a Neapolitan or someone coming from the richer North, an Italian or a British person travelling in Italy, a youngster or an old person, and so on. Thus, the receiver did not know who the donor was, either personally or socially. This nullified any power relationship between the donor and the receiver, because the receiver was not able to acknowledge the power of the donor. Instead, this article points out that in the practice of *il caffè sospeso* the power relationship lays not in the link between the donor and the receiver, but in the connections between the potential donors. As reported by Pazzaglia (2004), the donor who paid more coffees aimed to have more friends. It is in this context that the donor used to acquire power in the specific form of culinary capital.

Therefore, Mauss's idea that when one gives another person something as a present, he/she expects something else as a reward, finds its confirmation here. The donor does not expect his/her reward from the receiver, but from his/her peers. In a perfectly Bourdieusian scenario, by buying a *caffè sospeso* the donor used to accumulate 'culinary capital' (Naccarato and LeBesco 2012) among peers, showing distance from reality and creating distinction not from the poor but from friends, relatives and colleagues.

Suspended Coffee

Before analysing how the Italian social practice of *il caffè sospeso* arrived in the United States, it is important to highlight what happened to this habit when a massive Italian immigration reached America in the same years when in Naples many people used to buy one more coffee. Various studies have been written on how Italian immigrants took many food habits with them to the United States (Levenstein 1985; Gabaccia 1998; Cinotto 2013). Massara (1976: 190) testifies to the fact that Italian immigrants even tried to take *il caffè sospeso* to the United States in the first part of the twentieth century, but that this attempt achieved poor results. Probably the old formula did not fit into the American social scenario. Therefore, this social practice lay dormant for more than fifty years in the United States, and suddenly awoke in the twenty-first century, but with a new structure and different aims.

Interestingly, the new version of suspended coffee has been promoted in the United States since the beginning of the 2010s by two different kinds of stakeholders, private companies and charities (Duin 2013). This article only focuses on private companies, not because the way in which the

charities have constructed suspended coffee is irrelevant, but because in the space of one article there is not enough room to analyse both aspects. Thus, the focus of this study is exclusively on private companies.

Many cafes are adopting suspended coffee in the United States and in some European countries (Molina and Molina 2013: 101). Northrup (2013) highlights the strong links between the new version of the social habit of buying one more coffee and commercial interests, and Steuer (2013) advances the limits of and casts a shadow on this commercial practice in the neoliberal world. Finally, Snopes (2014) finds out that in many social media suspended coffee is promoted thanks to a photo in which a homeless person drinks a coffee in a bar, but that this photo has nothing to do with the habits of suspended coffee. It has in fact been taken in a cafe of a Washington suburb which does not support suspended coffee and was originally published by the *Washington Post* for other reasons.

A brief analysis of the cafe's websites and Facebook pages demonstrates that the practice appears similar to the old one but is actually profoundly different. Many Facebook pages praise the 'suspenders' who buy one more coffee. The Portland cafe Olè Latte Coffee (2015) dedicates a photo album entirely to them, portraying the donors as always smiling, often in groups and while adding one more coffee to the list on the wall in the cafe. In these images, it is clear that culinary capital still plays a relevant part even in the new version of this practice, but with some interesting differences. First, culinary capital is assigned and shown on websites owned by the company, and therefore in a context which has commercial aims; and second, this celebration of the donor seems to be only a small part of a more complex representation. Among the new fields that suspended coffee links to, for example there is also gastro-diplomacy. The US embassy to Italy states that *il caffè sospeso* has conquered the United States, and that Italian generosity triumphs around the world (Ambasciata U.S.A. 2013).

The main difference between the Italian and the American version is that in the old Italian formula the act of giving was spontaneous, while in the new model it is strongly encouraged by the company owning the cafe. While in the social practice of *il caffè sospeso* the bar was simply a mediator between the donor and receiver, in the new version the company is an active agent in the field and promotes giving in a commercial context. On the Facebook page analysed above, the company shows the donors in a positive light, to push other people to do the same. Moreover, it shows this on its Facebook pages, which is the means that the company uses to attract new customers. It is clear that for the company suspended coffee is one of the strategies to acquire new clients and to take them away from its competitors. Thus, it is the company which confers culinary capital on the

people that they display on their Facebook page, and it is the company that uses this power of assigning culinary capital to increase its revenues.

Reading this shift through Bourdieu is very interesting. To put it simply, in the shift between the old and the new model, the company has become a tastemaker. While in fact in the Italian version the company simply mediated between the donor and the receiver, and did not confer culinary capital, in this new version it chooses and shows those who have gained this type of capital. Moreover, this happens close to the logo of the company and in a context that aims to increase its economic capital. This perfectly mirrors what Bourdieu writes in his later studies, that is, that Neoliberal society is characterized by the concentration of different forms of capital in the same hands. In this case the powerful role of the tastemaker and economic and cultural capital are all in the hands of a sole agent, the company.

The float between legitimization and popularization which characterizes each tastemaker is evident on the Facebook page of the TriPointe Coffeehouse (TriPointe 2015). In a post of 20 March 2015, the firm states that

every time you make a purchase here at TriPointe you are not only helping to support at least 10 local businesses, but you are also helping us give young people job training, business and people skills, and now even helping us teach internationals English and other life skills needed for becoming productive members of our society!
(TriPointe 2015)

Interestingly, the charitable aims here are directly connected to commercial interests. The company helps the Other each time 'you make a purchase'. The statement legitimizes the firm as aware and responsible (there is a list of more than twenty countries they are helping). However, the firm does not forget its commercial aims, and thus attempts to legitimize itself through a moral mission in a context, the Facebook page, which aims to make it popular. The list of websites could go on. For example, Espresso Joe's (2015) promotes its gluten- and dairy-free vegan desserts (legitimization) and states that 'our coffee is the best on the block, maybe even better than across the street' (popularization). All of this is displayed close to the logo proving its membership to the network of suspended coffee, a kind of guarantee of the seriousness of the company.

Even more interestingly, the neoliberal model described until now may be considered an intermediate step of a further and more extreme process of separation between the donor and the

receiver. In fact, Starbucks is preparing a further version of suspended coffee, in which the chain gives the already paid coffee not to a homeless person who enters the cafe, but to a charity that will give the coffee to needy people for the same amount of money collected (Masters 2013). Clearly, this model forever breaks the old link between the donor and the receiver and assigns even more power to the company. In this, not only does the company play the role of the tastemaker, but also decides, through the charity, the needy people to reward. Somehow, the process of cancellation of the old habit is complete, and the company will decide both, the donor to reward with culinary capital on their websites, and the needy people to reward with a coffee. Again, the Bourdieusian idea that neoliberalism totally alters the old equilibrium to concentrate many forms of capital in the hands of the same agent finds its confirmation in the shift from the old to the new version of suspended coffee.

Formica (2013) argues that Starbucks wants to serve suspended coffees for the same, charitable reasons that people had in Naples in the past. However, it is difficult not to see the huge economic interests of Starbucks today. Certainly the recent accusation of tax evasion (BBC 2012) highlights the main aim of a big company. Thus, recurring to suspended coffee may be seen as the attempt to withstand the pressure of the general mistrust (Hurst 2014) surrounding the company.

Finally, this study has often classified the two practices of suspended coffee as 'Italian' and 'American' respectively. This refers to the fact that the old practice originated in Italy, and the new one arrived firstly in the United States. However, this classification is partially untrue, because the new practice is a global phenomenon and, as many global phenomena, has also landed in Italy. Today, many Italian cafes and cafe chains show their memberships to the new model of suspended coffee on their websites and Facebook pages (Caffè Sospeso Bar 2015), with strategies and aims that are the same as those described until now and that have been referred to as 'American'.

What is more, one of the biggest Italian coffee companies, Lavazza, on its website strongly encourages people to become members of the network of suspended coffee, and to donate to needy people (Lavazza 2015). This could also be seen as a humanitarian suggestion, even though the agent that says so also sells coffee. By analysing the phenomenon in depth, there seems to be a link to a larger advertising mechanism. In fact, a restaurant near Florence on its website states that it has adopted the practice of suspended coffee, 'obviously LAVAZZA' (Locanda Tinti 2015, cap letters in the original). It is evident that suspended coffee has enabled an advertising circuit and that neoliberalism has been translating old traditions into strategies to make money. However, it may be useful to point out that as the Italian model failed to spread in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, so in today's Italy the neoliberal version of this social practice is struggling,

especially in the less industrialized and globalized areas, such as Sardinia (L'Unione Sarda 2015).

Results and Further Research

This article has analysed how in times of neoliberalism an old Italian social practice, *il caffè sospeso*, has been reinvented and reconstructed. The article has first described the original version of *il caffè sospeso*, and second has analysed the new model, suspended coffee. A complex Bourdieu framework has been necessary to fully understand the sense of this shift. In this case, the word 'complex' has not referred to the intricacy of Bourdieu's theories, but to the fact that the adopted framework has pulled together two different parts of Bourdieu's theorization. To analyse the old Italian habit, this study has drawn on *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984) and the more traditional theories relating to class difference and cultural capital. Instead, to analyse the newer version of this social practice, this article has updated the above mentioned theories by building on the later part of Bourdieu's work (Bourdieu 2003 and 2005), centring on how neoliberalism has changed the social scenario and the interpersonal relationships. This complex framework may be considered as one of the results of this research, as Bourdieu's later studies have often been neglected in comparison to the extolling praise of his more classic body of work. This article has instead demonstrated that Bourdieu's later studies may contribute to the analysis of our society and specifically of how neoliberalism has been affecting our social landscape.

As regards the analysis, this article has demonstrated that the Italian tradition enabled a process of creation and accumulation of culinary capital. This process did not happen between the donor and the receiver. Instead, it conferred culinary capital on the donor in relation of his/her friends, relatives or colleagues being at the bar with the 'generous' donor. Thus, buying one coffee more aimed at acquiring distinction among peers, also through showing distance from reality, another concept that Bourdieu links to social distinction.

Certainly, in its original version, *il caffè sospeso* was 'an elegant way to show generosity: an act of charity in which donors and recipients never meet each other, the donor doesn't show off and the recipient doesn't have to show gratitude' (Poggioli, 2013). However, as Bourdieu theorizes about many social practices, this article has demonstrated that it was also a way to structure society and to exert power over others. Finally, *il caffè sospeso* was deeply rooted in Italian society, and when Italian immigrants in the first half of the twentieth century tried to introduce it into the United States, it never took hold in the new country. Similarly, today the neoliberal version of suspended coffee struggles to take hold in the less industrialized area of Italy.

In the second part of the analysis, this article has analysed how *il caffè sospeso* arrived in the United States in the 2000s with a different structure and aim, and how it became suspended coffee. The habit has spread throughout the United States in two different ways, promoted either by private companies or by charities, however this article has only focused on companies. What has been found is that the new version of this social practice has altered the structure of the relationships among the people involved. In fact, while in the past there was a blind link between the donor and the receiver and a passive role of the cafe, in the new model the company plays the role of tastemaker and mediates between the two parts. It is the company that encourages the donor to buy one more coffee, and it is the company that confers culinary capital, by showing the donors on its website or Facebook page. Finally, in Starbucks' plan, it is the company that chooses even the receiver, and this really is the final proof that the old roles of the donor and the receiver no longer exist. Thus, the new practice is involved in a complex commercial mechanism through which the company mainly aims to make money and to beat its competitors.

On a more general level, this study has demonstrated how neoliberalism re-uses old traditions to reinforce its primary aims of making money. Rather than 'inventing traditions' (Hobsbawn 1983) like much nation-building does in order to reinforce various forms of ideology, neoliberalism *re-invent* traditions, resurrecting authentic old habits and taking advantage of the popularity that they have among people, to bend them to commercial interests.

Related to this, there is an important point to specify. The present research does not want to demonstrate that the new social practice of suspended coffee has lost its social utility. Needy people will have their coffees even in today's United States, as in the first version. What has changed is that today this process also has commercial implications. By playing the role of the tastemaker, and by continuously floating between popularization and legitimization, companies make money by playing social roles. In conclusion, the most general result of this study may be summarized by saying that in neoliberal society private companies turn almost everything into money, even charitable social practices, and that companies have been replacing institutions such as the state and have been becoming the most relevant agents in the field when it comes to acquiring and distributing power.

Finally, this work also paves the way to further research. Firstly, the role of charities might be analysed with the same methods that have been adopted here, to find out to what extent they either replicate the old model, follow the neoliberal version, or experiment with new formulas. Even the mission of these associations should be investigated, to find out how they relate their charitable role to the supply of a product, coffee, which is not exactly of primary necessity for the poor. Secondly,

research might also centre on other old social practices that have been turned into commercial activities by neoliberal society in general and private companies specifically. Following on from this article, the focus might be on the various extent to which old and new tastemakers float between popularization and legitimization to mediate charitable aims and the thirst for money.

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