ANTHR 485: Italianness through food & gesture  
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Course Description
What we eat and how we comport ourselves are some of the most frequent features we use to distinguish ourselves from other groups, and there is hardly a better example of how food and gesture constitute regional and national identity than that of Italy. Starting with the exemplary way modern Italianness has been constituted through food and gesture, we will explore a number of core anthropological themes, such as the famous North-South axis of Italian regional stereotyping, and how it gets involved in forming larger Italian identity, esp. through its large North American diaspora. We will study food as a classification system and the visceral reactions to transgressing of its categories (or why you can’t eat risotto with spaghetti). We will travel in Tuscany and beyond to investigate how local food (i.e. olive oil, wine, cheese, pasta, etc.) gets used in self-promotion and construction of authenticity. We will finally explore how Italians behave in public spaces and how bodily habits helps societies remember. Throughout the course, and especially during the field trips, students will practice their “ethnographic sensibility” through a series of playful exercises that rely on different senses to develop acute receptivity to the nuances of everyday life.

Lecture and discussion topics:
Fractals of regional, national and international identity  
North-South stereotypes; diacritics of group identity; European and Mediterranean symbolic geographies; Italian diaspora
Anthropology of food  
Systems of classification and transgressing boundaries; food as communication system; table manners and civilization
Gesture and techniques of the body  
Food preparation, table manners and gestures as techniques of the body and social memory
Behavior in public spaces  
Propriety and proxemics in farmer’s market and the city square
Italian food, locality and authenticity

Evaluation of Student Performance
25%  Class participation
45%  3 small ethnographic exercises (each worth 15%)
30%  Ethnographic vignette

Class participation includes regular attendance and meaningful contribution to class discussion that requires doing the assigned readings. Ethnographic exercises will be short written assignments that may involve detailed description of a particular space (i.e. a café, a small square, etc.), an ordinary object (i.e. olive oil bottles, corks, chimneys, etc.), or a publicly observed behavior (i.e. gesticulation, greetings, ways of drinking, smoking, walking, calling for a waiter, etc.). The ethnographic vignette will be a slightly larger piece of writing that will integrate careful description of an aspect of everyday life with larger meanings that could be inferred from it based on our readings. Examples of this genre will be given to students during the course. Alternative media for the ethnographic vignette would be considered (i.e. a photographic essay, a video, a sound installation, etc.).