
Graduate Journal *of* Food Studies

*a peer-reviewed journal
on food studies
by graduate students*



JANUARY 2015 | VOLUME II NUMBER 1

.....
from the editor **1**

.....
contributors **2**

.....
essays

The Two Locals: Food, Agri(culture), and
Identity in Central Wisconsin,
Catie Peters **4**

“They Go By The Moon”: An Anthropological
Perspective on Home Winemaking Among
Italian Americans in Boston
Chris Maggiolo **20**

Cooking in Chaos: The Performative
Experience of Cooking in the Moment,
W. Gabriel Mitchell **35**

The Dark Side of the Spoon: The Gustatory
Experience of Eating in a Blind Dining
Restaurant,
Kathe Gray **50**

.....
book reviews **61**

.....

Cover: Brett Culbert, **Ledge Road Barn**, 2014

The GAFS thanks Harvard's American Studies Program for providing an institutional home for both the Association and the *Journal*. The GSAS name and shield are trademarks of the President and Fellows of Harvard College and are used by permission of Harvard University.

Graduate Journal of **Food Studies**

editor-in-chief

Carla Cevasco, **Harvard University**

founding editor

Brad Jones, **Boston University**

managing editor

Sarah Rush, **Boston University**

associate editor

Clara Hanson, **Boston University**

art director

Brett Culbert, **Harvard University**

design: Claudia Catalano, **Boston University**

layout: Zachary Nowak, **Harvard University**

copyediting: Kira Bennett Hamilton, **University of Gastronomic Sciences**; Laura Fakhry, **Boston University**

faculty advisory board

Ken Albala, **University of the Pacific**

Patricia Allen, **Marylhurst University**

Rachel Ankeny, **University of Adelaide**

Warren Belasco, **U. Maryland, Baltimore County**

Amy Bentley, **New York University**

Rachel Black, **Collegium de Lyon**

Melissa Caldwell, **Uni. of California Santa Cruz**

Joyce Chaplin, **Harvard University**

Simone Cinotto, **Uni. of Gastronomic Sciences**

Carole Counihan, **Millersville University**

Lisa Heldke, **Gustavus Adolphus College**

Alice Julier, **Chatham University**

Jane Kauer, **University of Pennsylvania**

Fabio Parasecoli, **The New School**

Heather Paxson, **Mass. Institute of Technology**

Amy Trubek, **University of Vermont**

David Szanto, **Concordia University**

Harry West, **SOAS, University of London**

Andrea Wiley, **Indiana University**

WWW.GRADUATEFOODASSOCIATION.ORG/JOURNAL

American STUDIES



Graduate Association
for **Food Studies**

The journal you're reading

right now isn't like most academic journals. Graduate students made it—researched, wrote, solicited, photographed, edited, copyedited, and designed every inch of it.

The *Graduate Journal of Food Studies* showcases first-rate graduate food scholarship, but it does more than that. It is not only an academic journal, but an educational platform. Graduate students are expected to learn to research and publish, to write book reviews and peer reviews, to present at conferences and forge professional reputations, and often to become educators ourselves.

Look no further than the pages of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and you will see that academia can be a challenging place to make a career. While commentators debate the causes, one fact is clear: graduate students are among the most vulnerable people in academia. Which is why we have to look out for each other. And it is part of why we offer this space for education, for learning to edit, review, and publish, for learning to see one's work in print. This is a place where rising scholars sprout wings.

It has been a busy year for us at the *Graduate Journal of Food Studies*, with several exciting changes. We have a new institutional affiliation: the *Journal* is now a collaboration between students from Harvard University and Boston University's Gastronomy program. As part of this new affiliation, we've seen some changes in our masthead. As Editor, I must extend heartfelt thanks to Founding Editor Brad Jones for overseeing numerous transitions with wisdom and wit. In addition to the *Journal*, we've founded the Graduate Association for Food Studies, an international professional association that provides exclusive resources and networking to graduate students interested in food. These changes will help us to continue providing a forum for exceptional graduate student scholarship.

Much has also stayed the same here at the *Journal*. I must thank all of our editors, reviewers, and authors for their hard work and intelligence. It is an honor to be able to call on the luminaries of our advisory board, and we owe much of our content and design to their guidance. We received a record number of submissions for the issue you are now reading. The flood of interest we have seen in the *Journal* and Association is further proof of the power of food studies in this new generation of scholars.

In this issue, four articles take us on a journey through the food system, from farmer, to winemaker, to chef, to diner. In "The Two Locals," Catie Peters complicates our vision of the local food movement with her case study of farmers in central Wisconsin, where local food holds profoundly different meanings than in an urban center. Next, Chris Maggiolo's "They Go By the Moon" explores winemaking culture among Italian Americans in Boston, where multiple generations of winemakers negotiate old traditions and new technologies. W. Gabriel Mitchell's "Cooking in Chaos" immerses us in the daily routines and improvisational rhythms of a restaurant kitchen. Finally, in "Dark Side of the Spoon," an ethnography of patrons' experiences in a blind dining restaurant, Kathe Gray raises provocative questions about taste, "mouth sense," and the ability of words to describe sensory experiences.

Read well. We are the future of food studies.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Carla Cevasco", followed by a long horizontal flourish line.

CONTRIBUTORS

Stephanie Boland is a graduate student in modernism at the University of Exeter. She has published in, among others, the *Cambridge Quarterly* and *Times Literary Supplement*.

Maria Carabello is a masters candidate in food systems at the University of Vermont, where she also earned her BS in nutrition and food sciences with a minor in anthropology in 2013. Her research takes a transdisciplinary approach to complex food and nutritional issues, with an emphasis on integrating classic and novel ethnographic methods. Her current interest is home cooking practice—specifically the skills and strategies involved, and how they are acquired and developed in everyday and educational contexts.

Brett Culbert is a PhD student at Harvard University, where he studies landscape representation and early American environmental history, in the Graduate School of Design. His interests in the built environment, photography, and the line between culture and nature has led to a recent series of bike adventures through the landscape. The photography from his most recent trip, from Cambridge to Pittsburgh, is featured throughout this current issue.

Kathe Gray is a masters student in social anthropology at York University in Toronto, Canada. Her ethnographic field study explores the various modes of attunement — sensorial, embodied, affective, material, and social — cultivated by musicians who perform improvised music, as well as how these capacities might be deployed differently across performance settings. She is also interested in how improvisation, as a knowledge practice, reflects the tactics people use to navigate — and disrupt — the dominant cultural, political, and economic landscape of the city.

Amanda Green is a PhD candidate in applied anthropology at Oregon State University, where she studies in the food in culture and social justice program. She holds a masters in social sciences from the University of Chicago (2008) and a BA in cultural anthropology from Davidson College (2005). Her research focuses on the intersection of global food movements and Sámi foodways, in particular the impacts of food organizing on food practice and discourse. She also supports the efforts of northern Swedish and western Oregon communities to bolster regional food systems and food sovereignty.

Chris Maggiolo graduated in January 2014 with a masters degree in gastronomy from Boston University. Having spent the entirety of the program studying the production, distribution, and consumption of alcohol—predominately that of the US craft alcohol industry—he now works as a beverage industry consultant and freelance beer and spirits writer in the Boston Area. The work contributed to this article is an adaptation of his masters thesis.

Amanda Milian is a PhD candidate in history at Texas Christian University. Her dissertation focuses on presidential dining, from George Washington to Martin Van Buren, and the role of food in the intersection of political, cultural, and social issues from 1790 to 1840. She analyzes the culture of dining in Washington, D. C., and the political meanings of the public performance of etiquette, food, and material culture. She currently holds a teaching assistantship at TCU and works as an assistant archivist at the Tarrant County Archives.

W. Gabriel Mitchell is a recent graduate of the masters in gastronomy program at Boston University. He holds a BS in design from Cornell University, and is a graduate of The French Culinary Institute. His research interests include the African influence on the cuisines of the Americas, the creative intentions of culinary professionals, and the anthropology of restaurant culture. His thesis examined Lima's new culinary phenomenon as a local articulation of nouvelle and Modernist gastronomic paradigms. His publications include the book chapter "What I Ate During My Summer Field Work," in *Delivery: Lazos EEUU-Perú* (2014); and the encyclopedia entry "Perú," in *Ethnic American Foodways Today* (2015). He is currently the CEO of Maison Mitchell-Hamburg, a gourmet pastry boutique, located in Hamburg, Germany.

Catie Peters recently earned an MA in anthropology of food from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She also holds a BA in the program of liberal studies and Spanish from the University of Notre Dame, where she graduated *cum laude*. Her research interests are evolving but involve the production of agricultural knowledge, the pastoral tradition, hermeneutics, and critical theory. She has worked on agricultural projects, both domestically and abroad.

Gretchen Sneegas is a PhD student in the geography department of the University of Georgia. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Indiana University (2004), and holds a masters in food studies from Chatham University (2014). Her current research examines the impacts of natural gas extraction upon food systems and rural landscapes in the Northeastern United States, focusing on the dairyscapes of Pennsylvania and New York.

Rachel A. Snell is a PhD candidate in history at the University of Maine. She completed an MA in early American history at the University of New Hampshire in 2008. Her dissertation project examines printed and manuscript cookbooks and women's personal writing to create a cultural history of women in the northeastern United States and English-speaking Canada between 1830 and 1880.

Serenity Sutherland is a PhD student at the University of Rochester writing her dissertation on Ellen H. Richards. This project captures her research interests of the history of women and gender in science, the environment, and Progressive-era reform efforts. She is currently an Andrew W. Mellon fellow in the Digital Humanities working on the Seward Family Papers Project to digitize and transcribe the family papers of William Henry Seward. She has taught courses on the history of food and beverage, sustainability, health, gender and feminism.

Kate Vickery is pursuing a dual master's degree in community planning and public affairs and works as an urban agriculture planner for the Sustainable Urban Agriculture & Community Garden program at the City of Austin.

The Two Locals: Food Agri(culture), and Identity in Central Wisconsin

abstract | *This article takes up the concept of local food in the context of rural Central Wisconsin. It examines the encounter between two locals—that of the local food movement and that of the denizens of the area—as a means of unearthing the silences and assumptions implicit in the word as wielded by each community. Rather than having the naturalized meaning that many in food activism impute to it, the local is socially constructed and engages people with diverse worldviews. Since locality is also a primary means of expressing identity, it stands to reason that “local” concepts of locality sit uncomfortably with the food movement’s use of the term. To date, many of the successful locally-oriented agricultural schemes have catered to cities, where farmers can trade on urban premiums and nostalgia for country life. This project seeks to address a gap in the literature, which—by and large—has not addressed the reception of local food in rural places. In the countryside, the local food movement meets economic and cultural challenges to its meanings and ideals, a gauntlet that may be attributed, in part, to its urban genesis.*

keywords | *Local food, the rural and the urban, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), Raymond Williams*

INTRODUCTION One drowsy morning as I lugged a crate of strawberries from the field to the packing shed, I perceived the repeated clicking of a camera. The local newspaper, I later learned, had come to the farm where I was working for a story about the effects of drought. I remember thinking it ironic that I might be featured in the newspaper as a photographed object, since I, too, was visiting the farm in order to capture people’s experiences of agriculture.¹ No sooner had the reporter taken my photo than he asked for my name and place, as markers of my identity. Though I had not lived continuously in the area for almost ten years, I gave the town where I grew up as my “place.” I supposed that, with my wide-brimmed hat and muddy boots, I could pass as a “local” in that moment, even if I did not especially feel like one.

In this article, I examine the translation of the local food movement into a specific context, that of rural Central Wisconsin. In particular, I am interested in the encounter between two locals—that of the local food movement and that of the

denizens of the area.² That these inter-penetrating worlds challenge the lesser-explored aspects of each other is the subject of my first section, “The Layers of Local.” In my second section, “The Rural Revisited,” I explore whether communities in Central Wisconsin might perceive the local food movement as irrelevant due, in part, to its urban genesis. Setting aside the technicalities and pitfalls of the rural-urban continuum, I am most interested in the language and attitudes of people in Central Wisconsin. How do its traditions of agriculture affect its reception of the local food movement?

METHODOLOGY I am far from an objective participant-observer in Central Wisconsin, the place where I was raised and to which I continually return. Central Wisconsin has changed as I have over the years, and I am regularly surprised at what I find when I go home. Though the local food movement began to coalesce several years after I left the area for college, I spent eight months in 2012 working for Martin Family Farm, a fourth-

generation operation in Rosholt, Wisconsin.³ It is worth noting that this stint as a farmhand transpired prior to my exposure to the social sciences: my days on the farm were considerably more sweaty than heady.

While my training in food studies has helped me to reflect on my experiences and capture them in academic language, my theoretical toolbox has also altered the way that I perceive local food. In 2013, I returned to Central Wisconsin for roughly one month in order to conduct “fieldwork,” both in its ethnographic and agricultural senses. Drawing upon the network that I had left the previous year, I engaged in informal discussions regarding food and agriculture with over thirty people. I resumed working as a farmhand at Martin Family Farm as well as at a second farm called Rocky View Acres, which I selected as a counterpoint. Though these two farms frame my research, I also conducted semistructured, recorded interviews with ten people who I considered to be representatives of various aspects of the local food scene. A cross section of individuals, they were involved with farming, local food advocacy, local food retail and restaurants, and agriculture education. Finally, in order to engage with the wider context of food in Central Wisconsin, I visited three farmers’ markets, worked at the regional energy fair, volunteered with a free meal service, and toured additional farmsteads.

As I assume is often the case, the direction I intended to steer my research did not resonate with the key individuals whom I interviewed. Ultimately, I found it most interesting to converse with people regarding their respective expertise and to tease out the emergent themes afterward. In addition to fulfilling theoretical objectives, it is my hope that this article conveys a story about place. I have always been fascinated with the way that language both illuminates and hijacks the experience of being-in-the-world. Of course, as I am an individual endowed with my own forms of social and cultural capital, the following account is as much about me as it is about the people of my community. Nevertheless, I have held them in my mind throughout the writing process and

attempted to channel their ethic of work in order to represent them to the degree that I am able.

SCENE-SETTING Situated squarely in the middle of the state, Central Wisconsin delimits an ill-defined clump of contiguous counties a few hours’ drive from the state’s largest city centers near its southern border. While Guthman emphasizes that the small-scale family-farming model is anachronistic and nostalgic in the case of California,⁴ Wisconsin does boast an agrarian tradition, as reiterated by the little red barn on the state license plate. The state takes special pride in its dairy industry, despite losing its status as the nation’s top milk producer to California in the 1990s. Touted as “America’s Dairyland,” there is the feeling in Wisconsin that its farmers are helping “to feed the world,” even if only symbolically.

After the economic shocks of the 1980s farm crisis (which are arguably ongoing), both Martin Family Farm and Rocky View Acres retrofitted their operations in order to gain organic certification and establish community-supported agriculture (CSA) schemes.⁵ John of Martin Family Farm is a fourth-generation farmer who grew up on an industrial-scale potato farm of about 300 acres in sandy Rosholt. After pursuing a postgraduate degree in plant pathology, he went back to farming, which he considers part of his identity: “I can’t think of the kind of person I would be if I didn’t grow up on a farm. I just can’t fathom that.” Aware that he could not continue his father’s operation viably without modification, John withheld his reservations and experimented with organic growing.

Today, John straddles the worlds of conventional and organic growing. He has inherited land and most of his farm infrastructure from the conventional growing operation that his father established. Because John was once skeptical of organic agriculture, he is acutely aware of the “misconceptions about what it is and what it isn’t.” In conversation, he suggested that “fancy organic farmers” are people with whom he does not identify. That John has been tasked with the conversion of a conventional farm to an organic

one is also evident upon visiting Martin Family Farm. A massive warehouse sits on Highway 86 and serves as the principal site for washing, sorting, and storage. About five minutes' drive away lie the farm fields, where John cultivates five acres of potatoes—his specialty crop—and five acres of other vegetables. John rotates his growing area, irrigated by a center pivot, on an annual basis. Though his fields are cultivated mechanically, the majority of the weeding and harvest are accomplished manually. John typically employs one manager and two field hands for nine months and hires a few additional people during potato harvest.

John has increased his CSA membership every year since 2010 to arrive at roughly eighty shareholders. He has found that his CSA scheme goes hand in hand with other forms of direct marketing, such as the Stevens Point Farmers' Market, several restaurants, a few retail outlets, and wholesale clients. "The CSA is kind of a *proving ground*. I can grow something I've never grown before. If it turns out, I can put it in the box. If it doesn't, who cares? And, if I'm good at it, then I can start offering it to my retail accounts." John loves working in the field and sometimes feels like the administrative tasks necessary for direct marketing take away from his time "farming." He puts it this way: "I guess what it really comes down to is that when we're doing this kind of marketing, we're being retailers as well as farmers. And so, we're taking on all that retail work that a lot of farmers don't do." Nevertheless, he is pleased with the opportunity to engage with customers, which he referred to as "the beauty of direct marketing."

The viability of Martin Family Farm has been tested by the cost of the organic fertilizers (approximately \$1,000 per acre) that amend the farm's sandy soil. Also challenging is the disjointed nature of Martin Family Farm as a setting. Without a "traditional" farmstead, John has trouble communicating a coherent brand. He lacks the facilities to host people on the farm for events, although he does organize an annual tour and potluck. Finally, supervision can be a stretch because John lives in a nearby city and works part-time for the United Spud Cooperative of Wisconsin.

Rocky View Acres, in contrast, is located in an area less populated than that of Martin Family Farm but closer to Wausau, a city of about 40,000 (the largest in Central Wisconsin). Tom is a third-generation farmer who was raised on the Athens farmstead that he currently co-owns and co-operates. Though he grew up feeling destined to inherit his father's fifty-cow dairy, one day in high school, he returned home to learn that his father, faced with "getting big or getting out," had opted to sell their herd. A devastated Tom went on to attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he met Lucy, who was a graduate student in rural sociology at the time. Tom writes about their teaming up in the farm's first CSA newsletter: "When she [Lucy] told me she daydreamed about having a farm of her own, I told her I had one, and that romantic vision of a family farm became all the more romantic."

In their eighth season of production, Tom and Lucy market their vegetables through the Wausau Farmers' Market and a CSA of about two hundred shares. They also produce small grains and maple syrup in addition to raising chickens, "beefers," and pigs to help with nutrient cycling. Not shy about seeking out government grants when applicable, Tom and Lucy have invested in three hoop houses to assist with season extension and a set of solar panels. They process their harvest in a multipurpose packing shed, complete with a walk-in cooler, commercial kitchen, and dining area. During the growing season, they employ two people full-time, whom they feed and house. Lucy also keeps an off-farm job at the local community college as a means of securing health insurance and as a personal preference.

Tom and Lucy's life on the farm with their two young sons looks traditional in many ways, though their politics are not mainstream. Tom articulates his vision of farm viability as measured not in terms of profit for himself but in the distribution of the farm's wealth. In part owing to their effusive personalities, Tom and Lucy have made their farm a hub of socialization: they play host to u-pick events, tours, pancake breakfasts, and an annual barn dance. Every Friday, they invite the community

onto the farm for stone oven-baked pizzas prepared from scratch with farm ingredients. Tom described the increasingly popular on-farm restaurant as hiding the elitism of local food in familiarity: pizza and companionship.

Having been acquainted with the dense network of CSAs in Madison, Lucy explained that their farm's rural location affords them lower land prices, a less competitive market, and support with childcare. Raised in New York City herself, Lucy is aware how far she is from the trendiness of conscious consumption that has taken off in urban centers: she described being treated as a "rock star" at a Brooklyn restaurant when the staff learned that she and Tom run a farm. Because of their collective training in the social sciences, Lucy and Tom seem particularly attuned to the ways in which power and privilege play out on country landscapes. They are uniquely situated in that they can appeal both to Tom's well-established roots in the community and to Lucy's familiarity with what she referred to as "the language of the elite."

"We feel a real kinship with the generation that's coming up. We certainly agree on a lot of things."

– Susan, former co-manager of
a Stevens Point natural foods cooperative

THE LAYERS OF LOCAL The local food movement seeks to re-embed both the production and the consumption of food in a context—that is, to employ a spatial means of addressing the economic, environmental, and social aspects of a food system. (For producers, local food tends to mean direct marketing schemes, such as CSAs, farmers' markets, or other forms of unmediated retail.) Though implicitly a critique of the neglect of social issues on the farm and beyond the farm gate,⁶ local food also inherits some of the shortcomings of antecedent movements (specifically, the sustainable and the organic movements). In the United States, local food advocacy can look like a progressive critique of the globalized food system or, alternatively, a reactionary desire for a time when foodways were necessarily more limited

in scope.⁷ Lucy at Rocky View Acres put it more succinctly when she described on-farm events as "a bumper sticker war."

Though the most basic definition of local food tends to emphasize the carrying capacity of a place or foodshed,⁸ the concept can also be used to suggest a philosophy or metaphysical stance.⁹ For its advocates, it implies not only proximity and nature as measure but also moral economy and commensal community.¹⁰ These latter aspects of local food resonate with the thread of agrarian populism that, from Thomas Jefferson to Wendell Berry, has embraced the family farm as the locus of economic self-sufficiency, cultural transmission, and social belonging.¹¹ In this vein, local food aligns itself with a vision of society in which small family farms become the agents of what Tom at Rocky View Acres described as "broad-based and independent decision-making." When considered an antidote for the concentration of power in food and agriculture, local food reflects an implicit belief in the Walter Goldschmidt thesis (the concept that agricultural practices can positively or negatively affect the social and economic characteristics of a farming community).

Local food's strength is that it seeks to address the economic, the environmental, and the social as intertwined *in place*, but the movement is often criticized for failing to unpack the distinctions between these various dimensions. Rural sociologist C. Clare Hinrichs writes that the term forces "shifting shapes into a stable, coherent concept,"¹² a compression in thought that can convert "the local" into shorthand for "the good."¹³ In other words, there is the danger that the local evolves into a hegemonic discourse if certain food practices are coded as normative.¹⁴ More complicated than "a process which reverses the trend of globalization,"¹⁵ the local is easily dominated by certain people, such as those who can appeal to established residency. This collusion between local food and nativist sentiment has been termed "defensive localism."¹⁶

While these critiques of local food's shortcomings have been well documented in the literature, one feature that has received

less attention is the context in which it has been popularized. Like earlier twentieth-century movements in food activism, such as the countercuisine of the late 1960s and the organic movement, local food owes its development to the support for “social experimentation” that cities are uniquely capable of fostering.¹⁷ The influence of urban resources has made local food an intervention driven by consumption, and, as such, the movement often assumes an urban ethos. As a result, local food has been tied up with a nostalgic revalorization of farming and the countryside, both of which have particular appeal for city dwellers. However, despite the influence of the urban, there are as many locals as there are places, or possibly even individuals, in the United States. For a variety of economic, social, and cultural reasons, these other locals are less often considered in public discourse,¹⁸ and it is this neglect that makes Central Wisconsin, as a rural place, a worthwhile case study.

In Central Wisconsin, the local food movement gains unity through an organization called Central Waters Foodshed, which coalesced around 2007 as an umbrella for the various forms of activism already in place, such as a local food fair, farm atlas, and several loosely organized Farm to School programs. Because Foodshed takes its cues from producers—including its Farmer Advisory Board—it is easily misunderstood as a farmer coalition. However, as the organization evolves, its activities are increasingly tied up with the demand side of the market: it is, *de facto*, a market linkage mechanism that seeks to support producers by way of building up consumer demand for local food.

Though its stated objectives also include environmental sustainability, Foodshed has consciously chosen the banner of local, rather than other framings, because it is thought to be the most inclusive. Lauren, the organization’s executive director, explained that the rhetoric of organic agriculture is alienating to many people in the area: “In this community, in Central Wisconsin, we lose people when we put those restrictions on because that’s where the elitism comes in.” During a reflection on his former views, John told me that

he used to be skeptical of organic farming, and two other interviewees, who run organic operations, mentioned that they sensed similar attitudes in their neighbors. This negative symbolism regarding organic practices appears to be more prevalent in the countryside, where conventional agriculture has been practiced for at least a generation, than in places less intimately bound up with farming.

Central Wisconsin is an area that has suffered from the decline of paper manufacturing, and, as such, is ripe for messages that promise to strengthen the local economy. As unlikely as it might seem, I saw gas stations sporting “Local Business” banners; it appears that, even among retail chains, “Buy Local” messages abound. Rather than delimiting a specific geographic region, Foodshed describes itself as “a network of people, businesses, organizations, and productive lands that create a *local food economy* [emphasis added].” As such, it mirrors the outcome of a content analysis by Hinrichs and Allen, who found that economic objectives accounted for three-quarters of the total objectives articulated in the mission statements of eighteen local food campaigns throughout the country.¹⁹ Here Hinrichs’ characterization of local food as “the stepchild of sustainable agriculture”²⁰ seems particularly apt, given that both have avoided explicit mention of endemic social injustices but instead doubled down on economic and environmental messages.

Central Wisconsin’s recent histories create the possibility that local food might be received as “little more than a primitive, backward, nonproductive, unscientific technology suitable only for the nostalgic and disaffected back-to-the-landers of the 1970s.”²¹ Aware that their efforts might be construed as elitist or exclusionary, several of my interviewees described tailoring their messages to their audiences. While promoting the CSA concept to Wood County workplaces, Jessica found that economic rationale and cost-savings could be counted on as the strongest and safest arguments. Lauren, on the other hand, explained that she stays flexible in order to appeal to the widest demographic possible: “I mold conversations based on who the person is.”

Despite attempts at inclusivity, I heard a number of people call the local food movement in Central Wisconsin a “clique.” Though likely true that the people involved in local food enjoy more financial and educational privilege than the wider population,²² it also appears that the term “local” fails to include the diverse communities of Central Wisconsin. Foodshed is based in Stevens Point, a university town that, despite being similar in size, commands more economic and cultural resources than the neighboring town of Wisconsin Rapids, which is a “paper mill town.” Sean and Amanda, both of whom base their businesses in Wisconsin Rapids, alluded to the differences between the two cities, a theme that was also addressed by Jessica and Josh, both of whom grew up in the vicinity.

Sean of Neighborhood Natural Foods sits on Foodshed’s board of directors but identified himself as the “only member from Wisconsin Rapids.” He hypothesized that the lack of participation has to do with the distance (“Sometimes thirty minutes away is just too far”). This sentiment was echoed by Amanda of Good Expectations, who told me that she hands out copious amounts of local food promotional materials to no avail. Amanda expressed disappointment that her business has not really been able to tap into the momentum at Foodshed. She found it “very difficult to bridge that gap” and thought that, rather than being solely about the distance, the lack of support for local food in Wisconsin Rapids is more cultural. She said: “I think that there is this idea that ‘Oh, that’s a very hippie attitude.’”

As we were harvesting kale, Tom made a point of mentioning Weber to me—that is, although they are difficult to pin down, he knows that there are cultural factors affecting the adoption of alternative agriculture and local marketing in rural Central Wisconsin. To further complicate matters, these factors also appear specific to each county, town, and neighborhood. For example, Josh, an agriculture education teacher, took a stab at articulating the cultural differences between Stevens Point and Wisconsin Rapids by disaggregating their respective histories of agriculture:

In Rapids, historically, when times got tough on the farm, there was no need to expand. You just got a job at the mill. That was great because you were making enough money, and you were farming at a scale that was convenient. And that’s why our rural economy in Rapids is not like other places that you would go to.

According to Josh, these microhistories affect the attitudes and expectations of residents today. Because of the dominance of paper mills, Wisconsin Rapids became a town “in which there was a family of educated people that took care of everyone.” Since factory jobs enabled farmers to maintain their small acreages, Josh reasoned that people in Wisconsin Rapids maintain a more sentimental relationship to agriculture than people in other area towns, where the buy-in tends to be intellectual.

The fact that there are many locals within “the local” was also echoed by John at Martin Family Farm and Tom at Rocky View Acres. Though his farm is located in Rosholt, John has only one shareholder from the town itself. This lack of participation may be attributed to the fact that many rural people tend to grow their own gardens, but there is a fair amount of irony to the fact that this local is not part of his local market. What’s more, John hypothesized that the presence of his organic farm in the community probably goes unnoticed since agricultural fields tend to look more or less alike from the road. He said: “People in Rosholt don’t even know I’m farming organic vegetables.” The situation is similar for Lucy and Tom: their CSA primarily serves the Wausau area, but Tom dreams of a growing operation that would support and be supported by Athens, which is the town closest—most local—to their farm.

Part and parcel of the definition of local food is the idea that an area’s landmass feeds the people who live on it. What such a framing fails to address is the mobility of people in and out of an area, including both temporarily and for the longer term. In my experience, a fair share of the people involved with local food and alternative

agriculture in Central Wisconsin are relatively new to the area. These people—as well as those who return after experiences away—settle because of their partners, a perceived support network, or the lifestyle afforded by the area. As such, it is important that local food activism accounts for the reality of present-day mobilities alongside place-building. In a restaurant interview, I was told that clientele often hail from larger metropolises as a consequence of the venue's proximity to the interstate and a "very big corporate hotel." Though obviously free to cater to whomever they please, it remains unclear whether institutions that self-identify as local food—and benefit from the trendiness of the conceit—have any mandate to privilege "local people." Who exactly are local people in the first place?

"Switching to a method like permaculture would, of course, require a shift in the Central Wisconsin farming paradigm."

– Mary, former employee of
Martin Family Farm

THE RURAL REVISITED One July morning, I came across Tom and Lucy's oldest son parading around in a cowboy outfit, complete with boots and a bandana. Evidently, the boy had dressed in order to spend the day with his grandpa at Farm Technology Days, an annual agricultural showdown highlighting big equipment and improved seed stock. Before he left, Lucy smiled as she coached her son regarding what to say if someone tried to impress him with CAFO propaganda: "Those are factory farms, and those are bad."²³ Nevertheless, the boy returned that afternoon towing a new coloring book called "Amazing Corn."

The way in which the various forms of farming are contained within the life histories of individuals in Central Wisconsin creates a unique (agri)cultural landscape. In Central Wisconsin, it seems normal for a young boy whose parents are engaged in what could be construed as either an elitist or a traditional form of cultivation to accompany his grandfather to an agribusiness fair, where participants could be described as either

real or co-opted farmers. Peri-urban operations catering to cities have the benefit of selling the "consumption of rurality" while collecting urban premiums.²⁴ However, as is the case with other rural communities, direct marketing schemes in Central Wisconsin face an amalgam of economic and cultural constraints.²⁵ Despite the universalizing tendency of local food discourse, there is no starting from scratch: the staying power of the local food movement in Central Wisconsin hinges on its ability to resonate with people and to accommodate its contested cultures of agriculture.

Though it is clear that idealized typologies of social organization, such as *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*²⁶ (which refer to communitarian and associational arrangements, respectively), do not easily map onto the country and the city, it is less clear how to pinpoint rurality and urbanity. The US government considers population density its tool for defining the rural and the urban (thereby generating a rural-urban continuum),²⁷ but this solution cannot account for the cultures of places, which involve local histories and habits as well as more popular opinions. The country and the city are powerful gestalts that go beyond the counting of persons. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams explains:

On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, of ignorance, limitation. A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times [emphasis added].²⁸

Williams is clear, that despite demographic change, the country and the city remain relevant in that they are modes of thinking and feeling by which people make sense of their experiences.

In addition to the associations often attributed to the rural and the urban are popular motifs regarding the relationship between the two, such as the idea that the city is a threat to the integrity of the country. For example, Goldschmidt's *As You Sow*, a seminal sociological account of agricultural change, takes up the industrialization of rural Californian communities during the 1940s. Because Goldschmidt understands rural communities as endogenous and self-sufficient, he argues that rural towns become "urbanized" when agriculture is industrialized. For Goldschmidt, an urbanized rural life is the product of an externally oriented economy that generates a social scene which "erodes the sense of community, the ideals of mutuality, and the social value of civility."²⁹ The irony in Goldschmidt's observation that rural towns became filled with "outsiders rather than local farmers and store keepers"³⁰ is that the "locals" he identifies had also arrived somewhat recently and that, due to the high capital investment necessary to irrigate the region's arid soils, the industrialization of its agriculture was inevitable from the outset. In other words, there were no natives to displace, and as Guthman argues in *Agrarian Dreams*, there was no agrarian tradition to overturn. That these rural places contained within them the seeds of urbanity suggests a more complex interrelatedness between country and city.³¹

Goldschmidt's narrative trades on an account that Michael Bell, a rural sociologist, would distinguish as "first rural."³² For Bell, first rural has modernist underpinnings: it is materialist, spatial, and always "implies the urban."³³ As such, it is constantly subject to urban encroachment, and its politics are those of defense. However, Bell also articulates a second rural that is epistemologically subject to, yet ontologically intertwined with, first rural. This ideal moment of the rural is untethered to the urban and evokes the long-standing associations—both positive and negative—of rurality, such as those identified by Williams. Resonant with postmodernism, second rural provokes a politics of discourse in which setting is constituted through various actors. For Bell, the rural derives its power through the interplay

between its material and ideal moments.³⁴ As demonstrated by the 2013 Dodge Super Bowl commercial "God Made a Farmer," potentially anyone—whether corporate or citizen, urban or rural—can tap into this power. Perhaps more to the point, W.H. Friedland, the sociologist famous for provocative pieces such as "The End of Rural Society and the Future of Rural Sociology," calls the rural charged with "semiotic magic."³⁵

Williams' claims regarding the rural and the urban go beyond an atemporal set of traits: he argues that popular conceptions of the country and the city become particularly reduced during times of structural transition.³⁶ In many respects, Nancy A. Naples puts this theory to the ethnographic test when she asks people in rural Iowa to reflect upon their lives since the farm crisis.³⁷ Interestingly, she finds that residents appropriate idealized associations of the countryside and use them as frames of reference when thinking through their responses. That popular conceptions of rurality act as "partial interpreters"³⁸ of lived experience is also corroborated by Bell in his own ethnography of the English countryside. Since his informants report and behave according to the *gemeinschaft* qualities that rural sociologists have discounted, Bell argues that these ideals still have relevancy: "Throughout the Anglo-American world, the rural-urban continuum remains an important source of legitimation, motivation, understanding, and identity."³⁹ Bell even goes so far as to argue that Ferdinand Tönnies, the scholar who originally drew the distinction between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, considered the two "interwoven in all kinds of associations."⁴⁰

Williams also makes a puzzling observation regarding the rural in his discussion of the European pastoral tradition: he argues that, beginning with Virgil's *Georgics*, representations of the countryside have implied its demise.⁴¹ Resonant with this motif is the way in which rural residents articulate declinist visions of the countryside.⁴² Without prompting, Jessica, Lauren, Sean, and John reported on the feeling that something had been "lost"; this idea was implicit in all but one of my interviews:

"The food culture has been lost."

"We've lost the intuition about eating and activity."

"One of the things I always think about is how difficult it is to get people to work on the farm who know something about farming because that kind of life is just not there anymore."

"Organic is not an easy alternative, but it's because we've kind of rejected it ... We've lost all those years of knowledge that we could have gained by farming organically."

Central to the *gemeinschaft* gestalt (or rural idyll) is the rooted nature of its community of individuals.⁴³ Despite regular mobility in and around the area, which would blur the boundaries of the local, many people in Central Wisconsin appear to employ *localism* as a touchstone of their identity. Localism points to the length of one's own and the length of one's family's residency in the area; as a consequence, some surnames have more currency than others. During my fieldwork, I noticed that, even in acknowledging demographic change, people cling to localism, as in the following: "The *natives* are passing away, and there are a lot of people who have moved into town *who don't have roots here* [emphasis added]."

In keeping with the ethos of the place, local food advocates, whether born in Central Wisconsin or elsewhere, communicate through selectively framing their messages and presenting *themselves* in a way that appeals to localism. This is to say that they have in mind the endemic perceptions of the unfamiliar when explaining their cause to the unconverted. Responsible for promoting the CSA concept to area workplaces, Jessica tried to present herself as a local individual with "an old name from around here." However, after her return from university and study abroad, she found herself "once-removed" and felt that her attempts to establish local credibility were not enough to overcome the divide she sensed.

Along with Hinrichs and Kathy S. Kremer,⁴⁴ Naples suggests that the "presumed consensus,"⁴⁵

which is a reflection of *gemeinschaft* ideology, makes the expression of difference difficult in rural communities: she found that people who articulate abnormal positions tend to refer to themselves as "outsiders." Josh's comments regarding the way that people perceive him, as a teacher and organic farmer, mimics this tendency: "My grandpa was the teacher here, and so, they look at us as being foreign already. We're always the odd ones out." Interestingly, throughout my fieldwork, I noticed that local food advocates in Central Wisconsin often attribute what they know are not mainstream opinions to their time away from Central Wisconsin. What's more, they often situate this difference in experiences of urbanity:

"And now I had all of these different ideas from the city so to speak."

"I came from the food movement as it is urban."

"I had seen the farm crisis but I had also seen, as a student in Madison, a lot of the new hope in agriculture."

Up until this point, I have characterized the local food movement and local people as two separate communities, but these categories are overdrawn, since many people in Central Wisconsin contain both. Josh, for example, described his social life as "really compartmentalized": "I have my definite Foodshed friends, and then I have my friends from high school, who are all these redneck people that live in Rudolph and Vesper. They don't always go between." Tom told me that, when moving in new circles, he nuances his language unless he gets an indication from an interlocutor that he might push further. Not easily pigeonholed, people like Josh and Tom know how to leverage the associations of the countryside in order to communicate and even provoke. For them, there is no "cultural chasm"⁴⁶ between the "new food movement" and the realities of rural life. They know how to appeal to the area's tradition of agriculture and to soft-peddle their politics.

Perhaps the successful adoption of local food rests with these individuals who, like organic

intellectuals, are able to serve as bridges not only through their words but also through their life stories. Although the local food movement is easily dismissed as a non-local imposition, if its leaders boast local credibility, it *becomes localized*. Witnessing the state of the rural economy and aware of the national turn toward local production, Josh concluded that the latter should be embraced—not as an extension of urban trends—but for the countryside’s benefit.

We’re producing more than we ever did with fewer people, but our towns are still dying... So what can we do? We need to add value to our product. We need to take advantage of this local movement and make it permanent.

In other words, the history of the local food movement does not determine its present-day appropriations. Even as a conceit developed in urban contexts, local food’s translation into the countryside can serve as a challenge to reduced (re) productions of rural life. In a similar vein, although the romanticization of the rural has historically been the concern of urban writers and readers, Tom chooses to see his own labors romantically. This vision informs his practice of agriculture and adds rhetorical gravitas to his message of social change.

In an age that has dissolved space and reconfigured time,⁴⁷ the rural derives power, in part, from its associations with stasis, permanence, and tradition. While these traits are unlikely to fade in the popular consciousness, they also do not define the countryside. Industry in the countryside has long been enabled by extensive mobility.⁴⁸ Though their influence may be contained through the process of othering, “new” people and ideas provoke the countryside and, in the case of local food, its practice of agriculture.

“People think that farmers are these backwards hillbillies, but the new generation of farmers are among the smartest and brightest people that we have.”

– Josh, agriculture education teacher

FARMING FOR MARX? During lunch in the farmhouse kitchen one afternoon, I witnessed Lucy teasing Tom about his weekly farmers’ market routine. She explained that—being tall, blond, and male—he fares better if she does not accompany him to the weekly event. A variety of theories emerged, but it was concluded that Tom’s presence taps into the iconic appeal of the farmer in the popular consciousness: the segments of the demographic who frequent the market rather enjoy buying vegetables from a “strapping young man.”⁴⁹ In addition to providing a window into the spirit of the farm, this anecdote underscores Tom and Lucy’s acute self-awareness, which derives, in part, from their command of certain forms of noneconomic capital. Tom and Lucy’s collective education and ability to speak “the language of the elite” puts them at a distinct advantage as farmers.

Alternative agriculture schemes, such as CSAs, require that producers think through marketing and consumption. As a result, people from nonagricultural backgrounds have been able to access farming in unprecedented ways.⁵⁰ “This is not to say that those without a college education are incapable of running a CSA or working off the farm, but it may indicate that college-educated and well-travelled farmers are more willing to experiment with the marketing associated with reflexive consumerism.”⁵¹ Somewhat surprisingly, one producer posited that, when it comes to alternative agriculture, it might be easier to learn how to farm than it is to gain an understanding of consumption.

Academic literature regarding alternative agriculture has emphasized the *intentionality* of “sophisticated urban transplants”⁵² who, like Lucy, have gone back to the land.⁵³ However, the stress placed on their “conscious choice”⁵⁴ has eclipsed the fact that people who grow up on farms also make the decision to stay. Farms today are rarely inherited without modification. For both John and Tom, continuing to farm viably has meant steep learning curves. John told me that the skills he learned growing up have had limited utility on his farm today. Given that agriculture has been conventional and industrial for at least a

generation, one is hard-pressed to find individuals who have grown up on the kind of farm (sustainable and diversified) that would equip them to run an alternative agricultural scheme (in terms of both growing and marketing skills). With the clarity of hindsight, John admitted:

I don't have a very broad skill-set when it comes to farming because I grew up on such a narrow specialized farm. Truthfully, I only learned how to really drive tractors and run machinery because that's what we used on the farm and then to use pesticides and synthetic fertilizers.

For people like John and Tom, a traditional farming background might be just as useful for the implied social support, spatial familiarity, and authenticity of their “brand” as it is for growing skills *per se*.

A considerable amount of literature on CSA evaluates whether its community ideals are compatible with its market objectives. It is generally argued that the lack of mutuality between producer and consumer (which occurs when community-building activities fall upon the shoulders of overstretched farmers) tests the realization of true community.⁵⁵ However, when asked about the community component of CSA, John explained that, though he agrees that his shareholders do not actually share in the risk of farming, as the rhetoric suggests, he values the up-front operating capital: “I take seriously their commitment to pay me up front.” John considers this sum an investment that makes it possible for him to farm and described it, along with fair prices, as one of the ways he requires support. Here it seems useful to consider that the meaning of community is contextually determined and that the word may not have the same significance in rural areas as in the literature.⁵⁶

The reconnection between producer and consumer, which is at the heart of the local food movement, presupposes that alienation exists in the first place. Without social distance, this primary mission of local food does not really make sense or, rather, does not make sense in the way the

movement means. As Lauren suggested: “I always wonder if it's [resistance to the adoption of local food] partially that we're in rural communities that have always had someone in agriculture near them, so the local food movement is not as enticing...” While a fascination with farming seems to have taken hold in urban centers across the United States, agriculture might be too familiar for people in Central Wisconsin to intellectualize and sentimentalize—in short, to valorize—it in the same way.

Hinrichs gets it right when she explains that, just as sustainability hinges on the command of capital, “the implications of the degree of decommodification may vary depending on the resources of different producers and consumers.”⁵⁷ Lucy and Tom have set out on an intentional investment in social change through agriculture and have poured their lives into representing this paradigm shift. As Lucy pointed out, Tom speaks in “sound bites” and, midharvest, made declarations to me such as: “The CSA is how I exert my *agency* in the farm crisis.” Theirs is the farm that seems closest to the ideals expounded in academic literature on local food; however, this close fit might be attributed to the fact that they are, in many respects, extroverted social scientists who happen to be running a farm. Martin Family Farm, on the other hand, which converted a conventional operation to a sustainable one, is precisely the kind of social change that should excite local food advocates because it suggests endogenous initiation. However, without a little red barn, it loses some of its archetypal appeal. What's more, lacking the same forms of articulation as the people who typically represent the local food movement, John is a different sort of farm mouthpiece.

Though they clearly do offer alternatives to the mainstream manner of distributing and sourcing food, not all farms running CSAs intend to make radical critiques of the industrialized food system. Producers and consumers will engage with social issues on their own terms, which are bounded by their own experiences. Nevertheless, that engagement in every locale reflects its own particular needs is necessary for the development of local epistemologies. It is important that CSAs

are differentiated. Not all farms or farmers are alike, but more importantly, they should not have to be, for the greater the diversity of farms and farmer personalities, the greater the number of people that will come to be involved in local food. Activist and academic discourse need resist assumptions about local food's adoption because every locale is different. Unfortunately, "[t]hese differences may be obscured by the universalization of the local as a site of resistance."⁵⁸

CONCLUSION This article has set out to address the reception of local food, a movement marked by urban contexts, in rural Central Wisconsin. The rural and the urban are spaces that "exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action,"⁵⁹ but they are also ways in which individuals locate themselves in the world—ways in which they articulate identity and find belonging. In his article "Culture on the Ground," Tim Ingold posits that knowledge is coterminous with our movement in the world.⁶⁰ Though the local food movement has emphasized place-making, it has not accounted for the mobility of people and ideas between places.

Because people in Central Wisconsin employ localism as a metric of acceptance, ideas that have their genesis elsewhere find kinder reception if tempered by the familiar. As a result, local food advocates reorient themselves, as well as their messages, around the ethos of the place. Family farming, in particular, is the guise to which people are accustomed in Central Wisconsin. Like Lucy and Tom's pizza—their nonchalant envoy for social change—family farming can help to promote equal access to food and rural revival, for it is the most locally appealing Trojan horse.

In *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton writes that it is "an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory."⁶¹ But what happens if they do not? Despite its surface similarity with farming of the past, local food may be more like an "invented tradition."⁶² The ideological component of local food—and its reimagination of farming and the countryside—is more pronounced than in agriculture of the past, which was constrained by necessity. This

distinction makes local food's appeal to history as "a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion"⁶³ appear nonsensical to some for whom the memory of farming, whether personal or collective, is bittersweet. While Paxson considers some American artisans "[u]nfettered by tradition,"⁶⁴ this case is overstated in many parts of the country, such as Central Wisconsin. Agri(cultural) traditions in Central Wisconsin may not look like the centuries-long commitment to place, as in Europe, but they are also not to be discounted.

APPENDIX ONE: INTERVIEWEES CITED

in order of their mention

The owner and operator of Martin Family Farm, **John** is a fourth-generation farmer based in Rosholt, Wisconsin.

Tom and Lucy run Rocky View Acres, a third-generation family farm located in Athens, Wisconsin.

Though she has now retired, **Susan** enjoyed a long career as co-manager of a Stevens Point natural foods cooperative.

Lauren has been Executive Director of Central Waters Foodshed, based in Stevens Point, since its inception in 2007.

Josh is an agriculture teacher at London High School in Wisconsin Rapids. In addition to farming, he has helped to found the Auburn Food Cooperative in collaboration with other growers.

Raised in Central Wisconsin, **Jessica** served one term as an AmeriCorps member in a co-appointed position between Foodshed and the Wood County Health Department.

In addition to working at Neighborhood Natural Foods in Wisconsin Rapids, which his family owns, **Sean** serves on Foodshed's Board of Directors.

After many years in catering, **Amanda** and her partner expanded their business to include a restaurant by the name of Good Expectations, which is located in Wisconsin Rapids.

Mary, who is presently pursuing graduate work in forest ecology, is a former employee of Martin Family Farm.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS I would like to thank my family, friends, and the community of people that

has helped me to cultivate this project. A special thank-you to Mike Fairley and Mukta Das for their critical feedback as I set out to fashion my thesis into an article. Last but not least, I am grateful to Kenny for his support and companionship across two continents.

NOTES

1. The reporter also managed to sneak up on Tom, the co-owner of Rocky View Acres, as he was relieving himself in a patch of brush. Later in the day, this genre of photography was coined the “piss-toral.”
2. After completing the initial draft of this article, I learned that McEntee also draws a distinction between two different localisms. McEntee employs the term “traditional local” to describe localized provisioning motivated by the desire to obtain fresh and affordable food. His “contemporary local,” on the other hand, points to similar activities driven by environmental and social commitments.
3. All of the people and organizations mentioned in this article have been anonymized.
4. Julie Guthman, *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 174.
5. Community-supported-agriculture (CSA) is a direct marketing mechanism in which consumers (referred to as “members” or “shareholders”) pay a producer up-front for regular distribution of the harvest, which is typically a weekly box or bushel of vegetables. CSAs allow consumers to “know” the source of their food and producers to retain a larger percentage of profit. Though the degree of their alterity is contested, CSA schemes—along with farmers’ markets—are considered alternatives to conventional modes of marketing. For background information regarding the individuals that appear in this article, please see Appendix One.
6. Patricia Allen, *Food for the Future: Conditions and Contradictions of Sustainability* (New York: Wiley, 1993). Aimee Shreck, Christy Getz, and Gail Feenstra, “Social Sustainability, Farm Labor, and Organic Agriculture: Findings from an Exploratory Analysis,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 23, no. 4 (2006): 439–49. Ryanne Pilgeram, “‘The Only Thing that Isn’t Sustainable... Is the Farmer’: Social Sustainability and the Politics of Class among Pacific Northwest Farmers Engaged in Sustainable Farming,” *Rural Sociology* 76, no. 3 (2011): 375–93.
7. Lewis Holloway and Moya Kneafsey, “Reading the Space of the Farmers’ Market: A Case Study from the United Kingdom,” *Sociologia Ruralis* 40, no. 3 (2000): 285–99.
8. Arthur Getz, “Urban Foodsheds,” *The Permaculture Activist* 24 (October 1991): 26–27. Jack Kloppenburg, John Hendrickson, and G. W. Stevenson, “Coming into the Foodshed,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 13, no. 3 (1996): 33.
9. Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace: Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. N. Wirzba (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2002).
10. Kloppenburg et al., “Coming into the Foodshed.”
11. Agrarian populists typically define family farms as those operations in which family members accomplish the majority of the labor.
12. C. C. Hinrichs, “The Practice and Politics of Food System Localization,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 19, no. 1 (2003): 33.
13. Ibid. Michael Winter, “Embeddedness, the New Food Economy and Defensive Localism,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 19, no. 1 (2003): 23–32. Melanie DuPuis and David Goodman, “Should We Go ‘Home’ to Eat? Toward a Reflexive Politics of Localism,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 21, no. 3 (2005): 359–71.
14. Patricia Allen et al., “Shifting Plates in the Agrifood Landscape: The Tectonics of Alternative Agrifood Initiatives in California,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 19, no. 1 (2003): 61–75. Julie Guthman, “‘If They Only Knew’: Color Blindness and Universalism in California Alternative Food Institutions,” *The Professional Geographer* 60, no. 3 (2008): 387–397.
15. Colin Hines, *Localization: A Global Manifesto* (London: Earthscan, 2000), 27.
16. Hinrichs, “The Practice and Politics of Food System.” Winter, “Embeddedness, the New Food Economy.” DuPuis and Goodman, “Should We Go ‘Home’ to Eat?”
17. Warren Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

- Guthman, *Agrarian Dreams*, 172.
18. Jesse McEntee, "Realizing Rural Food Justice: Divergent Locals in the Northeastern United States," in *Cultivating Food Justice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011).
 19. C. C. Hinrichs and P. Allen, "Selective Patronage and Social Justice: Local Food Consumer Campaigns in Historical Context," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 21, no. 4 (2008): 335.
 20. C. C. Hinrichs, "Embeddedness and Local Food Systems: Notes on Two Types of Direct Agricultural Market," *Journal of Rural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2000): 295.
 21. Youngberg et al., "The Sustainable Agriculture Policy Agenda in the United States: Politics and Prospects," in *Food for the Future: Conditions and Contradictions of Sustainability*, ed. Patricia Allen (New York: Wiley, 1993), 298, quoted in Julie Guthman, *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 114.
 22. Cynthia Abbott Cone, and Andrea Myhre, "Community-Supported Agriculture: A Sustainable Alternative to Industrial Agriculture?" *Human Organization* 59 (2000): 187–97. E. Paul Durrenberger, "Community Supported Agriculture in Central Pennsylvania," *Culture and Agriculture* 24 (2002): 42–51. C. Clare Hinrichs and Kathy S. Kremer, "Social Inclusion in a Midwest Local Food System Project," *Journal of Poverty* 6 (2002): 65–90.
 23. A CAFO is a concentrated animal feeding lot.
 24. Don Shakow, "The Municipal Farmer's Market as an Urban Service," *Economic Geography* 57, no. 1 (1981): 68–77. Cone and Myhre, "Community-Supported Agriculture." Holloway and Kneafsey, "Reading the Space of the Farmers' Market."
 25. Lewis Holloway and Moya Kneafsey, *Geographies of Rural Cultures and Societies* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004). Lois Stanford, "The Role of Ideology in New Mexico's CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) Organizations: Conflicting Visions between Growers and Members," in *Fast Food/Slow Food: The Cultural Economy of the Global Food System*, ed. Richard Wilk (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006), 181–200.
 26. In twentieth-century scholarship, *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* were often mapped onto the country and the city, respectively.
 27. This concept was also popular in academic literature during the twentieth century, as Pahl notes: "The notion of a rural-urban continuum arose in reaction against the polar-type dichotomies, but there are equal dangers in over-readily accepting a false continuity." R. E. Pahl, "The Rural-Urban Continuum," *Sociologia Ruralis* 6, no. 3 (1966): 322.
 28. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Nottingham, England: The Russell Press, 1973), 1.
 29. Walter Goldschmidt, "Conclusion: The Urbanization of Rural America," in *Pigs, Profits, and Rural Communities*, ed. Kendall M. Thu and E. Paul Durrenberger (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 185.
 30. *Ibid.*, 185.
 31. Unfortunately, I feel bound by the categories of rural and urban even in trying to deconstruct them.
 32. Michael M. Bell, "The Two-Ness of Rural Life and the Ends of Rural Scholarship," *Journal of Rural Studies* 23, no. 4 (2007): 404.
 33. *Ibid.*, 405.
 34. Halfacree makes a somewhat similar distinction between "the rural as space and the rural as representing space." Keith Halfacree, "Locality and Social Representation: Space, Discourse and Alternative Definitions of the Rural," *Journal of Rural Studies* 9, no. 1 (1993): 34.
 35. W. H. Friedland, "Agriculture and Rurality: Beginning the 'Final Separation?'" *Rural Sociology* 67, no. 3 (2002): 353.
 36. Williams, *The Country and the City*.
 37. Nancy A. Naples, "Contradictions in Agrarian Ideology: Restructuring Gender, Race-Ethnicity, and Class," *Rural Sociology* 59, no. 1 (2010): 110–35.
 38. Williams, *The Country and the City*, 296.
 39. Michael M. Bell, "The Fruit of Difference: The Rural-Urban Continuum as a System of Identity," *Rural Sociology* 57, no. 1 (1992): 79.
 40. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, ed. Charles P. Loomis (Devon, UK: David & Charles, 1940), 18, quoted in Bell, "The Fruit of Difference," 79. That rurality is also in the eye of the beholder became evident for me during a conversation with John. When I asked how the rural nature of the

area affects his CSA operation, John interpreted the question as excluding area towns. By this anecdote, I mean to qualify that people do not appropriate the idealized representations of rurality in the same way or to the same degree. The countryside provides a context for people first to entertain *gemeinschaft* ideals and then to realize or critique them through their practices. Because of the subjective interplay between person and place, (re)productions of the rural are specific to individual actors.

41. Williams, *The Country and the City*.
42. Bell, "The Fruit of Difference." Keith Halfacree, "Talking about Rurality: Social Representations of the Rural As Expressed by Residents of Six English Parishes," *Journal of Rural Studies* 11, no. 1 (1995): 1–20. Naples, "Contradictions in Agrarian Ideology."
43. Halfacree, "Talking about Rurality."
44. Hinrichs and Kremer, "Social Inclusion in a Midwest Local Food."
45. Naples, "Contradictions in Agrarian Ideology," 132.
46. Stanford, "The Role of Ideology in New Mexico's CSA," 185.
47. Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
48. Michael M. Bell and Giorgio Osti, "Mobilities and Ruralities: An Introduction," *Sociologia Ruralis* 50, no. 3 (2010): 199–204.
49. Before heading back to the fields, the people at lunch coined this concept "the erotic capital of farming."
50. Larch Maxey, "Can We Sustain Sustainable Agriculture? Learning from Small-Scale Producer-Suppliers in Canada and the UK," *Geographical Journal* 172 (2006): 230–44. Paul V. Stock, "'Good Farmers' as Reflexive Producers: An Examination of Family Organic Farmers in the US Midwest," *Sociologia Ruralis* 47, no. 2 (2007): 83–102. Pilgeram, "'The Only Thing That Isn't Sustainable.'"
51. Stock, "'Good Farmers' as Reflexive Producers," 90–1.
52. Heather Paxson, "Artisanal Cheese and Economies of Sentiment in New England," in *Fast Food/Slow Food: The Cultural Economy of the Global Food System*, ed. Richard Wilk (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006), 213.
53. Colin Sage, "Social Embeddedness and Relations of Regard: Alternative 'Good Food' Networks in South-West Ireland," *Journal of Rural Studies* 19, no. 1 (2003): 47–60. Brian Ilbery, Carol Morris, Henry Buller, Damian Maye, and Moya Kneafsey, "Product, Process and Place," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 12, no. 2 (2005): 116–132. Maxey, "Can We Sustain Sustainable Agriculture?" Stock, "'Good Farmers' as Reflexive Producers." Heather Paxson, *The Life of Cheese: Crafting Food and Value in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).
54. Maxey, "Can We Sustain Sustainable Agriculture?" 235.
55. Hinrichs, "Embeddedness and Local Food Systems." Laura DeLind, "Considerably More Than Vegetables, a Lot Less Than Community: The Dilemma of Community Supported Agriculture," in *Fighting for the Farm: Rural America Transformed*, ed. Jane Adams, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 192–208.
56. McEntee, "Realizing Rural Food Justice."
57. Hinrichs, "Embeddedness and Local Food Systems," 298.
58. Allen et al., "Shifting Plates in the Agrifood Landscape," 73.
59. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.
60. Tim Ingold, "Culture on the Ground," *Journal of Material Culture* 9, no. 3 (2004): 315–40.
61. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3.
62. Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
63. Ibid., 12.
64. Heather Paxson, "Locating Value in Artisan Cheese: Reverse Engineering Terroir for New-World Landscapes," *American Anthropologist* 112, no. 3 (2010): 447.



Farmstand at Closing. Brookfield, Massachusetts | 2014

Brett Culbert

In the spirit of journeys, as this journal issue is themed, the photography featured throughout offers a glimpse into a bike trip I took this past summer, from Cambridge, MA. to Aliquippa, PA—just north of Pittsburgh. The ride covered approximately eight-hundred miles in eleven days and, while the main attraction was meant to be the three-hundred mile corridor of the old Erie Canal, I found my attention piqued by the cultural and natural margins that surround this now abandoned and swampy pathway. The industrial ruins that punctuate this landscape seem stranded without the rail and canal networks that once enabled the region to thrive. Such features are often out of sight when traveling by highway and I recommend the pace and labor of bike travel to anyone who wants to grapple with the scale of this environment.

Overall, agriculture figures in as the primary subject of my work and, together with food—of utmost importance to fuel the cyclist—these two things were in my view and on my mind for most of the ride. My medium of choice when traveling is film photography and the compact Fuji 645 medium-format camera has the perfect size, durability and automation for bike work. Though one has to be patient to see the results of film photography, both the quality of images and the excitement of reliving your trip weeks later make film worth the wait.

(more at www.brettculbert.com)

“They Go By The Moon”: An Anthropological Perspective on Home Winemaking Among Italian Americans in Boston

abstract | *The Italian American home winemaker is a steward of the winemaking process, but this means more than simply guiding grapes through fermentation. As custodians of a masculine winemaking environment and masters of a male-dominated process, master home winemakers are keepers of Italian American patrimonial heritage. Under the tutelage of older generations of Italian American male winemakers, younger generations of Italian Americans engage in a home winemaking environment which embodies physical and sociocultural manifestations of masculinity and domestic gender roles, and in doing so these younger generations internalize what it means to be an Italian American man. Through the cases which follow, I aim to illustrate how Italian American home winemaking in Boston, Massachusetts, may be used as a lens with which to view aspects of cultural patrimony within the Italian American cultural experience. It is my hope that this will help introduce wine, especially homemade wine, as an element of Italian American culture which invites scholars of Italian American studies and food studies to perceive wine and other alcoholic beverages in a new light.*

keywords | *Italian American, Wine, Homemade Wine, Masculinity, Heritage*

Home winemaking, like any culinary tradition, exists as a dynamic performance of culture, a value-loaded operation which produces, reconstructs, and stabilizes dominant and subversive ideologies and identities. In particular, Italian American home winemaking functions as a discourse on Italian and Italian American masculinity and on heritage, both tangible and intangible. Boston, Massachusetts, with its deeply historic and continuously evolving community of industrious and oenophilic Italian Americans, presents a unique setting to explore these traditions of home winemaking.

Boston, a city well known today for its generous production and consumption of beer and for its love of spirits and cocktail culture, also harbors a thriving history of do-it-yourself winemaking, and this winemaking tradition, which survived the gauntlet of Prohibition relatively unscathed, may be the oldest continuous mode of alcohol production and consumption in the city.¹ An anthropological investigation of Italian American

home winemaking in Boston not only showcases an important and underrepresented aspect of Italian American culture while fleshing out the history of wine as it pertains to an iconic American city but also strengthens a growing body of literature which seeks to move past the academic medicalization of alcohol, instead presenting wine and other alcoholic beverages as meaningful lenses of inquiry within the realms of anthropology and food studies.

Home winemaking by Italian Americans in Boston is a constructive process which deliberately and unconsciously produces an environment richly encoded with cultural and social data. As Mary Douglas once argued about food, wine and winemaking is a code; it contains a sequence of possible cultural and social messages.³ At its most tangible, the educational sphere of home winemaking takes the form of studies in craftsmanship and technique. Fathers teach sons the proper physical methods of winemaking through experiential training: how to set up

equipment, how to recognize the development of wine across its stages, and how to press, age, and bottle. Less concrete, but still regulated by the senses, are lessons in taste and appraisal or beliefs about purity and cleanliness. Finally, but certainly not least of all, comes the transmission of intangible morals and ethics such as punctuality and the importance of hard work, or elements of social structure such as hierarchies and gender roles. Through the cases which follow, I aim to illustrate how the act of Italian American home winemaking in Boston, Massachusetts, may be used as a lens with which to view various aspects of the Italian American cultural experience. It is my hope that this will help introduce wine, especially homemade wine, as an element of Italian American culture, inviting scholars of Italian American studies and food studies to perceive wine and other alcoholic beverages in a new light.

Boston's Italian American community is a tight-knit group comprising several satellite neighborhoods; among them are the city's famous North End, East Boston, Stoneham, and parts of Medford. I first encountered this community and its members at the homebrew store but soon became aware of several local "clubs" founded over the last century to foster fellowship among Italian Americans and to preserve Italian American culture. Several of these clubs, such as the Appian Club of Stoneham, Massachusetts, host home winemaking competitions. In September 2013 I contacted Nicolas Orichuia, the founder and editor-in-chief of "*Bostoniano*," a news website

and print magazine featuring Boston's Italian American community. Nicola in turn put me in contact with clubs, individuals, and families whom he knew to make wine. As with many artisans, home winemakers are impassioned individuals who enjoy speaking about their craft, and I was quickly taken in by the community. By early October, the tail end of Boston's 2013 home winemaking season, I had collected ten interviews, shared a traditional meal of tripe with a table of home winemakers, and participated in a day-long crush event with Vincenzo Capogreco, the Capogreco family, and select family friends.

Semistructured interviews lasted an average of one hour per person. I prompted informants by asking questions regarding their personal winemaking histories and their winemaking processes and beliefs, noting that I was interested in the heritage and traditions of Italian American home winemaking. Not surprisingly, discussions required little further prodding on my part. Individuals were quick to share their thoughts and beliefs and frequently navigated their own stories and timelines without requiring me to keep our dialogues on topic. All interviews were recorded digitally, which allowed me to participate in winemaking processes as needed and, in some cases, to engage in the meals traditionally prepared by women for winemaking days or by men for Appian club meetings. I have chosen to transcribe these interviews verbatim in this paper. Because of the nature of spoken language, and because English is not the first language of many of my participants,

Name, Affiliation	From	Current Location	Year of Immigration	Learned From	Winemaker Since
Vincenzo Capogreco	Calabria, Italy	East Boston, MA	1962	Father, father-in-law	1962
Luigi Zeraschi, Appian Club	Parma, Italy	Melrose, MA	1958	Father	1968
Dominic Candelieri	Calabria, Italy	Braintree, MA	1983	Father, grandfather	1968
Franco DiStefano, Appian Club	Isernia, Italy	Stoneham, MA	1972	Father, grandfather	N/A
Vincent "Vinny" Festino, Appian Club	Massachusetts	Stoneham, MA	N/A	Italian and American cousins	1979
Charles Uglietto	Massachusetts	Cambridge, MA	N/A	Father, grandfather	2006
Susi Remondi	Connecticut	Somerville, MA	N/A	Father, uncle	2012



Figure 1: Vincenzo is observed by a grandnephew while straining new wine.

these excerpts often appear with grammatical and lexical inconsistencies. Punctuation has been added to help facilitate the flow of conversation.

The table above presents some of the winemakers with whom I spoke and organizes some demographic information regarding their winemaking histories. It is of note that Franco, Dominic, Luigi, and Vincenzo—the “old guard” of winemakers—are a generation older than Vinny and Charlie. In her midtwenties, Susi represents another generational gap. Though Susi now lives in Boston, she is originally from Connecticut, and her father, with whom I did not speak, still lives there. Though Susi does not come from a Bostonian background, I nevertheless felt that her insight as a female winemaker would lend a unique perspective to this conversation on Italian American home winemaking. The “Winemaker Since” field notes the year in which the individual self-identifies as becoming a primary or “head” winemaker, rather than as an assistant. Typically, these individuals have been making wine, or have somehow been involved in winemaking processes, for most of their lives. Because Italian American home winemaking is a highly patriarchal and patrilocal process, these winemakers did not engage in their own acts of home winemaking until immigration to the United States removed them from their established familial winemaking environments. If winemaking mentors were still present in the United States, such as Vincenzo’s father-in-law or Charlie’s

father and grandfather, then personal winemaking practices usually began after the death of a mentor or after the individual moved from the locus of winemaking (such as Susi moving from Connecticut to Greater Boston).

I met Vincenzo and his daughter Lisa at their home in East Boston. It was a nice house, small, but with a sizeable backyard which Vincenzo had converted into a thriving garden, cantina, and curing room for salumi. Vincenzo had built the cantina himself, a retirement gift which also fulfilled his life goal of owning and operating a personal winemaking space. It was the focal point of much discussion, and Vincenzo used it to explain to me the differences between contemporary home winemaking and that of the early twentieth century.

Most of the people in the South of Italy have the cantina. Make the grape. Then make the wine ... I learned from my father. It's tradition. And then come over here. It my father-in-law. He make the wine over here. But he no make it so good because he no have the place. He make it good. He know how to make good but he no have the place to make the wine.

First thing: The place to make the wine. Second thing: You got to buy the tools, the right tools. Three thing: The qualita. You got to pay the best. And keep it clean. And keep it clean. And the wine come good. So far make good wine every year. Every year. We drink wine every year. We don't have to put it in the refrigerator. Don't have to put in way. No chemical. Nothing. I make natural. Natural.⁴

Vincenzo originally learned to make wine with his father in his home region of Calabria in southern Italy. After 1962, when he immigrated to the United States, he continued to learn from his father-in-law. By this time, the tide of Italian immigration to the United States had long ebbed. The 1850 United States census, which first recorded nationality, noted 3,645 Italians. By 1890, this number had risen to 182,580, though over three hundred

thousand Italian immigrants were reported to enter the country between 1881 and 1890. With another two and a half million Italians immigrating to the United States between 1890 and 1910, the bulk of immigration would be complete by 1914 and the start of World War I.⁵ Though several of my informants immigrated to the United States in the last fifty years, many had family and extended family who were already practicing home winemaking in the United States. For Italian Americans who have lived in both Italy and the United States, winemaking education in Italy was frequently supplemented by further teachings by Italian family members in the United States.

"First thing: The place to make the wine." It is hard to avoid a discussion of *terroir* when engaged in studies on wine production and consumption. While I am certain that a connection between *terroir* and home winemaking could be drawn, it is my belief that home winemaking, especially in the context of Boston's Italian American home winemakers, is less a question of "the taste of place" and more a question of "personal taste." In other words, home winemaking reflects more noticeably the individual or individuals engaged in the process rather than the delicate expression of the vineyard's socioenvironmental climate. In Vincenzo's case, he literally built his cantina, his space of winemaking. Home winemakers typically have little to no connection with the region, let

alone the vineyard, from which they source their grapes. In Boston, for example, grapes and the more common prepressed grape juice can be purchased from retail locations specializing in homebrewing and home winemaking. Alternatively, bulk grapes can be purchased from a market in Chelsea. Some Italian families, such as the Capogrecos, do continue to grow grapes, though they rarely grow enough to produce wine and instead use the fruit for preserves and other domestic uses. With the winemakers alienated from the vineyard and with the supply of grapes bottlenecked through a small handful of markets and retail establishments, *terroir* no longer exists as a factor of distinction among homemade wines. Instead, the quality of homemade wine directly reflects the capability, and the individuality, of the home winemaker. For Vincenzo, the cantina plays a leading role in not only the winemaking process but also the development of Vincenzo's identity as a winemaker.

Even though *terroir* plays less of a role in the discussion of home winemaking than in discussions of its commercial counterpart, the concepts of space and place remain important pieces of the Italian American home winemaking experience. In his exploration of memory and space, Pierre Nora describes *les lieux de memoire*, the most material "sites of memory" which help cultural actors symbolically relive and perform an otherwise lost collective history.⁶ It could be



Figure 2, Left to Right: Vincenzo's Cantina; An Old Wine Bottle; Vincenzo, Apprentice, and Wine Press

said that Italian American home winemakers engage in tradition and history through these *lieux de memoire*—after all, personal cantinas and winemaking objects imbued with memory and meaning are commonplace features and artifacts of Italian American winemaking. These objects create portals, negotiated by an experience of winemaking, by which Italian Americans may interact with personal histories and memories. However, as the very act of winemaking within the Italian American home produces space and transforms space, so too does it challenge Nora's assertion that *milieux de memoire*, the true sites of memory, are all but extinct.

In addition to winemakers experiencing memory through objects, the act of winemaking creates a new environment, practiced and performed yet each year new and distinct from the one before it. Though the performance of winemaking itself is attached to a specific location, the winemaking atmosphere resonates outward from the cantina or cellar, converting the usually dormant workshop into a place of energy and excitement and then progressing to swallow the yard and house in a contagious field of joy and fellowship. The actors participating in these environments may be referencing memory through specific *lieux de memoire*, but they are also engaged in the production of a new, dynamic space and memory-building experience, a true *milieu de memoire* or what Lefebvre conceives of as *l'espace* or a "spatialization."⁷ Charlie, a newer Italian American winemaker who remembers his father and grandfather making wine out of a shack in their Cambridge home, describes how the smell of winemaking transforms his home:

In the basement we've made a little bit of a, kind of a working wine cellar. So it's not with the tile floor and the nice stained glass, it's really a working wine cellar. And now we've set up an area where we set up all our fermenting tubs. I think this year we had ...uh 2012 ... six fermenting tubs set up as we've increased a variety of grapes, more fermenting tubs. We don't have a lot of space. I wish I had made

*more space for it, but we make it work. We make it work. And I will always tell you, once we crushed the grapes, Thursday after we've crushed the grapes, I get up in the morning and it's like Holy Jesus. The entire house smells like wine, it's unbelievable. And you go, "Well, I know the fermentation process is moving along quite well."*⁸

The smells of winemaking which flood Charlie's house paint a more concrete example of the winemaking experience overstepping the physical boundaries of the wine cellar. When I joined Vincenzo at ten o'clock on a Saturday morning to help with the wine crush, the smell of grapes was not present in the Capogreco household. Still, something else had taken hold. On my way to the backyard, to its heirloom tomatoes, fig trees, and of course the cantina, I passed through the downstairs kitchen and dining room. Though I was the first apprentice winemaker to arrive that morning, work in the kitchen had already begun. One of Vincenzo's daughters was hard at work preparing *zeppoli*, broadly speaking Italian doughnuts. Rather than being coated with sugar, they were to be each stuffed with an anchovy in the traditional Calabrese way. It was quite the laborious feat, considering the massive bowl of dough which sat on the counter next to a pan of frying oil. As the day's other apprentice winemakers—friends and cousins and Vincenzo's son Pasquale (the apprentices were always male)—joined us in the cantina, children, wives, sisters, aunts, and girlfriends congregated in the basement kitchen and dining room. For many Italian American households, winemaking is a festive occasion, a day of celebration and commensality peppered with traditional foods such as *zeppoli* and home-cured *sopressata*. Though the pungent tang of fermenting grapes did not fill the Capogreco home, some other transformative energy was certainly in the air.

"Second thing: You got to buy the tools, the right tools." With the arrival of assistant winemakers, we immediately got to work. The grapes had been fermenting in large tubs for between one and two weeks. For the most part, the clusters had been

destemmed, though the skins remained in contact with the juice to provide flavor, color, tannins, and yeast. Vincenzo confided in me that all the help in the cellar sometimes annoyed him. It was a small space, and today's winemaking practices simply did not need the number of bodies and hands required by the older methods.

*Before it's all by hands. Everything by hands. You have ... you don't have it no more. You grind them up with the thing by hands. Then you put the thing and tie them up, push them up. Now today, everything automatic. But everything from Italy, everything ... When to press, we got the machine, but you had to work hard. Today, one man can make the grape. Before, two or three men, four men would do this. Now you get everything. Oof, it change a lot. And we lose a lot of wine with the thing antique. Now you don't lose nothing. You come the press, the temperature, it's all controlled.*⁹

Despite his grumblings, Vincenzo still teaches his son, his nephews, and his friends the correct techniques and processes. For my fellow apprentices, winemaking occurs with Vincenzo, at Vincenzo's house, regardless of whether you have your own equipment at home or not. Vincenzo is the master winemaker; everyone else is present to learn. Indeed, space was tight; the small concrete room pressed in on half a dozen full-grown men and a couple hundred pounds of freshly fermented grapes. Auxiliary containers soon made things even tighter as we prepared to squeeze the fermented grapes in a large, hand-cranked, and (of course) Italian barrel press. Meanwhile, an electric pump—notably juxtaposed against the pneumatic press—moved juice to empty vessels. Dominic Candelieri, another local home winemaker and Italian cookbook author from Braintree, Massachusetts, describes his own labor-intensive winemaking process. It is not unlike the work we performed with Vincenzo.

*When I do the white Moscato, I take every bit of the stem out. So once the grape is grind you cover. And you cover, every two or three nights you will look to see what will happen. And because the alcohol, it starts boiling. And then the wine will come up. And then you take a big stick, and you break them. And the sooner you break them and you stir, it is going to go down again. And then you cover. And then you check it again in a couple of days. I don't let my wine ferment for more than a week. So once it done with fermentation, I put it in the squeezer and you know. One you put in the squeezer, there is a lot of juice or a lot of stem. In other words, you put in the squeezer and you start a-squeezing and you will see that the juice is coming out.*¹⁰

Dominic and Vincenzo, like many older Italians—what I refer to as the “old guard” of winemakers—maintain a minimalist approach to winemaking. They ferment using the grapes' natural yeasts. With the exception of lighting a sulfur stick to sterilize barrels, they clean equipment with water. Wine is aged in glass demijohns, large carboys, or repurposed wine barrels. In Vincenzo's case, the wine barrels are old whiskey barrels. The recycling of whiskey barrels is a common practice among the old guard of Boston's Italian American home winemakers, perhaps adopted from the days of the Old Mr. Boston distillery that operated in Roxbury, Massachusetts from 1933 until 1986.¹¹ Whiskey barrels are frequently discarded after their first use and are a cheap and reliable source of barrels for do-it-yourself winemakers, none of whom seemed to mind the sweet, strong, bourbon-like flavors and aromas which the barrels impart to the wine.

Some techniques are older than others, yet remain equally important as or more important than evolving practices. I sat at the Appian Club meeting in Stoneham, surrounded by a table of the club's most respected home winemakers. It was a special night—Frank had spent the day preparing a classic Italian meal of slow-cooked tripe. It was a delicate process, arguably more delicate than the winemaking techniques we discussed at the

table. Vinny Festino, the club's president, called my attention to the gentleman who moved to join us.

*Chris, this is Luigi. He's one of our best [in the competition]. He either comes in first or second, never third. But always either first or second. And most of the time, first. He's really a master winemaker.*¹²

We exchanged salutations, and Luigi sat down to my right. Without hesitation or prompting, he launched into an explanation about his winemaking beliefs.

*Number one, you got to buy the best grape. That's the key. That's the number one key. Wine is like milk, you got to be clean. You got to watch the moon. Old moon all the time. When you got to move, got to be old ... That's the key ... You got to watch, even, when you move a clear day is even better. The old moon, a nice day, when you make the fortieth day, you squeeze, you take it out, you put them in the barrel. For forty day you're not supposed touch. The grape has to ... after forty day the wine is clear. Things at bottom. And when you move, don't shake. You got to leave it there. The bad wine at the bottom, you throw it away. If you shake them up, it doesn't come clean. That's one thing.*¹³

Luigi's discussion of the moon phases—I was continuously and emphatically reminded of the importance of “*mananza and crescenza*,” “waning and waxing”—is reminiscent of home winemaking's agricultural and peasant ancestry. Until after World War II, winemaking was a widespread rural and familial activity which generated a product for personal consumption, for guests, and for manual laborers. As the moon phase has guided agricultural processes for hundreds of years, so too did it guide the timeline of winemaking. Home winemaking is still present in Italy, though since the second half of the twentieth century the process has noticeably declined, yielding to the prominence of commercial winemaking.¹⁴ Interestingly enough,

since the majority of Italians immigrated to the United States in the early twentieth century, long before the rapid modernization of post-World-War Italian food culture, Italian American food traditions occasionally retain significant traces of pre-war peasant culture.¹⁵ Sometimes, such as with Luigi, these beliefs are overt. In other instances, these traditions have long since been assimilated into contemporary cultural practices and only hints remain. Charlie Uglietto, home winemaker in Somerville, Massachusetts, remembers making wine with his grandparents and father. In fact, he can still see the house where winemaking occurred from the office window of his family's oil company. Though he remembers his family's winemaking traditions, Charlie has deliberately strayed from the old guard's ways and instead follows more modern winemaking practices.

My father's father used to crush the grapes—however they crushed the grapes, stomping on them. Put them in the tubs, and let them ferment. Natural yeast, whatever it was. Ferment it. Then they would press them, put the wine in the barrels, top off the barrels, and then that's it. And they used whiskey barrels. Now, what we do is crush the grapes, throw them in the fermenting tubs, we add potassium metabisulfite to kill the natural yeast. Then we inoculate with yeast and a nutrient so that we can, you know, a cultured yeast so that we can control the process there.

*We started paying a lot more attention to, well, what's the acid—well, if we have to add, let's add some. If we don't, then let's cut it a little bit. So we really tried to—it has become more of a chemistry type of thing. So once we got it that we've let it uh ... ferment in the primary fermenters, you know, anywhere five to seven days, 'cause I like a darker red. We usually typically make a cab or a merlot, but typically mostly cab. Then what we'll do is we'll press it and we'll put it in—we use strictly French oak wine barrels. So we'll put it in the French oak wine barrels.*¹⁶

Charlie's choice of techniques is very indicative of the winemaking processes I learned while working at wineries in Virginia and while making my own wine out of the homebrewing store. He speaks of malolactic fermentation and of blending varietals to achieve a desired balance in flavors. Though he adheres to a chemistry-driven process that combines calculations and numbers with personal tastes and experiences, Charlie frequently refers to his winemaking experiences as a youth. Charlie fondly recalls riding with his cousins in the beds of delivery trucks, keeping boxes of grapes from falling out during transit. But gone are the days of stomping grapes and aging in bourbon barrels. Instead, Charlie uses destemming machines and French oak barrels, and he even has a bottle-filling machine to help with the bottling process. The savoir faire of winemaking that Charlie learned from his father and grandfather has been adapted to meet Charlie's understanding of contemporary commercial winemaking. It is this new tradition, grounded in a winemaking heritage at least three generations deep, which Charlie passes to his sons.

Last September, my wife and I went out to see one of our boys and we left my brother-in-law Gene and my older son in charge of the winemaking. And they stepped up and handled it on their own. And handled the chemistry on their own. And they really did a great job. I think the tradition is ... it's a pride thing to say, as a family, collectively, we've produced something that people like. But also from my standpoint again, being a little bit more selfish, it's a reason to get people together.¹⁷

Pressing wine is a long and arduous task, and Vincenzo's apprentices frequently rotated in order to evenly distribute the labors at hand. One dug through the tubs of grapes, pressing with a colander to release more of the fermented liquid while simultaneously maneuvering a hose to transport the liquid out of the tub. Another watched a receiving container, a twenty- or thirty-gallon Rubbermaid, managing the other end of

the hose to ensure that the precious wine would not overflow its new vessel. Two other gentlemen manned the press, a hand-pumped pneumatic barrel press which required constant management. Too much pressure, and the grapes would squirt out the side. Too little pressure, and the flow of squeezed juice would be insignificant at best. Vincenzo oversaw the entire operation, helping when needed, barking orders, and offering advice and opinions.

In his 1677 *Mechanick Exercises*, Joseph Moxon described the "Craft of the Hand" as something "which cannot be taught by Words, but is only gained by Practice and Exercise."¹⁸ The Italian American winemakers of Boston subscribe to a similar ethos. As an art or craft, winemaking must be experienced in order to fully understand how and why it occurs. Descendent from an agricultural past, the skills and lessons codified in the physical act of winemaking can only be learned through oral instruction and the process of making. It is precisely when these older, more "traditional" winemaking exercises interact with modernity and contemporary production methods that the performance of winemaking becomes a locus for discourse.¹⁹ Vincenzo entertained questions throughout the entirety of the crush. Why do we do it this way? Is this how you made wine in Italy? Are we there yet? At the intersection of old and new, the physicality of winemaking produces a dialogue of education, mediated through actions and tools and spaces.



Figure 3: Vincenzo and apprentices transferring remaining grapes

Charlie, on the other hand, took advice from winemaking experts in California. He reads books detailing contemporary winemaking practices and the chemistry of winemaking. His take is indicative of a widespread contemporary trend whereby consumers trust professional experience and scientific knowledge over familial authority and traditional practices.

"Three thing: The qualita. You got to pay the best. And keep it clean. And keep it clean." Living with one foot in the sensual sphere and one foot in the mental sphere, concepts such as taste, quality, and cleanliness blur the lines between corporeal and incorporeal. Nearly every winemaker with whom I spoke preferred lighter, sweeter Moscato wines and big, flavorful Zinfandels. The telltale flavors of bourbon, imparted via barrel aging, were a more acquired taste.

I enjoy a lighter wine, myself, only because I don't drink wine to get drunk. I drink wine to enjoy with my meal ... I think most Italians like a nice, hearty, full-bodied wine. And I think Zinfandel—Cabernet is the same, I think—but I think Zinfandel give you a nice hearty wine.²⁰

For Luigi and several others, Zinfandel represents the pinnacle of grapes appropriate for winemaking, and no place was more suitable to purchase these grapes than the New England Produce Market in Chelsea, Massachusetts.

I buy in [Chelsea]. There's two place you can buy in Boston. There's one in Woburn. It's more expensive. It's got the same grape. I check. You got to know wherever you go look at the grape, don't look one time and buy, you look around before. Check all the grape. The best sweet. Zinfandel is still the number one grape. They don't cheat. They give the Zinfandel. Zinfandel is the best wine. See, I get one box of Alicante for the color. Alicante give you the color.²¹

Viticultural research indicates that the Zinfandel grape is a clone of the Croatian varietal

Crljenak/Pribidrag and shares a DNA profile with the southern Italian grape varietal Primitivo.²² As closely related cultivars, Zinfandel and Primitivo exhibit nearly identical flavors. By law, Italian winemakers may import Primitivo as Zinfandel, though American winemakers must still label them as separate varietals.²³ Zinfandel's thick skin allows it to better withstand long-distance travel from California to Boston,²⁴ which allows distributors to deliver a sweeter grape to the market. For Luigi, this sweeter grape makes all the difference. That Zinfandel also looks and tastes like Primitivo, a common home winemaking varietal of southern Italy, may also play a role in its popularity.

The Chelsea market, the country's largest privately owned terminal market, is constituted in part by several Italian produce and fruit vendors, many of whom left Boston's North End neighborhood in the early 1970s after the Supreme Court ruling for desegregation.²⁵ Most of Boston's old guard winemakers make the bulk of their purchases here, where the intersection of quality and price seems to be at its most beneficial point.

The main thing, it has to be sweet. You could buy Barbera, or Zinfandel, or Merlot. The more important, it looks good. And the box got to be heavy. And that means you have the value there. Some people want to make wine and they go buy the cheap grape. They want to save money.²⁶

As important as knowing how to correctly produce wine is knowing how to correctly source grapes. Participating in the purchase or delivery of grapes is an important learning experience, and the value and sweetness chosen by Luigi's discerning eye may be notably different selection criteria than the chemical properties which drive a newer winemaker's selection. Charlie describes an encounter with the Chelsea market that ultimately led him to purchase from a more expensive store in Woburn:

We [purchased grapes from Chelsea] once and it was terrible. I shouldn't say that. I think

that may be harsh. They were less worthy of the \$50+ dollars a box I was paying for them. So they were older than they should have been. And then the other thing was when you're asking people, you know, "What are the brix on the Cab grapes?" "Oh, they're good. They're good. They're great grapes. Great." "No, I understand that. I just want to know, what's the brix because I need this for my calculation to figure out what the alcohol content's going to be." "Oh, it's high. It's good." It doesn't work that way. And it's like, if you don't know, say you don't know. But give me the number of somebody I can call that can tell me what it is, so I know what I'm doing. So, yeah, we were disappointed with the quality of the grapes there.²⁷

Charlie notes that he lacks the contacts within the Chelsea market who can notify him of new shipments. Though home winemaking as a whole can be viewed as an inclusive, welcoming process, the reality is that quality grapes are a rare commodity. Winemakers must compete with each other while navigating a fluctuating window to make sure that they are available to receive quality raw ingredients. Even if Charlie were to have an inside contact, he might continue to purchase grapes from the Woburn store, which can tell him the specific brix (a measure of the sugar content) and acidity levels of a shipment and can ensure that the delivery is fresh.

A discussion regarding quality is a discussion of taste, of personal preferences, and of choice.²⁸ Within the old guard, quality grapes are defined in terms of sweetness; a quality purchase is defined in terms of weight and value. For the new guard, quality may be expressed in terms of proper brix or acid levels, a quality purchase reflecting freshness and dependability. Following Bourdieu, these tastes are indicative of a group's broader social preferences. Value, for instance, is a concept that is known to the contemporary consumer but in many ways means far more to a generation which knew the Great Depression and the scarcity of the World War era. Similarly, dependability and a

correct chemical composition indicate a modern trend which emphasizes the importance of an enlightened consumer and transparent business practices.

Cleanliness is also an important part of the home winemaking process and was perhaps the most frequently addressed topic during my interviews with home winemakers. Paralleling her discussion in "Deciphering the Meal," Mary Douglas also explores concepts of purity, cleanliness, and dirt. In *Purity and Danger*, Douglas notes that "dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder".²⁹ Comparable to the symbolism present in and around a meal, dirt and cleanliness are also symbolic concepts. They represent order and chaos, politics, right and wrong. They are inextricably linked to the production and reproduction of cultural and social capital. Through discourses centered on dirt and cleanliness, experts in a field, be it cultural or natural, can communicate lessons in distinction. The arena of home winemaking is no exception.

Regardless of a winemaker's subscription to old guard or new guard ideology, cleanliness plays a fundamental role in the winemaking process. For Luigi, "Wine is like milk. It got to be clean." Just as milk has long been a classic symbol of purity, cleanliness, and wellness,³⁰ wine can also be a symbol of the sanctity of body, space, and place. Sabatino, another old guard winemaker, agrees that cleanliness is the most important part of the winemaking process. "Otherwise the bacteria makes all the impurity and stuff. It makes the wine sick".³¹ As an expression of the winemaker and by its very existence as a fermented product, winemaking is regarded by the older Italian Americans as a living product. As such, it remains important to keep the wine happy and healthy. If neglected or treated poorly, the wine, just like milk and the body, will spoil. In a comparison between her personal life and the writings of Homer, Italian American oral historian Joanna Clapps Herman recalls a moment of failed winemaking:

*My father loved to tell this story about the importance of wine to his family: His grandmother, his father, and his father's closest friend, Canio, stood solemnly in the cellar passing around the first taste of Canio's wine. They were the arbiters. The glass was passed in turn to each. No one said a word for a moment. Then Mamanonna, my father's grandmother, broke the silence grimly: "Canio's season is shot to hell." Poor Canio's wine wasn't any good, and so now he had no way to welcome guests to his home.*³²

To Herman, a failed wine yield represents a moment of significant personal and social conflict. Without wine, Canio's home is less inviting, even less complete. The magnitude of his failure is not expressed in terms of bottles or even barrels but rather as an entire season of resources, time, and energy. It is not explicitly stated that Canio's winemaking failed for lack of cleanliness, though infection is certainly the most common avenue to homemade wine spoilage, especially if the wine is still young and has not been exposed to many factors of aging. Among the first lessons communicated by Italian American home winemakers is how to rinse equipment, how to clean barrels with sulfur sticks, and that neatness and order aid in the swift assessment of cleanliness and the execution of cleaning. Vincenzo's strict policy of "No food. No potato. No bread ...just have the bottle of wine" also illustrates the rich set of rules which helps to govern the state of the cantina and the sacredness of the winemaking space.

For the new guard of Italian American home winemakers, cleanliness takes the form of an escalating chemical war between winemakers and hosts of undesirable microbes. Fueled by an arsenal of chemicals which alter pH, salinity, or any number of other variables, the new guard of Italian American winemakers uses cleansers and sanitizers to mold the winemaking environment into submission. Sulfur sticks remain the most efficient way of sanitizing barrels, but winemakers primarily use sodium metabisulfite and potassium metabisulfite to sanitize equipment. Percarbonate

cleansers (think OxiClean, but without the detergent) scrub away particles. Winemakers test acid levels and sugar content, using tools such as refractometers to obtain accurate readings. With this shift, gone are the days of sensory-oriented home winemaking. No longer do home winemakers rely on the sights, sounds, smells, touches, and tastes of the winemaking process; they instead follow prescribed instructions and work off of precise chemical measurements.

*I make wine because it reminds me of home. And my dad makes wine because it reminds him of home. And my grandpa made wine because that's what they fucking do in Italy. [laughs] But yeah, I think that it's a really cool skill to have. But I don't think that I have a skill. I think I have a good knack at following [my father's] sticky note instructions. Which is going to turn into a skill eventually. I'm getting better at it.*³³

In teaching proper methods of cleaning and sterilizing, winemakers not only convey which techniques and cleaning agents to use but also communicate the importance of sensory perception and a hierarchy of the senses.³⁴ For old guard winemakers, a clean wine is a happy wine. It is produced in a positive space with quality ingredients and is tended to by an attentive winemaker, a steward of the transformative winemaking process. Throughout our crush day, Vincenzo pattered around the small cantina. He tasted the new wine; he noted its bright purple color and the deeper purple of the must. To me, the wine press appeared a simple machine, but its older pneumatic construction required the learned observations of a seasoned machinist. Nearly inaudible hissings and clinks let Vincenzo and his apprentices know when the press was under too much stress or if the mechanism had gotten caught on a chain. Throughout all of this, it was understood that a clean environment was important, but this understanding was rarely acted upon. I was told once of a hat which fell in a previous season's grapes. Vincenzo was furious

about what it might do to the wine. Now, no hats are allowed. As important as cleanliness is to the winemaking process, Vincenzo only mentioned it in the context of cleaning out vessels. Submerging hands into the grape must while physically pushing a colander (as Vincenzo and his apprentices did) into the wine is not, by contemporary standards, a sanitary process, but the intimate and interactive performance between winemaker and wine is an important part of traditional winemaking and in the moment eclipses questions of sanitation. In Braintree, Dominic remarks on his own experiences with cleanliness and spoiled wine:

*If I don't do the proper cleanliness on the containers, the wine in less than a year will go a little vinegar. Very very rare in all this years, I had one bad year. I believe that was a year of bad grapes. If I was doing something wrong it would be something wrong I would do every year. But it was okay. I give it to a friend of mine, and he make the grappa out of it.*³⁵

The ends—the finished, drinkable wine which emerges some three-plus months from the pressing—justify the means and modes of making. A successful wine indicates a successful and clean winemaking process. Modern winemakers, on the other hand, are taught to minimize personal contact with the wine, lest bacteria and yeast contaminate the product. Dominic, in over forty-five years making wine, only had one bad season. He was able to sterilize and save the product by having his friend distill it into grappa, and he remains adamant that the fault lay with the grapes, rather than with his techniques and attention to sanitization. If the finished wine is drinkable, then the sensory-driven processes used to create it cannot be questioned. Since Dominic's practices over the remaining seasons continue unchanged, he believes the contaminating variable to be the quality of the grapes.

For the younger generation of Italian American winemakers, contemporary home winemaking is less of a sensual experience and more of an interaction with tools and equipment.

Thermometers and thermostats help read and regulate temperature. Filtering machines strain out particles. Chemicals treat and sanitize wine and equipment. Taste and touch are downplayed in this environment. It is suggested that gloves be worn during many chemical treatments, and physical contact with the wine is strongly discouraged. Instead, sight is preferentially elevated above all other senses. Properly reading measurements or noticing clarification and fining stages becomes more important than tasting, smelling, or listening to the wine in order to determine its progress. Modern winemaking books, such as *The Joy of Home Winemaking*,³⁶ champion the act of record-keeping so that the exact moment of contamination (should it occur) can be more easily recognized. Closely follow certain steps, log your actions, and your wine will come out perfectly. The means and modes of production justify the ends.

Home winemaking among Boston's Italian American community is a performative process symbolic of Italian heritage at large which helps construct an ever-evolving identity of Italian American masculinity. As an act of making, the process of producing wine in the Italian American household is encoded with not just the rules and techniques of craftsmanship but also with cultural value, elements of social structure, and countless other markers of tangible and intangible heritage. The social environments produced and reproduced through home winemaking facilitate the diffusion of this encoded knowledge. The narrative of home winemaking in Boston emphasizes the



Figure 4: Pasquale, Vincenzo's son, cleans out a fermentation tub

communication of concepts such as quality, cleanliness, gender, and tradition.

Just as the production of heritage through the act of home winemaking is constantly changing, so too are the fields of food studies and Italian American studies. Wine, overlooked and downplayed by academia throughout the emergence of these fields, might soon be rewritten as an important and valuable cornerstone of cultural and social inquiry. Like many forms of alcohol, wine sits on the border between food and medicine. It uniquely engages the physical body as nourishment and, at times, impediment. As a symbolic comestible, it also fulfills a more unique role of spiritual and ritual nourishment. As such, the lens of wine and wine-related culture is particularly well-suited to address a vast number of relevant social and cultural concerns. Among the most principal of these issues is the transmission of intangible heritage, which in turn begs for a continuation of the study of alcohol and its relationships to gender, heritage, space, and the Italian American experience.

Of shocking interest is the expediency in which intangible heritage may be lost from a community. As illustrated in this paper, the current generations of Italian Americans rest on a confluence of traditions and modern ideas. In a moment's notice, what was commonplace to parents and grandparents may be altered irreparably or all together lost. Perhaps because of its place in the private, sacred sphere of the household, or

through its relationships with spirituality and cultural festivals, the richly encoded tradition of home winemaking has not experienced nearly as much revision as its more public counterparts. Even so, within another generation or two, many of the contemporary traditions present in Italian American home winemaking will be lost, and with them their symbolic relevance to generations of Italian Americans. I do not mean to suggest that home winemaking will no longer remain a symbol of Italian American heritage but rather that the meaning encoded within the act of home winemaking will have in part changed once again, and that future research on the subject is imperative lest we lose the traditions in their entirety.

NOTES

- 1¹Herman Feldman, *Prohibition: Its Economic and Industrial Aspects* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1930).
- 2 Michael Dietler, "Alcohol: Anthropological/ Archaeological Perspectives," *The Annual Review of Anthropology* (2006): 229–49. Dwight B. Heath, "Anthropology and Alcohol Studies: Current Issues," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16 (1987): 99–120. David Mandelbaum, "Alcohol and Culture," *Current Anthropology* 6 (1965): 281–93.
- 3 Mary Douglas, *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology* (London: Routledge): 2003.
- 4 Vincenzo Capogreco (home winemaker) in discussion with the author, October 11, 2013.
- 5 Eliot Lord et al., *The Italians in America* (New York: B.F. Buck, 1905).
- 6 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire" *Representations* 29 (1989).
- 7 Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans., *The Production of Space*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992).
- 8 Charles Uglietto (home winemaker) in discussion with the author, October 18, 2013.
- 9 Capogreco.
- 10 Domenic Candelieri (home winemaker) in discussion with the author, October 6, 2013.
- 11 Sazerac Co., "Old Mr. Boston," <http://www.sazerac>.



Figure 5: Winemakers enjoying a lunch of sandwiches, zeppoli, and homemade wine.

- com/MrBoston.aspx (accessed November 13, 2013).
- 12 Vincent Festino (home winemaker) in discussion with the author, October 11, 2013.
 - 13 Luigi Zeraschi (home winemaker) in discussion with the author, October 11, 2013.
 - 14 Simone Cinotto, *Soft Soil, Black Grapes: The Birth of Italian Winemaking in California* (New York: NYU Press, 2012).
 - 15 Carole Counihan, *Around the Tuscan Table: Food, Family, and Gender in Twentieth Century Florence* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
 - 16 Uglietto.
 - 17 Uglietto.
 - 18 Joseph Moxon, *Mechanick Exercises, or, The Doctrine of Handy-Works* (London: Joseph Moxon, 1677).
 - 19 Glenn Adamson, *The Craft Reader* (New York: Berg, 2010).
 - 20 Festino.
 - 21 Zeraschi.
 - 22 John E. Bowers et al., "DNA Fingerprint Characterization of Some Wine Grape Cultivars," *American Journal of Enology and Viticulture* 44 (1993): 266–274. Carole Meredith, "Looking for Zinfandel in Croatia," *Zinfandel Express* (January 2002): 9. University of California, Davis, Foundation Plant Services, "The Zinfandels of FPS," by Nancy Sweet and James Wolpert, *Foundation Plant Services Grape Program Newsletter* (2007), [HTTP://IV.UCDAVIS.EDU/FILES/24490.PDF](http://iv.ucdavis.edu/files/24490.pdf) (accessed December 5, 2014).
 - 23 Foundation Plant Services, "The Zinfandels of FPS."
 - 24 Cinotto, *Soft Soil, Black Grapes*.
 - 25 New England Produce Center, "New England Produce Center Homepage," <http://www.nepctr.com/> (accessed November 3, 2013). Alex R. Goldfeld, *The North End: A Brief History of Boston's Oldest Neighborhood* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2009).
 - 26 Zeraschi.
 - 27 Uglietto.
 - 28 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).
 - 29 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2003).
 - 30 Andrea Wiley, *Reimagining Milk: Cultural and Biological Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
 - 31 Sabatino (home winemaker) in discussion with the author, October 11, 2013.
 - 32 Joanna Clapps Herman, "My Homer," in *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans*, ed. Luisa Del Giudice (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 183–92.
 - 33 Susi Remondi (home winemaker) in discussion with the author, October 9, 2013.
 - 34 Lissa Roberts, "Death of the Sensuous Chemist: The 'New' Chemistry and the Transformation of Sensuous Technology," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A* 26 (1995): 503–29.
 - 35 Candelieri.
 - 36 Daniel Pambianchi, *Techniques in Home Winemaking: The Comprehensive Guide to Making Chateau-Style Wines* (Montreal: Vehicule Press, 2008).



Ware Center, Massachusetts | 2014
Brett Culbert

The Performative Experience of Improvisational Cooking: A Critical Reflection

abstract | *This work employs visual ethnography to document a day in the life of a restaurant chef de cuisine, by examining the experience of a culinary practitioner rather than that of a consumer. The research is concerned with situations that may arise when a professional cooks on the spur of the moment, or “improvises,” when creating a new dish. Using theoretical models derived from organizational analysis founded on jazz improvisation metaphors, the author focuses on the improvisational performance of professional food preparation in the restaurant to explore concepts of spontaneous creativity and extemporal organization. Using ethnographic description, the author concentrates on the production phase of the restaurant. The research analyzes how improvisation potentially enhances culinary professionals’ creativity by providing them opportunities to insert variety to standardized processes and thus foster innovation and novelty. This microlevel examination employs a combination of ethnographic methods: on-site fieldwork, participant observation, and the interview. These primary source methods are then linked to theoretical principles found in scholarly literature. The work engages the conceptual frameworks of enskillment, temporality, present moment attention, and critical reflection. The author argues that improvisational cooking is not merely “cooking from nothing,” to paraphrase jazz bassist Charles Mingus, but rather an intuitive faculty that results from skill, experience, and the ability to efficiently access a system of knowledge in the negotiation of extemporaneous situations.*

keywords | *visual ethnography, skilled vision, improvisational metaphor, enskillment, professional cooking*

INTRODUCTION AND METHODS This work is an examination of the sensory foundations and implications of food. Rather than focusing on the gustatory phenomena surrounding food consumption, the research observes the challenges that occur during food preparation. In particular, the research examines situations that occur as a culinary professional prepares a new dish without the use of a written recipe, or how he “improvises.” The work, moreover, documents how critical reflection enhances the development of a researcher’s knowledge of a phenomenon. Critical reflection allows its practitioners to study phenomena with an added perspective that improves the quality of an observed experience by using participant observation

and reflection as primary research strategies.² It allows ethnographers to critically consider their research practices and has the potential to enhance the development of a discipline’s logics through its emphasis on discovery. Reflective ethnography, moreover, allows the observer to enter a phenomenon, participate in it, and then reflect upon it. Though reflection is not inherently critical, it can unearth paradigmatic and structural assumptions when applied critically.³

The research problem was conceived reflecting the experiential nature of a graduate seminar that explored the sensorial phenomena of food. The work is a case study of a single participant whose acquaintance the author made in September 2012 and who agreed to be studied by the author.

The experiment unfolded over the course of a single eight-hour shift in a restaurant kitchen located in downtown Boston, Massachusetts, where the participant was employed as *chef de cuisine*. Though the method of sampling may be contradictory to David Fetterman's large-pool sampling of respondents,⁴ it is nevertheless reflective of an in-depth, microlevel case study of "an experience."⁵ The ethnographic method of the informal interview was periodically conducted in order to later provide a logically consistent structure to the circumstances witnessed. The participant's responses were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. A digital camera was used to record systematic observations. Moreover, secondary sources in scholarly literature founded in organizational theory were reviewed and interspersed in the ethnographic narrative to provide additional insight to the phenomena observed. The combination of ethnographic methods was utilized to provide a holistic account of the event. Jason Throop argues that the [periodic] interview highlights reflective processes, while photographic imaging captures prereflective action in real time.⁶

The author restrained from asking persistent questions of his participant in order to facilitate the participant's aim of completing his workload on schedule during the observation. Nevertheless, questions spontaneously arose to gain information regarding the participant's organizational processes and state of mind, as opposed to clarifications regarding the participant's culinary practices. Rather than produce a paper from reflective memory, the author decided to observe the actions of a participant in order to witness spontaneous culinary procedures, all the while mitigating the potential of memory bias. Both the observer and participant's shared experiences as culinary professionals contributed to natural unfolding of events and liberated the participant from the urge to explain basic culinary techniques.

Improvisation is a mechanical skill set used judiciously in the service of art and social order.⁷ Improvisers are performers who possess the vocabulary and talent for direct composition. They

can create intelligible material extemporaneously, because improvisation is the process of making logic out of chaotic, turbulent environments by making fast and irreversible decisions dedicated to innovation and the creation of novelty.⁸ The author suggests that improvisation is a skill that is mastered after long hours of practice, which allows the practitioner the ability to treat the same theme, extempore, from an array of possibilities.⁹ Improvisation, therefore, is the ability to create novel situations by utilizing phrases and variations stored in repertoire to modulate one's performance, and having the skill to readily convey it to one's audience.¹⁰ Improvisation may appear in at least two forms: (1) through creating a complete and extemporal performance employing the language of a repertoire and the logic of a particular genre;¹¹ and (2) through the addition of supplementary material to a scripted, yet incomplete paradigm using the vocabulary and logic of a particular genre while adhering to the work's established structure throughout the performance's duration.¹²

Impromptu performers act from imagination rather than from memory, which is a more productive, rather than reproductive, process. Improvisers know the thematic outline and the configurations within a given genre;¹³ however, they create actual material in the moment. Though improvisers produce at amazing speeds from the depths of their imagination, they in fact are not improvisers in the true, free sense since they must adhere to guidelines of their scenarios in order to avoid chaos.¹⁴ In the jazz world, what appears to be improvisation is the deployment of specialized knowledge and experience with notes, chords, and melodies.¹⁵ Similarly, in the professional culinary world, what appears to be improvisational cooking is in fact the application of previously learned culinary techniques to a [pre]-selected group of raw ingredients that are chosen based on their flavor profiles and their compatibility with other victuals. Though it might appear that culinary professionals work from complete imagination, basic rules of food pairing must be adhered to in order to produce dishes that are not only reflective of their

creative intent. Dishes, moreover, must be sellable in order for restaurants to be profitable. Unlike jazz improvisation, which allows complete artistic freedom, improvisational cooking in restaurants requires a delicate balance of art and commerce to assure gustatory and financial success. Nevertheless, mastery, experience, and “common sense” contribute to culinary professionals’ ability to produce dishes that are both novel and pleasing in a similar manner as the aforementioned dimensions aid the jazz musician to produce music that is both innovative and agreeable.

TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2013: B&G OYSTERS. BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS B&G Oysters is a modern, yet classic interpretation of the oyster bar. Located in Boston’s South End, B&G has a decidedly casual feel. The menu combines professional service with local seafood that draws on Mediterranean influences as well as New England classics (e.g., fried Ipswich clams, lobster rolls, pan-roasted cobia, and cucumber gazpacho with Jonah crab). The author asked *chef de cuisine* Stephen Oxaal for the rare privilege of observing him cook during the course of a typical day. Oxaal, a culinary graduate with eleven years of professional culinary experience, obliged the request. Oxaal began his B&G career as a line cook in 2007 and has held the title of *chef de cuisine* for the past five years. Previous to his tenure at B&G, Oxaal held the managerial position of *sous chef* in a Texas restaurant.

What follows are the author’s observations, as an ethnographer observing his participant. Time stamp designations chronicle sequential noteworthy occurrences. Though the author intended to maintain an unobtrusive presence in conducting his observations, one situation arose during the course of the experience where his known experience as a culinary professional placed him in the situation of an impromptu culinary collaborator by making a suggestion for an alternative sauce preparation. In that moment, the author found himself in the embodied act of improvisation, switching from the role of an ethnographer to that of a culinary professional.

Similar to phenomena experienced in jazz bands, the solution generated via the free exchange of suggestion facilitated the participant’s ability to process information and thus contributed an innovative solution to a potential dilemma.¹⁶ Moreover, the author employed *skilled vision* in order to fully comprehend and document both Oxaal’s tasks and the context of their interactions.¹⁷

10:30 a.m. I arrive at B&G Oysters at our agreed-upon time to find Oxaal receiving an order from a purveyor. Once finished, Oxaal greets me and shows me my workstation. Oxaal then takes me on a tour of the preparation kitchen. B&G’s prep kitchen is small, approximately 70 to 100 square feet with a ceiling height of six feet and six inches, and located in the restaurant’s basement. The prep kitchen consists of a four-burner gas stove with a conventional oven; an upright combination oven, which contains conventional, convection, and steam heat options; a small island attached to one wall; a door that leads to the outside from which the restaurant receives its deliveries; and a stainless steel double sink. Due to its limited space, every square and linear inch is accounted for. I am told that this is a good day for me to observe Oxaal because it is one of the prep cook’s days off. Normally, the small kitchen houses a total of three people: Oxaal and two prep cooks, plus an assortment of various purveyors, managers, and other staff members who temporarily occupy what is already a petite space for three people.

We climb up the small circular staircase to the dining room, where Oxaal provides me with a tour of the open kitchen. The open kitchen has a formidable presence in the dining room; moreover, it is the first thing one sees upon entering the dining room via the front entrance. The only activity, besides two front-of-house staff members rolling flatware into napkins, is a meeting taking place in the rear of the restaurant. After the tour, Oxaal and I descend back down the stairs and return to the prep kitchen. Oxaal informs me that he will prepare two specials for the evening’s dinner service: a cold appetizer of Florida Gulf

shrimp and an entrée of skate wing. When asked about potential accompaniments, Oxaal reveals his uncertainty; however, he contemplates using some fingerling potatoes and fresh green almonds that arrived with the day's delivery:

I use the special to test a possible new menu item, or to experiment with a new ingredient, or a new technique... utilizing what's in house. We have, what was at the time, fresh Florida Gulf shrimp, which are frozen. [So] we're going to have a special tonight of poached and chilled Florida shrimp with fresh green almonds, pickled fennel, and some spiced peanuts ... but that might change. Then, we'll have skate wing with warm porcini mushroom vinaigrette, grilled fingerling potatoes, and pearl onions—or something—but I actually have to get it prepped first. That can also change.

Frank Barrett, an organizational theorist, argues that jazz music differs from classical music because there is no prescribed performance.¹⁸ Jazz improvisation contains a degree of uncertainty, as the performer is required to perform extempore, compose on the spur of the moment, and produce a coherent product. Playing jazz is simply playing with music theory and the rules that regulate musical progressions. Cooking is governed by similar structures and progression: recipes and techniques. Once competency is achieved in culinary techniques (i.e., knife skills, braising, roasting, recipe formulation), a cook can produce dishes without scripts or models.

Improvisation exists on a continuum that ranges from *interpretation* through *embellishment* and *variation*, ending in *improvisation*.¹⁹ The implied progression is based on the increased demands placed on the imagination and concentration of an actor.²⁰ In the culinary world, *interpretation* occurs when cooks take minor liberties with a recipe, selecting novel accents of flavor while preparing the dish essentially as it is written. *Embellishment* involves greater imagination. Here, whole components in the original appear

beyond customary expectation. The recipe is rearticulated, yet still recognizable. *Variation* occurs when ingredients or components not in the original recipe are substituted or adapted, yet their relationship to the original remains the same.

Improvisation of a recipe entails its transformation into an article that bears little or no resemblance to the original model, or using models altogether alternative to the intention as the basis for inventing new outcomes. When musicians improvise, they significantly modify portions of songs' melodies or substitute structural segments with new creations that carry slight relationships to the original melody's structure, if any.²¹ When cooks improvise, they methodically alter ingredients or replace components with new creations; however, they must retain some semblance to the original model or the whole composition is rendered unrecognizable. Though allowances are made and at times encouraged when cooking, certain rules within the genre must be adhered to in order to create and execute marketable dishes that appeal to the palate. Jazz improvisers, on the other hand, are granted greater artistic license in their attempt to create novel compositions and are encouraged to push the boundary of acceptability in an attempt to outwit learned habits.²²

In order to execute two specials for the evening's dinner menu, Oxaal will have to rely on his acquired culinary knowledge and past experience to create new dishes, unrehearsed, and have them ready by the evening's service. In order to accomplish his challenge, Oxaal will most likely operate somewhere between variation (of something that has been previously produced) and pure improvisation. Actions that alter, revise, create, and discover are purer enactments of improvisation than are actions that shift, switch, or add.²³ Oxaal's impromptu performance will be significantly influenced by past experiences, present mood, and the local environment, as these all contribute to his creative process. The more Oxaal sacrifices the established direction as determined by a preexisting model (i.e., a recipe), the more he will depend on his own idiosyncratic

direction.²⁴ It is here—in the production of material culture—that differences in prior experience, practice, and knowledge become most apparent and have the greatest impact on end results.

Jazz bassist Charles Mingus insisted, “you can’t improvise on nothing; you’ve gotta improvise on something.”²⁵ In jazz music, that “something” is a melody, such as one that originated in African American blues and gospel songs, rock, or soul music; in culinary expression, that “something” is the recipe. What these two disparate modes of artistic expression have in common is their respective dependence on procedure imposed by a sequence of harmonious actions. Essentially, all behavior has a spontaneous skillfulness analogous to improvisation since it integrates a semi-fresh eventuality with knowledge gained from previous experience.²⁶ Jazz musicians rely on a body of precomposed musical knowledge, which they access in the moment of their performance. The degree to which they can access this knowledge and compose in the moment determines their level of skill and the complexity of the performance.²⁷ As Oxaal engages the situation before him—having to prepare two dishes under my observation for the restaurant’s service—he must apply already learned lessons in a limited amount of time. If Oxaal is not simultaneously improvising and improvising *attentively*, then he is not engaging his trained knowledge system in a semi-fresh application. Oxaal’s ability and proficiency to access his knowledge is a direct indication of his level of expertise, not only as a culinary creator but also as a skilled practitioner. Similarly, had I not engaged in the multisensory practices of coordinating my observational stance with the skilled intention necessary to constantly shift my points of view, I would not have been practicing the mindfulness necessary to embody skilled vision. My presence in Oxaal’s kitchen obliged me to uphold the tacit agreement between us to implement the educated attention required for our mutual social exchange to be successful.²⁸

Improvisation does not manifest out of thin air; rather, it materializes around a single element that provides a pretext for in-the-moment

composition.²⁹ Organizational theorist Karl Weick contends that part of the composition process is conceived from “pre-composed phrases” that become significant retrospectively as embellishments, while part of the organization arrives from the embellishments themselves.³⁰ In component-based cooking, there is little need to create dishes entirely by original design. The genre, as established by Marie-Antoine Carême and elaborated by August Escoffier, is structured around a system of interlocking parts, which are based on established techniques that can be interchanged for the ease of production.³¹ Understanding how the gastronomic system functions provides professionals greater flexibility to compose impromptu once a central component is established, be it a technique, an ingredient, or a flavor pairing. Having chosen the main ingredient for each of his dishes, Oxaal can immediately consider potential accompaniments to highlight or supplement their flavors while simultaneously editing out those he finds undesirable. The ease of Oxaal’s decisions is relative and contingent on his skill set as a culinary professional.

Scholars argue that retrospect is significant in improvisational production.³² In culinary and jazz improvisation, people act in order to think and transmit retrospective sense-making to their improvisation. Culinary practitioners, who think retrospectively, can create dishes from whatever is at hand. Oxaal’s sense-making engages Weick’s conceptual model of retrospect and becomes embodied in improvisation rather than decision making because his intention is loosely linked to execution based on experience. The importance of retrospect in the act of improvisation creates new claims that suggest that not only is improvisation grounded in forms but it is also grounded in memory. Oxaal’s creative process is facilitated by his knowledge of specific techniques that can be applied to his two main ingredients, the shrimp and the skate wing. This may be perplexing for the culinary novice, but Oxaal’s self-observations can provide an objective perspective. Oxaal possesses the procedures and learned techniques of an experienced practitioner; however, the role of

memory in improvisation is paradoxical.³³ Dusya Vera and Mary Crossan argue that memory may encumber improvisation when faced with novel situations by simply reproducing past routines.³⁴ Moreover, overreliance on memory or thought may impede and disrupt well-practiced actions that are better entrusted to embodied actions.³⁵ Nevertheless, when embodied in the act of improvisation, memory becomes an effective source of information because improvisation is often the outcome of the imaginative recombination of previously successful routines of knowledge and action.³⁶ Once Oxaal had the time to focus on his two main ingredients, he was able to narrow down his possible techniques and complementary flavor options vis-à-vis access to his memory, while simultaneously considering novel alternatives. Oxaal's ability to process through his knowledge is a function of learned behavior and at some point becomes ingrained in his mental and physical capacities as embodied functions.

11:40 a.m. Oxaal interrupts our observational session to attend a mandatory manager's meeting. While he attends to his other managerial duties, I climb up the small circular staircase to the dining room. Guests begin to fill the tables and seats at the bar. A couple with a noticeable Southern accent is studying the lunch menu, considering the lobster

roll. The gentleman inquires if he might order the lobster salad without mayonnaise because of his dietary restrictions. After the gentleman's server informs the cook of the request, the server returns to his guests and informs them that the request would not be a problem. The line cook reappears from downstairs with a half-pint plastic container filled with a portion of cooked lobster meat and a stalk of celery. The cook cuts roughly one-third of the celery stalk into small dice then pours the diced celery and lobster meat into a small aluminum mixing bowl. The cook then adds lemon juice, minced lemon zest, salt, and pepper (see figure 1), producing a lobster salad *sans* mayonnaise. Similar to Oxaal's process, the line cook accesses his retrospective memory and expertise to quickly develop a suitable alternative to an established recipe, however, in this example the line cook embodied *variation* rather than improvisation.

Many definitions of *improvisation* tend to blend prescriptive and descriptive elements because management theorists have borrowed heavily from the descriptions of improvisation in the arts in which "effectiveness" and "performance quality" have been embedded.³⁷ Spontaneity is considered a form of thinking;³⁸ however, spontaneity also acknowledges that the creative process does not always lead to creative outcomes. Defining improvisation as a creative process does not focus on the creative outcome that is novel and useful but rather on how one creates in particular situations or events.³⁹ The occasion to improvise may be made on the spot, as in the case of the lobster salad preparation, or it may be an option considered in advance, as in Oxaal's inspirations that are initiated by a purveyor's notification of new products or by passing through a farmer's market and discovering that a fruit or vegetable has just come into season.

In the lobster salad example, the line cook knowingly decided to engage in an extemporaneous process and tried to achieve an effective objective to a situation that was novel, at least to him in that particular moment. The amount of time in which various obligations need to be met does not always provide a basis for the distinction



Figure 1: Impromptu preparation of a standard menu.
Photo by author

of improvisation from other forms of performance, e.g., embellishment or variation.⁴⁰ Jazz musicians learn to improvise through the integration of music rules and theory. Integration allows for variation, similar to learning basic recipes. After years of repeating culinary procedures, cooks train themselves to recognize opportunities for introducing variation to standard recipes, similar to how jazz musicians recognize options within the constraints of chords and songs.⁴¹ In the case of the lobster salad, pertinent distinctions had more to do with problems of coordination and time, i.e., adjusting the preparation to a guest's preference while maintaining the constant flow of orders. Restaurant food preparers cannot know in advance a guest's particular preferences or dietary concerns, or even how they will respond to the estimations and moments of coordination that occur in a particular performance. Scholars argue, however, that an evaluation of what has occurred in the past, or what should occur in the future, may influence the behavior regarding the performer's manipulation of a model based on previous experience.⁴² More importantly, *beneficial* improvisation depends on the developed traditional skills in a particular sphere.⁴³

12:15 p.m. Oxaal returns to claim me. We descend the small iron circular staircase and re-enter the prep kitchen. Oxaal begins to prepare his components for the specials and starts by poaching

fingerling potatoes. In a medium-sized pot, Oxaal places potatoes, whole peppercorn, fresh thyme, bay laurel, coriander seeds, lemon peel, and enough water to cover the potatoes. Oxaal informs me that the lemon zest contributes a “fresh note” to the flavor of the potatoes; moreover, Oxaal made the executive decision of “why not?” In affirming both his authority and right to creativity, Oxaal's addition of lemon peel engages Meredith Abarca's concept of the *chiste*.⁴⁴ Abarca argues that recipes exist as templates where possibilities of change within a culinary paradigm illustrate an unprecedented growth of a creative moment in the life of a preparer.⁴⁵ The emphasis on the adherence to established recipes in the name of “authenticity” in a recipe's execution promotes the tendency to erase the *chiste* from versions of the same recipe, this impeding improvisation and hindering innovation and the individual expression of creativity. Rather than focus on “authenticity,” Abarca suggests a conceptual re-evaluation engaging the use of “originality” in culinary production. Similarly, the improvised solo affords the musician opportunities for creative agency by composing in the moment. Enacting various forms of improvisational expression requires actors in either discipline to extend themselves beyond their comfort zone while it offers opportunities for creative growth and learning.

Next, Oxaal prepares the shrimp to be poached. As Oxaal peels the shrimp, he informs me that he



Figures 2-3: Embodied movements (from left to right): Peeling shrimp, chopping carrots and celery for *mire poix*, and tossing roasted peanuts in spice mixture, at B&G oysters. Photos by author

will make a sauce from the shells and considers making a *nage*.⁴⁶ As the details of the two dishes begin to crystallize, Oxaal explains what is next on our agenda and what he still needs to accomplish:

We're going to poach shrimp in a court bouillon [and then] make a shrimp stock. Then, we're going to set the stock with gelatin. Hopefully it sets-up in time because we're going to cut a cube of what is now our shellfish nage and that's going to be the "sauce." So we'll have the chilled poached shrimp with shellfish nage, and shaved green almonds, which we're going to slice in half and shave them on the mandolin to order. So, we'll have the shrimp with a really umami gelatin, bright citrusy green almond, and something else [the spiced peanuts].

Meanwhile, Oxaal places the shrimp in a large pot of water with spices similar to those used for the potatoes and sets the pot on the stove. To the pot he adds chopped onion, carrot, and celery (see figures 2–3). In another pot Oxaal places the shrimp and enough water to make his shrimp stock. While Oxaal is downstairs doing production, the dining room upstairs is fully immersed in its lunch service. In the midst of preparation, Oxaal is called upstairs to tend to an important issue.

12:30 p.m. Oxaal returns from addressing the issue upstairs. While the potatoes, shrimp, and stock are on the stove, he starts to prepare the porcini vinaigrette. Oxaal informs me that the skate wing will be receiving an ample grating of *bottarga*, which Oxaal keeps frozen. Oxaal notes that *bottarga* is an excellent salt replacement because of the saline quality it acquires during the curing process. After receiving a sample to taste, the author notes that *bottarga* has a flavor quality similar to anchovies; however, Oxaal clarifies that it is much subtler.

As Oxaal prepares his ingredients for the vinaigrette (which consists of chopping dried and reconstituted porcini mushrooms, mincing shallots, zesting and squeezing a lemon, and chopping

chives into fine dice), he updates me on our status regarding the remaining tasks:

We appear to be in good shape. I've been looking at the clock all day... it keeps me on schedule. If we didn't start the shellfish nage until two o'clock, then I'd scrap it and do something else ... Evening pre-meal is at 4:35 sharp! If I don't have everything ready to go, then we're not doing a special.

It's [a function] of knowing how much time you have in-between each project, which is why you're able to multitask ... it's why I always look at the clock. I know that that court bouillon has to come to a boil and steep for a little while before we poach the shrimp. I know that the wine needs to reduce with the shrimp shells. I know that the potatoes still need to poach on low heat. I can make the vinaigrette and still have three projects working simultaneously. The number one thing is getting the shrimp poached and the shrimp shells into that stock, so that they can come to boil and reduce, then add my gelatin as soon as possible.

When asked if any random person would be able to function in his situation, Oxaal replies, "They'd be able [to function] to a certain degree. You need experience, not necessarily a formal education, but you need some type of experience. It can be taught."

In observing the operation of a professional kitchen, one can hardly ignore the centrality of time in shaping the lives of workers. Time is as integral to cooking as is any other ingredient. In order to properly prepare food, the cook must understand the temporal dimensions of the various activities involved.⁴⁷ Time distinguishes a rare steak from one that is charred, bad fish from fresh, or soft-ball sugar from hard-crack. Proper sequences are also important in following a recipe. Culinary sequences take into consideration physical properties and chemical reactions that occur during food preparation. The interchange of culinary processes, or their complete elimination, results in a product

that may be considered unsatisfactory compared to its established model. Synchronization of tasks is more complicated in the restaurant. It is essential for the execution of multiple tasks, or for the coordination of multiple stations in the production of one or multiple plates. Rhythm and tempo may be used to maintain a schedule or chart the production of the preparer. Gary Fine, whose research considers the temporal demands of restaurant work, argues that restaurant life is not structured by the clock *per se* but rather by the events that occur, e.g., lunch, dinner, or banquets. Though this is true for the line cook, I argue that for production cooks, the clock is an integral part of the day. In Oxaal's role as an organizational manager, time is an essential element not only for his production schedule but also for synchronizing his team's activities. Oxaal's peripheral awareness of the activities that occur under his management is essential for mitigating the potential chaos that might occur without his organizational expertise. Furthermore, Oxaal's ability to switch within his own role of manager to the role of laborer is yet another example of improvisation in action.

An obvious characteristic of improvisation is the spontaneity of action.⁴⁸ Oxaal must respond in the moment to various stimuli from his staff, fellow managers, purveyors, my presence, and the projects that are under his direction. Managerial responsibility is spontaneous by nature. Research in chaos theory illustrates that beyond a certain point, "increased knowledge of complex, dynamic systems does little to improve our ability to extend the horizon of predictability of those systems."⁴⁹ Oxaal may know what to do in a particular situation, but he cannot predict the situation that might occur. Thus, the capacity to respond to unforeseen situations in a spontaneous and effective manner is crucial. At any given moment, he must bend, yield, adapt, and respond to situations that are beyond his control. Though Oxaal may start out with a clear idea of what he wants to accomplish in a given day, the unreliable nature of the restaurant requires Oxaal to have the ability and flexibility to respond to unforeseen circumstances.

1:40 p.m. Oxaal makes the executive decision to eliminate the *nage gelée* component because the *nage* has not sufficiently reduced. Because of the limited amount of space in the walk-in, Oxaal does not feel comfortable allowing the *nage* and gelatin mixture to cool down and remain in the walk-in undisturbed. Once the dinner shift begins to arrive, Oxaal warns me that his kitchen will be in a state of confusion. Rather than exhibit signs of anxiety, Oxaal makes the calm, informed decision to make a fluid gel after a brief consultation with the author.⁵⁰ He disappears for a few moments and returns carrying a plastic pint container labeled "agar."

All production is temporally structured, whether implicitly or explicitly. Temporality is the organizing principle of productive life within organizations, which resonates through the productive structure as much as spatial or hierarchical organizational structures.⁵¹ For production to run efficiently, schedules must be coordinated and production must occur at a rate that permits the organization to achieve its goals—it is these temporal constraints that influence the work experience. Gary Fine's research on the temporal demands of restaurant work argues that the temporal order has both "objective" and experienced effects.⁵² Time passes regardless of workers' conscious acknowledgement. Both "real" and phenomenological time experiences must be considered. Within the temporal organization of production schedules, allowances must be afforded for particular activities to occur. The well-trained performer must respond to possible situations that might emerge while following a "script" or a recipe.

Fine proposes five concepts central to temporal organization that constrain work: (i) *periodicity*, the rhythm of the activity; (ii) *tempo*, the activity's rate or speed; (iii) *timing*, and *synchronization* of activities; (iv) *duration*, the length of an activity; and (v) *sequence*, the ordering of events.⁵³ Fine argues that these concepts allow workers to resolve the various modes in which time might be conceptualized. Though each is external to individuals, they nevertheless affect job performance because of how they are both experienced and negotiated. Oxaal's awareness of

the obdurate nature of the *gelée* given his staff's arrival time raises his concern regarding the time required to set a pan of hot liquid in an area that is heavily trafficked before it has time to set. Oxaal decides to switch from the *gelée* to the fluid gel, for the sake of time. In this moment, Oxaal moves from objective intent to practical execution. The decision does not affect the final dish. In fact, the only two people who were aware of the details of his intentions were Oxaal and the author. Considering Fine's model, though the duration and sequence are external factors to Oxaal as an individual, they would both only affect Oxaal's job performance and satisfaction based on how they were experienced.⁵⁴ Oxaal's negotiation would have become evident only if the allotted time were unpleasant or dysfunctional to the unscheduled situation, for example, "not enough time ... now what?" Though Oxaal realized that he had insufficient time to make a *gelée*, he simultaneously understood that he *could* have enough time to make a fluid gel, just by the spontaneous substitution of agar for gelatin. This substitution constituted a variation of his original intent.

Barrett argues that successful jazz improvisation requires an active exchange between members and their ability to alternate between soloing and supporting.⁵⁵ The sense of community established by jazz musicians allows for collaborations and mentoring practices, which fosters leaning experiences because musicians

borrow ideas from each other by hanging out amongst peers. A similar fraternal structure exists in the culinary world. Cooks regularly frequent friends' establishments to eat, support, or simply hang out. There, they may observe a novel way of executing a familiar recipe or discuss problems that arise in the creation of a new dish. The professional kitchen serves as an informal educational system for the dissemination of knowledge and expertise that extends beyond one's formal education. Though the experience was not intended as a collaborative event, the author's impromptu suggestion was intended as a simple suggestion to a professional peer in the midst of a creative crossroad. Oxaal's reception of the suggestion underscores his ability to surrender his virtuosity and authority in order to best serve his composition. Jazz musicians negotiate, recover, and adapt to each other because their shared task knowledge brings multiple perspectives to the same experience via the observation of associates' performances. Though our respective roles were outlined before the experience began, there was a tacit agreement between both parties that they were in the experience together. Though the author embodied the role of observer, he improvised the role of culinary colleague when he observed that the status of a participant's dish might be in peril.

3:20 p.m. We climb up the small circular staircase one more time. Oxaal informs me that he will work



Figure 4: Considering plating options of skate and shrimp specials.



Figure 5: Running through a skate pick-up before service.

a double shift because the restaurant is short-staffed for dinner service. For his second shift, Oxaal stands in on the entrée station as lead cook, as he is obliged to stand in on any station lacking a team member. Oxaal surveys his station and exchanges the components that were associated with the lunch menu with those that are required for dinner service, particularly the components that were prepared in anticipation of tonight's specials. Oxaal, moreover, assesses what needs to be replenished for the components that carry over from the lunch to the dinner menu. As the members of the line perform similar functions regarding their stations, Oxaal takes a few moments to contemplate possible plating options. Observing the various designs that Oxaal makes on clean plates, I am reminded of musicians who warm up before a performance. In this engrossed moment—one of many that were witnessed throughout the course of the day—Oxaal resembles Dexter Gordon or Dizzy Gillespie running through scales and phrases before a performance (see figure 4–5). Once he has an idea for the skate plating, Oxaal saunters over to the cold appetizer station to work through and show the plating to the line cook, who has been alerted to the additional pick-up that she will be responsible for during the evening.

4:35 p.m. As if by an intuitive force, the three members of the wait staff and the general manager appear at their designated area for the pre-evening meal. After describing some particulars concerning the menu, Oxaal introduces the night's specials (see figure 6):

Chilled Poached Florida Gulf Shrimp / Spiced Peanuts / Green Almonds / Golden Beets / Shellfish Fluid Gel

Cornmeal-Encrusted Skate Wing / Grilled Fingerling Potatoes / Roasted Pearl Onions / Shaved Bottarga / Warm Porcini Vinaigrette

CONCLUSION Professional culinary improvisation is an embodied skill acquired through experience, practice, and cognitive

thought based on previous logics and memory. It does not materialize out of thin air but rather by means of skilled intention by professionals who must make efficient split-second decisions during their performance. As in jazz improvisation, salient conditions that facilitate improvisational thinking and acting on the spur of the moment are expertise as well as the capacity to make sense out of what might appear to be disparate elements. The execution of similar dishes may have been possible by other practitioners; however, their degree of ease and efficiency would have been dependent on the very qualities that were observed in Oxaal.

The author's assessments and projected assertions were not the result of the detached gaze of a casual spectator but rather the educated attention of an intentional observer. Employing multiple senses (e.g., attuned sight, hearing, and reason) in order to gain knowledge through skilled vision is necessary in practicing visual ethnography. This allowed the author the opportunity to better comprehend the day's occurrences compared to applying sight alone. Cognitive sight, moreover, is an essential element of skilled vision. It applies knowledge to an observational process in order to facilitate a situation and extract information from a participant or situation observed. Cognitive sight, furthermore, involves the education of attention as part of the multisensory experience from a phenomenological perspective. The skill informed his active involvement to know when to take a



Figure 6: Final compositions: Skate Wing (foreground), Gulf Shrimp (background). Photo by author.

picture, ask a question, or simply get out of Oxaal's way. By suspending the culinary knowledge gained from the author's fourteen years of professional experience and focusing on apprenticeship, the author offered Oxaal the enhanced opportunity to inhabit his role of participant, and thus increased the participant's capacity to instruct the author for the purpose of this research experiment. Through critical reflection, the author was able to visit particular phenomena with various embedded senses to better analyze observed situations. Critical reflection allowed the author to enter the participant's domain in an effort to fully comprehend their shared experiences. Consequently, the author was able to tack between his roles as observer and author to develop the voice of this work.

The contexts that both the participant and author found themselves alternated between chef-instructor-participant, with respect to Oxaal, and social scientist-apprentice-skilled observer, with respect to the author. The unexpected action of the author switching from his established role as ethnographer to culinary collaborator illustrated improvisation in its pure sense. Similar to jazz combos, shifting performance roles that were independently enacted within the context of the research contributed to the enhancement of both participants' shared experience. Peer-to-peer negotiation, hierarchical relations, and the management of context facilitated their respective mindfulness in order to bring all previous experience to bear in the present moment. Critical reflection compels ethnographers to consider their own comprehensions and interpretations of participants' understandings and encourages the reader to engage with both parties. Critical ethnography relies on the engagement of the self, offers an added dimension to observations, and increases consciousness through analytical examination. The methods and theories explored may also be useful in future research projects. Though improvisation affords extempore creativity, skilled vision contributes to its temporal comprehension.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS I thank Stephen Oxaal, chef de cuisine at B&G Oysters in Boston, for allowing me the opportunity to observe his daily production output for the purpose of this research project. The generosity of both his time and insight are most appreciated.

I thank Dr. Carole Counihan for her comments on earlier versions of this paper.

NOTES

- 1 A *chef de cuisine* is the person in charge of the daily activities of a professional kitchen whose duties include menu creation, staffing, procuring ingredients, and plating.
- 2 Joseph A. Hegarty, "Achieving Excellence by Means of Critical Reflection and Cultural Imagination in Culinary Arts and Gastronomy," *Journal of Culinary Science & Technology* 9 (2011): 55, 59.
- 3 Hegarty, "Achieving Excellence by Means of Critical Reflection," 58.
- 4 David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step-by-Step* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2010): 35.
- 5 Clifford Geertz defines an "experience" as including a beginning and a conclusion, interspersed with the author's analysis of observed phenomena. Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (London: Sage, 2009): 42–43.
- 6 Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 43.
- 7 Cristina Grasseni, *Skilled Visions: Between Apprenticeship and Standards* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2007): 1–5. Domenico Pietropaolo, "Improvisation in the Arts," in *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, edited by Timothy J. McGee (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003): 2.
- 8 Frank J. Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation in Jazz and Organizations," *Organization Science* 9, no. 5 (1998): 606. Pietropaolo, "Improvisation in the Arts," 3.
- 9 Pietropaolo's *fluency of rehandling* involves executing quick and clever employment of arguments and turns of phrase that are potentially applicable to many situations; for example, "If I did this, then I *could* do that." Pietropaolo, "Improvisation in the Arts," 9.
- 10 Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation," 606. Pietropaolo, "Improvisation in the Arts," 10.
- 11 Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation," 606. Pietropaolo, "Improvisation in the Arts," 11.
- 12 Mary Crossan, "Improvisation in Action," *Organization Science* 9, no. 5 (1998): 594. Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation," 605–606. Mary Jo Hatch, "Jazz as a Metaphor for Organizing the 21st Century," *Organization Science* 9, no. 5 (1998): 556. Karl E. Weick, "Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis," *Organization Science* 9, no. 5 (1998): 546–547.
- 13 Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation," 605–606.
- 14 Here, I use "chaos" to refer to a state of complete disorder or confusion. Pietropaolo, "Improvisation in the Arts," 4. Dusya Vera and Mary Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance in Teams," *Organization Science* 16, no. 3 (2005): 207.
- 15 Vera and Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance," 204.
- 16 Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation," 605.
- 17 Grasseni defines skilled vision as the application of trained vision and embedded multi-sensory practices in order to gain empirical knowledge. Grasseni, *Skilled Visions*, 1, 4–5.
- 18 Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation," 607.
- 19 Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994): 66–71.
- 20 Weick, "Improvisation as a Mindset," 544–45.
- 21 Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 67, 270–71.
- 22 Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation," 609.
- 23 Weick, "Improvisation as a Mindset," 545.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Barry Kernfeld interview, *What to Listen for in Jazz*, 119, quoted in Weick, "Improvisation as a Mindset," 546.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Hatch, "Jazz as a Metaphor," 565.
- 28 Grasseni, *Skilled Visions*, 8. Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography* (London: Sage, 2007): 106–107. Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 42–43.
- 29 Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation," 606. Vera and Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance," 205.
- 30 Weick, "Improvisation as a Mindset," 546.
- 31 Alain Drouard. "Chefs, Gourmets, and Gourmands: French Cuisine in the 19th and 20th Centuries," in *Food: The History of Taste*, edited by Paul Freedman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007): 277, 285–286. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 67–70.

- 32 Weick, "Improvisation as a Mindset," 547-48.
- 33 Ken Peplowski, "The Process of Improvisation," *Organization Science* 9, no. 5 (1998): 560. Weick, "Improvisation as a Mindset," 547.
- 34 Vera and Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance," 205.
- 35 John Sutton, Doris McIlwain, Wayne Christensen, and Andrew Geeves, "Applying Intelligence to the Reflexes: Embodied Skills and Habits Between Dreyfus and Descartes," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 42, no. 1 (2011): 80.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Vera and Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance," 205.
- 38 Sutton, et. al., "Applying Intelligence," 78-79. Weick, "Improvisation as a Mindset," 552.
- 39 Vera and Crossan, "Improvisation and Innovative Performance," 205.
- 40 Stephen Blum, "Recognizing Improvisation," in *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, edited by Bruno Netti and Melinda Russell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998): 27-28.
- 41 Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation," 606.
- 42 Blum, "Recognizing Improvisation," 27-28. Gary Alan Fine, "Organizational Time: Temporal Demands and the Experience of Work in Restaurant Kitchens," *Social Forces* 69, no. 1 (1990): 96-97.
- 43 Crossan, "Improvisation in Action," 594 (emphasis mine).
- 44 Abarca's *chiste* is derived from the Spanish word *chistar* ("to joke," or "essence"). The *chiste* represents moments of agency that place emphasis on authenticity in new renditions of culinary production. Meredith E. Abarca, "Authentic or Not, It's Original," *Food and Foodways* 1, no. 12 (2004): 4.
- 45 Abarca uses Debra Costello's definition of a recipe to suggest that recipes are models from which multiple interpretations of a single paradigm within an ethnic community can be expressed. See Abarca, "Authentic or Not, It's Original," 3.
- 46 *Nage*, from the French word *nager* ("to swim"), is a concentrated seafood broth made from a reduction of seafood stock and court bouillon, with the optional addition of tomato or, in Ox-aal's case, tomato paste.
- 47 Fine, "Organizational Time," 97, 101.
- 48 Crossan, "Improvisation in Action," 593.
- 49 Crossan, "Improvisation in Action," 595.
- 50 "Fluid gel" is a cross between a sauce, a gel, and a purée. Fluid gels are controlled liquids, which have the properties of all three preparations. Moreover, fluid gels display viscosity and fluidity at the same time, being thick yet still spreadable. Fluid gels behave as solids when undisturbed and flow when exposed to sufficient outside forces. Fluid gels are prepared by combining a base liquid, which may be from a variety of sources (fruits, vegetables, stocks, or purées) with a thixotropic gelling agent such as agar to create a gel. Once set, the gel is then exposed to shear stress, such as blending to break it down.
- 51 Fine, "Organizational Time," 95.
- 52 Ibid, 96.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid, 96-97.
- 55 Barrett, "Creativity and Improvisation," 613.



Chanterelles. Windsor State Forest, Massachusetts. | 2014
Brett Culbert

The dark side of the spoon: The gustatory experience of eating in a blind dining restaurant

abstract | *In this ethnographic account, a blind dining restaurant, where visually impaired people lead sighted patrons into pitch-black dining rooms and then serve as their waiters, becomes the field site for a “sensory apprenticeship,” an experiential approach to accessing sensorial, embodied, and affective ways of knowing that otherwise elude visual observation. By making several visits to restaurant and eating both mystery meals and those I selected myself, I explore “mouth sense,” an assemblage of sensory modalities—such as taste, olfaction, and touch—which is perceptually located in the mouth. In doing so, I discover the paucity of vocabulary that the English language has to describe gustatory experiences in specific and evocative ways, especially when the tastes themselves are unremarkable. I also experience how sensory systems working in concert can construct a rich portrait of a physical space even in the absence of visual information.*

keywords | *anthropology of senses; gustatory system; taste; mouth sense; blind dining.*

MOUTH SENSE: A SENSE-SCAPE DEFINED Picture the human tongue: a roughly surfaced muscle covered with moist, pink tissue and stippled with small bumps. In addition to its role in speech, the tongue churns food as we chew it and conveys masticated material to the digestive tract as we swallow. It is also responsible for gustatory perception, what we commonly refer to as taste. Taste is a chemical sense; a taste sensation is triggered by the reaction between an outside tastant—a molecule of a dissolved substance, such as food—and receptor sites on taste buds.¹ Imagine the receptor as a lock and the tastant as a key; only when a particular tastant fits into its matching receptor is a taste stimulus activated.² A neural impulse is then communicated to the brain, which in turn translates the impulse into a conscious taste perception.

Gustatory perception is limited to five recognized categories of taste: bitterness, saltiness, sourness, sweetness, and umami (a sense of ‘meatiness’).³ These tastes provide the most basic of palettes with which to identify that which we consume; however, “mouth sense”⁴ provides a more detailed sensory impression of foods and other substances. Mouth sense more accurately captures the sensorial reality

of eating and drinking as a daily activity, adding to taste perception several other sensory modalities located perceptually in the mouth: chemical sensitivity (especially through the detection of the piquancy, or “heat,” of foods like chili peppers), thermoreception (temperature), touch (including sensations of both shape and texture, by the tongue, oral cavity, and throat), and, most prominently, olfaction. The olfactory system routinely processes complex mixtures of odorants; released from a substance and forced into the nasal cavity during chewing and swallowing, these complexes enhance gustation with subtlety and nuance.⁵

However, a taste experience cannot be defined by neurochemistry and physiology alone. The philosopher Carolyn Korsmeyer posits that taste is a most intimate sense, given that in knowing a material through taste, we necessarily take it into our bodies.⁶ Consequently, a taste experience is influenced not only by how the body encounters matter but also how it is interpreted culturally, understood intellectually, and experienced (and re-experienced) emotionally. We are inculcated with taboos from an early age so that the mere thought of ingesting certain substances—roadkill or human

flesh, for instance—might fill us with revulsion. While we might appreciate that the pungency of Stinking Bishop emanates only from the rind, we may still be resistant to sampling the cheese itself. The flavor of yet other stuffs might evoke vivid mental images of the past; for example, iced sugar cookies always bring to mind my mother's Christmas kitchen, no matter what time of year I might eat them.

As these examples intimate, the taste experience, while an intensely personal one (for while we can share food, we cannot share the exact same mouth sense of it), is also an inherently social activity.

This process of socializing cannot be done with human sensorial productions of noise, heat, taste, smell, spectacle, etc. (through speaking, shouting, singing... cooking, feasting, toasting... etc.) In other words, we sensorialize our world, especially through engaging in intense social activities.⁷

To understand that social encounters invariably result in the production of all manner of sensorial perceptions—sight, sound, touch, smell, proximity, movement, pain, change in temperature, taste—is to see how sharing, distributing, and withholding food, drink, tobacco, and other consumable substances can create both social ties and divisions.

For most of us, sight is usually part and parcel of these social interactions. As Korsmeyer notes, sight is also an integral component of the quotidian taste experience; that is, we typically see whatever it is we are about to put in our mouths.⁸ In fact, the visual recognition of what we are about to eat not only prepares us for the aesthetic pleasure (or displeasure) of it but also “for having the ‘correct’ experience.”⁹ We salivate at the sight of a succulent steak on the grill; we steel ourselves for the flavor of Buckley's cough syrup; we react with befuddlement, alarm, and then amusement to have swallowed a spoonful of hair mousse thinking it was whipped cream.

A SERIES OF BLIND DATES The anthropology of the senses posits that sensory perception is

both a physical and a cultural act; the senses are both physiological receptors of information and mediators of social value.¹⁰ A sensorial anthropologist explores a culture's “sensorium,” or the pattern of emphasis and meaning through which it orders its various senses. In Ghana, the sensorium of the Anlo-Ewe prioritizes bodily comportment, with kinesthetic control and balance acting culturally as measures of both aesthetics and morality.¹¹ In Western culture, where sight has long been privileged as the rational, modern, and superior sense, the sensorium is marked by a pronounced visual bias.¹² Having often heard that the human body compensates for the loss of one sense with an enhancement of those that remain, I wondered if I might be better able to explore mouth sense by bracketing out vision, given its intimate relationship with taste. So it was that I found myself visiting O.Noir, a blind dining restaurant in Toronto, Canada.

Blind dining originated in the home of Jorge Spielmann, a visually impaired Swiss pastor who would sometimes blindfold his dinner guests so that they could experience the challenges he himself faced when eating. Encouraged by his friends' response, he opened the first blind dining restaurant in Zurich in 1999. Blindekuh—which translates to “Blind Cow,” the German name for the childhood game Blind Man's Bluff—became the world's first dark restaurant. The restaurant was established in part to provide employment opportunities to blind and visually impaired people, who lead sighted patrons into pitch-black dining rooms and then serve as their waiters.¹³

Blind dining has since become one of the latest trends in the hospitality business, with the establishment of other dark restaurants in urban centers worldwide: Beijing, London, Los Angeles, Paris, New York, St. Petersburg, Sydney, Tel Aviv, and, in Canada, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver.¹⁴ Like Blindekuh, most dark restaurants publicize their socially conscious efforts to both provide jobs for blind people, a historically underemployed demographic, and to teach the sighted about the experience of being blind. Additionally, many restaurants—and their patrons—rhapsodize about

the sensuality of eating in the dark as well as the heightening of all of their other senses.¹⁵ They also applaud the way that the darkness allows people to loosen up without embarrassment, to let go of some of their inhibitions to have a rollicking good time.¹⁶ Some restaurants pitch themselves as a respite from the visual overload of the modern cityscape. Most mention the sheer fun of eating without sight—and trying to identify the mystery meals they’ve been served.

My choice of a blind dining restaurant as my research site was predicated on a handful of assumptions. First, while I doubted that my nonsight senses would be heightened, I did expect that I would attend to them differently. I also suspected that eating in the dark would require more care and take more time. Cittàslow (City Slow), a transnational movement, encourages its participants to live more slowly, taking sensual pleasure and long-lasting enjoyment from their leisure and work activities. During her tour of a Cittàslow town in Wales, Pink found herself attentively and mindfully attuned with her interlocutors.¹⁷ I expected a dark restaurant would provide me with the atmosphere to come to know my sense-scape—both the flavor experience and the restaurant space itself—with that same rich, reflexive, sensory detail. Second, I would be studying what I’ve now come to understand as mouth sense, rather than just the tastes perceived by the tongue, as I wanted to capture a more accurate portrayal of how food and drink are experienced. Thirdly, I wanted to share the O.Noir experience with friends, to see how the social element might “flavor” my experience. Finally, I determined to focus less on identifying what foods I might be eating in the darkened restaurant and more on enriching the lexicon of words I use to describe my flavor experiences; I wanted to attempt to note my experiences of mouth sense using terminology that would both take me back to the experience and evoke my experience for others.

Over the course of my research, I visited the restaurant on three occasions. On the first visit I was accompanied by Dawn and Kevin, a married couple who had wanted to experience O.Noir since

they’d heard about it months previous; our guide that evening was Victor.¹⁸ My friend Alison joined me on my second visit; on my final visit, I dined alone. For both of those evenings, Tracey was the sole guide on the floor.

While I did not interview my friends regarding their experiences, they granted me permission to make use of any spontaneous observations they made over the course of the evening. I also participated fully in the research myself—one cannot comment on mouth sense without actually consuming food and drink, after all. I was, then, an eating ethnographer, in the same way that Caroline Potter, who undertook the very same contemporary dance training that was the subject of her research on the sensory and bodily attunements that student dancers undergo, was a dancing ethnographer.¹⁹ Like her, my method was not so much participant observation as it was what Sarah Pink calls “sensory apprenticeship.”²⁰ Such an apprenticeship represents not only “an excellent way to learn a skill: it is also an ideal way to *learn about it*, and to *learn how one learns*,”²¹ and to access sensorial, embodied, and affective ways of knowing that otherwise elude visual observation.

I neither wrote nor recorded observations during my visits but instead scribbled brief scratch notes immediately after dining, using them to write more elaborate field notes no later than the following morning. I also took from Pink that ethnographic places—and I would extend this to include sense-scapes—are “not simply made in the moments in which they are lived. Rather they are crafted over longer periods of interaction and intellectual activity.”²² Consequently, I added commentary and detail to my field notes over the course of my research period, sometimes prompted by subsequent visits to O.Noir, sometimes stirred by readings that I had done, other times occasioned by other mouth sense experiences.

PICTURING THE DARK Each visit to the restaurant began the same way: after checking our coats and placing our order with the host, my guests and I would meet our guide. We’d all introduce ourselves by first name and then queue up behind

the guide, each of us placing our right hand on the right shoulder of the person in front of us. Our guide would lead us through an initial doorway into an unlit antechamber. As the door closed behind us, we'd be engulfed by darkness. A second door would open—an action our guide would narrate for our benefit—and our assembly would pass into the blackened dining room, chugging our way past other tables until we reached our own, giggling quietly and commenting parenthetically (mostly about the darkness) as we travelled. Our guide would gently escort us one at a time to our chairs, placing our hands firmly onto the chair back so that we could each seat ourselves safely. Once we were settled, our guide noted the table setting for us: a central rubberized placemat, a fork to its left, a knife to its right, a paper serviette in the center, and a bread plate with a dollop of butter at its top. Each time, my hands would trace the location of each object; this intimate space, as wide as my shoulders and no deeper than my lower arm, became my known world. While the guide attended to other patrons, we were left to settle ourselves in.

I would like to tell you that the darkness of the O.Noir dining room was absolute, that I had never before experienced such a serene sheet of blackness, that it enveloped me utterly and completely. Instead, even though I was unable to discern even the vaguest of outlines, to *see* in any recognized sense, a random pattern of speckles danced through my visual field, like a low-contrast version of television snow back in the days of the analog signal or perhaps a pointillist rendition of the aurora borealis seen through sunglasses. Whether my eyes were opened or closed, I saw the same variegated noise. Each of my companions did as well, and this became one of the first observations each of us made: there was nothing solid or still about the “blindness” we were experiencing. Even though there was nothing to see, we were seeing something: the afterimage of so many days lived in the light? An invention of our visual cortexes? The misfiring of so many synaptic connections? I initially found myself inordinately distracted by these ever-shifting patterns of black on blacker. To contend with the distraction,

Kevin opted to sit with his eyes closed; my female companions and I preferred to keep them open. I wondered whether the patterning would go away over time. Indeed, it seemed to, but in fact whenever I thought to check this, the noise was still there. It hadn't dissipated; I'd simply acclimated.

Just as I'd expected the space to *look* like a swath of black velvet, I'd expected it to *sound* that way too: hushed and secretive, with vibrations attenuated and even distorted by the depth of the darkness. In fact, the opposite was true: the room was alive with sound. There were the normal sounds of any shared dining space—chairs scraped against the uncarpeted floor, silverware clinked, glasses chinked—but the guides were a most audible crew. They used their voices like drivers use horns, alerting one another—and their patrons—to their whereabouts with ongoing patter. The voices of our fellow diners, both in speech and in laughter, were also notable. This was especially true on my first visit: we'd anticipated being a group of six but lost three of our compatriots to other commitments. Consequently, Dawn, Kevin, and I were seated in the dining room to the right of the lobby, an area I later concluded is usually reserved for parties of four or more. Perhaps the darkness released us from our usual inhibitions about speaking too loudly, perhaps the lack of visual cues made it more difficult to recognize and maintain our personal audio space, perhaps we were energizing ourselves to combat the chilliness of the room, and perhaps the strangeness of the experience itself begged to be shared across tables, but the air here was filled with loud and spirited conversation, boisterous laughter, and the occasional squeal from patrons somehow surprised in the dark. While the tables around us seldom participated actively in one another's conversations, we did all laugh unshyly at one another's commentaries, most of which related to the dining experience: “What is this?” “What are you eating?” “This is definitely chicken ... or maybe pork,” “I think I have gravy on my face,” “What is this?” and “Have a taste,” followed by a string of instructions, interjections, and exclamations as one person attempted to share a forkful with a companion. On my subsequent two

visits—once with Alison, once solo—I was seated in what I have construed as the restaurant’s other dining room, one that seemed set up for tables of two. Pleasant, if innocuous, folk-pop bubbled into the room from an overhead speaker, obscuring individual conversations and somehow rendering the experience more intimate and insular. Still, a sense of the animation that characterized my first visit persisted, partly through the chatter Tracey carried on with each table but also through sporadic interactions with the entire room. This was particularly true when Tracey asked all of us to sing “Happy Birthday” to a fellow patron. The entire room feted Amy sonorously, more so, I suspect, than we would have had we been visible to one another.

While the vocalizations of both patrons and guides lent a convivial commensality to the O.Noir experience, I discovered that, along with incidental noises, they also helped me build a (decidedly partial) portrait of the dining room. For example, when Dawn, Kevin, and I were first seated, I determined that a table of at least four sat about eight feet to my right and that an additional table or two sat at least twice that distance away in front of me. Until another party joined us in the dining room, I was convinced that a wall stood directly behind me, even though I was unable to locate it with repeated sweeps of my arm. As a guide led that group to their seats, I could feel my conception of the room expand in size. Interestingly, that same evening, as Victor guided a group out of the dining room, one of their number accidentally flipped an emergency light switch. For a brief moment, dim light spilled into our immediate area. Dawn saw my face in profile, as I struggled to find my napkin. With peripheral vision, I saw Kevin, eyes closed, and behind him the suggestion of a wall. A wall? Ultimately, that split second of light added nothing—save perhaps some confusion—to my image of the dining room. I understood, in the most rudimentary of ways, how it might be that a man who had regained sight after years of blindness suddenly found “his house and its contents unintelligible”;²³ a space is fashioned much differently in the imagination when it is heard rather than seen.

My conception of the dining areas consolidated on my second visit; Alison and I were estimating the number of occupied tables in the room. We listened for conversations taking place around us, almost intuitively distinguishing one table from another by how those voices were positioned in relation to our own by both distance and direction. It suddenly seemed to me that it was as though we were watching a stage play that featured several discrete settings; each time dining companions spoke, it was as if a tight pool of light were cast upon their table, bringing them out of the dark and into existence. The space between tables—more generous than usual in restaurants—was a kind of terra incognita, traversed only by our guides. It strikes me, of course, that this image of the space depends on a visual analogy. Dining in the dark is just too temporary and superficial an encounter with blindness—and the ocularcentrism of Western society too omnipotent—to teach its participants how it is that sight-impaired people might construe the world.

Leaving the dining room after each visit was the inverse of our entrance: with left hand on the left shoulder of the person in front of us and our guide in the lead, we conga-lined our way from the room through the antechamber and into the lobby, which, though softly lit, seemed overly bright when we re-entered the light.

PLAYING WITH OUR FOOD At O.Noir, patrons choose between a three-course meal (starter, entrée, and dessert) and a two-course meal (entrée plus either starter or dessert). Additionally, they are invited either to order from the menu or to opt for the daily off-menu surprise dishes.

On my first visit, Dawn, Kevin and I all selected the three-course surprise meal, vegetarian for me and meat for them. When our starter arrived, we were all momentarily at a loss, uncertain exactly how to proceed. Middle-class North American etiquette dictated that we not use our hands, while at the same time, the notion of stabbing in the general direction of an unknown appetizer with a fork was rife with potential embarrassment. After some hesitation, we all began to play with our food. I first

dabbed my index finger lightly over the surface of my plate, getting a sense of the texture, temperature, and quantity of food there: a soft mound of cooked shapes topped with a thick and slightly gritty sauce sat on a bed of wilted greens. The entire assemblage was lukewarm. I then pinched one of the nickel-like shapes between my thumb and index finger and conveyed it to my mouth.

"Root vegetables."²⁴

"Yeah, me too. Carrots, maybe?"

"Or a potato? It would be bland without the sauce."

"Well, that was a parsnip."

"Parsnips?"

"Yup, definitely a parsnip."

"And arugula—peppery, and that bitter aftertaste."

And so it went: we would nibble at the starter, try to identify its major components by texture, taste, and shape, and then share our discoveries. The sauce was the most challenging to identify: an acerbic but mellow bite, an astringent pull, and a grainy meatiness—perhaps a balsamic vinaigrette chock-a-block with grated Parmesan? It was so flavorful that I sopped up the excess with my roll and swallowed it down.

Almost as quickly as we'd finished our starter, Victor arrived to clear our plates and, minutes later, returned with our entrées. Again, I dabbed my finger around my plate, detecting through touch a mess of saucy vegetables arranged around a pillow of short-grained rice. Though it was sufficiently warm, I knew I'd need to eat steadily to finish it before it grew unappetizingly cool. Still using my fingers, I found a bean, which I judged to be a green bean from its slightly stringy texture, then a carrot nickel and a floret of broccoli.

"Have you tried your fork yet? It's actually pretty easy."

I switched to my fork. Trying to eat the soft white rice with my fingers had begun to feel rather undignified anyway. I ate cauliflower, potato, and more broccoli, all sautéed to a soggy softness, much of their inherent flavor muted in the process. The sauce, though, the same one served over the salad, was savory on my tongue. On the whole, it

was a palatable, if unremarkable, stir-fry. Dawn and Kevin, meanwhile, had determined that they'd been served mildly spicy butter chicken with white (rather than the more traditional basmati) rice.

Victor removed our plates, returning quickly to announce the arrival of our desserts and dessert spoons. The bowl was cold, so we all immediately suspected ice cream. A spoonful of the stuff—pliable, creamy, redolent with vanilla—and we knew we were right. Yet buried under the silky-smooth ice cream was a chunk of firm but juicy flesh. We each struggled to break off a piece with our spoons, identifying it first as some sort of exotic fruit from its perfumed bouquet and then realizing that the spices—cinnamon, perhaps a dash of nutmeg—had deceived us.

"Pear?"

"Maybe, but it doesn't seem quite granular enough."

"Apple, then?"

"Sure, apple."

Later that night, while assembling my field notes, I was surprised to see how readily we'd all fallen into the habit of deconstructing what we had on our plates, trying to determine what the component ingredients were, rather than trying to describe the flavor sensations we'd experienced.

Alison and I visited O.Noir a few days later. We both opted for the two-course surprise: a vegetarian dish and dessert for me, a meat dish and dessert for her. Just as Dawn, Kevin, and I had done, we focused on identifying what it was we were eating, rather than meditating on the flavor profiles of which it was composed. I had another stir-fry, with a sauce more piquant than umami; she had sliced chicken breast with green beans and roasted potatoes. For dessert, we both had baked apple with ice cream. Again, when elaborating my field notes, I was disappointed to see I'd again missed the opportunity to exercise my vocabulary for describing the sum of my meal rather than its parts.

Korsmeyer suggests that this is a natural response.²⁵ A taster can exercise both inward and outward intentionality; that is, a taste sensation can draw the taster's attention to her own body, to the appreciation of a flavor and its

effect on her own body, or it can serve a cognitive function, directing the taster's attention to acts of discovering and identifying substances out in the world. Without knowing what it is we are eating, we are unable to say with certainty that it is not a prohibited food, that it is a food for which we have an affinity, or that it is a food that stimulates memory for us. Not only can we not avoid those foods that disgust us, we can't even fully enjoy what might normally give us great pleasure. Consequently, to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of what we eat, we must first be able to identify it: outward intentionality, then inward enjoyment.

Perhaps I needed a different approach to the blind dining experience to encourage the development of vocabulary for communicating mouth sense.

STRUGGLING FOR WORDS I felt self-conscious in the lobby, standing alone as I waited to place my order while other patrons milled around flush with the first of holiday cheer. I'd already determined to order from the menu on my final visit to O.Noir; I would know what I was eating, so I could attend to articulating my flavor experience more mindfully than I had during previous visits. I placed my order quickly and hoped to be escorted into the (seeming) solitude of the dining room without too much awkward delay.

Initially I felt like a voyeur, sitting solo in the dark dining room while couples sat in conversation at tables around me. However, cloaked by both the darkness—no one could see me—and the folk-pop on the stereo—no one could hear me—I quickly became comfortable in my invisibility. I acclimated to the visual static more quickly than in the past. Once Tracey brought my entrée to the table—pasta with light tomato sauce and vegetables—I was ready to begin assessing, appreciating, and describing my meal: warm and slippery rotini noodles with an ever-so-slight al dente crunch, pasta just on the right side of being overcooked; a zesty sauce rounded out with a hint of citrus and a dash of heat; chunks of meaty mushrooms, fat slivers of (what I assumed to be) mellow onion, florets of barely bitter broccoli, and

mushy, tasteless bits of some nameless vegetable; a generous sprinkling of savory grated cheese. I followed the entrée with dark chocolate mousse and a cup of coffee. Rich, velvety, and gooey, the mousse clung to my fork and then to my teeth, where it melted in a rush of mingled sweet and bitter. Some lodged in the back of my mouth, in the flaps left over from a wisdom tooth extraction the week before. I twisted my tongue to loosen it and nudged the stitches, unleashing a metallic tang, a jolt of irritable red. The coffee was surprisingly strong, made bittersweet by the addition of sugar and cream. I was reminded vaguely of the small cups of dark coffee I drank while travelling Ethiopia, though this coffee was much harsher and lacked that indelible honeyed aftertaste.

And still I found myself speaking of the flavor experience through the components that make a meal, in words that lack specificity and evocation! Part of my dilemma stemmed from the ordinariness of meals that blind dining establishments tend to prepare so that people can determine what they are eating;²⁶ it is difficult to describe the unremarkable in unique and memorable ways. However, I suspect that a deeper cultural explanation—namely, the historical subordination of the sense of taste in the West—is also at fault. Sutton notes that studies of North American restaurant workers, even chefs, indicate that when they speak of the food they prepare, they use other superlatives—"That was exquisite!" "That was cruddy!"—or express themselves in similes and metaphors.²⁷ Conversely, Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that Chinese languages feature an extraordinarily rich lexicon for describing taste and texture, a vocabulary that is used not only by chefs and gourmands but also in everyday parlance.²⁸

AFTERTASTES As this account makes obvious, dining blind did not prompt me to dispense with identifying the foods that I was eating—even when I knew what the dish I was to be served was—in lieu of describing the flavors themselves; in fact, it seemed that precisely the opposite happened. In part, I needed to know precisely what I had put into my mouth in order to respond to its

aesthetic qualities in a way consistent with my cultural mores and my own personal preferences. Furthermore, my ability to articulate my mouth sense experiences—especially the ordinariness of the foods I'd been served—was hampered by the lack of a specific and evocative vocabulary with which to share it in memorable ways.

Although my research was focused primarily on my own phenomenological and social experience of O.Noir, it was inevitable that my companions and I were also curious about staff experience at the restaurant, from questions of practicality to those of agency: How do guides “see” the food to serve it? Is it liberating to work at a job from which they would typically be excluded? I searched the Internet for interviews with blind dining guides only to find that, in article after article, blind dining is discussed almost exclusively from the patron's perspective.²⁹ Yet guides are fundamental to the experience, using voice and touch to guide visitors through the restaurant, to announce their presence at the tableside, and to calm and reassure guests unnerved by the darkness. As Gill notes, guides not only need to be legally blind:

*they also have to have a gentle touch, a sense of humor, a commanding voice, the nimbleness not to knock customers in the head and the graciousness to baby needy patrons while juggling a four-table section.*³⁰

Despite this, in the few interviews I found, servers either reported patrons' reactions to the dark dining experience or spoke only about how such restaurants allow them to be employed in a service position usually denied them³¹—not about the tactical, emotional, and financial realities of their work. Tamara Tedesco, once a guide at Vancouver's Dark Table, intimates that she sees waiting tables as a rite of passage: “It is a job I always wanted to be able to do—it's something people always seem to do at some point in their lives.”³² At the time that she was interviewed, Tedesco had a full-time communications job with a Canada-wide nonprofit. For her, then, working at a dark dining restaurant was less about making

money than it was about obtaining an experience common to many of her peers.

While I'd intended O.Noir to be an exploration of literal taste, the kind that takes place in the mouth, it also caused me to reflect on taste as the power and practice of discerning excellence while also calling into question the socially conscious aspirations of blind dining establishments. Providing an underemployed demographic with jobs in the hospitality industry, a sector recognized for its low wages, difficult hours, and drudgery, is a dubious good. Given the pedestrian quality of the dining room fixtures—the kind of seating found in hotel conference rooms and inexpensive veneer-topped tables—and the workaday cuisine for the relatively high prix fixe, I can't help but see the restaurant as an explicitly ambitious business intent on turning a healthy profit. The assumption that patrons and—especially—guides will not notice the effects such cost-savings measures have on the atmosphere of the place simply because they can't see them is, to me, a huge oversight.

Moreover, I wonder how much the dark dining experience can teach the sighted about the living with blindness. The anthropologist Tim Ingold suggests that sensory responses can be nuanced by their practical apprenticeship within a specific community of practice:³³ for example, cardiac doctors cultivate distinctive techniques of listening to diagnose their patients' heart conditions.³⁴ I would suggest that blindness itself is kind of life-long apprenticeship, with visually impaired people developing, practicing, and polishing their capacity to “see” without sight. However, such sensorial knowledge is acquired over a significant period of time. Blindness over course of a meal or two is a novelty, not an education.

NOTES

1. Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).
2. Linda M. Bartoshuk and Valerie B. Duffy, "Chemical Senses: Taste and Smell" in Carolyn Korsmeyer, *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2007).
3. Naomi Duguid, *Burma: Rivers of Flavor* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2012).
4. Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 83.
5. Bartoshuk and Duffy, *The Taste Culture Reader*.
6. Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*.
7. Adam Yuet Chau, "The Sensorial Production of the Social," *Ethnos* 73, no. 4 (2008): 490, doi: 10.1080/00141840802563931.
8. Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*.
9. Ibid., 90.
10. David Howes, *The Varieties of Sensory Experience* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
11. Kathryn Geurts, *Culture and the Senses: Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
12. Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2010); Howes, *The Varieties of Sensory Experience*.
13. "Press Releases," http://www.blindekuh.ch/en/blindekuh_zuerich/who_we_are/press_releases/, accessed August 31, 2014; "What is O.Noir?" <http://www.onoirtoronto.com/what-is-o-noir/>, accessed August 31, 2014.
14. Florence Fabricant, "At Dans Le Noir, Dining in the Dark," *New York Times*, December 6, 2011, <http://dinersjournal.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/06/at-dans-le-noir-dining-in-the-dark/>; "What is O.Noir?"
15. "Dining in the Dark," *Night Guide*, posted March 12, 2007, <http://youtu.be/d548Gqb4j7s>.
16. Andrew Yang, "Waiter, I'm at Your Mercy," *New York Times*, July 22, 2007. <http://travel.nytimes.com/2007/07/22/travel/22surfacing.html?r=0>.
17. Sarah Pink, "An Urban Tour: The Sensory Sociality of Ethnographic Place-Making," *Ethnography* 9, no. 2 (2008).
18. Although O.Noir refers to their wait staff as "servers," I've opted to call them "guides" as an acknowledgement of the more complex relationship engendered by dining in the dark: patrons entrust their guides to steer them through the unlit space and through the experience of dining and socializing without sight.
19. Caroline Potter, "Sense of Motion, Senses of Self: Becoming a Dancer," *Ethnos* 73, no. 4 (2008).
20. Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Anthropology* (London: SAGE Publications, 2009), 69.
21. Greg Downey, *Learning Capoeira: Lessons in Cunning from an Afro-Brazilian Art* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 53.
22. Pink, "An Urban Tour," 190.
23. Oliver Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1996), 127.
24. Any conversation reported here is not a verbatim transcript but instead a reconstruction of the discussion Dawn, Kevin, and I had at the restaurant.
25. Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*.
26. Fabricant, "At Dans Le Noir"; "Dining in the Dark."
27. David E. Sutton, "Synesthesia, Memory, and the Taste of Home," in Carolyn Korsmeyer, *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2007).
28. Yi-Fi Tuan, "Pleasures of the Proximate Senses: Eating, Taste, and Culture," in Carolyn Korsmeyer, *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2007): 226-236.
29. Numerous articles about the blind dining experience can be found in online newspapers, magazines, and blogs. A sampling of those I have referred to include Catherine Allman, "Dining in the Dark at Concept Eatery Dark Table," *Vancouver Weekly*, October 11, 2012, <http://vancouverweekly.com/dining-in-the-dark-at-concept-eatery-dark-table/>; Richard Aston, "Review of Nox: Dine in the Dark, 269 Beach Road, Singapore," *The Dark Smile* (blog), "Dining in the Dark" September 10, 2014, <http://www.thedarksmile.com/blog/review-of-nox-dine-in->

- the-dark-269-beach-road-singapore; Fabricant, "At Dans Le Noir"; Alexandra Gill, "Pitch-Black Dark Table Misses the Mark," *The Globe and Mail*, January 25, 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/food-and-wine/restaurant-reviews/pitch-black-dark-table-misses-the-mark/article7889819/>; Jen (hklovebites), "Alchemy—Dinner in the Dark," *Love Bites* (blog), July 2, 2014, <http://hklovebites.com/2014/07/02/alchemy-dinner-in-the-dark/>; Liane Katz, "Dining in the Dark," *The Guardian*, March 1, 2006, <http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2006/mar/01/restaurants.london>; Yang, "Waiter, I'm at Your Mercy."
30. Gill, "Pitch-Black Dark Table."
 31. Night Guide, "Dining in the Dark"; Gillian Shaw, "Diners in the Dark at a New Blind Restaurant in Kitsilano," *The Vancouver Sun*, September 6, 2012, <http://www.vancouversun.com/health/Diners+dark+blind+restaurant+Kitsilano/7196261/story.html>.
 32. Shaw, "Diners in the Dark."
 33. Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000).
 34. Tom Rice, *Hearing the Hospital: Sound, Listening, Knowledge and Experience* (Canon Pyon, UK: Sean Kingston Press, 2013).



Pownal, Vermont | 2014
Brett Culbert

Cultures of Milk: The Biology and Meaning of Dairy Products in the United States and India

Andrea S. Wiley

Harvard University Press, 2014. 208 pp.

In *Cultures of Milk*, Andrea S. Wiley explores the material and cultural characteristics of milk in the United States and India. Wiley illuminates how each country's distinctive political, economic, religious, and historic context produces divergent meanings attached to dairy. These meanings, in turn, shape how milk is viewed and consumed. Wiley, a medical anthropologist, approaches this topic through the analytical lens of "bioculture," or how the forces of biology and culture constitute one another over time. In the case of milk, its biological properties are intertwined with its cultural significance in a relationship that continues to shift and flow according to current, historically specific conditions in both countries. Wiley illustrates how material characteristics such as dairy's nutritional value or lactose (im)persistence in humans are reflected and reconstructed through ideals of health and vitality. She marshals evidence from mass media, literature, regulatory policies, ethnographic and scientific data, and her own studies of child growth and milk consumption. As a result of these interplays, milk becomes embedded in discourses of national strength, vigor, and unity in both locations.

The book delves into the specific historical backgrounds shaping dairy culture in the U.S. and India, placing milk consumption within the context of colonialism and its consequences. Wiley argues that Britain had substantial culinary impacts on the United States, which had no indigenous dairying culture; in effect, Northern European immigrants transferred their dairying practices intact across the Atlantic, bringing cattle and Old World dairy products such as butter and aged cheeses. In India, the consequences of colonialism have been more subtle. Wiley traces millennia of Indian dairy history, which is characterized by the production of yogurt or "curd," *ghee* (a clarified butter made from fermented

milk), and fresh cheeses such as *paneer* and *chaana*. European practices of aged cheese production were not transferred to India, nor were European breeds of dairy cattle—India produces milk from its own indigenous *zebu* cattle and water buffalo.

However, British colonization did intensify the stance of the "sacred cow" as a powerful political symbol for the Indian nation. As Wiley indicates, Buddhist practices of cow worship and protection from slaughter gained new force during colonialism. As a result, calls for cow protection became a "rallying cry" as the cow became a compelling emblem for "Mother India," driving a movement for unity and independence (89-90). Yet despite the vaunted role of the *zebu* dairy cow as "sacred," Wiley notes that India actually consumes more water buffalo than cow milk, due to its higher butterfat content and the superior production of water buffalo relative to *zebu* cattle. While the U.S. does not have a religious history tied to dairying, Wiley makes a persuasive argument that Americans still see the cow as "sacred" in its own right, given its privileged status as nearly the sole provider of fluid milk, the political and economic subsidies the dairy industry receives, and the normative status of milk as a necessary food for growing children.

The theme of milk as food for children is common to both India and the U.S. Here, Wiley traces how dairy has played a role in discourses around building healthy bodies, going hand-in-hand with nation-building projects in the mid-twentieth century. Such narratives were characterized by the colonial context in India, and America's need for healthy, powerful bodies during both World Wars. These discourses are tied up in the nutritive materiality of milk in both countries, yet Wiley demonstrates how the biology of milk became entwined with broader themes of nationalism, purity, and the sacred.

Wiley's biocultural framework is a useful and compelling analytical hook to examine the ways in which milk consumption practices and meanings converge and differ between India and the U.S. A major strength of this approach is its ability to bridge the theoretical divide between

materialist and culturalist epistemologies, which traditionally have expressed opposing perspectives concerning how consumption practices are shaped and maintained. Is milk consumption a result of adaptations resulting from its nutritive value and the role of lactose (im)persistence in populations, or did lactose persistence arise from cultural ideologies shaping its prevalence? Wiley argues that the answer is both—the biological effects of milk and its role in the cultural imagination have together resulted in geographically specific consumption patterns.

What *Cultures of Milk* does not address, as Wiley discloses in the Introduction, is how these same biocultural processes have shaped dairy production. Production and consumption form a dialectic relationship; one cannot exist without the other. Wiley gives tantalizing hints concerning the role of production in both locations. For example, regarding state promotion of dairy consumption, she ties the U.S. school lunch program to the need to dispose of surplus dairy production. India, on the other hand, struggles to produce enough milk to meet demand, and has no comparable school or government programs. Given that India and the United States are two of the world's largest milk producers, this is a topic ripe for further analysis. Additionally, Wiley notes that Southeastern Asia is a little-studied region in terms of dairying practices. Further research on this topic will help close this gap in the literature.

In *Cultures of Milk*, Wiley asks the reader to consider the broader ramifications of telling children to “drink their milk.” She encourages us to consider the meanings we digest along with our dairy, and their biological, cultural, individual, and national ramifications. Wiley explores these views past the limits of “bio-ethnocentrism,” the normative establishment of Western European dairy practices inherent in many previous analyses of milk consumption (106). She inspires scholars to ask how specific historical, biological, economic, and political contexts shape dairying worldwide. In short, Wiley illuminates a path for those wishing to explore the distinctive ways in which biology and culture come together to shape lived experiences across the globe.

BOOK REVIEW | AMANDA MILIAN

High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America Jessica B Harris

New York: Bloomsbury. 2011. ix, 304 pp.

The author of nearly a dozen cookbooks and a recent inductee into the James Beard Foundation's Who's Who of Food and Beverage in America, Jessica B. Harris is among the top scholars of foodways in the African Diaspora. In *High on the Hog*, Harris constructs an elegant narrative history that connects the culinary experiences of the African and American continents to show how African Americans shaped the country around them. Harris disputes the portrayal of foods associated with slaves as “unhealthy, inelegant, and hopelessly out of sync with the culinary canons that define healthy eating today” (1). She discusses not only rural Southern fare, but also the elegant feasts that African American cooks prepared for the wealthy. These two distinct strands of the African American culinary experience guide the narrative. Ultimately, Harris emphasizes African Americans' culinary ingenuity, their ability to overcome adversity, and the significant role they played in the development of American cuisine, manners, and taste.

Moving chronologically and topically, *High on the Hog* offers a broad narrative of the origins and innovations of the African American culinary journey. Each chapter contains three parts: the introduction uses the author's personal experiences as a lead-in to the main subject, which is a topical analysis of African American contributions to American society and culture; finally, the chapter closes with an examination of the food of the period. Harris convincingly demonstrates how the diaspora built culinary connections between Africa and America. She walks the reader through African markets and traditional African and European dishes and cooking techniques. Through the Middle Passage, African slaves brought their culinary techniques and African tastes to America. After a somewhat superfluous “arrival story” for the many cultures on the North American continent, including the

Spanish, French, Dutch, and English, Harris relates how each interacted with the Native Americans and arriving Africans (46). Harris's comparison the culinary habits of Native Americans and Africans, as two "agricultural societies" whose "daily life was organized around the hunting and gathering of food," is short, but intriguing (53).

Harris's most compelling arguments come from her analysis of slave cooks and their contributions to American cuisine. She divides the African culinary tradition into two strands and distinguishes between the emerging Europeanized "elite" cuisine and that of traditional African heritage. Despite this division, both contribute to the blending of culinary tastes in America. The cooks in the kitchens of wealthy whites, or "slavery's elite," shape one thread (68). Through their position in the owner's house, slaves could influence the foods served at the table and helped create a creolized diet (71). Harris uses biographies of the prominent slave chefs, Hercules and James Hemings, to illustrate not only the chefs' struggles in bondage, but also how their skill in preparing European-style meals provided them with luxuries rarely afforded to other slaves. The other thread relates to free and enslaved urban caterers and vendors. They used their skills as cooks to create entrepreneurial opportunities and transform their African culinary heritage into marketable American dishes. In the post-Emancipation period, Harris contends, the two distinctive strands of African American culinary history solidified into the "basic African-influenced" fare of the less prosperous and the "European-oriented offerings" of the wealthy (162-163). Representatives of the African-influenced strand, including Black cowboys, the first African American cookbook authors, Harlem street vendors, and professionally trained culinary experts, all used food to secure a place in American society. Mary Ellen Pleasant, a representative of the latter of the two strands, moved west looking for opportunities and used "culinary know-how" to prepare and serve the types of elaborate meals desired by the white upper classes and the "newly affluent" (153). Fueled by necessity, all of these groups drew upon their culinary heritage and the

practices common in African markets.

These two threads become more complex in the mid-twentieth century. The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s brought an "increasing internationalism and growing awareness of self in the African American community" (213). By the 1970s, class no longer served as the primary factor in African American food choices, and instead, people across classes chose foods that "reflected a newly discovered pride in African roots and international connections" (215-216). African American cuisine became increasingly diverse. Harris concludes her narrative as she began it, by asserting that African Americans should receive acknowledgement for their integral part in America's culinary character and that the stigma attached to "slave food" is ill deserved.

This book's narrative structure seamlessly weaves together individual stories with the broad trends of history. Her range of source material, including city directories, cookbooks, journals, oral histories, literary works, and secondary literature, help Harris tell a myriad of tales. However, historians will feel frustrated by the lack of endnotes and the inclusion of only a select bibliography in the "Further Reading" section. Nonetheless, readers will appreciate Harris's inclusion of twenty-three recipes at the back of the book, including "Gumbo," "Son of a Gun Stew," and "Grandma Harris's Greens," as well as a list of selected African American cookbooks. Anyone with a general interest in culinary history, or the history of African Americans, should appreciate Harris's contribution to the field and her skill as a writer.

BOOK REVIEW | STEPHANIE BOLAND

Pure and Modern Milk: An Environmental History since 1900 *Kendra Smith-Howard*

New York: Bloomsbury. 2011. ix, 304 pp.

Pure and Modern Milk: An Environmental History since 1900 is a cogent study of dairy production from the turn of the twentieth century to the

present. A wide ranging and carefully researched piece of scholarship, Kendra Smith Howard's book takes up, as her introduction explains, the practice of environmental historians who have "elucidated the relationship between production and consumption" (6). Following in the footsteps of authors such as Richard White (whose book, *The Organic Machine*, Smith-Howard references) and historian Edmund Russell, the author joins a growing group of scholars who advocate a more nuanced reading of the urban-rural relationship than has previously been undertaken by environmental histories. Rather than adopting the Marxist (or Ruskian, or any one of other innumerable nineteenth-century thinkers') fear of the "'machine'" encroaching on the bucolic (8), *Pure and Modern Milk* reads twentieth century dairy production as predicated on reciprocal interaction between the city and countryside. This allows Smith-Howard to excavate with the movement of milk between these two locales, both in terms of literal production pathways and in the ideological framing of the substance and its products. At the heart of this book is a dialectic between the pastoral and pastural; between milk as a natural product, and as something sanitized—made safe—by new technology.

As one would expect, then, this is a thorough volume. Smith-Howard explains that her book's methodology is one which seeks to "explain [the] physical settings, economic structures, and political mechanisms through which [purchasing] took place and became meaningful" (9). This excitingly ambitious task sees *Pure and Modern Milk* turn to a range of primary sources: "the papers of consumer organizations, government bodies, surveys of consumer behavior conducted by dairy organizations, cost-of-living surveys, and women's magazines and advertisements" (9). Smith-Howard's extensive consultation of commercial documents—the sort of material evidence increasingly the substance of such studies—both answers her queries and complicates them. "What emerges from such a history," she writes, "is not a simple story about milk, but a history of the evolution of consumer society" (11). This, in turn,

points to a wider theoretical framing still: for "[t]o take milk's history seriously is to understand the compromises, complexity, and challenges involved in our dependence on other organisms for our very sustenance" (11). If it sounds like this assessment of what must be understood might lead to an overly-detailed attempt to understand it, Smith-Howard's study is reassuringly clear-eyed. There are undoubtedly more interesting aspects to *Pure and Modern Milk* than its style, but nevertheless its clear prose deserves mentioning, if only to note how well it allows technical processes which might in other hands feel turgidly digressive—such as artificial insemination and the assessment of fallout-contaminated milk—to be integrated fluently (85, 134-5).

Smith-Howard's evident skill at handling these specialized subjects is particularly fortunate given how necessary they are to *Pure and Modern Milk*'s central thrust. Milk's "purity," she argues, carries two competing narratives: on the one hand unsullied natural origins, and on the other the industrial processes that allow milk to be cleansed of its actual and perceived contaminants. In this sense, her study takes up one of the fundamental dialectics of twentieth century consumerism, and indeed food marketing today: that which advocates progress while resisting untempered appeals to new technology that may be off-putting for the average consumer. As a product that passes from the countryside to the city, milk is particularly illustrative of this marketing dyad. *Pure and Modern Milk*'s chapter on butter is particularly revealing on the subject, presenting the seeming contradiction of packaging which both "assured consumers that even as the world around them changed, their butter remained authentic and simple" and simultaneously "highlighted creameries as modern manufacturers" (56). The complex interplay of milk's nature and nurture had significant ramifications at the point of production and of sale; in following milk goods from the dairy to the self-service grocery, Smith-Howard elegantly lays out how this relationship affected milk at each stage of production.

If the journey from cow to glass is the core narrative of *Pure and Modern Milk*, it also serves as a carrier for a larger story. Just as the relationship at the center of this book reflects general twentieth century concerns, so does milk's passage along the supply chain serve to illustrate the evolving journey of commercialism after 1900. Smith-Howard's analysis of the constant intersection between the changing dairy industry and the juggernaut of commercialism, which gained radically increased traction over the period, is well buttressed with specific examples: how the war impacted the marketing and sales of skim milk (76), and how the rise of supermarket shopping prompted manufacturers to opt for packaging designed to induce impulse buys (81). Accordingly, *Pure and Modern Milk* is attentive to points of contact between dairy production and neighboring industries, recounting, to cite one example, how casein was used to manufacture products that ranged from paper to high fashion items (72-5). If there is a flaw in the book, it is perhaps that these broader contexts might have sometimes been made more explicit; *Pure and Modern Milk*'s well-applied methodology and deftness of thought makes for a text that might easily have resonance beyond environmental history and indeed beyond food studies, and Smith-Howard could justifiably have been more ambitious in stating her work's implications at certain points. Nevertheless, this is a minor point compared to what has been included, and the interested reader will have little trouble spotting the parallels between Smith-Howard's observations and their own fields. As the epilogue makes evident, *Pure and Modern Milk* has much to offer in terms of informing investigations into marketing and consumer habits, including contemporary ones. This is, ultimately, the book's gift: a reminder of the complex social and economic depths that lie beneath the visible surface of food production.

¹ See *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*, ed. Tony Bennett, Patrick Joyce (London: Routledge, 2010), 7.

BOOK REVIEW | MARCIA CARABELLO

Secrets from the Greek Kitchen: Cooking, Skill, and Everyday Life on an Aegean Island David E. Sutton

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014 .256 pp.

At a time when modern society is said to have left the kitchen for the couch,¹ David Sutton's latest book, *Secrets from the Greek Kitchen*, brings welcome empirical and theoretical depth previously lacking from the home cooking discourse. Through his fine grained ethnographic account, supplemented by video footage available online, Sutton provides a truly immersive look at the everyday cooking practices of Kalymnian islanders. This innovative application of visual ethnography lends dimensionality to Sutton's text, and provides an "argument for what is revealed about cooking when one starts from a more complex and contextual understanding of what ordinary people have been doing in kitchens" (5). Sutton's work shows that cooking, while perhaps a practice in transition, is still very much "bound up in the world" of all Kalymnians—young and old, female and male (182).

The book, divided into six thematic chapters, explores everyday kitchen activities on this Aegean island with the purpose of teasing out "the ways that cooking is transmitted, reproduced, and transformed among several generations of Kalymnian cooks" (3). Shifting focus from the general (e.g., theories of skill and knowledge transmission, the gendered and generational propriety of cooking practice, discussion of recipes and cooking shows) to the specific (e.g., cutting ingredients in the hand and other kitchen "micropractices," the kitchen choreography of mother and daughter, instances of continuity and change in familial practice), Sutton crafts a balanced and meaningful text that expertly navigates the central tension of any good ethnographic work: paying due tribute to participants' lived experiences while also presenting an argument resonant to a broader audience of food and culture scholars.

In the first chapter, "Emplacing Cooking,"

Sutton introduces readers to the geography and demography at the heart of his text. An island in the Dodecanese chain just off the coast of Turkey, Kalymnos has served as Sutton's fieldsite for more than two decades. In his previous work,² the author explored the role of food memories in creating and maintaining individual and collective identities, yet it was not until this latest work that he realized that cooking itself is in many ways a "memory process" (9). Starting in 2005 and returning yearly since, Sutton has pursued this new insight through open ended interviews, videotaped kitchen visits, and immersed participant observation on the island. His efforts offer a deep and nuanced understanding of the role cooking plays in the flow of everyday Kalymnian life. In this first chapter, Sutton reveals how the provisioning and preparation of food are socially embedded practices (36), serving as unifying threads in the fabric of Kalymnian society. On the island of Kalymnos, and arguably numerous other locales, cooking decisions are deeply entrenched in systems of value (41) and are bound up with myriad social concerns and moral considerations, not to mention more individualized ideas about health and finances.

Having established this contextual frame of value and meaning from which to further explore Kalymnian kitchen activities, Sutton's second chapter shifts focus to the active everyday use of kitchen tools as windows into broader patterns of life on the island. Through both text and video, Sutton presents a montage of three generations of Greek women cutting ingredients (potatoes, onion, zucchini) in the hand with small paring knives, rather than on the fixed surface of a cutting board. Sutton points out that while classically trained chefs would be appalled by the time and precision sacrificed, not to mention the risk assumed, by the practice of cutting ingredients in hand, it remains the predominant cutlery practice on the island because it is *socially* efficient (53-4). In having their attention freed from the surface of a cutting board, Kalymnian cooks are permitted to converse and engage with those passing in and out of their kitchens. The impact of this point is greatly strengthened by the unique experience afforded by Sutton's strategically referenced video clips, allowing reader to become viewer.

In chapters three, four, and six, Sutton closely follows the practices of another subset of participants to further contextualize his understandings of how Kalymnian women negotiate individual and collective tastes each time a meal is prepared and consumed. From the specificity of these individual choices and actions, Sutton demonstrates the importance of broader cultural contexts in understanding the significance and complexity of the everyday and habitual tasks of cooking practice. This reveals one of the book's most well kept secrets: the broad and empirically supported revelation that while the value considerations occupying the collective consciousness of Greek and American cooks may be similar (e.g., health, tradition, time pressures), the way they are acted upon is contingent on the cooking landscape in question (181). The intrigue of this point, however, actually marks one of the weaker points of Sutton's text. It seems a missed opportunity that the author did not further interrogate how such an intercultural revelation could apply intraculturally as well, providing a lens from which to make sense of the variations in cooking skill, knowledge, and practices from household to household, and not just country to country.

Nevertheless, food scholars seeking a contemporary discussion that diverges from the somewhat pessimistic stance that cooking as an everyday practice is bound for extinction will find much solace in *Secrets from the Greek Kitchen*. Sutton's book, impeccably researched and lucidly presented, complicates and challenges this widespread view while also providing the tools and guideposts needed to re-think what it means to cook and the myriad reasons why it matters—in Kalymnos and elsewhere. Since the author gives the last word in his book to one of his informants, here are Sutton's own in conclusion: "...cooking is an everyday, significant practice that generates so much discourse precisely because it matters" (182).

¹ Pollan, Michael. 2009. "Out of the Kitchen, Onto the Couch." *The New York Times Magazine*, August 2.

² Sutton, David E. *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory*. New York: Berg, 2001.



Route 5 Farmstand. West Springfield, PA. | 2014
Brett Culbert

Food Between the Country and the City: Ethnographies of a Changing Global Foodscape Nuno Domingos, José Manuel Sobral, and Harry G. West, eds.

London: Bloomsbury. 2014. 251 pp.

Food Between the Country and the City uses Raymond Williams's 1973 classic *The Country and the City* as an analytical filter to understand rural to urban foodways in contemporary societies. An edited volume, it is composed of eleven essays written primarily by scholars from SOAS at the University of London. The book's editors, Nuno Domingos, José Manuel Sobral, and Harry G. West, weave together ethnographic narratives from multiple authors and settings. Perhaps what each piece does best is identify, through ethnographic and archival research, what underlies, is experienced, or is even erased by use of the words "country" and "city" in conceptualizing foodways. A certain beauty emerges in using these words as analytic points of departure: they call forth related tropes, whether industrial and artisanal, conventional and organic, modern and traditional, or local and global.

The volume opens with an introduction that clarifies just how Williams's work can be applied to food and foodways. The editors argue that despite the transformations of recent decades—a more urban world population and increasing global connectivity—the tropes of country and city persist "even if their respective constellations of meanings have partially shifted over time" (3). As Williams once did, the editors explain that the nature of tropes depends upon specific historical moments. That is, the precise meanings of country and city are the result of processes of selection, emphasis, neglect, and exclusion of particular moments. Thus, today's industrialized and urbanized nations have come to symbolize lifestyle related diseases and the insatiable consumption of the countryside's resources. The introduction can be read on its own, simply to understand the myriad ways Williams's observations can be applied to contemporary foodways.

The book is broken into three subsections, focusing on foods of the country, the city, and the nation. In Section I, the authors identify characterizations of the country's foodways, largely constructed by individuals and institutions in the city. These representations are then contrasted with the lived experiences of ethnographic participants. Nuno Domingos's study of Portugal's Alentejo wine region identifies a sharp contrast between the lives of the region's inhabitants who experience emptiness due to outmigration, fewer jobs, and declining public services; and the work of wine marketers who represent that emptiness as idyllic village life. Emma-Jayne Abbots's study of ideal type representations of *cholas*, rural female food producers of highland Ecuador, reveals that the lives of these real-life *cholas* are not as imagined. Real *chola* women are forced to navigate a series of binds, generated by others' expectations of their *chola*-ness. Finally, Elizabeth Hull portrays how food insecure South Africans celebrate the qualities of Zulu foods in contrast to the grocer's fancier foodstuffs, and West illustrates how Saint Nectaire cheese producers define their engagement with heritage tourism as simply a continuation of their family's traditional production of cheese. These chapters expose not just the contradictions and binds generated by the disjuncture between the discourse and reality of rural spaces, but also how individuals of the country engage and refashion these discourses to their own purposes.

In Section II, the lens shifts to the city, where the authors look closely at foodways in urban to rural areas. These include Laura Delind's engaging critique of celebrated urban agriculture projects, in which she argues that urban gardens will not solve urban decay on their own and are quite problematic because they do not engage with the realities and wishes of urban inhabitants. Johan Pottier and Maria Abranches carefully complicate the binary division of urban and rural food production. In Malawi, Pottier identifies how urban migrants maintain ties to their rural homes to ensure food security throughout the year. Abranches's research in Guinea Bissau reveals a

food continuum, from production in Guinea Bissau to consumption in Lisbon, that satisfies migrants' desire for food from home. Interestingly, Williams's voice drops to its lowest pitch in this section, eliciting the question of whether his observations are more difficult to apply to urban foodways and their discourses or if the authors found other frameworks more appropriate.

The final section addresses the concepts of rural and urban foods in the context of nationalism, dealing extensively with the historic development of national foodways. From Sobral's description of the historic development of Portuguese gastro-nationalism to Maria Yotova's research on the growth of Bulgaria's national yogurt culture, these pieces reveal the importance of mythmaking (particularly of the rural) undertaken by scholars, government agencies, and marketing firms to create specific regional or national foodways. Sami Zubaida takes us to the sixteenth-century work of an Egyptian religious scholar who ridicules the foodways of the peasant population, offering a distinct contrast to the lauding of rural foodways undertaken in other regions and times. Finally, Monica Truninger and Dulce Freire discuss the conflicting narratives and lived realities that underlie perhaps one of the most mythologized foodways, the Mediterranean Diet. These chapters contribute to a discussion of the country and city at a different scale, looking more closely at the ways in which different locations (cities and nations) and the producers of their discourses impact one another.

The volume builds on previous research often undertaken on Slow Food, for example by Rachel Laudan, Jeffrey Pilcher, and West. These three, among others, have pointed to the contradictory nature of current and historic food organizing. Such projects tend to be put in place by or for city dwellers who in turn expect to assist peasant food producers through valorization of their products. However, these projects often advance the interests of urbanites far better than rural livelihoods.

The volume is especially appropriate for those working in rural and urban studies and can easily

be assigned for undergraduate and graduate level coursework. Rural to urban foodways are addressed from many disciplinary perspectives (history, literature, geography, and anthropology), so scholars looking for comparative ethnographies of food will also be interested. Individual chapters will be of interest to those with related regional and topic focuses, though the material is heavily weighted towards Portugal. And for those interested in Williams's work, the intrigue of this volume remains, in large part, due to the strength of his original insight. What the editors give readers, where perhaps many food anthologies fall short, is a comprehensive theoretical perspective from which to analyze the plethora of ways humans produce, consume, represent, and interpret contemporary foodways.

BOOK REVIEW | SERENITY SUTHERLAND

Drinking History: Fifteen Turning Points in the Making of American Beverages *Andrew F. Smith*

New York: Columbia University Press. 2013. x, 250 pp.

America has an ebullient past of diverse and shifting beverage tastes that intersect histories of politics, economics, social movements, and global influences. This is the story Andrew F. Smith tells by analyzing important historical moments in *Drinking History: Fifteen Turning Points in the Making of American Beverages*. Like a narrative mixologist, Smith throws together seemingly unlikely ingredients: beer, wine, rum, cider, whiskey, tea, coffee, milk, bottled water, juice, and soft drinks. The book is not organized by individual drinks per se; Smith focuses on time periods such as colonial diversity and the temperance movement as he traces the development of American drinking habits. For instance, the chapter "Colonial Diversity" examines the beverages of colonial society including familiar drinks such as rum, beer, wine, and brandy, as well as mixed drinks that are less familiar: syllabub, posset, flips, shrubs, and cherry bounces. Similarly, the chapter "To Root Out

a *Bad Habit*” examines the temperance period that led to the passage of the Volstead Act and National Prohibition. The remaining chapters, however, focus on a single type or category of beverage, such as “youth” drinks—juices and soft drinks.

Smith introduces each chapter’s theme with a catchy story that captures the beverage’s role in and connections to larger American society. Then, Smith delves into the history of the time period that heightened the significance of the “turning point.” For instance, Smith begins the chapter on Prohibition on the eve of the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. Smith then travels back in time, tracing how Americans from Increase Mather in colonial times to Benjamin Rush in early America dealt with drunkenness. Chapters like “The Judgment of Paris” explain the significance of place and history to the success and popularity of a particular beverage. For so long, French and Italian wines were viewed as the eminent vintages, best exemplified in American history by Thomas Jefferson’s affinity for expensive European wine. Now, Americans feature wines from California to New York and Chile to South Africa on their lists of “best of class” vintages.

Some chapters also include recipes to make the beverage in question, including a colonial recipe for roasting coffee and an unfermented wine recipe for communion during Prohibition. The chapters end with a description of how the beverage is integrated into American society today, as well as postscript notes that read as a “who’s who” and historical timeline. These additions include spicy tidbits about company factions and corporate buy-outs, details like birth and death dates of prominent figures, and the dates of larger national movements, such as wars and elections, that played a role in the chapter’s narrative.

Virtually every chapter ends with the same theme: mergers and acquisitions. Indeed, this is the subtle brilliance of Smith’s story. The story of American beverages is about the diminution of small businesses leading to conglomerate corporate control. Iced teas and juices that began with small businessmen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century sell to larger corporations

like Kraft and Nestle, which then go through mergers and acquisitions of their own. Today’s familiar corporations like Diageo, Anheuser Busch (now owned by InBev), and Constellation Brands bought out local distilleries, small time beer brewers and family owned wineries. Smith writes that he hopes his book will “provide insight into how we ended up where we are today” as well as “provide inspiration for alternative approaches for the future” (viii). These alternative approaches become clear in the sections on beer, wine, spirits, and to an extent, coffee, as Smith tells us that small brewers, distillers, and wineries have sprung up to compete with the larger corporations.

Smith places great value on the agency of American consumers who have the power to bring larger corporations to task by making thoughtful drink choices. Increasingly, consumers seek beverages with taste, character, and a business culture that emphasizes quality of the product over shareholder earning statements. This is especially true in the craft beer market where consumers deliberately purchase flavorful, quality beer made by local crafters using locally grown hops, barley, yeast, and water. This is one of the best features of the book, and it offers a hopeful yet cautious tone for the future of the American beverage industry.

Each chapter reads as its own unique essay, full of historical information, which makes it quite useful for short readings for a class or factual research. Reading the book straight through, however, is frustrating due to the repetitive nature of Smith’s style. For instance, readers will encounter the definition of a syllabub—a drink made with frothy, spiced milk or cream mixed with cider, wine, and sugar—half a dozen times. Dr. Benjamin Rush is also featured extensively as one of the first alcohol reformers. These are only a handful of examples, as Smith treats each chapter as its own unit, re-explaining as he goes along. In terms of content, readers may wonder why certain beverages, such as the controversial absinthe, were excluded from this history. The book also lacks good coverage of beverages from non-European ethnic backgrounds, such as rice-based alcohols like sake. Likewise, tequila and vodka receive only

a few short paragraphs (136-7). Also missing is coverage of topics relating to the drinking age debate, which for many youths in America is one of the greatest “turning points” of their lives.

Overall, Smith’s engaging narrative style provides the reader with specific and useful facts. The book will surely be useful to scholars in history, anthropology, American studies and others who are interested in the culture of American beverages. Scholars interested in the development of corporations and business history will surely find details about the rise of American companies such as Starbucks, Kool-Aid and Welch’s (to name a few) useful. Researchers focused on the food and beverage industry will also find a great resource in the fact-packed pages of Smith’s book.

BOOK REVIEW | RACHEL A. SNELL

Three Squares: The Invention of the American Meal *Abigail Carroll*

New York: Basic Books, 2013. 344 pp.

Abigail Carroll’s *Three Squares: The Invention of the American Meal* traces the evolution of the American meal from the colonial era to the present. By exploring the concurrent development of dining and snacking habits, Carroll provides insight into the development of class-consciousness, national identity, and the growth of consumer culture in America. Carroll argues that “the shape of the meal is also the shape of society” and ably demonstrates the power of food studies to illuminate fresh perspectives on identity formation (219). So much of American identity is wrapped up in choices of how, where, and what to eat. Carroll reveals that a significant portion of that identity is inherited from the past.

In *Three Squares*, Carroll contends that our eating habits “lie deeply embedded in popular assumptions about what is normal, good, fashionable, healthy, and American” (xii). A relatively recent invention, our modern eating habits and current dining customs stem from developments in the nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries that influenced the timing of dinner, impacted the composition of breakfast, invented lunch, and legitimized snacking. To explore this transformation, Carroll’s text is arranged chronologically and thematically. The first two chapters present a chronological narrative of eating habits prior to the nineteenth century. In these chapters, Carroll traces eating habits from the earliest period of colonial settlement in North America to the post revolutionary period. This overview of eating in America from times of subsistence to times of plenty sets the stage for the remainder of the book, which describes the development of each meal, with separate chapters for lunch, breakfast, dinner, and snacking. The final chapters explore current practices and speculate about how emerging concerns related to health and tradition might impact American dining in the future.

In order to show the development of a uniquely American middle-class identity in the nineteenth century, Carroll describes the evolution of dinner from subsistence to a family repast imbued with specific cultural meaning. The informal and pragmatic nature of colonial dining shifted during the late eighteenth century to become more complicated, genteel, and self consciously imitative of European conventions. The atmosphere of the dining table with its prescribed etiquette, extravagant table setting, and increasingly elaborate fare set the stage for a deliberate performance of identity. As Carroll writes, “the ritualization of dinner as a nightly ceremony . . . spoke of class values; the trappings aided the ambitious middle-class family in identifying itself as respectable and successful” (69). To accommodate these aims, dinner evolved from a hearty, midday repast meant to refuel the family for the remainder of the day’s labor into a meal served to mark the end of the working day. Dinner brought the family, scattered by work and school during the day, together and provided parents with an opportunity to model proper behavior to their children. Dinner, according to Carroll, “did double duty: it fed Americans’ spirits as well as their stomachs” (76). As men and children spent more time outside the

home, the evening meal solidified their sense of belonging within the family, the growing middle class, and the nation.

While dinner defined the transformation of eating habits in the nineteenth century, breakfast and lunch embodied shifting ideas about health, work, and the influence of commercialization in the twentieth century. Processed foods like orange juice concentrate and TV dinners simplified the process of preparing meals. A growing emphasis on profitability and efficiency invented lunch as a “lighter, colder, cheaper, and quicker” meal hastily grabbed from a cafeteria before returning to the office or brought to work in a paper bag (103). Profitability and efficiency likewise reshaped the morning meal, transforming breakfast from a varied and calorie dense repast as “business incentives drove entrepreneurs to create new products, grain producers to seek more profitable outlets than livestock agriculture for their goods, and middle-class Americans to simplify their morning routine in order to get to work” (134).

The greatest influence on American dining, according to Carroll, was business. The establishment of dinner in the nineteenth century served as a counterweight to rampant American capitalism. She describes how “rigid work schedules streamlined breakfast and lunch” and placed greater emphasis on dinner as an opportunity for family bonding, etiquette training, and social striving (216). Likewise, business interests remade snacking by rebranding and repackaging not only foodstuffs, but also American attitudes toward snacking. Commercialization transformed snacking from an activity of dubious morality and an indicator of a lack of self-discipline (associated with immigrants and the boisterous lower classes) to a routine leisure activity in American homes.

In *Three Squares*, Carroll presents a detailed overview of American food culture, but her history excludes much of the population. The book tends to focus on middle-class American food culture, particularly in its discussion of the nineteenth century. Carroll presents a more complete picture of contemporary American society, but the focus

on dinner as a uniquely American institution—adapted to business practices and desire for family togetherness—often precludes attention to other groups. The final chapter, “The State of the American Meal,” explores the eating habits of working class and immigrant families. However, these groups are conspicuously absent from earlier chapters tracing the evolution of the American meal.

Carroll’s contentions about the development of the American meal and its connections to capitalism and class consciousness will be of interest to food specialists and those concerned with the development of American culture. Her chronological approach to American dining from the colonial era to the present provides an exceptional overview of food and American history that would benefit students of American history. Her admonition in *Three Squares* that we are not only *what* we eat, but *how* we eat is particularly noteworthy in light of our current obsession with the source, treatment, and environmental impact of our food. Carroll reminds us that before we can understand how we eat, we must first understand why.



Center Road. Conneaut, Ohio | 2014
Brett Culbert

Call for Artwork

The *Graduate Journal of Food Studies* is seeking original artwork from artists, students, and readers to feature in forthcoming issues. Artwork must consider the topic of *food* broadly including, but not limited to: its production, availability, preparation, journey, cultural context and history, taste, texture, etc. Work conceived as a series is appreciated but not required.

While we live in a photographic social networking age, it's important that your contributions are ambitious and considerate of both broader media, as well as tried and true techniques. The *Journal* welcomes drawings, paintings, and collages as alternatives to digital snap shots of dinner courses in exotic locales (though these could be interesting too).

If you are interested in submitting your work for our review, please send 6-10 images formatted on 8.5x11 sheets as hi-resolution (300 dpi) .pdf or .jpg files to the following address:

ART@GRADUATEFOODASSOCIATION.ORG

Call for Members

THE ASSOCIATION

The Graduate Association for Food Studies (GAFS) is an interdisciplinary academic community founded in the spring of 2014 with the goals of connecting graduate students who are interested in food and promoting their exceptional work.

The organization publishes the *Graduate Journal of Food Studies*, provides its members with calls for papers for food-related conferences, offers short primers on professionalization, and is currently organizing its first annual conference. For more information on joining, please visit the website.

WWW.GRADUATEFOODASSOCIATION.ORG/JOIN

Call for Submissions

THE JOURNAL

The *Graduate Journal of Food Studies* is an international student-run and refereed journal dedicated to encouraging and promoting interdisciplinary food scholarship at the graduate level. The *Journal* is now accepting submissions for its third edition; the deadline is **31 March 2015**.

Published bi-annually in digital and print form, the journal is a space in which promising scholars showcase their exceptional academic research. The *Graduate Journal of Food Studies* hopes to foster dialogue and engender debate among students across the academic community.

The *Journal* features food-focused articles from diverse disciplines including, but not limited to: anthropology, history, history of science, sociology, cultural studies, gender studies, economics, art, politics, pedagogy, nutrition, philosophy, religion, and the natural sciences. The *Journal* also includes a section for Book Reviews.

WWW.GRADUATEFOODASSOCIATION.ORG/JOURNAL

Call for Papers

THE CONFERENCE

The Graduate Association for Food Studies will hold its first annual conference for graduate students to present and discuss their research. The conference will be held 23-25 October 2015 at Harvard University. The Association will offer ten, \$200 travel grants to members whose submissions are accepted. The full Call for Papers and other information about the conference is posted on the website.

WWW.GRADUATEFOODASSOCIATION.ORG/CONFERENCE

Join Us on Social Media



Twitter: @gradfoodstudies



Facebook: "Grad Food Studies"



Instagram: @gradfoodstudies

