

EATING IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD:
AN ESSAY ON THE EXCLUSIONS AND ERASURES OF LOCAL FOOD

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Abstract

The common sense about local food is that it is essentially a virtuous project. Unlike the global food system which is designed to maximize corporate profits above all else, local food systems are said to be responsive to human and ecological needs. Both academic advocates and popular writers highlight the potential for food system localization to generate attachments to place and community that change how people “relate to food.” Critics, however, identify consistent patterns of exclusion in empirical studies of local food, and note troubling “blind spots” in local food politics with respect to labor issues.

The most influential positions in the field argue for a critical localism that preserves the features that make local food promising while addressing injustices and exclusions. What they miss, however, is how “local” works as a category of desire -- something that popular advocates of local food seem to appreciate better than academics do. This means that localness is not simply a guide to organizing markets and supply chains, or evaluating the virtues of foodstuffs. In order for it to become that guide, it must first be realized as a meaningful idea -- one that is worth the material and emotional investment necessary to become an organizing principle in social life. The problem, I argue, is that what makes local food compelling is also what makes it exclusionary.

Based on a critical reading of the literature, a discourse analysis of popular media, and participant observation in several local food markets in San Francisco, CA in 2014, this dissertation examines the realization of “local” as compelling and lively, and then draws out some of the consequences of that realization. In popular discourse, I identify a characteristic style of reasoning and desiring -- including an articulation of specific ways of knowing and relating to place that are valorized as natural -- that I describe as the fantasy of “real food.” In empirical chapters, I examine how this fantasy shapes local food markets, and demonstrate its influence in both ordinary market interactions and in market management. In particular, I describe how farmers markets have become constituted as vital sites for enacting local desires and local knowledge. I illustrate how problems in farmers markets come to be identified and articulated as problems of contamination, thus prompting an understanding of appropriate social action in food systems as a pursuit of purity.

The result is a seemingly comprehensive view of food and place that heightens the resonance of specific issues, including taste, community, and connection to the land. However, this also has the effect of rendering other concerns less intelligible -- including issues relating to domestic foodwork, migrant farmworkers, and other concerns operating at nonlocal scales which cannot be known or addressed in the characteristic style prescribed by the fantasy of real food. Thus, unlike other scholars in the field who would preserve localism while address its worst tendencies, I argue that the exclusions and erasures are built into the very practices that realize localness in the world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Arguments for local food typically start with the disastrous consequences of the global food system -- unsustainable use of resources, environmental destruction, rampant labor exploitation, systemic animal abuses, the production of hunger and illness, and so on. Local food systems, in contrast, are said to be not only more environmentally sustainable because they require fewer resources for transport but also, more generally, responsive to the needs and interests of the public in a way that global food systems are not. It is this responsiveness that makes it reasonable to think that local food systems might be able to address effectively the variety of issues any food system presents. A wide range of positive outcomes are claimed for local food systems, including specific benefits for individual consumers (improved health and taste), for the environment (reduced carbon footprint, improved local environmental amenities), for the local economy (survival of small businesses), and for the local community (especially with regard to connections between producers and consumers) (Kloppenborg et al. 1996, Hassanein 2003, Lyson 2004, Pollan 2008, Nabhan 2009, Kurland et al. 2012, Schnell 2013).

The converse -- that the global food system is unresponsive to public needs -- seems to accord with the experience of consumers who are concerned with what they eat. To consumers, global food system can appear distant, opaque (deliberately so, in many cases), and unknowable -- as are the foods that the system delivers, which often appear to be the products of a deeply alien technological artifice rather than the product of a natural bounty. Indeed, it is often argued that if people were permitted to know more about global food -- the conditions of industrial animal feeding and animal killing, the poisonous chemical inputs of intensive agriculture, the labor conditions of agricultural workers, and so on -- they would be far more reluctant to consume quite so much of it (e.g. Pollan 2006). This sense persists despite (because of?) the enormous money and time put into marketing research by global food

companies that seek to discover and respond to consumer interests. For many, the manner in which consumer interest is translated into novel product lines (e.g. in the form of “low fat” or “nutritionally enhanced” varieties) only adds to the sense that the real objective is to manipulate consumers rather than respond positively to their concerns (e.g. Fine 1994 2004, Pollan 2008).

While the local food movement is often framed as a response to the serious and pressing problems of the global food system, this framing of local food as an answer to unknowable and ungovernable global food leaves behind direct confrontation with those problems to focus instead on building up alternatives. Leaving aside the regrettable concession of global systems as ungovernable, the danger of this kind of politics is that it can be easy to lose sight of long-term goals, mistaking means for ends (Born & Purcell 2005) or market share with movement success (DeLind 2011). The destructive power of the global food system and the alienation that consumers feel when confronted by that system are not unrelated, but centering the latter (as the local food movement often does) can be counterproductive. It is fair to wonder, for example, if the consumerist emphasis undermines the basic logic of local food’s responsiveness by reducing local governance mechanisms to a call to “vote with your forks” (e.g. Nestle 2000).

At the same time, this emphasis has undoubtedly contributed to the greatest accomplishment of the movement thus far -- articulating and popularizing a convincing argument that the best production practices serve not only environmental interests but consumer interests as well (Pollan 2008). In popular discourse, the most resonant summary of this position comes from the discourse of “real food” -- an encompassing answer to the artificial, inauthentic, commodified, and unknowable foods of the global system. As terms of classification, real food and local food are not identical, but they do overlap quite a bit. Real food is fundamentally food that is both understood to be “traditional” (as in, not newly invented) and

traceable, so much local food often qualifies as “real” because its origins and production practices are not obfuscated. The products of industrial production practices that happen to be located nearby do not qualify as “real,” but are often not claimed as “local” either (only “technically local”). Thus, more than overlapping classifications, real and local seem to share deep principles such that each is in some sense the ideal of the other -- the “realest” real food is local while the truest local food is “real.”

The discourse of real food presents a vision of good food -- thoughtful, connected, wholesome, natural -- that seeks to perform the tricky balance of chasing market share while staying true to the “deeper” values of localism. Or, to put it a way that casts exhortations to “vote with your fork” in a more generous light, efforts to popularize the values of local food aim at the constitution a public that is attuned to the range of issues that food systems present and refuses to be manipulated by the marketing tricks of global food. The trouble is that the “public” that is thus constituted -- with its specific aesthetic and political sensibilities -- can appear more like an exclusive club than an inclusive demos.

Accessibility and the Politics of Local Food

In the past few decades, the market for local foods has seen dramatic growth, particularly in the United States. According to the USDA, there were 8,687 farmers markets operating in 2017, up from 1,755 in 1994 when the national directory began (USDA 2017). This growth in farmers markets has been accompanied by parallel growth in other outlets, including community supported agriculture schemes, community gardens, specialty groceries, the increased presence of locally sourced ingredients on restaurant menus, and the increased availability of local products in conventional supermarkets. In all, the USDA estimates 6.1 billion USD in total direct marketing sales of agricultural products in 2012, the most recently available estimate (Low et al. 2015).

Despite this growth, local food continues to have problems with accessibility. One of the purported advantages of local food is that consumers can be more knowledgeable about local production practices and support the most responsible producers by paying premium prices. Those higher prices are justified as paying the “real cost” -- accounting for costs that are typically externalized in the global food system -- but this still means that some will struggle to afford the best local products. Moreover, procuring, storing, and preparing local products can be more costly as well. Farmers markets tend to be located in richer neighborhoods, are often inconvenient to public transit, and often have limited hours. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) can be demanding for consumers because they typically require consumers to pick up their boxes at a set time and place. Some require consumers to pick up boxes at the farm, which can be a considerable distance away. Moreover, consumers cannot replace supermarket shopping entirely with farmers market visits or CSA boxes, which means that these generally constitute an additional weekly errand for the household. And consuming local food can require additional resources as well, because storing and preparing fresh produce generally requires more skill and time for cooking, and well-stocked and well-equipped kitchens.

Some of these added costs can be mitigated. In farmers markets, for example, market managers have some leeway to set policies that would make the market more accessible and inviting, but those policies have tradeoffs. Expanding hours of operation can make a big difference for busy consumers, but is more taxing on vendors who often drive for many hours to make it to the market. Expanding the mix of vendors likewise allows consumers to take care of more of their shopping in one trip, but also increases competition for individual vendors. Including vendors who sell more cheaply allows lower income shoppers to also enjoy the market, but may anger vendors who get undercut on similar products. Including more prepared food vendors allows the shopping trip to be combined with a meal, but this also draws people

who are only or primarily interested in prepared foods. Permitting vendors to cut prices towards the end of the market day allows consumers to buy for less and allows vendors to sell off more of their produce so that they have less to pack up and haul back to the farm or warehouse, but also invites “bargain hunters” to show up only at the end. Each of these decisions generally affects the “character” of the market in the same direction -- making markets more accessible means making them feel a little bit less special, less like the expression of a committed “community” of locavores and more like just another commercial space.

For many, added effort and cost is part of the point, and efforts to expand access by making local food more convenient are met with unease or skepticism. According to many advocates of local food, part of the problem with the global food system is its convenience -- the ease with which fast foods or packaged foods are integrated into daily routines lends itself to unthinking consumption habits that have wide-ranging negative consequences. The purpose of encouraging people to eat locally, to reject processed “foodlike substances” (Pollan 2008) and seek out “real” food, is in large part to change how they “relate” to their food, and inconvenience is essential to that project (Petrini 2009). Laura DeLind (2011), for example, argues that delivering CSA boxes instead of requiring pick-up, for example, compromises the greater goals of the local food movement in order to indulge the laziness of privileged consumers:

It is sobering to recognize that the local food movement is now accommodating and indulging (i.e., conveniencing) individual consumers who are too busy to pick up their own CSA shares, or too disinterested to plant or weed their own gardens, but who have sufficient enlightenment and capital (possibly the same thing), to eat local. They now have an official name -- “lazy locavores” -- which, in a regenerative system, can only be a contradiction in terms. (p. 276)

At the same time, DeLind also argues against making local food available cheaply at more accessible outlets like Walmart, because this “pairs [local food] rhetoric with some of the very conditions the movement was designed to overcome” (p. 277).

DeLind is right to be concerned with the dangers of co-optation or “conventionalization” (cf. Guthman 2004 on the organics movement). But practical issues of access inevitably become laden with social meanings, so that the willingness to invest time and money into specific kinds of foodwork becomes part of the way people establish their status as thoughtful citizens of the world. People who are unwilling or unable, on the other hand, demonstrate their thoughtlessness and their lack of fitness to govern themselves. The problem for advocates of local food is that it becomes difficult to endorse inconvenience without also implicitly endorsing the social exclusions that arise from those barriers to access. Many of the avenues for addressing these exclusions, moreover, have been rendered undesirable because they run counter to the specific ways that localness has been valorized (e.g. price and “paying the real cost,” or convenience and “relating to food” differently). It is no surprise, therefore, that local food spaces -- including both market spaces and activist spaces -- have been found to be markedly whiter and wealthier on average, and often subtly hostile to participants who do not fit in (Slocum 2007, 2011; Guthman 2008; Alkon & Agyeman 2011). Governance in local food systems has likewise been shown to be problematic, prioritizing the interests and welfare of privileged locals over and above any deeper movement ideals (Hinrichs 2003, Winter 2003, Gray 2013).

Other scholars in the field have called for reforms to address these troubling tendencies while preserving the centrality of localism (e.g. DuPuis & Goodman 2005, Gray 2013). In contrast, I argue here that these shortcomings of local food are not really “tendencies” at all. The tension between accessibility and the mission of local food suggests a very different dynamic -- not simply that the current local food movement is failing to thread the needle between counter-hegemonic practice and accessibility, but rather that localness produces its own exclusions.

Outline of the Argument

The overarching argument of the dissertation is that the patterned exclusions and erasures that have consistently been found to trouble local food projects are rooted as much in localism's ideals as in its compromises with the market. I start with the familiar premise that "local" is not a naturally given category. I take this to mean that when "local" appears as a coherent idea around which aspects of social life are organized, it is the result of specific discursive and material practices. This dissertation, then, examines the practices that produce "local" as a socially effective idea -- that *realize* localness in the world. Each of the main chapters of the dissertation illustrate in various ways how the discursive and material practices that realize localness also produce its characteristic drawbacks, structuring and animating that basic tension between accessibility and exclusion described above. Throughout, I pay special attention to how these practices shape what we might call the epistemological politics of local food -- what we know and how we know things in spaces that are constructed as local.

In the first part of the dissertation, I identify the central appeals of localism through a reading of academic and popular writing. Through a critical literature review, I describe how the ideals of local food are effectively distilled into appealing propositions about localness. I find that advocates frame local food as offering people a way of relating to their food that is *informed* and *connected* in a way that the global food system cannot be. In Kloppenburg et al. (1996), for example, the appeal can be summarized as the possibility of authentic belonging -- "becoming native," in their terms -- based on a uniquely local way of knowing that enables people to live in harmony with the social and natural environment of a particular place. In popular media, these appeals to knowing and belonging become specified and popularized in a discourse of "real food" that hails consumers with the promise of more authentic, natural, or wholesome

satisfactions. Real food discourse, in other words, realizes local food's ideals as a kind of shared *desire* for the authentic satisfactions of local knowing and belonging.

Drawing on Butlerian performativity theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis, I explain how, generically, the dangers of organizing social life around desire of this kind are that it relies on (1) the production of threats and enemies in order to sustain itself as desire, and (2) an illusion of comprehensiveness that is generative of unreflexive erasures. Based on this analysis, I suggest that the trouble for local food advocates is not simply that the localist desire for authentic satisfaction is unrealistic or unrealizable. Rather, the trouble is that what makes local food projects compelling and lively for so many is also precisely what makes them amenable to (and perhaps even reliant on) unjust exclusions and erasures. The second half of the dissertation presents empirical findings that support and refine these claims. Rather than attempt to examine local food systems as a whole, the empirical focus is specifically on farmers markets as key sites in the realization of local food's ideals. As many have noted, local food practices are heterogeneous, and this dissertation does not attempt a comprehensive account of the variations in accessibility or insularity. Instead, it attempts to illustrate common and transposable *mechanisms* in order to provide an understanding of how exclusions and erasures arise from local food ideals. This is accomplished by showing how the desire for distinctly local satisfactions of certainty and authenticity shape how farmers markets are organized, managed, and experienced.

The empirical work illustrates that this desire often takes the form of the idea of farmers markets as sanctuaries for real food, and has a variety of troubling consequences for food politics. First, the idealization of farmers markets promotes a regressive politics of purity in which any dissatisfaction or failure with the market is necessarily seen to be rooted in some outside contaminating presence -- a dangerous style of problematization that eschews true

reflexivity in favor of a search for scapegoats. When farmers markets are idealized in discourse but are found to fail to deliver on the lofty promises in practice, the trouble cannot be with the markets or with the promises. Inevitably, the blame falls on “outsiders” such as hipsters, tourists, or dishonest vendors who need to be controlled or banished. Second, while the idealization of farmers markets allows important issues like seasonality and carbon footprint to emerge “naturally” as central concerns, it renders other issues less intelligible. Because farmers markets are thought to be sanctuaries for communal rather than instrumental relations, they are presumed to be free of the unequal power relations that plague the rest of the food system. This is compounded by the specifically localist presumption that local entities, including farmers markets in particular, are uniquely available to be known in some authentic and comprehensive way. As a result, issues such as the exploitation of farmworkers, urban-rural power differentials, and gendering of food-related labor are not only less likely to emerge as legitimate concerns within farmers markets, but also treated as secondary issues when they are.

The findings in this dissertation suggest reasons to be skeptical of the idea that reforming localism to be more inclusive is essential to a progressive food politics. The general scholarly consensus in local food studies has been that, despite its shortcomings, local food is valuable to progressive food movements because of the enthusiasm it has already generated. But if, as this dissertation argues, that enthusiasm and those shortcomings are in practice closely articulated, then it is unclear whether localism belongs in progressive food politics at all. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of how a food politics without the false certainties that local food promises might proceed.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 2, “Ungrounding Local Food Studies,” provides a critical review of the literature, situates the argument of the dissertation in the major debates, and introduces the theory and

methods used to make that argument. Through the literature review, I note that the common premise that “local” is “socially constructed” is usually the starting point for a fairly specific kind of inquiry. On the one hand, critical studies show how empowered actors manipulate the definition of the local and related constructs like “community interest” in order to serve their own ends, and warn that constructing something as “local” carries the danger of reifying boundaries, flattening differences within the local and casting outsiders as suspicious (e.g. Hinrichs 2003, Allen 2004). On the other hand, advocates of local food argue that the meaning of local food has been diluted or warped by powerful interests. DeLind (2011), for example, argues that local food does (or should) have a kind of essence -- the emancipatory notion of an embedded “regenerative food system” that has been compromised in order to serve “market potential and economic outcomes” (p. 275). But both positions, premised on the malleability of definitions of “local” in practice, prompt questions of *strategy* or *implementation* -- how to make local practice live up to its theoretical ideals, how to keep privileged interests in check, how to incorporate neglected interests and voices in local processes, and so on.

In this chapter, I make the case for focusing on a different set of questions, prompted by different premises about how the idea of local food operates in the world. Despite the prevalence of constructivist talk, I argue that much of the literature that advocates for localism is still “grounded,” in the sense of presuming a naturally given coherence to the category of local (which is then elaborated in various ways through processes of “social construction”). This grounding is rarely explicit, but it comes through clearly in the pervasive assumption that the local is somehow knowable because it is proximate. The idea is that we can, through specifically local ways of knowing, produce a kind of normative knowledge about how to inhabit the places we live in (Kloppenburger et al. 1996). As I explain, the critical literature also tends to presume a similar ground while giving relatively more weight to the construction process, suggesting that a

wide range of just and unjust outcomes are possible. According to this literature, those outcomes depend not on any "inherent" characteristic of the local -- of which nothing can be said -- but on which local agents and what local agendas are empowered in each particular organization of localness (e.g. Born & Purcell 2006). This presumes, however, the pre-existence of local agents and local agendas that precede any process of social construction, and precludes lines of analysis that interrogate localness as a socially meaningful idea with independent consequential effects. Moreover, the argument does not even really deter enthusiasm for localism, and can even be taken as encouragement because it opens the door for "reflexive" local agents to intervene in order to make local food more open and democratic (e.g. DuPuis & Goodman 2005).

I argue that local food studies should be "ungrounded." Drawing inspiration from Judith Butler's work on the performativity of gender, I offer an approach to local food that avoids presuming the coherence of local without also disarming analysis. Butler's example directs our attention to fundamental processes of knowledge production -- to the oppressive and exclusionary consequences of a discourse that performatively produces its own foundations, articulating a "truth" about food, the local, and belonging. Thus, when the idea of local food is found to exert some material force in the organization of social life, I argue that this is because it has been made lively and compelling through its articulation as connected, natural, and wholesome (as "real" in other words). Perhaps ironically, this perspective has the most in common with DeLind's insistence on a local "essence." Although there is nothing about the local that is inherent or naturally given, it does have historically given resonances that cannot be separated from how it is strategically deployed. The questions we should be asking of local food, then, are less about the varieties of implementation and more about the (perhaps unintended) consequences of this kind of articulation -- how this framing of local-as-real shapes

the common sense of local food politics, the way that social problems are identified, what kinds solutions emerge as sensible or insensible, and whose concerns get excluded.

I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the methodology of this dissertation. The methods used include discourse analysis and participant observation, with readings and observation sites selected to address the questions of articulation and its consequences which this chapter has identified. I read Alice Waters and Michael Pollan to describe the translation of principles of localism into popular desire through the discourse of real food. I analyze popular media coverage of farmers market controversies to trace the emergence of a particular style of problematization that reveals the contradictory and troubling effects of applying of those desires to the practical problems of farmers markets. Finally, from participant observation, I describe common farmers market programs and practices to trace how relatively anodyne desires to know the provenance of food or connect with farmers, refracted through the specifically local ways of knowing that are valorized in real food discourse, constrict the domain of intelligible concerns in deeply troubling ways.

Chapter 3, “The Fantasy of Real Food,” argues that real food discourse is a fantasy in the Lacanian sense, defined roughly as a narrative that mourns the loss of some fundamental wholeness and invites people to pursue the recovery of that wholeness as if it were a practical project. The fantasy analytic is useful here for analyzing desire in sociological rather than psychological terms. As I illustrate in the chapter, the fantasy analytic allows us to make sense of social phenomena that might otherwise appear contradictory and inexplicable by sensitising us to the the social structuring of desire (and thus making it available for sociological analysis). In brief, the discourse of real food narrates the traumatic loss of a natural way of relating to food that kept people connected to “the land,” to the growers and producers of that food, and to the cultural traditions that articulated culinary wisdom with familial and communal relations. In this

narrative, the advent and eventual market dominance of industrial agriculture replaced real food with endless aisles of untraceable and over-processed foodstuffs, and left as the only guide the opaque and contradictory prescriptions of modern food science. The situation is rightly articulated as dire (although it is unfortunately framed as a problem of alienation and cultural unmooring rather than as structural), but the solution turns out to be deceptively straightforward. People -- consumers, more specifically -- can recover their relationship to food and everything that goes along with it by seeking out the right foods from the right sources. Real food, like all fantasy, is thus interpellative, in the sense of hailing into being subjects who feel the loss of connection and authentic belonging as their own and organize their practices accordingly.

Drawing on the work of Ghassan Hage, Slavoj Žižek and others, I focus on elaborating the perhaps less familiar social dynamics of fantasy in order to illustrate how the basic appeals of local food become translated into social exclusions. The proposition in real food discourse that the local is *knowable* in some deeper way is appealing because it offers a seemingly comprehensive accounting of the subject's dissatisfactions. However, as I illustrate, this comprehensive account of the subject's troubles can pave the way for a nostalgic yearning for an insular social order based on exclusionary and hierarchical notions of family and community. Likewise, the proposition that there are others, "farmers" in this case, who do not experience the dissatisfactions of modern life because they have preserved a life close to the land (and further, that we can participate in their rootedness by forging "connection" with these others) is appealing because it offers a route to healing. However, the way fantasy discourse organizes value around the natural and inherently noble work of local farmers relies on the specific erasure of farmworkers, and migrant farmworkers in particular, because they cannot be imagined as participating in the kind of rooted and authentic belonging at the heart of the real food fantasy. The chapter thus shows how propositions about the local have been articulated

into a coherent and compelling narrative, and further, how that narrative can generate exclusionary tendencies and constrain capacities for reflection.

Chapter 4, “Purify the Farmers Market,” presents empirical support to the more theoretical propositions in the first half of the dissertation by illustrating how the specific structuring of desire in farmers markets effected by the discourse of real food is generative of exclusionary dynamics. This is accomplished by tracing the way that social exclusions are produced in the process of identifying and responding to violations of farmers market norms (both real and imagined). As I show, these identifications are always affectively charged, animated by desires for authentic belonging and connection. The main finding of the chapter is that farmers markets have been constituted in real food discourse as a kind of fantasy space, such that any complaint is cast as a problem of contamination. I argue that this style of problematization is precisely what generates the “defensive” and “unreflexive” local politics that critics have warned about because when the problem is understood to be contamination, purification becomes the only sensible course of action.

The bulk of the chapter provides a detailed analysis of newspaper and magazine articles that purport to identify problems in farmers markets. I begin with articles that offer advice or shopping “tips” for consumers. Ostensibly about helping consumers navigate markets that may be less familiar than the supermarkets they are used to, almost all of these articles instead work to bound appropriate modes of engagement and incite anxiety about feeling out of place. I then link these advice columns to a second set of articles that aim to explain how farmers markets are being “ruined” by their own popular success due to the influx of people who are more interested in the “scene” than the food. Like the shopping tips but more forcefully, these articles identify a variety of ways of inhabiting the market “incorrectly” and articulate a desire to “restore” farmers markets to some imagined past state when the markets were the exclusive domain of

committed farmers and consumers. Together, the articles that offer tips for inexperienced shoppers and the articles that lament the loss of “real” farmers markets to newcomers articulate an image of farmers markets as a kind of sanctuary for real food. Against the view that shopping farmers markets can be an ordinary part of foodwork, or that congregating in farmers markets can be ordinary sociality, these articles suggest that farmers markets play a special role in the realization of local ideals that is threatened by the intrusion of those who do not understand or properly appreciate those ideals.

Finally, I examine the media outcry that emerged in response to the problem of vendor fraud in farmers markets. The controversies arose in 2010 when a local television news station in Los Angeles, California caught multiple produce vendors passing off imported warehouse produce as locally grown, and culminated in 2014 with the passage of legislation that dramatically increased state surveillance of farmers market vendors and introduced harsh new penalties for fraud. What makes this case interesting is that it seems to call into question the basic purpose of farmers markets. According to the popular commonsense understanding, farmers markets are valuable because they allow consumers to “know their farmers” and buy from people whose practices they support. The new legislation, on the other hand, seemed to concede that “knowing farmers” was really a job for the state -- only possible with increased funding and a coordinated army of trained investigators. Yet, as I detail in the chapter, the law was almost universally celebrated by by market managers, consumers, and local food advocates as necessary for “saving” farmers markets by preserving “consumer confidence.” As before, I argue that the view of farmers markets as sanctuaries is what drives the apparent contradiction. Because farmers markets are “known” to be sites of authentic knowing and connection, the presence of fraud cannot be taken to suggest that the prescribed modes of

engagement are limited in any way. Instead, fraud is taken to indicate corruption from an exterior source that must be expelled.

Taken together, these patterned responses to discomfort, overcrowding, or dishonesty in farmers markets illustrate how the basic ideals of local food, refracted through desires for real food and articulated in the form of an idealized market, can easily be generative of defensive and exclusionary sentiments and practices. While I can make no quantitative claims about the strength or popularity of those desires or articulations, the findings do indicate something of their influence. Even when the image of farmers markets as sanctuaries runs up against the seemingly foundational idea of farmers markets as *places where consumers can know farmers*, it is the latter that gets twisted to conform to the former -- and then codified into law.

Chapter 5, “Real Food and the (re)Education of Desire,” examines the epistemological politics of real food in order to both explain its appeal and identify its limits. Through an analysis of key epistemological claims in real food discourse, this chapter identifies two related but distinct ways of knowing that are embedded in the narrative of loss at the heart of the real food fantasy. These include direct sensory experience of food and the traditional knowledge codified in pre-industrial food cultures. In the narrative of real food, these are presented as ways of accessing a deeper truth about food, health, and the environment that we are said to have lost in the transition to industrial food production and our subsequent reliance on modern food science. The fundamental appeal of ways of knowing lies in how they are presented as almost innocent or naturally given, as products of a lost harmony between nature and human cultures which must be restored. This framing has two significant consequences. First, it contributes to the idealization of farmers markets themselves by heightening what we imagine to be at stake in farmers market interactions. Second, this framing effectively masks the limits of these

approaches to knowledge, rendering other truths that are not accessible to these specific ways of knowing less intelligible.

Farmers markets are often praised for being both immersive sensory experiences and edifying cultural experiences (e.g. Eckstein & Conley 2012), and this combination explains much of how they have come to be seen as critical sites for the recovery of real food. Instead of relying on labels and packaging, people in farmers markets can smell, touch, and taste real food, and speak directly with farmers who grow the food to learn about its qualities. Just as importantly, farmers markets are said to restore confidence in the reliability of sensory experience because they exclude the artificially processed foods that “lie to our senses.” Farmers are crucial figures in this account because the nature of their work is presumed to afford them access to a natural wisdom about food. Farmers markets are the rare places where those who have relinquished connection to the land for the comforts of modern life might reacquaint themselves with some of this wisdom. In this way, as sites that offer both reliable sensory experiences of food and the opportunity to connect with farmers, farmers markets come to be thought of as almost literal sanctuaries in real food’s recovery project.

Drawing on fieldwork in several different farmers markets, I describe how people attempt to enact these ways of knowing in both formal and informal market practices. Formal practices include educational programming that encourages children to speak to vendors and try unfamiliar foods. The goals of these programs align with the less formal practice of taking samples and chatting up vendors, which similarly encourages consumers to experience the qualities of peak-season produce for themselves. My experience in these practices illustrates the extent of the social and material investment required to cultivate these ways of knowing, suggesting that perhaps they are not as “natural” as is claimed. More importantly, I show how these ways of knowing are adequate for accessing only part of what we might want to know

about the food system. Through training, we may learn to detect something about the health of the plants that our produce comes from and, through that, perhaps make some inferences about the health of the soil and the wider ecosystem. But labor abuses, to take one important example, are never going to be accessible to direct sensory experiences of produce, no matter how refined. Moreover, because of the way that these knowledge practices are presented as the “natural” answer to the limited ways of knowing endorsed by industrial food science, the things that they leave out are rendered less accessible. The figuration of farmers as bearers of natural wisdom, for example, makes the actual people that staff market stands and pass out samples more difficult to know.

The desire for real food is thus generative of not only a constrained aesthetics but also a corresponding, and correspondingly limited, epistemology. This chapter traces how this epistemology is developed in discourse and shows how it is put into practice in the programs and rituals of farmers markets. The significant consequence of this practice is then shown to be a kind of erasure which works in conjunction with the exclusionary tendencies outlined in other chapters to produce a stunted food politics. More generally, the arguments in this chapter add to what we know about why some issues have historically been over- or underemphasized in local food politics. Issues like individual health, taste, the survival of small businesses, and some aspects of environmentalism have typically held pride of place, while scholars have noted that issues having to do with labor, migration, and gendered foodwork in particular have tended to be overlooked (Gray 2013, Preibisch 2013, Bowen et al. 2014). The former, note, are precisely those issues which are easily apprehended by the specific ways of knowing valorized as “natural” in real food discourse, while the latter do not avail themselves readily to those ways of knowing. The general rule is that local food politics has been eager to emphasize issues which are accessible to “local” ways of knowing and slow to take up issues that escape them. What

this chapter shows, I think, is that these local ways of knowing are not only partial, but actively misleading when put into practice.

Chapter 6, “Conclusions,” returns to two central problems in local food in order to draw out some of the broader consequences of the findings and arguments presented in this dissertation. The first problem concerns the articulation of “local” with place and community. One of the central claimed benefits of local food is that localization offers a way past the narrow instrumentalism imposed by capitalism by enabling communal social relations grounded in an authentic sense of place. Even critics of localism who emphasize that communal relations are by no means guaranteed acknowledge that localism is powerfully motivating, although they often fail to account for that motive force. I do not dispute the capacity of localism to generate communal attachments and motivations -- the dissertation is dedicated in large part to exploring this dynamic. But this dissertation rejects the presumption, quietly shared by advocates and critics, that local attachments and motivations are basically good and, at worst, in need of proper channeling. While there are indeed benefits, the analysis here illustrates that there are also significant drawbacks to the incitement of community-feeling. Moreover, while the drawbacks outlined in this dissertation generally align with the “defensive” tendencies described by early critics, the findings also demonstrate in various ways just how tied up these tendencies are with specifically local affects and logics. The specific finding that the affective pull of localism has a tendency to stunt reflexivity in practice ought to make us at least somewhat more pessimistic about the prospects of managing these drawbacks through strategic, reflexive action.

The second problem concerns the relationship between local scales and democratic governance. The claim from advocates is that local scales enable democratic governance because it is empowering. Proximate relations and consequences, it is said, encourage

engagement and allow people to feel a sense of ownership over and responsibility for their community. Critics rightly note, however, that this rosy account neglects intra-local power relations. They warn that, in practice, more powerful locals can work to universalize their own standards and elevate their own interests as the interests of the community. What the analysis presented in this dissertation adds to this debate is a clearer understanding of the challenges to democratic governance presented by the process of local empowerment. As I explain, the discourse of real food invites people to play their part in restoring a naturally harmonious social order -- an invitation whose nostalgic appeal varies emphatically along with class and racial privilege. The findings here imply that commitment to this project of restoration is, to some significant degree, what drives the local engagement and “sense of ownership” that motivates localist optimism. Moreover, from the perspective of those empowered locals, the warnings from critics regarding the need to be inclusive of other people and perspectives would seem to miss the point. Inclusion is nice, but there is a whole natural order at stake.

The major conclusions in this dissertation cut against established arguments in local food studies from both advocates and critics, even as many smaller findings confirm or resonate with past results. Fundamentally, this is because I proceed from different theoretical premises that prompt me to ask different sorts of questions of local food. Underlying the variety of perspectives in local food studies thus far is the presumption that “local” has some presocial coherence on which to build, prompting classic constructivist questions that essentially ask after the effects of different definitions and constructions of the local. Here, prompted by my reading of performativity, I have presumed instead that local’s foundations need to also be produced in some way. The questions I have asked, therefore, are not ones of strategy or implementation -- the “right” way to go about constructing a local. Instead, I have asked after the *realization* of

local -- how it is made lively and compelling, how its epistemological foundations are written, and how this mix of desire and knowledge do work in the world.

The dissertation concludes with provisional thoughts on food politics in general. Against the appealing but ultimately limited certainties of localism, I suggest working towards a food politics that accepts uncertainty as a fundamental condition of being in the world. Accepting and working with uncertainty, I argue, can not only help to realize the kind of reflexivity called for by other scholars, but also facilitate connections with emancipatory political projects that food politics has too often neglected. Confronting the influential but unacknowledged vision of a natural order at the heart of localism will be essential to that task.

Chapter 2: Ungrounding Local Food Studies

The presumption that local food is virtuous has been resilient to empirical and theoretical critique. Advocates of localism identify two primary appeals. First, that the local is inherently more knowable because it is accessible, thus offering the promise of a kind of epistemic security. Second, that the local enables or even incites communal social interaction because proximate social relations inspire empathy and proximate consequences inspire responsibility. Critics of localism, on the other hand, note that this image of the local misses and even masks intra-local power relations, in which some locals oppress others for their own advantage. Interventions based on these critiques include DuPuis and Goodman's (2005) call for "reflexive localism," which entails the institution of open, democratic decision making, and Born and Purcell's (2006) suggestion that the local ought to be considered "strategically," an argument to think of scales (and especially the local) as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

That line of critique and those interventions have rightly been hugely influential. As I will argue, however, these critics permit an unwarranted faith in the possibilities of localism to persist because they do not really address localism's core appeals. Instead, the standard lines of critique have produced a field in which the local has somehow been reduced to a kind of abstract container, thus making the central question of localism one of how to instantiate a more just version. In this chapter, I propose an alternate theorization of localism that leads to different questions. I argue that we ought to take the core appeals articulated by advocates of localism seriously, but perhaps in ways that they would not appreciate. These appeals are what makes localism real to people, compelling enough for them to invest in and organize aspects of their lives around. Thus, I argue that instead of articulating the local as an abstraction, we should attend to the realization of the local as a compelling social idea -- something with the force to shape people's sensibilities and desires. When we do, it becomes apparent that the limits of

localism that critics have rightly identified are built in, and not simply the product of a misshapen social construction that we can get right the next time.

A Brief Review of Localisms

The political valorization of small, locally-owned businesses has a long history in the United States. The rapid rise of chain stores in the 1920s and 1930s led by the A&P prompted widespread opposition. The argument from Progressive Era reformers that large chains homogenized the nation's small towns and rendered them dependent on absentee monopolists won support from state legislatures and the Supreme Court, but ultimately failed to stem the tide (Schragger 1990). Post World War II saw a revival of arguments for small business in the name of community self-sufficiency, this time with a specific focus on agricultural production -- always a key sector in such discussions (Mills & Ulmer 1946, Goldschmidt 1946, cited in Lyson 2004). In both cases, the deleterious effects of big business on "democratic citizenship" or "civic responsibility" emerged as prominent concerns. The ideal was business owners who were present and engaged in their communities, responding to local conditions, and being held responsible by their fellow citizens.

Concerns over the effects of globalization prompted the most recent resurgence in this line of thinking. Philip McMichael's work on what he calls the "corporate food regime" (1992, 2005, 2009) described the "abstraction of agriculture through its incorporation and reproduction within global capital circuits" (2005, p. 287) and popularized the term "food from nowhere" to describe the products of corporate food production. Food from nowhere is the outcome of intensely capitalized food production -- ingredients produced in fields and factories all over the world with the extensive help of chemical inputs, collected in opaque production facilities and reconstituted into highly processed products, and shipped all over the world to be sold cheaply in supermarkets. This regime has proven to be increasingly catastrophic to both human and

environmental health. Its legitimation relies on the delivery of cheap food to consumers and a structurally imposed ignorance. Hence, the challenge that the regime engenders is articulated as a “food from somewhere” regime (Campbell 2009) which is meant to encompass both food sovereignty movements in the global South and the growing market for traceable, knowable foods in the global North.

It is in this context that the current enthusiasm for local food has emerged, combining the epistemic security of “food from somewhere” with the self-reliance and self-governance ideals of “civic agriculture” (Dahlberg 1993, Kloppenburg et al. 1996, Lyson 2004). The most influential early formulation is probably Kloppenburg, Hendrickson, and Stevenson’s (1996) essay which codified the emerging common sense of localism under the umbrella term of “foodshed” -- intended as both an analytic and a call to action:

The intrinsic appeal the term had and continues to have for us derives in part from its relationship to the rich and well-established concept of the watershed. How better to grasp the shape and the unity of something as complex as a food system than to graphically imagine the flow of food into a particular place? Moreover, the replacement of “water” with “food” does something very important: it connects the cultural (“food”) to the natural (“...shed”). The term “foodshed” thus becomes a unifying and organizing metaphor for conceptual development that starts from a premise of the unity of place and people, of nature and society. However, the most attractive attribute of the idea of the “foodshed” is that it provides a bridge from thinking to doing, from theory to action. (p. 34)

As an analytic, foodshed is intended to recover knowledge of the cultural and natural geography that supplies a particular place. But for Kloppenburg et al., foodshed is as much aspirational as it is descriptive, drawing inspiration from activities already underway (mostly in North America):

We want to establish the analytic and normative distinction between the global food system that exists now and the multiplicity of local foodsheds that we hope will characterize the future. Since we give the term “foodshed” this normative meaning, “global foodshed” is for us an oxymoron. Within the existing food system there already exist alternative and oppositionalist elements that could be the building blocks for developing foodsheds: food policy councils, community supported agriculture, farmers

markets, sustainable farmers, alternative consumers. We will use the term "foodshed" to refer to the elements and properties of that preferred, emergent alternative. (p. 34)

The kind of analysis they have in mind, then, ideally prompts a localization of supply structures that conforms to the natural affordances and limits of the locale, while generating the capacity for local "self-reliance" apart from the global food system.

The presumption the authors make, optimistic in retrospect, is that localized foodsheds will produce outcomes that are not only more sustainable but also more just. To their credit, they are quick to acknowledge that realizing these outcomes will be difficult; they insist that they are suggesting the concept of foodsheds as "conceptual vocabulary" rather than a "manifesto" (p. 36), as a "project" rather than a "blueprint" (p. 41). They are also careful not to bound the foodshed too precisely (p. 38) and note that processes for local decision-making need to be sorted out carefully (p. 37). But they are insistently optimistic, and that optimism is rooted in the power of "community" and the sense of "civic responsibility" that comes from becoming "native to our places" -- themes invoked throughout the article as a guide to just processes (if not a guarantor of just outcomes). Thus, their primary analytic focus remains firmly on the challenges to local knowledge, community, and autonomy presented by the global food system -- and in particular, the masking and disempowering effects of "distancing."

Early critiques of localism, led by C. Clare Hinrichs (2000, 2003) and Patricia Allen (2004) in the United States, noted the considerable additional challenge of intra-local power dynamics. Hinrichs (2000) argues that localism "conflates spatial relations with social relations" (p. 301), noting that localization does not "automatically" lead to economic exchange that prioritizes social values over narrow instrumentalism. Moreover, Hinrichs (2003) argues that organizing economic activity around "community values" is not necessarily liberating or beneficial for everyone, as "local" and "community" are inherently exclusionary concepts. Thus, she warns against the "tendency" in local food towards what she called "defensive localization" that

“imposes rigid boundaries around the spatial ‘local’ and minimizes internal difference in the name of some ‘local good’” (p. 37). Allen (2004) similarly argues that “Localism subordinates differences to a mythical ‘community interest’” (p. 171). She notes that local decision-making is presumed to be more democratic because participants are imagined as relative equals, and moreover, that “shared community interests” are imagined to mitigate whatever imbalances exist. But, she argues, these presumptions take “community interests” for granted when in fact they are contested precisely along the lines of power (class, gender, race, etc.) that the invocation of “community” conceals (p. 171).

Reflexive Localism and Strategic Localism

Two programmatic syntheses shaped the next decade of writing about local food. The first was DuPuis and Goodman’s (2005) call for “reflexive localism” (cf. DuPuis, Harrison, & Goodman 2011; Goodman, DuPuis, & Goodman 2012). In a particularly insightful survey of the critical literature, DuPuis and Goodman decry what they call the “romantic anti-politics of localism studies” (p. 360). Citing Hinrichs’ notion of defensive localism, they note that the concept of local “intrinsically implies the inclusion and exclusion of particular people, places and ways of life” (p. 361). They note that definitions of local can be manipulated, and that prevailing representations “privilege certain analytical categories and trajectories, whose effect is to naturalize and occlude the politics of the local” (p. 361). Citing DuPuis’ (2002) own earlier work, they argue that localism often exhibits the more general problems of “reform movements controlled primarily by members of the middle class” -- and in particular, how the white middle class’s “possessive investments in [their] own racial privilege influences how [they] define problems and solutions” (p. 362). Drawing on the critical human geography of David Harvey (1996) and others, they note how localism is mobilized in order to empower certain locales over others in a kind of “sectional politics” (p. 366-367). Noting that localization projects can be entirely consistent with the

neoliberal devolution of governance, they argue that, far from being opposites, “localization most recently has been deployed to further a neoliberal form of global logic” (p. 368).

DuPuis and Goodman’s central argument is that the (many) potential negative outcomes of localization they identify all stem from what they term “unreflexive localism” which “arises from a perfectionist utopian vision of the food system in which food and its production are aligned with a set of normative, pre-set ‘standards’” (p. 360). What they call for instead is “reflexive localism”:

Here, the emphasis is not on creating an ideal utopian “romantic” model of society and then working for society to meet that standard, but on articulating “open,” continuous, “reflexive” *processes* which bring together a broadly representative group of people to explore and discuss ways of changing their society. These processes... treat ongoing conflicts and differences between various groups not as polarizing divisions but as grounds for respectful -- and even productive -- disagreement. In other words, we place fully democratic processes squarely at the center of our formulation of an open politics of localism. (p. 361)

It is a little bit uncharitable, perhaps, to complain that the authors here have “solved” the problem of localism by turning it into the even more intractable problem of democracy. But if the problem really just boils down to how to realize democratic processes, then the real question is why retain localism at all? Given the critiques that DuPuis and Goodman have thoroughly recounted, it would seem that localism would be more hindrance than help in getting those democratic processes right. And if we are somehow able to address the problem of democracy, what could localism possibly offer in addition? Their answer (which I return to below) is simply that localism already exists and has proven to be useful in mobilization:

The purpose of our critique is not to deny the local as a powerful political force against the forces of globalization. Our real goal is to understand how to make localism into an effective social movement of resistance to globalism rather than a way for local elites to create protective territories for themselves. This requires letting go of a local that fetishizes emplacement as intrinsically more just. (p. 364)

The idea of reflexive localism has been enormously influential in the literature, for good reason. It offers a useful way of thinking about ongoing local projects -- is the goal articulated as a utopian standard or a flexible and inclusive process? -- but it seems clear, over a decade later, that it has not accomplished what it set out to do, which is to convince people working in local food to let go of that fetish.

The other influential synthesis comes from Born and Purcell (2006), who argue forcefully against what they call "the local trap" -- the tendency in planning and local food literature to presume that the local is preferable to larger scales for implementing environmentally sustainable and socially just solutions. They begin with the notion, now common, that scales are "social constructions." From this, they argue two seemingly contradictory points. First, they suggest that because scales are constructs, nothing can be determined in advance about their characteristics. Rather, they argue that "[t]his principle of social construction means that the best way to think about scale is not as an ontological entity with particular properties but as a *strategy*, as a way to achieve a particular end" (p. 197). Second, drawing on Neil Smith's (1993) critical geography and Anthony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, Born and Purcell argue that scales should be understood as both "fluid and fixed" (p. 197-198). But this position is quite different from the one they have just staked out because "structures" enable and constrain action in ways that "strategies" do not.

The real problem, however, is their asymmetric application of these principles in their discussions of local and global scales. For them, it appears that "local" is eminently "flexible," and should be deployed as a "strategy" when it makes the most sense to do so (p. 196). They use this point to argue against opponents who presume that local is "inherently" more sustainable, but in fact, few at this point are actually committed to that point. Meanwhile, "global" for them appears to be largely "fixed" -- not ontologically, of course, but rather by the historical

development of agricultural capitalization which has predominantly used the global scale as *its* primary strategy (p. 199). The overall effect has been to reset the local trap at a different register -- “fixing” the global as the privileged site of capital and leaving the local as the only “strategic” site of resistance. Indeed, the flexibility of the local has turned out to be one of localism’s most attractive qualities, as it permits “reflexive” agents to intervene and overcome the negative “tendencies” identified in study after study.

Born and Purcell’s notion of “the local trap” remains useful as a reminder that localization is (at best) a means to an end rather than an end in itself. But the reduction of localization to strategy does have drawbacks. In particular, it obscures the fact that “local” *does* have predictable characteristics in the same way that other constructs do (e.g. gender, nation, race). What makes local a “trap” is not only that it does not automatically confer the ends we might want. Rather, the “trap” lies in the way that the predictable downsides of localization strategies are dismissed or understated simply because they are not “automatic” or “ontologically given.” The trap is insisting that we can get it right next time, without the undemocratic power relations, sectional politics, and racist and classist exclusions that have troubled localization in the past.

These critiques and syntheses have failed to dissuade advocates of local food (e.g. DeLind 2011, Schnell 2013) because the argument that local is merely a “construct” with many possible outcomes does not actually address the central appeals of localism (e.g. as articulated in Kloppenburg et al. 1996 or Lyson 2004). Steven Schnell (2013), in his discussion of the multiplicity and complexity of meanings that “local” contains, sums it up in this way:

A fourth critique is that “local” means nothing at all. Born, Purcell, DuPuis and Goodman have argued that it is foolish to equate any sort of virtue with a particular scale, an error they refer to as the “local trap” (Born and Purcell 2006; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; see also Hinrichs 2003). Allen and Hinrichs (2007) have similarly argued that “local” food has been assigned so many virtues that it has become a meaningless term. Yet, as I will argue, all of these critiques grossly oversimplify the idea of local eating and ignore or marginalize a key aspect of local food advocacy: its tie to place. (p. 619)

Food Justice

The decade since has seen a welcome turn in both food movements and food studies to an explicit engagement with the concept of food justice (e.g. Alkon & Agyeman 2011). This turn roughly parallels (and draws inspiration and support from) the earlier turn from environmentalism to environmental justice, hoping to steer a movement that has historically centered elite experience towards a more inclusive path. In addition to work cited above, precursors to the food justice approach include Julie Guthman's work on the privileged subjectivity of many food movement activists (2003, 2007, 2008a, 2008b), Rachel Slocum's work on whiteness and resistance to anti-racism in food policy councils (2006, 2007, cf. 2011), and food sovereignty movements in the global south (Edelman et al. 2015). The codification of food justice as an approach and topic of study begins with a familiar critique of popular food movements, exemplified in the United States in the writings of Michael Pollan. These critiques point out how what is presented as universal is actually exclusionary, how the prescribed interventions are individualistic and require money and privilege to carry out, and how possessive investments in racial and class privilege inform the movement's common sense. Thus, for example, in their introduction to *Cultivating Food Justice*, Alkon and Agyeman note that Pollan's famous advice to avoid anything "your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food" presumes quite a bit about the circumstances of "your" great-grandmother (p. 3).

In their introduction to *The New Food Activism*, Alkon and Guthman (2017) describe the food justice critique as focusing on "the ways that race, class, gender, and other forms of inequality affect both conventional and alternative food systems" (p. 5). They continue:

The authors in this volume, as well as many others, have called for a food system that is not only ecologically sustainable, but also responds to racial and economic disparities, and for a food movement that highlights the contributions that low-income communities and communities of color have made to agriculture. In this way, food becomes a tool toward broader social justice and antiracist organizing. (p. 5)

The call for attention to “racial and economic disparities” is welcome, but of course not new -- Patricia Allen has been making the argument since at least 1991 (Allen & Sachs 1991), and it is not hard to find similar concerns much earlier in environmental studies and other related fields. If food justice has brought anything new to food studies, it is encapsulated in that last clause -- a strong (almost exclusive) emphasis on work that “highlights the contributions” from marginalized communities. In fact, Alkon and Agyeman (2011) endorse a definition of food justice in precisely those terms:

The divergent stories represented in this volume warrant a broad definition of food justice. According to veteran organization Just Food, food justice is “communities exercising their right to grow, sell, and eat [food that is] fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers, and animals.” Detroit’s D-Town Farmers additionally emphasize that those communities that have been most marginalized by the agribusiness system need to “lead the movement to provide food for the members of their community.” (p. 5)

While this is surely important work, the easy invocation of “community” in these studies borders at times on reification. Taking communities for granted in that way simply reproduces many of the difficulties that Allen, Hinrichs and others had been writing against within the local -- a flattening of intra-community power differentials, exclusions and contested boundaries, sectional politics and competition among differently articulated “communities,” and so on. It is early, of course, and it is reasonable to expect that food justice will complicate their conception of community as it develops, but food justice thus far has been more a reprisal rather than an answer to the tricky problems of localism.

One great benefit of the explicit focus on justice is the way it has been picked up in popular writing. In 2010, Michael Pollan’s “The Food Movement, Rising” article in *The New York Review of Books* attempted to identify among “various factions” an emerging cohesion in food politics “around the recognition that today’s food and farming economy is ‘unsustainable’ -- that it can’t go on in its current form much longer without courting a breakdown of some kind, whether

environmental, economic, or both.” Pollan includes quite a lot in the “big, lumpy tent” of the food movement -- everything from anti-GMO activism to efforts to regulate junk food marketing -- but, aside from a passing mention of the challenge to sustainable agriculture posed by the charge of “elitism,” notably fails to engage issues that center questions of justice or even “inequality” anywhere in the article. His only mention of “race” exemplifies the tacit presumption that these issues are secondary to eating well: “Good food is potentially one of the most democratic pleasures a society can offer, and is one of those subjects, like sports, that people can talk about across lines of class, ethnicity, and race.” Only a few years later, Mark Bittman’s 2014 *New York Times* Op-ed argues that “making good food fair and affordable cannot be achieved without affecting the whole system. These are not just food questions; they are questions of justice and equality and rights, of enhancing rather than restricting democracy, of making a more rational, legitimate economy.” The difference from Pollan’s article in both tone and content is striking, and not (in my opinion) attributable to differences in the respective authors’ political sensibilities. But Bittman’s article is also useful for illustrating what has come to be taken for granted, what arguments have been settled. Included in the features of good food alongside “sustainably produced” and “healthy”: “Real” food, farmers markets, and cooking.

The Appeal of “Unreflexive” Localism

As far as I can tell, Patricia Allen’s (2004) *Together at the Table* and Born and Purcell’s (2006) article on the “local trap” were the last efforts with any influence to really question the wisdom of localism. Since then, advocates of localism have leveraged the critique that local has no “inherent” qualities to draw out the “complexity” and “heterogeneity” of local food practices and meanings (e.g. Mount 2012, Nost 2014, Carroll & Fahy 2015, Trivette 2015, Papaoikonomou & Ginieis 2017). The central question in local food studies has thus become one of how to do localism better -- how to improve connections between producers and consumers

(Papaoikonomou & Ginieis 2017, Albrecht & Smithers 2018), how to “scale up” local connections without compromising essential values (Mount 2012, Nost 2014, Clark & Inwood 2016), or how to govern local food systems more reflexively (Mount 2012, Laforge et al. 2017). Questioning localism itself has fallen out of favor.

Margaret Gray’s (2013) *Labor and the Locavore* (cited approvingly in Bittman’s Op-ed) provides the best illustration of this status quo. Drawing on over a hundred interviews with mostly undocumented migrant farmworkers in Hudson Valley, New York, Gray shows that labor conditions on the “small family farms” that are valorized in local food discourse are as bad as those on the “factory farms” of industrial agriculture and argues for a “comprehensive food ethic” that does not leave farmworkers out. She details how paternalism -- intimate hierarchical relations in which employers extend non-monetary benefits in exchange for compliance and loyalty -- operates as “a significant component of labor control that is unique to small-scale agriculture” (p. 42) in which “the employers’ control extends into workers’ everyday lives, affecting even their personal and recreational habits” (p. 53). She shows further how this paternalism both contributes to the “extreme vulnerability” of farmworkers on these farms and shields this worker abuse from questioning. And yet, her “comprehensive food ethic” remains firmly committed to localism. Gray’s final chapter includes a series of prescriptions to address labor issues in local food, which range from policy proposals like requiring overtime pay or rest days (p. 142) to recommendations for concerned consumers (p. 145-149). The final bit of advice urges consumers to “buy local!” because a more robust economy will allow farmers to “pass on their profits to their workforce” (p. 148).

What is notable about Gray’s book -- other than its disinterest in imagining alternatives to localism -- is that it does not fit into the food justice rubric as defined above. Gray not use the term “food justice” in her text and does not cite the work most commonly associated with the

emerging subfield. More significantly, the undocumented farmworkers in her study do not comprise a “community of color,” and their labor does not exactly qualify as a “contribution” to the alternative food movement. We might even say that, far from being the solution, “community” is itself the problem for workers, as close relations with their employers is what enables their extraordinary exploitation.

What the preceding discussion shows is that the question of localism has somehow been settled without adequately addressing the concerns of those initial critiques. Reflexive localism would have us respond to intra-local power dynamics by instituting more democratic processes. Strategic localism would have us retain localism to address the problems of global agriculture, while “jumping scales” (cf. Smith 1993) to address problems specific to the local -- for example, by utilizing national-level regulatory bodies to control local powers. The food justice approach, as noted, simply displaces the difficulties that those critiques articulate to the slightly different context of “communities.” As Schnell (2013) rightly notes, however, none of these address the core appeals of localism -- the epistemic security of “knowing” a place and the collective civic responsibility exhibited by a community organized around a place. Kloppenborg et al. (1996) even link the two by articulating the incitement of dedication to a community and a place (“becoming native”) that comes from intimate knowledge (via foodshed analysis).

The reason that the local remains a “powerful political force against the forces of globalization” as DuPuis and Goodman put it (2005, p. 364; cf. Goodman et al. 2012, p. 18) is because it appeals to these powerful desires to know and to become native. It is easy to see why this vision of localism remains attractive, but what if these appeals to knowing and to community are generative of an “unreflexive” politics in precisely the sense described by DuPuis and Goodman? If that is the case, then the problems that “reflexive localism” is supposed to solve and the stated reason for retaining localism are actually aspects of the same thing. As I

will show in the later chapters, the intra-local power imbalances, the possessive investments in privilege, and the erasure of migrant labor are intrinsic rather than incidental -- not to "the local" as a geographic construct, but to the fantasies of knowing and control that make localism compelling. In short, localism is a powerful imaginary precisely to the extent that it is based on a pursuit of purity -- to the extent that it is "unreflexive."

The Limits of Social Construction

That the local is socially constructed has been established as a truism in local food scholarship, but the specific theorization of that construction leaves something to be desired. There are two problems with the social construction thesis as it has been applied to local food -- what is said to be constructed and what the local is said to be constructed out of. The shortcomings of that theorization, I will argue, are one important reason why faith in the wisdom and efficacy of localism has survived persistent critique. Typically, the thing that is imagined to be constructed in processes of social construction is articulated as a kind of structure (e.g. Hinrichs 2000; Born & Purcell 2006). But these articulations of constructionism miss how *agency* is also constructed -- in the same moment and through the same processes as the structures within which it is supposed to act. This misunderstanding is evident in Born and Purcell's notion of scale as "strategy" and, to a lesser extent, DuPuis and Goodman's call for "reflexive" localism, both of which imply a kind of voluntarism in which the consciousnesses of agents are largely unconstrained by the structures they inhabit.

Thinking about how political strategy intersects with scale is important, but we should not imagine that there is a neutral "objective" position from which to judge the efficacy of different scalar strategies. If we take seriously the idea that localist constructions shape agencies along with structure, then it becomes apparent that the local is not a tool that can be picked up and put down as we please. Similarly, conceptually dividing agency from structure and then asking

“reflexive” agents to solve structure’s problems is perhaps the defining dead-end of structuralist social theory. As poststructuralist thinkers have repeatedly stressed, reflexivity, properly understood, is *not* a property of agency. Rather, it is a property of agents and structures in combination. Understood in this way, the problem of localism is not that empowered local agents abuse the construct of the local “strategically” for their own ends. Instead, the problem is the way that localism acts *as a discourse*, dictating everyday understandings of how the world works, and what is possible and reasonable within it. This means that human beings who understand themselves as belonging to and participating in a “local” are different from -- and exercise a different kind of reflexivity than -- human beings who do not understand themselves in this way.

Consider, for example, Hinrichs’ (2003) observation that localism generates opposing tendencies towards “defensiveness” on the one hand, and “receptivity to diversity” on the other (p. 36-37). The observation is powerful, it rings true for anyone who has attempted to engage in local food politics, and it seems to offer direction for progressive-minded activists. However, I suspect that any careful empirical observation will reveal both “tendencies” present -- not just within the same place or market, but within the same actors. Thus, instead of conceiving of these tendencies as two alternative possibilities *enabled* by “structure,” they are better understood as elements of a local subjectivity that is co-constructed in the same moment as that structure. Ghassan Hage’s (1998) argument about the “white nation fantasy” is instructive here. The common understanding about debates over “multiculturalism” is one which pits “racist” nationals who call for exclusion against “tolerant” nationals who promote diversity. Hage argues that *both* are problematic. Fundamentally -- and this is what makes them nationalists -- they share a fantasy in which they are “spatial managers” of the national space, empowered to make determinations about who should and who should not be permitted in that space. What it means

for people to consider themselves *local* in the relevant sense, then, is that they imagine a sort of managerial ownership of the place that they define as such. This *necessarily entails* the idea that they are the rightful arbiters of how much “diversity” to tolerate within the local. That means, among other things, that the tendencies named by Hinrichs are more complementary than opposed. Or, to put it another way, there is no version of *localist* reflexivity that allows one to fully opt out of “defensiveness.”

Methodological Localism

The second issue is more methodological in nature, and concerns what it is that the local is imagined as being constructed out of. Here, I argue that the literature has shown a sort of “methodological localism” that privileges the relationships of identifiable “stakeholders” over other (equally constitutive but less obviously influential) elements of the local. This leads to a kind of circularity in determining the outlines of the local because, as it happens, these stakeholders are precisely those whose claims to “local” status are least likely to challenge the localist paradigm. Thus, the local is typically said to be made out of geographically bounded supply chains and the attendant relationships among producers, consumers, market managers, and other important market actors. Attending to these relationships is of course important, as these are typically the most influential in shaping the “local” that emerges. But this focus leads to a systematic misrepresentation of the constitution of the “local” in important ways. Whether or not the findings are positive for the evaluation of localism, taking the interactions of uncontroversially “local” folks as the central building blocks of that local is obviously circular. In these studies, when “localness” does come into question, it is typically a question of whether some producer or product is “local enough” -- a question that presumes that there is some pre-given quality of “localness” there to evaluate in the first place.

The “localness” of migrant farmworkers, on the other hand, turns out to be much trickier to pin down. Kerry Preibisch (2013), in a talk given at the University of Guelph’s Initiatives in Global Justice, calls migrant farmworkers the “blindspot of the local food movement.” Here, she is specifically referring to the absence of migrant labor in the discourse of marketers and activists, but it might be equally applied to the academic literature on local food. It is not entirely obvious why farmworkers have had so little presence in this subfield, as migrant labor has received significant attention in adjacent fields (e.g. Thomas 1985; Getz et al. 2008; Harrison 2011). Happily, that has begun to change with Gray’s book (discussed above; see also Weiler et al. 2016). The status of labor -- and specifically that of migrant farmworkers -- in local food is important because it has the potential to destabilize the category of local itself. In her otherwise positive review of Gray’s *Labor and the Locavore*, Julie Guthman (2015) notes:

Putting aside the question of how farmworkers would fare in regions that don’t have the same opportunity as New York’s Hudson Valley to be marketed as foodie enclaves, this analysis, it seems to me, misses a greater irony: which is that a local food system that depends on migrant wage labor may not be all that local. It is telling that the workers in her account compare their conditions favorably to those in their home country rather than US workers. It is also telling that they value their jobs so they can send remittances home to Mexico. Her account could have exploded the notion of the local, recognizing the ever-presence of extra-local economic and moral ties. Instead, her call for a more ‘comprehensive food ethic’ still resides in the local. (p. 675)

As Guthman suggests, attention to this particular “blindspot” is generative of more troubling questions for localism. It is not only that the local is permissive of bad outcomes (like defensiveness or worker abuses). Rather, it is that “local” might not be a stable category at all.

Consider the notion of “food miles” -- a shibboleth of sorts for local food advocates (c.f. Schnell 2013). As with other aspects of localism, the idea of “food miles” has been challenged before (e.g. Desrochers & Shimizu 2008; Berners-Lee 2010), but typically on the grounds that the idea oversimplifies what is in fact a much more complicated calculation. They argue that the environmental costs of transporting in bulk can be overstated while the costs of transporting

over short distances can sometimes be high. They might further argue (e.g. Born & Purcell 2006) that the ecological benefits of short food miles need to be weighed against other factors that do not pertain to transport. These sorts of challenges are important, but they concede the premise of the idea -- that, all else being equal, shorter transport is better. In this way, "food miles" often represents the last bit of unconstructed ground on which the idea of localism rests. Preibisch (2013) notes that the idea of "food miles" fails to account for (and might even be said to actively obscure) the many miles traveled by the workers themselves:

["Food miles"] tells us that purchasing a tomato grown in an Ontario greenhouse, that's heated by subsidized natural gas, and produced and harvested by a migrant flown in from Thailand, is "greener" than one produced in Mexico by a Mexican and air-freighted in a commercial jet from Cancun... Or that the sugar-snap peas that we buy from an on-farm market that we drove to in our SUVs are more sustainable than those air-freighted from Guatemala that are produced by a small farmer whose... extended family's carbon footprint is still smaller than the [local] producer's.

Preibisch's critique here is still cast within the rubric of accounting, but it is articulated in a way that is suggestive of something more. Asking why certain "miles" count while others do not suggests that the grounding criterion of "localness" might be fundamentally askew. It suggests that there might not be a ground at all.

Asking how the "localness" of some farm or product is determined has been a productive question, as the answers often illuminate how certain empowered actors manipulate the boundaries of "local" in order to achieve the outcomes they desire (cf. Trivette 2015). However, such questions still presume that there is something coherent in the category of "local" to bound or evaluate. The examinations of the place of migrant labor in local food, on the other hand, lead to questions that cannot even be properly articulated from within localism. Why does the spot in which a plant literally comes out of the ground trump all other considerations? How did that consideration become the ground of localism in the first place? What sorts of mobilities are obscured by such a focus? How are these other mobilities organized, with what implications (for

ecology, for justice, for theorizing the local)? These are questions to, as Guthman put it, “explode the notion of the local.”

Ungrounding Local Food Studies

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues against the then common understanding of gender as a social construction. Of course her argument is not that gender is natural, but rather that it cannot be understood as a sort of “social” elaboration of a pregiven biological sex. She instead argues for an understanding of gender as “performative” -- not the “truth” behind gendered practices, but rather the product of the very practices it is said to cause. Butler’s primary concern is with the relationship between representation and political agency. Some of the debates that she intervenes in include contestations over the wisdom of valorizing femininity, the politics of identifying traits like empathy and care as the essence of womanhood, and of the liberatory prospects of a universal sisterhood. She writes:

[T]he premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes... The suggestion that feminism can seek wider representation for a subject that it itself constructs has the ironic consequence that feminist goals risk failure by refusing to take account of the constitutive powers of their own representational claims. (p. 6)

I want to be a little bit careful with the analogies here. Things are complicated, and broad strokes have a way of making things seem simpler than they are. But the problem that Butler identifies -- a category constructed against an external oppression for “emancipatory purposes” that is revealed to produce its own coercions and exclusions -- is at least formally similar, and her proposed solution to that problem is instructive for how we think about the local.

For Butler, the normative pull (and hence subjectivizing power) of identity categories is not rooted in their ability to reference some essence in the world or the self but rather from an

iterative process in which categories accrue meaning and power through a kind of “sedimentation” of ordinary use (Butler 1990, 1997, 1999; cf. McNay 1999a 1999b, Mills 2003, Pahk 2017). Deployments of such categories in utterances and related material practices are “performative” in the sense that they are agentic efforts to reproduce the categories and their effects. Crucially, such performances can never be perfect copies of what came before because the contexts of each performance are never perfectly replicated. On the one hand, this possibility of failure means that performances require willful effort to ensure intelligibility. Thus, we participate in our own subjection by committing to and investing in the categories that ensure our legibility as subjects. Our existence as subjects depends on our continually taking up categories that precede us, and this has important consequences for how we experience the world:

We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order. This is surely a fair description of part of what power does. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are... Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency. (1997, p. 2)

On the other hand, this possibility of performative failure also means that the categories themselves are at some small but definite amount of risk in each performance. As long as they are close enough to be recognizable, “bad” performances -- whether unintentional or through deliberate misappropriation or parody -- have the potential to destabilize categories or at least open up possibilities for new forms of legibility:

The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; “agency,” then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that

repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. (1990, p. 198-199)

The overall picture of political agency here is one in which people are neither radically free nor doomed to static reproduction of oppression. Participation in the structures of domination is the condition of possibility for agency, but that participation is also what puts those structures at risk.

The point of all of this is not to suggest that gender and localism work in identical ways, but rather to indicate something of the different kinds of questions that we ought to be asking of a “structure” that also operates as a subjectivity, a “construction” that also performatively produces its own foundations. Instead of asking what kind of analysis will allow the social construction of a local that is true to its underlying reality, we can attend to the coercive and exclusionary consequences entailed in the production of knowledge about the local. Instead of trying to identify the right circumstances for the strategic deployment of localism, we might attend to the ways that meanings accrue in such deployments and exceed their strategic ends. Instead of taking the psychic rewards of localism as a reason to work within it, we might attend to the various ways that that localism tends to constrain political sensibilities.

Gender is compulsory in a way that localism is (usually) not. That is an important difference for thinking through what kind of politics we should advocate for -- the compromises that localism has historically entailed are not mandatory, which means that we can and should interrogate those compromises before we commit to projects that merely seek to minimize the tradeoffs. But what we learn from Butler is that although gender is compulsory, it is not always experienced as oppressive. At least sometimes, gender is experienced as empowering -- because it literally is. Our investments in gender enable us to act and desire in ways that are intelligible to others and ourselves. Similarly, investments in localism can feel empowering and even liberating -- as DuPuis and Goodman (2005) acknowledge when they note its efficacy in

political mobilization. But this efficacy substantially depends on the constitution of a specific kind of political subject, defined by a specific “trajectory of desire,” that is necessarily limited in its capacity for reflexivity.

Realization

The kinds of questions prompted by this reading of Butler necessarily involve a methodological approach to localism based on different presumptions about the object of study. The prevailing approach thus far has been to presume that “local” referenced a real fact about the world. Empirically, the task was then to identify and explain the social processes that explicated and sometimes manipulated the facts of proximity, and to what effect. Normatively, the task was to uncover the power relations that these processes entailed and show how things could be different. Underlying both is an understanding of the local as a geographic fact, a kind of calculus of proximity -- the question is just how this fact does or should influence social life.

Here, I instead start with the observation that the local appears not only as a presocial fact, but also one that is somehow affectively and normatively effective. This, of course, is not how “facts” work -- there are no facts that in themselves entail socially meaningful interpretations, courses of action, or normative positions. Thus, the question becomes one of how the local has come to be regarded in this way -- how the quality of “localness” has come to be understood by some as a naturally given property of people and things (and food in particular) that is relevant for the organization of social life. The process of making relevant I will call “realization” - - a term akin to “performative constitution” as Butler uses it, but slightly more flexible as it applies as much to ideas (like the local) as it does to political subjects.

As many have noted, there is great heterogeneity in local food discourse and practice. A common line of critique that keeps faith in localism intact is that many local food practices have been compromised by a focus on market success and an overemphasis on messaging around

individual health, thus allowing “local” to become commodified as just another marketing label while losing sight of local food’s grounding in knowing, connecting, and belonging to a place (e.g. DeLind 2011). The argument here, however, is that local’s exclusions are rooted in the commitment to that ground, not in the compromises. Thus, the target of analysis is the realization of localness as knowing, connecting, and belonging to a place. As I will show, realization involves a kind of coordinated practice that makes the local feel substantial, that provides the idea with a sense of fullness and of life. This includes a specific discourse of local food that exceeds simple assertions of fact -- invitations, exhortations, judgments, calculations, propositions, nostalgic invocations, and the like that make localness compelling for people and reward psychic investment. In the next chapter, I identify the discourse of “real food” as the discourse which today gives the idea of local food a sense of richness and substance. There are, of course, many ways of talking about food that emphasize localness and seek to make it relevant to an audience in different ways -- including the carbon calculus of “food miles” or the anti-corporatism of “local economies.” Real food overlaps with these and other ways of talking about local food. As I will show in the coming chapters, however, the discourse of real food also links individual, communal, and environmental health through the articulation of a “truth” about food. In doing so, real food promises a kind of epistemic security that is said to be unique to local food, inviting people to invest in the local (“becoming native” in Kloppenburg et al. 1996) as a solution to a kind of existential insecurity.

The practices that realize this idea in the world include the proliferation of real food discourse in popular media and daily life. A discourse of this kind, if successful, provokes the emergence of subjects who desire and publics that reason in the manner prescribed. Thus, realization also includes the organization of material spaces and the institutionalization of specific practices that allow or encourage people to engage in those modes of identifying and

desiring. For reasons that I will discuss in detail in later chapters, real food as a material practice is most at home in farmers markets -- sites where, we are told, we can “know our farmers” and learn “where our food comes from.” The realization of localness, then, happens in large part in farmers markets. It is realized materially in the institutionalization of market practices and the physical organization of the spaces themselves, and realized discursively in writing that works to shape market behavior and organization -- loosely coordinated in order to provide a home to the political agency provoked into being by the discourse of real food.

Methods

In order to explain “real food” as realization, I use three kinds of data -- the production of real food discourse in the writings of Michael Pollan and media profiles of Alice Waters, the deployment of that discourse in news articles and online blog posts to the concrete circumstances of farmers markets, and the practices I observed and participated in at various farmers markets in San Francisco, California. Although the target of analysis is centered on a discourse, participant observation proved useful for a number of reasons that should hopefully become clear over the course of the dissertation. One thing that that is worth mentioning up front: Reflecting on my fieldwork experiences has helped to remind me that the discourse of real food is better understood as a project than an accomplishment -- something that was at times easy to lose sight of while immersed in the readings I chose for discourse analysis. The world of local food, even in San Francisco farmers markets, is very obviously not entirely populated by the subjects of this discourse. With the exception of Pollan and Waters (who figure into the analysis as figures rather than as political subjects), there are no such subjects in the chapters that follow. Nor, with one notable exception, are there specific “events” that demonstrate the decisive influence of real food discourse in determining outcomes. Instead, the influence of the discourse of real food in shaping how people think, talk, and write about farmers markets and

act within them comes through in the application of certain characteristic logics and the expression of characteristic desires.

The first source is the primary production of the discourse of real food itself, which I read primarily to draw out its contours and highlight its appeal and only secondarily to note its contradictions or exclusions. I take Michael Pollan (through his writings) and Alice Waters (through profiles and interviews) to be the representative authors and theorists of real food. Michael Pollan, mostly through his massively popular books on food, has become the source of a certain kind of conventional wisdom about food politics. Alice Waters, through her restaurant and the cultivation of her public persona, has come to embody a particularly satisfying and fulfilling way of relating to food that is emblematic of real food. Together, they articulate shared sensibilities and feelings about food that, for me, defines the core tenets of real food.

There are of course other possible candidates that I could have drawn on for this sort of thing, but Pollan and Waters are adequate, and the inclusion of others would not materially change the analysis. Part of the reason that this is the case is because of the way that Pollan in particular consumes what other candidates have to offer and rearticulates it for his audience. Most importantly, however, they are adequate because they remain among the most influential food thinkers in the United States -- especially in California where I conducted my fieldwork. Thus, my strong sense is that Pollan and Waters are often the proximate source of the kinds of propositions about food that I am interested in -- the kinds of commonsense claims about freshness and health or the evils of food subsidies that you might overhear at farmers markets or natural food stores -- even when those propositions can be traced back further to someone like Wendell Berry or Marion Nestle.

The second source I draw on is a kind of secondary production of discourse in popular media that I identify as being written from the perspective of real food. By that, I mean a

particular mode of identifying problems (in the governance of farmers markets, for example) and proposing solutions (such as increased state surveillance) that reveals a commitment to the tenets of real food discourse. What distinguishes these writings from the discursive production of Pollan and Waters is their practical orientation. One way to think about this distinction is as the difference between theory and application -- I consider Pollan and Waters to be producing the theory of real food, while these second set of writers apply that theory to the concrete, bounded circumstances of specific farmers markets. The selection criteria for the articles analyzed was not particularly systematic. I performed web searches for specific terms -- "farmers market etiquette" and "farmers market tips" for one set of articles, "farmers market fraud" and "farmers market cheats" for the other -- and pulled articles and blog posts from the first two pages of returns. I also included some articles linked from other articles. The goal in selecting articles was not to be comprehensive but rather to adequately characterize specific kinds of writing. The argument is not that real food is the only perspective on local food (or even necessarily the dominant perspective) -- only that it has some nontrivial influence on how people articulate their experience of farmers markets. The chosen articles respond to real concerns in a way that illustrates the influence of this real food discourse in identifying problems and articulating solutions.

Finally, I draw on participant observation conducted in the summer of 2015 in San Francisco, California, working in three different roles at three different farmers markets:

- I worked twice a week for Cipponeri Farms' stand at the Heart of the City farmers market at the Civic Center from June 2015 to August 2015. Cipponeri is a larger farm located in Turlock, about 100 miles east of San Francisco, that sold mostly stone fruit, melons, and almonds in farmers markets around the Bay Area. I was a seasonal hire, to help out at one of the busiest markets where they sell during their busiest season. My job there included sorting and displaying fruit for sale, cutting and distributing fruit as samples, and occasionally working the scales and register.
- I also worked as an assistant to the market manager of Mission Community Market in the Mission District from May to December 2015. Unlike the Heart of the City market

which drew customers from all over the city, Mission Community market was a smaller evening market that was intended to serve the local neighborhood. I was at first a volunteer, then later paid. My job there included helping the manager and other volunteers set up the market so that the individual vendors could do their thing, which meant blocking off the street an hour before the market opened, setting up the information booth, music stage, and general seating areas, and setting out trash and recycling bins. I usually left the market during operation, then returned at closing to help break down and clean up.

- Lastly, I volunteered weekly in late spring and early summer of 2015 (a total of four times) for the “Foodwise Kids” program organized by the Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture at the Ferry Plaza farmers market. There, I helped guide groups of children through the farmers market and led them in activities designed to help them learn about food.

Again, the observations included here were not chosen to be somehow representative of my experiences. Rather, they are relayed in the following chapters to demonstrate the influence of the real food discourse in specific ways -- to illustrate the installation of practices and the normalization of perspectives that are revealing of this ultimately narrow perspective on relating to and “knowing” food and the people that grow and sell it.

Together, what these readings and observations show is that the local is realized, at least in part, through a commitment to its specific kind of purity -- and is thus generative of the sort of “unreflexive” politics that results in the same patterned exclusions and erasures that have consistently plagued localism. It is not impossible, at least theoretically, to have a version of localism that is not committed to this sort of thing, that does not produce those exclusions. But, first, it is difficult for me to imagine what would be gained from that localism -- what sort of localism is it if it does not bound our political sympathies to some geography? And second, in any case, this inclusive (“reflexive”) localism is not available to us at present. The localism that we have now is compelling *because* it incites a desire for security and purity. It is exclusionary and coercive to the extent that it is successful in inciting those desires.

Chapter 3: The Fantasy of Real Food

"I want to get people into the farmers' market," says Waters, "to taste and to touch and have their senses opened to real food, to support the people who are taking care of the land so we'll have a pure source of food in the future." "Actually," she continues with a smile, "until recently, people had been eating like this for centuries. All I've been trying to do is find something that was fresh and serve it simply. But we'd gotten so far away from that idea that it seemed unusual. It seemed special." (Plummer 1992)

It started with a peach. Not just any peach but a Frog Hollow Farm peach, coaxed into its fullness by the rich loam of the Sacramento River Delta. A golden peach suffused with a lover's blush, a hint of erotic give at the cleft, its juice sliding down the chin at the gentlest pressure -- it was a peach that tastes the way peaches once did, the way they should. It was the peach with which Alice Waters, the founder of Chez Panisse in Berkeley, the chef who revolutionized American fine dining, imagined she would transform children's lives. It was Frog Hollow peaches, which can sell for about \$5 a pound, that Waters took seven years ago to the first day of summer session at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Berkeley. She was carving an organic garden out of a parking lot next to the playground, planting the seeds for a schoolwide program to promote ecological and gastronomic literacy. One bite of these peaches, she thought, and the scales placed on students' eyes by the false prophets of the junk-food industry would fall away. They would see the folly of their Devil Dog ways and convert to the gospel of lush produce. Like Genesis inverted, the fruit of knowledge would lead them back to the garden of innocence. It didn't quite work out that way. "They wouldn't touch the peaches," Waters recalled. "They said they were furry." (Orenstein 2004)

The basic contention of this dissertation is that the troubling patterns of exclusion that have plagued local food are in some nontrivial way inherent to localness. This, I argue, is because the same practices that realize localness in the world also produce those exclusions and, moreover, engender specific erasures that make recognizing and addressing exclusions more difficult.

"Realizing" localness means more than simply proposing the local as an idea around which to organize social life. The previous chapter was dedicated largely to a critique of the dominant constructivist paradigm for theorizing local food. This brief theoretical chapter offers answers to some of the questions raised in that critique. In particular, it demonstrates an alternative approach that clarifies the advantages of thinking in terms of realization over social construction. As noted in the previous chapter, thinking about realization means attending to the

practices that make localness lively, substantial, sensuous -- in short, compelling enough to draw people in and keep them invested in the idea. I suggest that the discourse of “real food,” as exemplified in the quotes that open the chapter, is what accomplishes this realization today.

While real food is not identical to local food, it is exemplary of local food in ways that I will explain shortly. More to the point, real food is the discourse through which localness exceeds narrow geographic calculation to become a socially meaningful matter of concern. In just a few lines, Alice Waters outlines a classic narrative of loss: a past that was characterized by a sort of natural purity, a present so corrupt that fresh food now seems strange and alien, and a possible future that depends on radical changes in how people engage with the world. Within this narrative, Waters articulates real food as personal, as a transformative sensual experience. Of particular interest here is the way that the loss is articulated as a loss of knowledge. The hoped-for transformation is a recovery -- “like Genesis inverted” -- not only of a certain kind of diet but also of knowledge, and moreover, of a sensuous and intimate *way of knowing* that has been devalued. This is what makes the connection between real food and local food more than a simple matter of overlapping discourses -- the local is where this valorized mode of knowing can take on the appearance of a *practical project*.

This chapter makes the case for understanding the discourse of real food as a Lacanian fantasy. The fantasy analytic is useful here because, as I will show, it helps to identify and name features of the discourse that work to structure desire in discussions of local food. Specifically, and in contrast to social constructionism, the analytic helps to describe more precisely the ways that realization of localness necessarily involves processes of subjectification -- which is just to say that what makes the local lively and what makes people understand themselves and their relationships in terms of localness are the same thing. To be clear, at this stage it is appropriate to think of subjectification by the discourse of real food as a sort of invitation rather than as an

accomplishment. Or, to put it another way, what I offer in this chapter is not an analysis of subjectivity per se, but rather an analysis of a discourse that seeks to produce subjects of a certain sort. Still, this analysis has some significant political consequences, as I show. The discourse implicitly asks subjects to align themselves with a regressive social order and, to the extent that it is successful, makes it difficult for those caught up in the fantasy to acknowledge (let alone address) injustices in local food.

The next section is a primer on the fantasy analytic in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Following that, I illustrate how real food's narrative of loss mirrors the narrative of Lacan's fundamental fantasy. This illustration then leads to an analysis that applies three key concepts of fantasy to the discourse of real food -- staging of desire, fantasmatic explanations of dissatisfaction, and unrepresentability. In the first of three brief sections, I outline how the staging of desire in the fantasy of real food hails a consuming subject who seeks to remake the world through wise purchasing decisions. Next, I discuss the specific way that the fantasy is structured to incorporate and explain away disappointments, and explain how this mode of explanation lends itself to regressive political attitudes and projects. Finally, I show how the internal logic of the fantasy produces specific blind spots with respect to power relations generally, and migrant workers in local food production specifically.

Lacanian Fantasy Primer

For Lacan, the original trauma of human subjectivity is our entry as children into what he calls the Symbolic Order -- a process which includes both socialization and language acquisition. We submit ourselves to social norms (the so-called "Law of the Father") in order to become a legible subject, but after this point we are forever barred from that feeling of wholeness and security that supposedly characterized our pre-socialized existence. According to Lacan, this provides the defining structure for all fantasy: an unconscious yearning to overcome the trauma of social

life by returning to an imagined time of innocence. As adults, we perform a sort of substitution, positing a thing in the world which, if acquired, would satisfy us in that same way.

In this way, fantasies always revolve around a central narrative of loss that orients desire around the recovery of some unattainable thing. As Slavoj Žižek (1993; cf. Žižek 1991, 2009) notes, however, if actually we did achieve the object of our desires, we would immediately discover that it was not *really* what we were looking for, that the desired object must have been something else all along. This is because desire is not provoked into existence by the desirable object as we might assume. Rather, desire is produced in relation to *lack*; it is this lack that is originary, while the object of desire is an attribution made to explain that lack to ourselves. The function of fantasy, then, is not to offer a path towards the resolution of desire but rather to articulate and sustain it. Here is Žižek:

Fantasy is usually conceived as a scenario that realizes the subject's desire. This elementary definition is quite adequate, on condition that we take it literally: what the fantasy stages is not a scene in which our desire is fulfilled, fully satisfied, but on the contrary, a scene that realizes, stages, the desire as such. The fundamental point of psychoanalysis is that desire is not something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed -- and it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject's desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it. It is only through fantasy that the subject is constituted as desiring: through fantasy, we learn how to desire. (1993, p. 6)

Fantasy in this sense “stages” a complete scene -- one that includes not only the goal of fulfillment, but also positions the subject with respect to that goal (it “gives the coordinates”).

There are several important consequences to understanding fantasy in this way.

First, because the scene staged by fantasy is of desiring rather than fulfillment, the scene always provides a meaningful role for the subject to occupy. As Ghassan Hage (2000, p. 70) puts it: “People don’t *have* fantasies. They *inhabit* fantasy spaces of which they are a part” (original emphasis). *Inhabiting* involves much more than, say, *wishing*. We can think of it as a sort of interpellation -- we find the fantasy compelling if and when we recognize ourselves in the

call. This is what makes “world peace,” for example, a wish and not a fantasy. The way we normally discuss and imagine “world peace” makes it difficult to understand just what our role is supposed to be in realizing it. Moreover, it is difficult to *feel* its plausibility. We can only wish for it, not inhabit it.

Second, because fantasies are inherently unrealizable, they always require an element which can help explain this failure to the subject -- an Other for the subject to fixate on so that they do not turn their backs on the fantasy itself. Jodi Dean (2007), drawing on Žižek, articulates this idea in relation to enjoyment (*jouissance*), which she calls the “central concept” of his political theory. She reiterates that fantasies are not “stories we tell ourselves about getting what we want.” Instead, fantasies “keep our desire alive, unfulfilled, intact as desire” by offering an explanation for “why our enjoyment is missing”:

Such fantasmic explanations may posit another who has stolen our enjoyment or who has concentrated all the enjoyment in his hands, preventing the rest of us from enjoying... What is crucial, though, is the way that the fantasy keeps open the possibility of enjoyment by telling us why we aren’t really enjoying. (p. 20)

This idea of the “theft of enjoyment” is seemingly absurd (how can someone “steal” enjoyment?) but, in a characteristic reversal, Žižek (1993, p. 202) argues that we can only know our enjoyment through the feeling that it is under threat.

Lastly, as we might expect, there are limits to the consistency of any fantasy. In Lacanian theory, this is often articulated in terms of the *Real*, an ontological category commonly defined as that which is constituted with, but cannot be represented in, the symbolic order. It is precisely that which eludes our grasp when we acquiesce to language and socialization. Thus, it has an important structural relationship with that fundamental fantasy of returning to innocence. There has been a lot written about the Real as a category of metaphysics, and in particular, its consistency with the ontology of performativity (e.g. Butler 1993, p. 181 ff.) For the purposes of this dissertation, I will not be using the term as Lacanians do. Instead, I extract what I take to be

the basic analytic lesson from discussions of the Real -- that discourses, as organized systems of thought, possess an internal “grammatical” structure that delimits what is intelligible within that discourse. I take this to be a sensitizing concept (rather than a metaphysical certainty) that hypothesizes the existence of “blind spots” in any discourse that emerge as an artifact of how that discourse organizes value and knowledge. Because these blind spots, when they exist, emerge in a structural relationship with the discourse, they have the potential to “unravel” the discourse from the inside out if confronted. This is not very different from what Hage (2000) does with the concept. He retains the use of the term, but “modifies” it to make it “a more sociologically specific and less of a general ontological category” (p. 133 and fn 21 on p. 257).

The Narrative of Loss and the Trauma of Industrial Agriculture

Michael Pollan, perhaps the only person whose influence in these matters rivals that of Alice Waters (in Northern California) or exceeds it (elsewhere in the United States), writes in his popular 2008 book *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*:

So many of the problems of the industrial food chain stem from its length and complexity. A wall of ignorance intervenes between consumers and producers, and that wall fosters a certain carelessness on both sides. Farmers can lose sight of the fact that they're growing food for actual eaters rather than for middlemen, and consumers can easily forget that growing good food takes care and hard work. In a long food chain, the story and identity of the food (Who grew it? Where and how was it grown?) disappear into the undifferentiated stream of commodities, so that the only information communicated between consumers and producers is a price. In a short food chain, eaters can make their needs and desires known to the farmer, and farmers can impress on eaters the distinctions between ordinary and exceptional food, and the many reasons why exceptional food is worth what it costs. Food reclaims its story, and some of its nobility, when the person who grew it hands it to you. (p. 160)

Here, Pollan helpfully identifies industrialization (and the accompanying lengthening of the “food chain”) as the moment when knowledge of food was lost and the “wall of ignorance” erected.

For Pollan, what is needed is for food to “reclaim its story” and its “nobility.” He continues:

So here's a subclause to the get-out-of-the-supermarket rule: *Shake the hand that feeds you*. As soon as you do, accountability becomes once again a matter of relationships instead of regulation or labeling or legal liability. Food safety didn't become a national or global problem until the industrialization of the food chain attenuated the relationships between food producers and eaters. That was the story Upton Sinclair told about the Beef Trust in 1906, and it's the story unfolding in China today, where the rapid industrialization of the food system is leading to alarming breakdowns in food safety and integrity. Regulation is an imperfect substitute for the accountability, and trust, built into a market in which food producers meet the gaze of eaters and vice versa. (p. 160-161)

This is, frankly, a ridiculous account of the history of food safety. All of the techniques that humans have developed for preserving or preparing food have their origins in concerns over food safety, starting with the basic sorting of things into edible and inedible. Moreover, Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle* thinking he was exposing labor abuses and famously lamented its reception as a book about food safety ("I aimed at the public's heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach"). Both the specific abuse of Sinclair (enlisting him into a project he opposed) and the general abuse of food history to suit narrow ends are, unfortunately, not uncommon (cf. Farrell 2011, p. 16-17; Gray 2013, p. 1-2).

According to this real food discourse, the great epistemological failure of contemporary times is that we have conceded our knowledge of food ("where it comes from") to an industrial food system and accompanying regulatory framework that is overly technical and impersonal. I have some sympathy for that critique, but less for the romantic epistemology that advocates of real food have proposed in its place. Especially in Waters' quotes that open the chapter (but also underwriting Pollan's here), true knowledge of food is understood to be a *natural* condition that modernity has torn us out of. It would be the easiest thing, they imply, to simply let the scales fall from our eyes and go back to how it used to be, how it should be still.

Although these quotes might appear naive or even eccentric, they in fact express widely shared sentiments about the shocking ignorance of contemporary times -- and its affective

consequences. Deborah Barndt opens *Tangled Routes*, her (rightly) celebrated ethnography of the North American tomato trade, like this:

Where does our food come from?

This book starts with that seemingly simple question. But the question itself raises many other questions. To start with, why are we even asking the question now? A century ago, our great grandparents had little reason to wonder where their food came from; if they didn't grow their own, at least they usually knew the people who did. To ask the question today is to admit, in fact, a shared ignorance; very few of us have much sense at all of the processes that have brought food to our table, nor can we envision the many people that have moved it along the way. Our disconnection from both the earth and its fruits is not only physical and social but also mental and spiritual. (2008, p. 1-2)

Even the reference to the Book of Genesis is not so unusual. In his introduction to *Coming Home to Eat*, Gary Paul Nabhan writes:

One fact from our time is so blatantly obvious that even to repeat it is to pretend that it is not immediately self-evident: More people than ever before in history have absolutely no involvement in producing the foods that sustain them. Most children are so laughably clueless about the origins of their food that they are just as likely to mention Safeway as the Garden of Eden as the place where the first apple came from. Eve, honey, please forgive us our sins, the freeze-dried ones, the ones we have spiced with MSG, and all the others we heave into our shopping carts. (2002, p. 26)

These quotes not only lament the loss of a particular way of knowing, but also articulate a connection between that loss and a condition of spiritual loss -- a kind of collective trauma, in other words -- along with the implied promise of spiritual healing that comes with recovering that knowledge. It is not an accident, then, that Waters and Pollan have been respectively referred to as the "High Priestess of Slow Food" and "High Priest of American Food" (Zelmanov 2003; Kandil 2013).

In this usage, "real food" fits the description of fantasy as defined above. At its core, it narrates a loss of bodily health, spiritual health, community, connection to nature, and ultimately a sort of natural innocence -- brought about by concessions to industrial food production (here standing in for Lacan's Symbolic Order). However, Lacanian fantasy is more than narrative

analysis. It identifies a set of interconnected social dynamics that such narratives tend to generate -- namely, an inhabitable staging of desire, frustration and Othering, and denial or erasure of the Real. For Lacanians, these can seem like answers to metaphysical questions. Because fantasies are inherently unrealizable, for example, disappointments necessitate the identification of an Other who is to blame in order to preserve the integrity of the fantasy. An alternative approach is to think of these as “theory driven predictions,” but that is not precisely what I am after either. Very simply, I find fantasy to be a useful analytic because it sensitizes us to such dynamics -- if and when they occur. Consideration of each of these helps to outline the real food fantasy and identify its limits.

Real Food as a Consumption Fantasy

The first and most important of these is the way that fantasy works to “stage” rather than fulfil the subject’s desire. If real food is a fantasy, what it stages is the desire to return to that wholesome past of fresh food simply prepared, of knowing where that food came from, and of communal relationships with those that produced it. Real food discourse invites subjects to feel the loss of that past as their own, to yearn for its restoration, and to identify with the project of recovery. Another way of saying this is that real food must be understood as an *interpellative* discourse that hails subjects to a specific mode of desire.

Once we look at it that way, it becomes clear that real food is actually a *consumption* fantasy. Given what we have discussed so far, it is not obvious that this should be the case. We might imagine a different articulation of real food that invites people to “return to the land,” for example, or to confront and dismantle the production of non-real food through political activism. But these are only minor currents. The overwhelming proportion of energy is directed towards specifying right and wrong acts of consumption (what to buy, how to buy, and who to buy it from). Recall that Alice Waters wants to “get people into the farmers’ market” while Michael

Pollan advises “Shake the hand that feeds you” -- with “people” and “you” in these quotes presuming consumption as the default relationship to the food system. (Indeed, presuming consumption this way can obscure other possible relationships to food -- including, ironically, producing, distributing, preparing, and selling -- a point I will return to shortly.)

As a consumption discourse, however, “real food” is not reducible to a kind of calculus that identifies which purchases are better for health or environment or the “local economy.” It is, rather, the fantasy that pursuing the right foods in the right way will also engender a sort of spiritual healing -- that knowing real food is a path to redemption for the “Devil Dog follies” and “freeze-dried sins” that “we” (consumers again) have been unthinkingly “heaving into our shopping carts.” Thus, this fantasy *finds its home in localness* (and especially in farmers markets), where real food becomes an “inhabitable fantasy space,” as Hage puts it. This is because, while “whole” or “natural” foods can come from anywhere, only the local offers opportunities to engage in the sort of knowing consumption that the fantasy really prizes.

Fantasmatic Explanation, or the Normative Order of Real Food

Second, the real food fantasy operates through a specific articulation of enjoyment and disappointment. The basic narrative account of real food serves as an explanation for why the subject’s life is not already satisfying, and a promise of the kinds of satisfactions that might be enjoyed if they “returned” to real food. It is easy to see how that account of dissatisfaction is performative (in the Austin-inspired sense of producing the effects it purports to describe). But we should be careful about distinguishing between the disappointment authorized by real food discourse and the one that is not. The former dissatisfaction is part of the hail, an invitation to the subject to feel the loss of wholesome connection as their own. The latter is the disappointment of pursuing “recovery” through real food only to discover that it does not quite deliver as promised. That disappointment is largely an empirical question: Does anyone in fact

find their pursuit of real food dissatisfying? If so, how do they account for it? I address these at length in the next chapter which is dedicated more to empirical evidence.

Here, I focus on the first -- the fantasmatic explanation for the spiritual poverty of contemporary life. As we have already seen, “real food” is never merely a specification of what constitutes good food. Instead, primarily through its articulation of a lost state of wellbeing, it reveals itself to be a specification of a good *life* situated in (and dependent on) a normative social order. Here is Waters again:

To Waters, the obesity epidemic is a symptom of a deeper issue: how fast food and industrial agriculture are destroying the environment and our culture. “We’re losing the values we learned from our parents when we sat around our family table, when we lived closer to the land and communicated,” she says. “The way children are eating now is teaching them about disposability, about sameness, about fast, cheap and easy. They learn that work is to be avoided, that preparation is drudgery.” (Orenstein 2004)

As Waters makes clear, that lost social order is built on historically given notions of propriety regarding everything from the relationship between human culture and the natural world to communal meals at the family table. Similarly, Michael Pollan’s programmatic 2010 essay on the sensibilities coalescing in the “food movement” identifies nostalgia for a lost domesticity as one of the major appeals:

[The food] movement’s interest in such seemingly mundane matters as taste and the other textures of everyday life is also one of its great strengths. Part of the movement’s critique of industrial food is that, with the rise of fast food and the collapse of everyday cooking, it has damaged family life and community by undermining the institution of the shared meal. Sad as it may be to bowl alone, eating alone can be sadder still, not least because it is eroding the civility on which our political culture depends. (Pollan 2010)

Along the same lines, Pollan notes elsewhere in the essay that this “communitarian impulse” is “is drawing support from the right as well as the left” (as we might expect from such a direct appeal to civic and family values).

Note, moreover, that the profile of Waters is from 2004 when moral panic over the obesity “epidemic” was at a high -- for real food, the specific plagues that need addressing may

continue to change but the solution remains constant (cf. Pollan 2008 above on “the story unfolding in China today”). As is the case with fantasies in general, this discourse is highly flexible in its ability to account for whatever ails: *Do kids these days seem lazy to you? Are other people too fat for your liking? Are your own children less communicative than you wish? And, isn't all of this a symptom of some deeper disconnect?* Moreover, it is highly suggestive in the way that it makes the subject sensitive to these supposed ills: *Things were definitely not this bad before, right?*

Thus, we see that the desire staged by real food is made up in part by the nostalgic desire for the comforts of a life that conforms to a specific normative social order. But that order is a familiar one. Julie Guthman (2004), summarizing the normative order embedded in the closely related valorization of “small family farms,” notes the following:

[T]here are some significant problems with the small-scale family farm ideal. First of all, although it is highly critical of mainstream agriculture, the agrarian imaginary is equally bound up with a sort of cultural conservatism and even with Christian fundamentalism. As Brass (1997) argues, agrarian populism, with roots in conservative notions of an organic society, consistently links small-scale property with family values and tradition. Moreover, by failing to question the race and gender relations that enabled the family farm, as noted by Allen and Sachs (1993), it inherently glorifies them. Not only do these often romanticized notions of the family farm take as perfectly unproblematic patriarchal exploitation of women's and children's labor (Allen and Sachs 1993; Sachs 1996), they also ultimately uphold white privilege by ignoring the racial history of U.S. land policy (Romm 2001). (Guthman 2004, p. 174)

Guthman's points are collected from across a range of academic writing. With respect to real food, I think it is possible to be a little bit more specific: In rewriting the history of food in order to naturalize a particular way of eating, relating, and knowing, Waters, Pollan, and their allies also romanticize a set of social relations that valorize purity while being deeply suspicious of difference. In particular, the articulation of familial order to social order that we see in Waters' “family table” claim should ring alarms (xenophobic, patriarchal, heteronormative). And while I am not suggesting that “real food” discourse is some sort of slippery slope to the fascist

imaginary of nation-as-family, economy-as-household, and ruler-as-patriarch, I do suggest that these articulations make “real food” available to be enrolled in more mundane exclusionary projects. This is, I think, what is at the root of the “defensiveness” and “romantic anti-politics” discussed in the previous chapter.

As fantasy, real food invites people to long for a lost purity (that never existed) and offers an account of contamination as an explanation for current ills. As I will show in the next chapter, the result of this is that dissatisfactions with real food are met with a rededication to this implicit social order (rather than reconsideration) that finds expression in attempts to purify the marketplace. Again, what makes real food attractive is precisely what makes it exclusionary -- or at least available to exclusionary politics.

Unrepresentable Concerns

Finally, this specific staging of desire has implications for what can and cannot be represented, what can and cannot be incorporated into the discourse of real food without destabilizing its internal consistency. It is curious, for example, that “farmer” does not appear to be an inhabitable role in this discourse. Instead, farmers are reduced to noble figures whose primary value is, first, their (quasi-mystical) relationship to the land that consumers can access by getting to know them, and second, their availability to be “supported” in just this way (cf. Sayre 2006, Munzer 2010). Figuring farmers in this way has the effect of erasing the obvious fact that farming is a business, rather than a selfless activity pursued primarily to bring good food to good people. And while that idealization may seem advantageous, this is not always the case -- in particular, for example, when farmers need to find ways of explaining decisions made under financial duress in more palatable language. As I will argue in later chapters, this is the dynamic that makes farmers who sell “imposter” produce at farmers markets so unsympathetic to so many.

Crucially, as capitalists, farmers need to hire workers, or exploit family members in a sufficiently small farm, in order to realize profits. Yet, the discourse of real food has no way of incorporating those workers into its narrative. While farmers are idealized, farmworkers are essentially erased. Unlike farmers, farmworkers cannot be rendered as “rooted” -- they are more likely to be migrants and, in any case, there is no property relation tying them to any specific plot of land. Thus, unlike with farmers, “knowing” farmworkers cannot be said to restore the healing connections to the land promised by the fantasy. Moreover, while it is possible to imagine that wise consumption choices enable farmers to carry out their noble mission, there is simply no way to understand the issues that farmworkers face as available to consumptive intervention. The concerns are diverse -- wages and wage theft, benefits, working and living conditions, workplace harassment, immigration and border regimes, and so on -- but none of these are addressed by identifying and buying the right foods. Ironically, this is much easier to imagine when the farms are not “local.” Then, the “farmers” that employ the farmworkers are readily recognized as corporate actors against whom boycotts can be organized.

Acknowledgement of farmworkers and their concerns would undermine the logic of the fantasy in several ways. First, it would undermine the idealized image of “local farmers” and their “small family farms” that consumers support. In particular, it would throw into question the position of farmers in the community-capital dualism and make the prospect of “knowing” farmers a more uncertain wager. Second, it would undermine the idea of an independently operating “local economy” that consumers are invited to participate in and help build. Taking seriously the concerns of migrant farmworkers, in particular, means confronting some of the specific ways that the local is shaped by and participates in a global political economy. It does not take much reflection to recognize that working conditions for migrants are determined in collaboration between their local farmer bosses and an oppressive border regime. It takes only

slightly more to recognize that money spent on local produce must be divided between circulation in the “local economy” on the one hand and remittances sent elsewhere on the other -- and thus that the objective of contributing to and fortifying the local community is in some sense in direct competition with adequate compensation for migrant labor. And finally, as noted above, it would undermine the basic belief in the efficacy of the fantasy’s prescribed mode of intervention.

The discourse of real food never confronts any of these issues because farmworkers essentially do not appear in accounts of real food. Of course they cannot be the actors in a consumption fantasy, but they also cannot be represented even as figures for consumers to connect with and support. Farmworkers (and migrant farmworkers especially) are, in an almost literal sense, unrepresentable from within the symbolic order of real food. Their position in food production, the concerns that come out of that position, their nonlocal “roots” and nonlocal interests -- all of these would, if acknowledged, undermine the “minimum of coherence and stability that the fantasy needs in order to reproduce itself,” as Hage puts it.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have identified how the discourse of “real food” animates the idea of local food and argued that this discourse is best understood in terms of Lacanian fantasy -- a narrative of loss that interpellates desiring subjects. Using that fantasy analytic, I have argued that real food is a consumption fantasy that implicitly mobilizes a regressive social order and illustrated how that discourse makes issues of labor and migration in local food more difficult to address. The arguments in this chapter have focused on the properties of real food discourse rather than the “accomplishments” of that discourse. The actual influence of real food is indicated (but not definitively established) by the prominence of Alice Waters and Michael Pollan, the figures I take to be the central theorists and proselytizers of real food. In a sense, we can take the arguments

here to be informed “predictions” of the social dynamics that we might expect to emerge as real food becomes more successful in shaping the local food landscape.

I have advanced the major argument of the dissertation in several specific ways. First, I have offered a concrete example of the theoretical proposition forwarded in the previous chapter that localness is better understood as “realized” than “constructed” (at least the way the latter term is generally used). I have suggested that *real food* is the discourse that enlivens localness today, giving it substance, realizing it as an idea that people can invest in or inhabit. Second, I have argued that what makes local food inhabitable simultaneously produces its appeal and its exclusionary tendencies. The image of local food implied by constructionism is of a structure that can be pulled towards inclusiveness or defensiveness by the agents that populate it. In contrast, I noted that the temptation to restore the lost purity that makes up much of the appeal of local food is generative of dangerous politics. Finally, I argued in the previous chapter that the constructivist paradigm permitted an unwarranted optimism in the ability of reflexive agents to reform localism because it failed to adequately account for subjectivity. Here, I have noted the impotence of the specific mode of intervention prescribed by the real food fantasy to address a major class of problems related to the production and distribution of local food, and have indicated some reasons to think that interpellation by this discourse would limit subjects’ capacity to engage in reflection or reform.

In the next two chapters, I engage in more empirical work to illustrate the influence of real food on shaping local food practices in California, focusing specifically on farmers markets. These chapters examine in turn the affective and the epistemological constitution of farmers markets as fantasy spaces. Chapter 4 draws on a variety of secondary sources to trace a series of media events which culminated in a rather dramatic change in the regulatory governance of certified farmers markets in the state. Without necessarily identifying any specific people as

having been definitively “interpellated,” I argue that we cannot make sense of these events unless we accept the significant influence of the real food fantasy. Chapter 5 draws on my fieldwork at different farmers markets in San Francisco in 2015 to illustrate how the discursive organization of value and knowledge characteristic of the real food fantasy shapes interactions in those markets. Again, I make no claims at being able to access the subjectivities of the people I worked with or came across in the course of my work. Instead, I use the episodes described to highlight the epistemological limits of real food and identify the mechanisms through which this discourse produces its specific and patterned erasures.

Chapter 4: Purify the Farmers Market

At the top of the previous chapter, Alice Waters described farmers markets as sites where people “have their senses opened to real food,” and where they can “support the people who are taking care of the land so we’ll have a pure source of food in the future.” This chapter examines the way farmers markets have been constructed as a kind of fantasy space. While there are other ways to engage with the local and the real -- produce subscription programs (CSAs), community gardens, co-op groceries, and the like -- farmers markets hold a definite pride of place in the fantasy landscape. Because they are immersive, sensual, affecting spaces, farmers markets in the real food discourse are represented as a sanctuary of sorts against the dispiriting and alienating influences of industrial agriculture. What this chapter seeks to demonstrate is the degree to which the fantasy of real food has indeed influenced popular understandings of -- and set popular expectations for -- farmers markets. In this way, this chapter extends the argument of the last chapter by providing an illustration of the way that real food discourse enlivens a scene.

In the first section, I illustrate how the experience of failing to find farmers market shopping as satisfying as expected is a fairly general one. That is not so surprising -- not everyone can sense and taste the way Alice Waters does. What is noteworthy here is how common it is for this dissatisfaction to be understood as a result of a failing on the part not of markets to deliver the promised experience, but rather on the part of the consumer to engage the market appropriately. What it reveals is the influence of a normative affective state, linked to a normative mode of engagement, that produces farmers markets as potentially anxious spaces.

Next, I examine what happens when responses to dissatisfaction turn from an internalized anxiety and insecurity to an antisocial expression of frustration or even anger at

other customers who inhabit the farmers market “incorrectly.” The problem here, I show, appears to be articulated most often as an excess of sociality which must be expelled in order to restore the market to its ideal state. The basic narrative is that farmers markets have recently become “overrun” with people who fail to appreciate or respect the true purpose of the market (a place to get real food) and are only there to socialize. This articulation is recognizable as a reinscription of the fantasy’s founding narrative of loss -- “real” farmers markets have been lost and need to be recovered.

Finally, I explore what happens when the problematic presence in farmers markets is not consumers who are perceived to violate norms, but vendors who commit actual, serious violations. The specific problem I examine here is fraud -- the misrepresentation by vendors of warehouse produce as locally grown. I illustrate how this more serious violation came to be articulated, as in the previous section, as a threat to the integrity of the true purpose of farmers markets, rather than a more mundane threat to the integrity of a transaction. This way of understanding the threat, then, leads to the acceptance of increased state surveillance and policing as the only sensible solution -- a deeply ironic outcome that at face value seems to throw away the basic premise of farmers markets as sites where consumers get to know their farmers. I argue that what makes this solution sensible is the sacralization of farmers markets in real food discourse. In both this case and the case of excess sociality, because farmers markets are constituted as sacred spaces, norm violations come to be understood broadly as problems of *contamination* and generate responses that call for and celebrate *purification*.

Enjoyment, Anxiety, and Farmers Market Norms

I don’t like farmers markets because no one else who shops at farmers markets ever gets the Sunday blues. Instead of waiting anxiously for nightfall to distract them with HBO, they’re going to go home to their tastefully appointed kitchen in their rapidly appreciating condo to whip that rhubarb into a seasonally appropriate crumble. After

dessert, their handsome husband is going to do the dishes without being asked because they have an equal partnership. (Doody 2015)

The association of farmers markets with satisfying consumer experiences is commonplace. Indeed, it is clear that the *expectation* that farmers markets are uncommonly happy places is familiar enough to take for granted -- as Clare Doody, humor columnist for the *Washington Post*, does in her article "Why I hate farmers markets." But expecting to find satisfaction is of course not the same as finding it. If we start with the fantasy premise that farmers markets tap into a deep spiritual need, that they are somehow sensual and healing spaces, then the failure to find them satisfying can only be a personal one. (Doody opens the article: "I don't like farmers markets. Some people think that has more to do with me than it does with farmers markets. But I think I make a pretty objective case.") That this is a personal failing is further evidenced by the fact that everyone else at the market appears to be enjoying themselves as they should. Thus, Doody's article runs through an extended list of "flaws" in everyone else -- they wake up early, they do yoga, they own property, they have satisfying personal lives, and so on -- that explains how they are able to enjoy the market in a way she cannot.

She is joking, of course, but she identifies two important features of enjoyment: First, part of how people experience farmers markets is refracted through their perceptions of the enjoyment of others. Doody's experience at farmers markets is an unhappy one precisely because other people seem to be so happy there. Second, Doody's joke expresses something of the urgency of finding explanations for dissatisfaction. She "knows" that farmers markets are inherently satisfying, so unless she can explain it away, her failure to enjoy them suggests something fundamentally wrong with herself.

I suspect that this sense of unease -- feeling like an outsider at the market, wondering what others have figured out that you have not -- is not uncommon. At the very least, it is relatable enough to make Doody's column in a major national newspaper accessible. But the possibility

that this uneasiness in farmers markets is rather more widespread is suggested by the sheer volume of articles published on the internet that purport to address this unease. Here is a small sampling of headlines:

- 10 Farmers Market Shopping Tips (Watson 2018)
- 10 Etiquette & Shopping Tips to Help You Enjoy the Farmers Market (Velden 2014)
- 5 Things Not to Say (or Do) at the Farmers Market (Gordon 2014)
- Farmers Market Etiquette: 8 Ways To Be A Good Customer (Baillieul 2015)
- Do's and Dont's: Farmers Market Etiquette (Notopoulos 2013)
- Hands Off the Tomatoes! And Other Market Mishaps to Avoid (Jampel 2016)
- Avoid Farmers' Market Faux Pas (Echlin 2010)
- 9 Annoying Things You Should Never Do at Farmers Markets, According to Farmers (Hester & Gan 2015)

Many of these articles start the same way -- with an introduction that extols the virtues of farmers markets, a sympathetic concession that they can be trickier to navigate than the supermarkets that shoppers have become used to, and a promise that a few tips will make shopping the farmers market enjoyable instead of stressful. Here is a typical introduction from *The Kitchn*, an online food magazine that claims a monthly readership of 17 million:

Do you love the market but find yourself occasionally confused or flustered by all the unknowns? *Is it okay to sample or to ask a lot of questions? Can you bring your dog? Is this the best tomato of the day? Or maybe you avoid the market altogether because it just seems so insider-y?* We love our farmers markets here at Kitchn, but we totally get it: Sometimes the experience can be challenging. So we decided to tap the experts at CUESA, the nonprofit organization that runs San Francisco's iconic Ferry Plaza Farmers Market, for their insider farmers market tricks and tips. (Velden 2014)

The ostensible purpose of these articles, then, is to help readers navigate the market, to become an “insider” so that the experience is less stressful. The actual tips themselves (with exceptions that I will get to momentarily), however, betray a preoccupation with teaching

shoppers how to not appear annoying to the farmers or other shoppers. These include things like having bags and small bills ready so that farmers do not have to dig for change, not haggling over price because that is disrespectful of the farmers' labor, not taking up farmers' time with mindless chatter about irrelevant hobbies, not bringing dogs or large strollers to the market, not taking up farmers' time with questions that are already answered on posted signs, not making a meal out of free samples, and not sully the produce by digging around in search of the best ones. These articles, in short, seem far more interested in regulating shoppers' behavior than in helping them enjoy the market.

It is true, of course, that shopping is work, that it is possible to be more or less skillful, that the specific skills required vary across markets, and thus, that information about what to expect and what is expected of you can be useful to shoppers who have to perform this work. But by my reading, only one of the articles listed above is actually intended to help shoppers in this way. *The Spruce Eats*, a food and cooking website nested in a larger home improvement website, recommends many of the same tips -- but from an entirely different perspective. They suggest arriving early for the best selection or late for the best deals, bringing canvas bags because the ones provided are often flimsy, bringing small change to make purchases go faster, asking farmers how to prepare unfamiliar items because trying new things is part of the fun, and keeping preparations simple when cooking because farmers market produce is fresher and more flavorful than what is found in supermarkets. Notably, this is the only article that explicitly locates shopping alongside cooking as part of ordinary foodwork. What is striking is how different the same advice sounds when it treats foodwork as *work*, and is actually geared toward making the work of shopping go more smoothly.

The other exception in the list is the "Do's and Don'ts" from Notopoulos (2013) in *Modern Farmer*, a quarterly food magazine (online only as of 2018) that claims to be "the authoritative

resource for today's cutting-edge food producers and consumers." First, this article is notable because it is the only one in the list that does not presume that all of the people working the stands are "farmers." Second, unlike in the earlier articles, Notopoulos seems to have little interest in either regulating or helping shoppers. Instead, her article simply implores readers to be less neurotic about their farmers market shopping: large bills are fine, haggling is fine (although many stands will not be receptive), buying pastries is fine, sampling a lot without buying is fine, returning stuff is fine, and flirting with the staff is encouraged. According to this article, the only thing that is not fine is cutting in line -- avoid that, and everything else is no big deal. In essence, the article identifies many of the activities that consumers have learned to be self-conscious about -- perhaps through the proliferation of these kinds of lists? -- and declares them all to be perfectly acceptable, not "annoying." (Given what we have discussed, the inclusion of "buying pastries" in the list seems curious. I will return to it in the next section.)

In comparison to *The Spruce Eats* (these tips help your work go smoothly) and *Modern Farmer* (relax, you are doing fine), the advice that dominates the other articles in the list seems almost designed to incite insecurity (am I being annoying, unaware?). And, perhaps, to sensitize shoppers to the many ways that other shoppers can be annoying. What is happening here, I think, is that the idea of farmers markets as part of the mundane work of shoppers attempting to feed themselves and their households is running up against the idea of farmers markets as part of the valorized work of consumer-protagonists endeavoring to do good in the world by shopping right. I will explain.

The Problem of Excessive Sociality

Farmers' Markets are thriving, more than five thousand strong, and there is a lot more going on in them than the exchange of money for food. Someone is collecting signatures on a petition. Someone else is playing music. Children are everywhere, sampling fresh produce, talking to farmers. Friends and acquaintances stop to chat. One sociologist calculated that people have ten times as many conversations at the farmers' market than

they do in the supermarket. Socially as well as sensually, the farmers' market offers a remarkably rich and appealing environment. Someone buying food here may be acting not just as a consumer but also as a neighbor, a citizen, a parent, a cook. In many cities and towns, farmers' markets have taken on (and not for the first time) the function of a lively new public square. (Pollan 2010)

In the previous chapter, I argued that the fantasy of real food implicitly mobilized a social order based on a nostalgic invocation of community that valorizes purity while being suspicious of difference. Michael Pollan's idyllic description of farmers markets as the "new public square," on the other hand, paints a scene that appears to embrace diversity -- petitions are circulating, children are playing, friends and acquaintances are chatting away. As he describes it, "there is a lot more going on in them than the exchange of money for food." One of the great strengths, in fact, is that there is no one way to inhabit the market: "not just as a consumer but also as a neighbor, a citizen, a parent, a cook."

And yet, there do seem to be a great many wrong ways. As discussed above, not everyone is satisfied with their farmers market experience. For some people, the problem is not that they feel unsure of how to act, but rather feel quite sure that other people are acting incorrectly. Or, to put it another way, it is a short step from "9 Annoying Things You Should Never Do" to "Hipsters Are Ruining Our Farmers Markets":

The new market is bigger, with more vendors, and offers a lot more choices of produce and other stuff. But it's always jammed. If you have kids in tow, it also feels like more work to visit. "It's more of a social event than a shopping event," says Stephen Paferi, a grower at the new market who jumped ship from the other one. Like many who had done the same, he's begun questioning his choice. Another farmer, Mike Duda, observes, "They are here for the scene, for the coffee and breakfast sandwich or whatever." His loyal customers, he says, have to arrive early to avoid the craziness. "They hate the crowds. I can't believe how many people bitch about the crowds. The regulars show up early." There is no doubt in Duda's mind that the people there for the scene are suffocating the market. "People with strollers; four people having a conversation, which is fine, but it's frustrating. And if you're a customer that wants to go to the farmers market and get some food, you're like, 'Nah.'" (Levaux 2016)

Just as Pollan's farmers market has "a lot more going on," the one described by Levaux "offers a lot more choices of produce and other stuff." There is little to distinguish this farmers market from the one that Pollan describes above as "a remarkably rich and appealing environment," but in this case, that rich social scene is seen to be "suffocating the market." The headline bemoans the loss of "our" farmers market, marking the "hipsters" that ruin them as outsiders, as intruders to a space rightfully shared by "us." Their presence is problematic because, unlike "native" inhabitants of the market like the author and their readers, hipster enjoyment is misguided, excessive. The problem, in other words, is that other people in the market are acting not just as bad consumers, but also as bad neighbors, bad citizens, bad parents, bad cooks.

Other articles make similar arguments. Daniel Duane, writing for *Mother Jones* magazine, opens his extraordinarily bitter 2009 article "Foodie Beware: Is your farmers market just a grocery store with a taco stand and a didgeridoo?" with a personal account:

Every Saturday morning, I get up early to beat the crowds at the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market in San Francisco. The nearby Bay Bridge soars above the shimmering blue water, and the rising sun breaks warm and bright over the Oakland hills. By 7:30 a.m., most of the vendors are ready for action and we early shoppers are practically stalking them, standing in wait near our favorite farmers, looking for the go-ahead nod. Dirty Girl Produce, Star Route Farms, Frog Hollow Farm Legendary Fruits, Swanton Berry Farm—some of the most famous purveyors in California sell direct here, a foodie's fantasy come true. And by 8:30, when I'm usually grabbing a last basket of mushrooms and beating a retreat, the crowd has become unbearably swollen with post-jog couples buying scrambled eggs from prepared-food vendors, and tourists snapping up dried lavender and flavored honeys.

Joggers and tourists have stolen his enjoyment! Because of their love of scrambled eggs and flavored honeys! The body of the article goes on to describe the changes that farmers markets have undergone over the past decades -- in particular, increased participation from larger farms that offer a wider variety of produce, and the inclusion of more prepared foods and other non-produce vendors. He attributes both changes entirely to pressures brought by consumers who misunderstand of the point of farmers markets (they "don't want to make multiple shopping

stops,” they like prepared foods and “value-added” products). The cumulative result is that the few “real” farmers who remain have been reduced to “carnival monkeys” that exist to add a veneer of legitimacy to markets that have otherwise become “fucking hayrides.” Duane concludes in the most patronizing tone he can muster:

If you just like buying vegetables off folding tables on the weekends, and don’t care where or how they were grown, you shouldn’t trouble your head with any of this. Same if the lure of your local market is mostly the coffee cart and the street performers. But if you shop at the farmers market in part to vote with your food dollars—for a stronger local economy, say, and for better stewardship of the land, and for a food network that lets you know exactly what you’re putting in your mouth—and if you’d prefer not to feel like a dupe, it turns out that going to the farmers market isn’t enough anymore. Now you actually have to find out exactly who’s behind every folding table, how their business is really doing, and accept the disappointment the answers are bound to bring. But isn’t that what a farmers market is supposed to be about—caring about how and where and by whom your food was grown?

Ostensibly about recovering the “real” purpose of farmers markets, Duane’s article is really about his loathing of the Other -- people who have degraded markets for real foodies like himself. A widely shared *Washington Post* article rediscovers this dynamic in 2016, sighing “For Some Growers, Farmers Markets Just Aren’t What They Used To Be” (Carman 2016). The problem, again, is young people who “don’t care about the season” and are only at the market “to socialize.”

By designating certain forms of enjoyment as ruinous or degrading, what these and similar articles do is refine and bound legitimate enjoyments and legitimate communities -- always in contrast with the excesses displayed by intruders to the once sacred space. No one will say out loud that they hate difference, of course. What people are surprisingly forthcoming about, however, is how much they hate: hipsters, bargain hunters, mothers with strollers, tourists, Instagrammers, and joggers. From this perspective, Pollan’s description of a lively new public square is precisely what is being stolen -- they *used to* enjoy a community of friends and associates that arose, spontaneously and organically, around a shared appreciation for the best

offerings from local farms. The problem for them is not quite that there is an excess of community. It is that the community they believe they had is being overrun by outsiders who do not seem inclined to assimilate and contribute to the traditional way of life at the farmers market. It is fundamentally xenophobic.

To be clear, I am not arguing that everyone who shares “The 7 Worst People at the Farmers Market” (Weymouth 2015) on their Facebook page is acting out a reactionary farmers market nationalism. But I am arguing that there is an exclusionary impulse at the heart of the urge to identify and decry excessive enjoyments. That impulse is apparently common enough to produce secondary effects -- people who may not be caught up in the fantasy of real food, but who are nonetheless made to feel insecure about enjoying farmers markets in the wrong way. Here is the text from the *Modern Farmer* “Do’s and Don’ts” article cited earlier reassuring readers that it is okay to buy pastries:

Do: Buy the bad-for-you pastries. One of my chief complaints is that I feel like some sort of monster when I eschew the healthy produce and buy a pie. Miller assures me this is all in my head.

Earlier, buying pastries at the farmers market seemed like an odd thing to be self-conscious about. I think it is clear now -- they are worried about being judged because they are indeed being judged.

The Problem of Vendor Fraud

In September of 2010, a local television station in Los Angeles, California aired a “hidden camera” exposé of farmers markets, apparently months in the works, that showed multiple vendors at farmers markets misrepresenting their produce across Los Angeles County and neighboring Orange County. The footage showed “undercover shoppers” purchasing a variety of produce items while questioning vendors about their growing practices. Farmers at these

stands answered that all the produce was grown on their farm, of course, but the next scene contradicted those answers directly -- a surprise visit to the farms themselves revealed farmers unable to show where the produce they had claimed as their own had actually been grown. The news crews secretly followed these farmers on their rounds, where further footage showed them surreptitiously loading boxes of goods from wholesalers. These deceptions were set against sympathetic interviews with dismayed consumers, one of whom is quoted as saying "I feel like I want to take my vegetables back," and concluded with tips for how consumers could avoid being defrauded, including the familiar line that they should "get to know vendors they buy from, and ask them a lot of questions" (Grover & Goldberg 2010a). A follow-up story then confronted department of agriculture officials from Los Angeles and Orange Counties, asking why more was not being done to police the markets. Damningly, the officials could only admit that they had failed on the job and gesture lamely at the difficulty of the task: "'Could you be doing better than that?' NBCLA asked Commissioner Iizuka. 'Yeah, we could,' Iizuka replied." (Grover & Goldberg 2010b).

The story was a small sensation. It was picked up by *Eater.com* (Forbes 2010), *Mother Nature Network* (Ju 2010), and an online wellness blog on *The New York Times* website, which amusingly notes that the markets in Los Angeles were found to have items grown "as far away as Mexico" (Parker-Pope 2010). In subsequent years, the subject of farmers market fraud became something like an object of fascination, as the following headlines from across the United States indicate:

- You Bought It At A Farmers' Market. But Was It Locally Grown? (Walker 2015)
- Beware Of Produce Cheats At Farmers' Markets -- They Don't Grow What They Sell (Cook 2015)
- Your Favorite Farmers Market Food Might Be A Scam (Hirsch 2016)

- Is Your Farmers' Market A Sham? (Shilton 2015)
- Your Favorite Farmers Market Might Be A Scam (Kelly n.d.)
- Is The Produce At The Farmers Market Local? Turns Out, Not Always (Dyas 2018)

I am tempted to suggest that these reports constitute something like a moral panic, but that is not quite right. I do not doubt the scope of the problem that is being reported here -- I believe it is rather widespread. Nor do I think these reports are inciting readers to get worked up over a trivial matter -- I think the matter is quite serious. The problem is in the specific manner of incitement.

Note, first, how many of these headlines make themselves compelling by addressing the reader with a subtly urgent question: are *you* are being scammed at *your* farmers market? In this, they mimic local news broadcast teasers: Do you have a common household cleaning product under your sink that could *give your child cancer*? Is there a remorseless sexual predator on the loose *in your neighborhood*? Is your farmers market *selling you lies*? We'll have the answer for you... right after this break. The opening sentences of many of these articles reinforce that interpellative gesture. The *mashed.com*'s article opens ominously: "The summer months mean a lot of different things to different people, but if you love cooking with fresh food and supporting local businesses, the farmers market is the place to be. Or, is it?" (Kelly n.d.). *Huffington Post*'s opening is simpler: "If you spend your weekends at the farmers market to stock up on local produce, you could be in for a surprise" (Dyas 2018). And *Outside Online*'s the most dramatic:

Imagine: You're unloading your farmers' market bounty from your favorite canvas tote bag and the sticker on the zucchini catches your eye. "Grown in Chile?" you shriek, glaring at the summer squash in your hand, lost in a cascade of anguish and betrayal. (Shilton 2015)

The reader of these columns is always presumed to be a consumer, of course. But more than that, these and similar columns address readers as if they were a specific kind of consumer.

The Houston Chronicle's lede helpfully spells it out:

"Eating is an agricultural act," Wendell Berry reminds us. With every bite we take, we support one kind of agriculture or another, and what a wonderful thing. Just in the course of feeding myself, I can put my money where my mouth is and contribute to the kind of agriculture I want to flourish — local family farms based on methods that nourish the soil and protect the quality of water and air. And so I buy almost all of my food at farmers' markets from the farmers who grew it. And I'm far from alone. The number of people seeking local food grows daily. Unfortunately, so do the opportunities for cheating. This undermines, and even threatens to destroy, the very local farm and food communities so many of us go out of our way to support. (Walker 2015)

Farmers market fraud is a problem, but what sort of problem is it? Or rather, who is it a problem for? These articles insist that it is primarily a problem for enlightened consumers who endeavor to remake the world through their purchases -- who, moreover, are *entitled* to do so. If those endeavors have been thwarted, what is being threatened is not just the integrity of a transaction, it is the integrity of the fantasy itself.

If the problem is understood in this way, then policing in the name of "consumer protection" comes to be seen as the logical solution -- just as it was in the original 2010 exposé's follow-up that confronted county officials over their negligence. This is, in fact, precisely what happened in California. In a series of articles in 2013, *Los Angeles Times* food writer David Karp described enforcement efforts from the county level and highlighted some of the challenges. The February 2013 article described a meeting of farmers market managers and state and county officials. There, Steve Patton, the head of the state farmers market program urged market managers to be more vigilant ("If you think everything's fine, leave it alone and wait for the next exposé of cheating on television.") while Ed Williams, deputy director of the Los Angeles County agricultural commissioner's office, described some of the constraints faced by the county in their efforts to help:

[E]ven a routine inspection is expensive, \$112 to \$1,280 yearly per vendor, and it costs much more if a serious violation such as cheating, meriting a fine or expulsion, needs to be proved. "You mostly see us at the market, but we have to spend five times as much time to back up that inspection," said Williams... "If you want enforcement, we're going to have to recover that money," Williams said to the managers. "You may be looking at increased fees, although I'm not sure what path that's going to take." (Karp 2013a)

The June 2013 article raised the alarm that state funding for market inspections, meager as it was, was in danger of being cut off entirely at end of the year -- "just the opposite of what many stakeholders were aiming for from California State Legislature," as Karp (2013b) notes.

The December 2013 article (Karp 2013c) offered a retrospective of sorts, looking back on some of the successes of the county-led "crackdown" prompted when Los Angeles County Agricultural Commissioner Kurt Floren was "stung by media reports of farmers market cheating," while continuing to make the case for more support from the state. What comes to the fore in this article is the way it takes for granted both the framing of the problem of fraud as a thwarting of consumer efforts to do good on the one hand:

"The whole point of farmers markets is that you know who you're buying from, and what their practices are," said Robin Holding, a regular shopper at the Santa Monica market who unknowingly bought one of the bogus "local" mangoes. "It was not inexpensive, and of awful quality. I was really turned off," Holding said.

And the understanding that the (only) appropriate solution is increased enforcement on the other:

Avery, the Santa Monica market supervisor, said she welcomes the oversight. "I'm thrilled that the Los Angeles agriculture department is going after the cheaters," Avery said. "For farmers markets to continue to prosper, it is crucial that consumers have confidence that vendors really grow what they sell."

In doing so, Karp unwittingly highlights a glaring contradiction between "knowing" farmers and policing them, between the ostensible "whole point" of farmers markets and the insistence that the only way to know and ensure their practices is through vigilant state surveillance.

That contradiction is all the more jarring because it was (and remains) unacknowledged. In 2014, the state of California eventually did pass Assembly Bill 1871, a law that provided funding for surveillance by raising vendor fees at certified farmers markets across the state from \$0.60 to \$2.00 per day (Cal. 2014). Unlike in most other US states, California had already regulated farmers markets after the 1977 establishment of the certified farmers market program, so it was already illegal in California for vendors to sell produce that they did not grow themselves. The new bill established a new misdemeanor that dramatically increased penalties for violations (up to \$3000) and, remarkably, added the possibility of jail time (up to six months) for multiple violations. Its passage was widely celebrated in the state as a victory for consumers and “farmers market stakeholders” (e.g. Karp 2014). The law was also lauded as a model in many of the articles cited above. Writing for *mashed.com*, for example, Kelly (n.d.) notes that the news nonlocal produce at farmers markets “isn’t all doom and gloom, because there might be changes coming in the future. California has been leading the way, and that’s encouraging.”

It is remarkable that state surveillance became the commonsense solution to the problem of farmers market fraud. On its face, the solution suggests that in order to save farmers markets, we have to dispense with their *raison d’être* -- that only the state (and not the consumer) has any hope of really “knowing” farmers at all. But proponents of this solution were hardly found proclaiming this fact. Instead, “crackdown” in enforcement, first in Los Angeles County and then the state California, was widely celebrated as a way to preserve rather than call into question the treasured qualities of farmers markets. It is the flexible logic of fantasy that permits this contradiction to be elided so effortlessly: We used to have a space where we could go to get to know our farmers and know where our food comes from. If the sanctity of that space has been contaminated and its integrity compromised, then the only logical course of action is to purify it,

to restore farmers markets to what they were so that they can again be spaces where we can know farmers.

Dissent

It is important to note it could have gone differently. There are other ways to understand difficulties or discomforts at the farmers market, other ways to translate those affects into threats, other sensible responses. It might have turned out that people who relate to Doody's article would feel about farmers markets the way they feel, generally, about natural food stores: *oh, these markets aren't for me, they must cater to a different sort of person, hippies or something*. There is no obvious need to take the discomfort personally, in other words. People that put their energy into tracing the changes in farmers markets might have thought about the sociality differently -- not as dragging markets away from their ideal but as an indication that farmers markets were growing and changing. They might have left the market to be what it had become, and turned to CSAs or other arrangements to accomplish what they understood to be the true and legitimate aims that were being squeezed out.

The problem of vendor fraud is more difficult but, from my perspective, it should have prompted a radical rethinking of the aims and methods of local food. To me, the practice of fraud is the clearest indication that valorizations have veered firmly into the territory of fetishization. In his reporting for the *Los Angeles Times*, David Karp (2013c) recounts a story from a Ventura County official that illustrates the lengths that some farmers went through in order to fool inspectors:

To avoid being sanctioned, investigators say, some farmers go so far as to plant dummy crops to deceive inspectors on the lookout for sales volume that far exceeds a grower's capacity. "They plant [crops], but they never harvest, they're just for us to see," said Korinne Bell, who supervises farmers markets for the Ventura County agricultural commissioner. (Karp 2013c)

In the context of Karp's reporting, this story is intended to illustrate the challenges that investigators face in regulating farmers markets. It is recounted to suggest that the deviousness of some bad actors requires proportional measures for vigilance and deterrence. But more fundamentally, this story also illustrates that it actually makes sense for farmers to plant crops only to let them die in the fields while they sell warehouse produce at farmers markets. That such a practice might be rational indicates just how broken the incentive structure of local agriculture has become. Or, to put it another way, to put farmers (generally, although not universally, struggling financially) in the position of choosing between profitable and wasteful dishonesty and less profitable honesty is, in the first place, malpractice on the part of those offering the choice.

It is almost certainly true that other ways of engaging with and responding to fraud or dissatisfaction did happen. But the specific kind of engagement with farmers markets I have described in this chapter was widespread enough and influential enough to produce a good deal of discursive activity, to emerge as a sort of common sense, and eventually to shape policies in California, with similar efforts likely on the way elsewhere. I have argued here that this should be understood as evidence of the real food fantasy at work -- that fantasy is what accounts for the dynamic of identifying problems as a form of contamination and thus solutions in terms of purification. If that fantasy thesis is to be believed, moreover, the counterfactual point is that the specific problematic presences identified here matter less than the characteristic responses to those problems. Some problematic presence would need to have been invented in order to preserve the idea of farmers markets as pure spaces -- whether that be hipsters or something else. I would also suggest that there is a kind of relief apparent in the identification of the source of contamination in these cases. This is especially true in the discovery of fraud, when that relief seems to drive the zeal with which purification is pursued. Something like relief is also evident, I

believe, in the discovery of other contaminating presences (hipsters, for example) which similarly offer an outlet for the underlying but unauthorized anxieties that come with inhabiting the real food fantasy.

By my reading, there are two small notes of dissent in the reporting on state enforcement of farmers markets. The first comes from the *Outside Online* article that opens with the hypothetical horror at discovering a “grown in Chile” sticker:

Phil Blalock, the executive director of the National Association of Farmers Markets Nutrition Programs, thinks that California is over-regulating. His organization helps vendors at farmers' markets utilize federal food benefits like SNAP and WIC, which provides food assistance to women and children. He says that he's less concerned about where the food is coming from and more concerned about people having access to it. “I'll tell you that people who buy wholesale and sell it are commonplace in every state, and the general public may not care in the long term,” says Blalock. If the only crop available to sell four months of the year is mealy potatoes and the last of the fall rutabagas, no one is going to come and shop, Blalock says. That's bad for the sellers and bad for people who count on the markets as a place to spend their S.N.A.P. dollars. (Shilton 2015)

From the perspective of someone who is primarily interested in access rather than localness, the same activity -- buying produce in bulk from wholesalers and moving it to markets more accessible to the public -- is suddenly a valuable service. This indicates something of the real damage that the fetishization of localness has done by effecting a kind of moral hierarchy of produce that corresponds to a hierarchy of the people who grow, sell, and consume that produce.

The second note of dissent comes from Karp's (2013c) *Los Angeles Times* reporting on the county-led enforcement efforts that preceded passage of the 2014 state law, which included this brief interview with a farmer who was caught in the crackdown and subsequently banned from selling at farmers markets:

One of the sanctioned farmers, Victor Gonzalez of Atkins Nursery in Fallbrook, did not contest that his vendors had on three occasions sold produce not grown by the farm, records show. But he appealed the penalty to the California Department of Food and

Agriculture, asking that he not be suspended from participating at farmers markets because that would "cause him and his employees a great hardship." In a decision issued Tuesday, the agency's staff counsel affirmed his suspension for six months. Speaking by phone Thursday night, Gonzalez said his workers had mistakenly placed fruit from another farm on his farm's tables at markets. "I fired those people, and I'll pay the fine, but please let me work, or I'm dead," he said.

The interview is a curious inclusion in an article that is otherwise quite celebratory of enforcement. What is more curious is that Gonzalez's pleas here go entirely unremarked upon. He says that he has fired the employees responsible, but there is no concern for the employees who have lost their jobs. The article notes that he has been suspended for six months. Gonzalez states that if he is suspended, he is "dead," but the article simply moves on, as if what he is quoted as saying here was never said. He is unintelligible.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have examined how the fantasy of real food contributes to the affective constitution of farmers markets. This examination advances the overall argument in two main ways. First, the arguments in this chapter demonstrate the extent of the influence of the fantasy. The key question throughout the chapter has been: How do people respond to unsatisfactory experiences at farmers markets? A variety of responses are plausible. We might imagine disillusioned shoppers replacing farmers market visits with shopping other markets. We might imagine justice-minded people taking the opportunity of disappointment to imagine other more directly confrontational ways of reforming the food system. We might imagine those in positions of power and responsibility -- those that manage, oversee, or govern farmers markets -- deploying any of the tools at their disposal short of state repression to adjust the incentive structures so that fraud is less appealing. Instead, the dominant response has been to call for (and, in the most decisive instance, to actually legislate) a purification of the marketplace. I have noted the different ways that this response is ironic and contradictory, and argued that these

responses are inexplicable unless we presume that people are working with a fantasy logic. Purification becomes sensible only if we presume that dissatisfaction is a product of some form of contamination.

Second, this chapter more clearly illustrates the existence of the reactionary undercurrent in the discourse of real food suggested in the previous chapter. In that chapter, I argued that the tendency towards “defensiveness” identified in local food politics is rooted in an appeal to a normative social order that valorizes purity. In this chapter, I have shown some of the ways that this appeal becomes mobilized in discourse against contaminating presences of various kinds. It is true that the categories identified as unwanted do not obviously articulate with racist or classist classification. The point is not to suggest that these identifications anticipate more explicit exclusions (no “residents only” farmers markets are coming to California). Local food *already* has an acknowledged problem with accessibility. The point is that these are the dynamics that reproduce those boundaries when they are seen to falter.

The next chapter examines how farmers markets are constituted as privileged sites for the ways of knowing food valorized in the real food fantasy. Chapter 5 explains in some detail how these ways of knowing are defined as both natural and cultural -- as products of a “biocultural evolution” as Michael Pollan puts it. These ways of knowing are then mourned as corrupted by or lost to the ways of knowing preferred by modern food science. Chapter 5 also addresses the unique role that farmers markets are supposed to play in the project of recovering these ways of knowing. These arguments will address some of the remaining unanswered questions by explaining the search for purity that underwrites the affects discussed here, and by providing a clearer picture of what is imagined to be at stake in farmers market interactions.

Chapter 5: Real Food and the (re)Education of Desire

The basic argument of this dissertation is that the exclusions and erasures that have plagued local food are built into the practices that realize localness. In Chapter 2, I reviewed the literature on exclusions and erasures in local food, explained how the dominant theorization of localness (constructionism) was limited, and suggested “realization” as an alternative. Chapter 3 proposed the fantasy of real food as the discourse that effects this realization and indicated how the internal logic of that fantasy would, if realized, lead to the kinds of patterned exclusions and erasures that trouble local food. Chapter 4 demonstrated the influence of the fantasy in the affective constitution of farmers markets and showed how this produced the threat of contamination as the major matter of concern animating reform projects. The reforms and calls for reform discussed in that chapter are, from my perspective, counterproductive -- moving local food away from the “inclusivity” and “openness” hoped for by advocates of reflexive localism.

One concrete outcome was dramatically increased state surveillance and state punishment in California farmers markets, and the celebration of the same by observers both in California and elsewhere. What should have given them pause -- the contradiction between celebrating farmers markets as sites where consumers could know their farmers and celebrating state surveillance of those same farmers because they were otherwise unknowable -- did not. Why not? And, how hopeful can we really be about the prospects of reflexive localism if such a striking contradiction failed to register? This chapter seeks to address these questions by examining more directly the production of boundaries between what is sensible and insensible, or legible and illegible, in the context of local food. More specifically, this chapter takes up the ways of knowing that are valorized in the fantasy of real food -- what kinds of knowledges do these modes of engagement allow us access to, and what kinds are obscured?

In the following section, I identify two ways of knowing that are said to have been lost according to the narrative of real food -- the ability to acquire unmediated knowledge of food via direct sensory experience, and the ability to acquire deep traditional wisdom regarding food via participation in an established food culture. The next section then discusses how the discourse of real food proposes to recover these ways of knowing food and highlights the unique role of farmers markets in that project of recovery. Specifically, farmers markets are sites which exclude the processed foods that thwart the efforts to know via sensory experience and provides for a new food culture which recovers, nurtures, and sustains traditional food wisdom. These sections draw on interviews with Alice Waters and writing from Michael Pollan (in particular, his 2008 *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*) to specify the key tenets.

The two sections that follow take up the valorized ways of knowing in turn, drawing on episodes from my fieldwork in San Francisco farmers markets to illustrate the influence of the real food discourse in shaping how people approach knowledge problems in farmers markets, and then to identify the limits of those ways of knowing. Many of the ordinary practices of farmers markets are organized around the unique sensory experiences available in those markets -- including especially formal programs designed to teach children how to taste and appreciate real food. There are indeed many things that are accessible to our sensory experience of produce, including important lessons about seasonality and perhaps even soil health. As I will argue, however, there are also important features of food production and distribution that cannot be known by sensory experience, that a focus on these ways of knowing actually obscures.

Practices organized around the popular “know your farmer” slogan offer a second way of knowing about food in farmers markets. It is true that vendors at farmers markets (more likely employees than farmer-owners) often do know quite a bit about the food they sell, and it is

possible to learn important things from them. However, as argued earlier, the discourse of real food warps how consumers “know” farmers and their employees. As I show, this has the effect of limiting the scope of farmers market interactions and predetermining to a significant degree what consumers can learn. In particular, I will argue here that the figuration of farmers as bearers of a kind of natural wisdom is a deeply patronizing and ultimately damaging form of respect. It makes their self-interest obscene and renders vendors who violate farmers market norms entirely unknowable.

The Gospel of Lush Produce

There is no perfect consistency to the various accounts of the loss of real food, but they are often founded on a yearning for an unmediated personal connection to the natural world in the form of an ability to know real food directly, through senses of taste, touch, smell, and so on. As Michael Pollan (2008) puts it, the prehistory of real food is, almost literally, a paradise of knowing that is uncorrupted by motive or agenda outside of eating well:

In many cases, long familiarity between foods and their eaters leads to elaborate systems of communication up and down the food chain so that a creature's senses come to recognize foods as suitable by their taste and smell and color... Ripeness in fruit is often signaled by a distinctive smell (an appealing scent that can travel over distances), or color (one that stands out from the general green), or taste (typically sweet). Ripeness, which is the moment when the seeds of the plant are ready to go off and germinate, typically coincides with the greatest concentration of nutrients in a fruit, so the interests of the plant (for transportation) align with those of the plant eater (for nutriment). (p. 103-104)

This faith in direct sensory experience is especially important for the narrative Alice Waters constructs. It is the conviction with which Waters brings peaches to middle school students, expecting the “scales to fall from their eyes” (Orenstein 2004). It is the reason that she is “lapses into raptures over a head of kale” (Plummer 1992), and the reason her recent memoir is titled *Coming to My Senses* (Waters et al. 2017). She is the founding chef of Chez Panisse, one of

the most influential fine dining restaurants in the United States. Yet, she is now most famous for her ability to shop and to taste -- an image she seems to cultivate in her public statements. The very first line of *Coming to My Senses* begins "Here is how I cook: First I'm at the farmers' market..." (p. ix). Elsewhere, she explains how her sourcing standards emerged from her tastes rather than any initial interest in sustainability or ethics:

Well, really when we started, I was never looking for sustainable farmers or organic food. I was really looking for taste. And so every day, because we had that one simple, you know, four-course menu, we had to come up with these ideas. And we had to go out and look for those ingredients. And I think it might have pushed us more quickly into the realization that the produce and the - all of the ingredients that we get really make Chez Panisse what it is. (Waters 2011)

Here, Waters is explaining how Chez Panisse initially came to its sourcing policies in an interview for a National Public Radio story celebrating the 40th anniversary of the opening. In her telling, the identification of Chez Panisse with local and organic sourcing is a kind of accident -- it was her uncompromising hunt for the *taste* of real food that led her to the most conscientious local producers.

Pollan, too, finds a place in contemporary life for this foundational knowledge when he discusses how gardening can revive people's "ancient evolutionary bargain" with real food (p. 198-199). But for Pollan, this direct sensory knowledge of nature and health constitutes a sort of prehistory. In his accounts, it has been incorporated into, and to some extent subsumed by, a different sort of essentialism:

[M]ore than many other cultural practices, eating is deeply rooted in nature -- in human biology on one side and in the natural world on the other. The specific combinations of foods in a cuisine and the ways they are prepared constitute a deep reservoir of accumulated wisdom about diet and health and place. Many traditional culinary practices are the products of a kind of biocultural evolution, the ingenuity of which modern science occasionally figures out long after the fact. In Latin America, corn is traditionally eaten with beans; each plant is deficient in an essential amino acid that happens to be abundant in the other, so together corn and beans form a balanced diet in the absence of meat. (p. 174-175)

This socially organized knowledge of food, developed over time through “a kind of biocultural evolution,” builds on and exceeds what can be known through direct sensory experience, codifying the accumulated wisdom regarding right relationships between culture and nature into traditional diets, techniques of preparation, and rituals. For Pollan especially, this harmony between culture and nature represents the true prelapsarian state of real food.

Pollan attributes the fall from grace to the advent of modern food science -- and specifically its codification into what he calls the “Western diet” predicated on the ability to break down “whole” foods and reconstitute them into “foodlike substances.” The tragedy of food science was twofold. First, it undermined the reliability of human senses:

One of the problems with the products of food science is that, as Joan Gussow has pointed out, they lie to your body; their artificial colors and flavors and synthetic sweeteners and novel fats confound the senses we rely on to assess new foods and prepare our bodies to deal with them. Foods that lie leave us with little choice but to eat by the numbers, consulting labels rather than our senses. (p. 149)

The second tragedy is related -- the theft from “Culture” of authority in food knowledge and its enclosure by nutrition science:

[F]or most of human history, humans have navigated the question without expert advice. To guide us we had, instead, Culture, which, at least when it comes to food, is really just a fancy word for your mother. What to eat, how much of it to eat, what order in which to eat it, with what and when and with whom have for most of human history been a set of questions long settled and passed down from parents to children without a lot of controversy or fuss. But over the last several decades, mom lost much of her authority over the dinner menu, ceding it to scientists and food marketers (often an unhealthy alliance of the two) and, to a lesser extent, to the government, with its ever-shifting dietary guidelines, food-labeling rules, and perplexing pyramids. (p. 3)

Pollan, borrowing a term from Grygory Scrinis (2008), describes this transfer of legitimacy as *nutritionism*, which he calls the “official ideology of the Western diet” (p. 11). For Pollan, then, the current fallen state we must navigate is one in which our natural senses have been rendered

unreliable for knowing food and the traditional authorities we might turn to in its stead have been thoroughly undermined.

If there is an equivalent fall from grace in Waters' accounting of real food, it is certainly the advent of fast food. However, Waters is much more reluctant to concede anything to the appeal of processed foods. She insists that our taste for manufactured snacks or fast food burgers is illusory in some relatively strong sense -- they would disappear if we knew the taste of real peaches or real beef. This is important because she founds her authority of real food on her own ability to directly sense the virtuousness of farming practices by their fruit. And, although she has in fact made a unique career in exploiting this ability, she must insist that the ability is a general one -- something anyone could do with some retraining. The corresponding culture problem for Waters is what she calls "fast food culture," which instills "fast food values" (disposability, sameness, cheap, etc.).

It is easy to see the appeal of such an account -- Pollan's seemingly liberatory combination of naturalism and traditionalism on one side (not to mention an invitation to share in Waters' apparent superpower), against a reductionist, inconsistent, and possibly corrupt food science on the other. But on closer inspection, this narrative of loss has some troubling features. First, we should not ignore the fact that the appeal of this account depends on gross historical distortions, as Rachel Laudan (2001, 2004, 2013) has often noted. Laudan contests virtually every aspect of what she calls "Culinary Luddism," including the valorization of fresh and natural food:

That food should be fresh and natural has become an article of faith. It comes as something of a shock to realize that this is a latter-day creed. For our ancestors, natural was something quite nasty. Natural often tasted bad. Fresh meat was rank and tough; fresh milk warm and unmistakably a bodily excretion; fresh fruits (dates and grapes being rare exceptions outside the tropics) were inedibly sour, fresh vegetables bitter... Natural was usually indigestible. Grains, which supplied from fifty to ninety percent of the calories in most societies have to be threshed, ground, and cooked to make them edible. Other plants, including the roots and fibers that were the life support of the societies that did not eat grains, are often downright poisonous. Without careful processing green

potatoes, stinging taro, and cassava bitter with prussic acid are not just indigestible, but toxic. (2001, p. 36-37)

And the vilification of fast food:

[F]ar from being an invention of the late twentieth century, fast food has been a mainstay of every society. Hunters tracking their prey, fishermen at sea, shepherds tending their flocks, soldiers on campaign, and farmers rushing to get in the harvest all needed food that could be eaten quickly and away from home. The Greeks roasted barley and ground it into a meal to eat straight or mixed with water, milk, or butter (as the Tibetans still do), while the Aztecs ground roasted maize and mixed it with water to make an instant beverage (as the Mexicans still do). City dwellers, above all, relied on fast food. When fuel cost as much as the food itself, when huddled dwellings lacked cooking facilities, and when cooking fires might easily conflagrate entire neighborhoods, it made sense to purchase your bread or noodles, and a little meat or fish to liven them up. (p. 38-39)

It is indeed jarring to realize just how recent the sensibilities we supposedly need to “recover” really are. The most common rejoinder to this line of criticism is that this kind of nostalgia has important political uses, even if it does not present an accurate historical account (e.g. Donati 2005). That is, bad history is expedient (or even necessary) for mobilizing people against the current food system. But the other lesson that we get from Laudan’s history -- one that comes through more in how her history unfolds (2013) rather than in her polemics (2001, 2004) -- is a sense that for most people, in all places at all times, decisions about what and how to eat are made under conditions of serious constraint. Unlike Pollan’s (2006) “omnivore’s dilemma” which imagines an abstract human standing over the world and choosing from its bounty, Laudan’s eaters are always making the best of a situation determined as much by landlords as by landscape. In other words, decisions about food and eating are settled not so much by “tradition” as by opportunity and by power -- and the problem with a nostalgia that erases power is that it is expedient mostly for the powerful.

Thus, more than the technical inaccuracies, what should trouble us about this romantic narrative is that what we are said to have lost is an *innocent* way of knowing. This is obviously the case with direct sensory experiences of nature, which is essentially an instinctual way of

knowing that emerges from the “ancient evolutionary bargain” between people and food. But it is also true of the “deep reservoir of accumulated wisdom” that is codified in traditional cultures (and is also, somehow, “just a fancy word for your mother” -- more on that below). That, too, is the product of a “biocultural evolution” that was more or less unintentioned, unreflexive, and unchanging (“a set of questions long settled”) until traditional authorities were undermined. In other words, the way of knowing that we are said to have lost is *presubjective* in a very real sense (the parallels to both the Garden of Eden story and the fundamental fantasy in Lacan are very clear here). If people were eating well, it was not really on purpose; if people knew how to maintain their health or the health of their environment, it was not really by their own design. Thus, what Pollan presents as the utmost respect for tradition, culture, and “mothers” is really only patronizing acknowledgement -- the reason that the keepers of traditional wisdom have conceded so much to industrialization and nutritionism, it turns out, is that they are only mothers who do not really know why they do what they do.

Recovering Lost Ways of Knowing

As noted in Chapter 3, fantasies do not simply evoke a sense of loss. They also constitute the prospect of recovery as a practical project (they create “inhabitable spaces” as Ghassan Hage puts it). For real food, part of this practicality is established in the narrative of loss -- we know that regaining real food is possible because we once had it. But Pollan argues that this alone is insufficient:

Most of what we need to know about how to eat we already know, or once did until we allowed the nutrition experts and the advertisers to shake our confidence in common sense, tradition, the testimony of our senses, and the wisdom of our mothers and grandmothers. Not that we had much choice in the matter. By the 1960s or so it had become all but impossible to sustain traditional ways of eating in the face of the industrialization of our food... The supermarket had become the only place to buy food, and real food was rapidly disappearing from its shelves, to be replaced by the modern cornucopia of highly processed foodlike products. And because so many of these

novelties deliberately lied to our senses with fake sweeteners and flavorings, we could no longer rely on taste or smell to know what we were eating. (p. 13-14)

Here, Pollan starts out by reaffirming the plausibility of the project, suggesting that what we really need to do is to recover “confidence” in our traditional ways of knowing food. But he also argues that, starting at some point in the last fifty years or so, we did not have “much choice in the matter” (of retaining confidence?) because the practices that sustain this knowledge were undermined by industrialization, supermarkets, and “novelties” that “lied to our senses.”

Thankfully, this has changed. He continues:

Most of my suggestions come down to strategies for escaping the Western diet, but before the resurgence of farmers' markets, the rise of the organic movement, and the renaissance of local agriculture now under way across the country, stepping outside the conventional food system simply was not a realistic option for most people. Now it is. We are entering a postindustrial era of food; for the first time in a generation it is possible to leave behind the Western diet without having also to leave behind civilization. And the more eaters who vote with their forks for a different kind of food, the more commonplace and accessible such food will become. Among other things, this book is an eater's manifesto, an invitation to join the movement that is renovating our food system in the name of health -- health in the very broadest sense of that word. (p. 14)

What ultimately establishes real food a practical project, it turns out, is the new (or rather “resurgent”) availability of certain products and markets in which to buy those products. But notice: In this extended passage, the focus seems to have shifted from a knowledge of real food that has bases in not only in “the testimony of our senses” but also common sense, tradition, and “mothers and grandmothers” to the wide availability of foods that simply do not “lie to our senses.” Meanwhile, the project itself has changed from recovering a certain knowledge of how to eat (or simply recovering “confidence” in that knowledge, even) to a “movement” that promises to essentially remake the world.

It is telling that Pollan does not simply recommend adopting any one of the many “traditional diets” that he praises throughout his book. One might even argue that supermarkets, with their ability to bring in a huge variety of foods from around the world, would be rather useful

for people looking to approximate any number of different diets. But for Pollan, it seems that tradition and mothers and grandmothers are adequate stores of wisdom only when the task was merely to internalize and transmit lessons learned from nature; as unreflexive agents who only know how to respond wisely to natural stimuli, they are too susceptible to environmental changes to be reliable guides in the modern food landscape. I am not the first to notice the difficulty Pollan can have with respecting the subjectivity of his “eaters.” Julie Guthman (2007) notes a similar problem in *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, in which Pollan (2006) identifies the ubiquity of cheap junk food as the primary cause of the obesity “epidemic.” He believes he is making a structural argument -- the problem is some combination of corn subsidy, advertising, and industry making these foods so available. However, Guthman asks, “If junk food is so ubiquitous that it cannot be resisted, how is it that some people remain (or become) thin?” (2007, p. 78). The implicit answer is one that recalls ugly colonial discourses about masses unfit to govern themselves -- on some level, Pollan simply does not consider people who eat badly to be full moral agents. What the “resurgence of farmers' markets, the rise of the organic movement, and the renaissance of local agriculture” offers, then, is not only the increased availability of real food that communicates honestly with our senses. It also offers a new culture -- or at least a new set of durable social relationships -- on which to ground a more reliable authority on real food.

This comes through most clearly in Pollan’s advice for “escaping the Western diet,” which essentially come down to shopping for food differently. There is a lot of advice on how to shop familiar spaces differently (avoid foods with unpronounceable ingredients, shop the edges of the supermarket, and so on), but Pollan is clearly most interested in advising people to shop in new spaces entirely:

You won't find any high-fructose corn syrup at the farmers' market. You also won't find any elaborately processed food products, any packages with long lists of

unpronounceable ingredients or dubious health claims, nothing microwavable, and, perhaps best of all, no old food from far away. What you will find are fresh whole foods picked at the peak of their taste and nutritional quality -- precisely the kind your great grandmother, or even your Neolithic ancestors, would easily have recognized as food. Indeed, the surest way to escape the Western diet is simply to depart the realms it rules: the supermarket, the convenience store, and the fast-food outlet. (p. 157-158)

For Pollan, the value of farmers markets is that they enable and sustain a specific way of knowing food. Farmers markets are not only places where real food is available, but also places where foods that lie are not present so that our natural (Neolithic?) relationship to food can be recovered and our senses can retrained.

But farmers markets (and other “short food chain” arrangements) have other important benefits as well. First, shopping at farmers markets encourages cooking from scratch (rather than from a can or a package), which Pollan describes as a “subversive act” (p. 200):

[W]hat these acts subvert is nutritionism: the belief that food is foremost about nutrition and nutrition is so complex that only experts and industry can possibly supply it. When you're cooking with food as alive as this -- these gorgeous and semigorgeous fruits and leaves and flesh -- you're in no danger of mistaking it for a commodity, or a fuel, or a collection of chemical nutrients. No, in the eye of the cook or the gardener or the farmer who grew it, this food reveals itself for what it is: no mere *thing* but a web of relationships among a great many living beings, some of them human, some not, but each of them dependent on the other, and all of them ultimately rooted in soil and nourished by sunlight. (p. 200-201)

As part of a set of practices including gardening and cooking, regular shopping at farmers markets recovers a holistic way of knowing food that resists the reductions of commodification and nutritionism. Instead, food is revealed to be a natural, interdependent “web of relationships” in which the health of any part depends on the health of the rest.

More generally, farmers markets replicate the former role of tradition for individual eaters by codifying knowledge of right relationships between human culture and nature in the form of edifying practices and rituals. I have already quoted Pollan at length discussing how the awareness of participants changes in “a market in which food producers meet the gaze of

eaters and vice versa” (p. 161, quoted in Chapter 3). Such markets break down the “wall of ignorance” that “fosters carelessness” in thinking about and working with food. They allow farmers to impress upon consumers the “nobility” of the food they eat and teach them its “story” (p. 160). When farmers market shopping becomes a regular practice, moreover, “we are reminded every week that we are indeed part of a food chain and dependent for our health on its peoples and soils and integrity -- on *its* health” (p. 161). Here, the authority of farmers comes to replace the authority previously held in traditional cultures (according to Pollan) by mothers and grandmothers -- they are stewards of a specific knowledge of nature whose presence is presumed to be edifying for the rest of us.

The Education of Desire

Although sensory knowledge of real food is said to be natural and to come naturally, even Alice Waters acknowledges that our senses require a sort of retraining to undo the damage caused by the flood of foods that lie (the students refused her Frog Hollow peaches, after all). This re-education of taste is a major theme in the discourse of real food. As discussed above, it is ever-present in the pages of Michael Pollan’s books and magazine profiles of Alice Waters. This also remains the central goal of the international Slow Food organization that insists, ridiculously, that what is good for the world and what is pleasurable are identical -- and thus the only important political task is to convince consumers of this fact.

Alongside these attempts at discursive persuasion are practices that target this sensory ability directly, including informal practices that take place among consumers and vendors, and formal educational programs for children. The most basic informal practice includes ordinary conversations about how to choose the best produce -- the colors, scents, and textures that indicate the sweetest peaches, for example. The most well-known formal program is probably Alice Waters’ own “Edible Schoolyards” project.

Waters has learned a thing or two since the Frog Hollow peach debacle. These days at the Edible Schoolyard, the first lesson for incoming sixth graders is picking and roasting an ear of corn from the garden. For many it's the first time they've tasted the fresh, and certainly the fresh-picked, version of their favorite vacuum-packed vegetable. While tilling the garden, they're encouraged to graze the Cape gooseberry patch or snack from the esplanades of fruit trees. Slowly, carefully and always emphasizing participation in cultivation and preparation, students are enticed to try the more ewww-producing stuff: asparagus, kale, fava beans. (Orenstein 2004)

In the course of my fieldwork, I participated in both types of practices. In the first, I was an employee for Cipponeri Farms at the Heart of the City Farmers Market passing out fruit samples for customers to taste. In the second, I volunteered at an educational program hosted in the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market called Foodwise Kids.

Sampling

Most markets allow vendors to put out samples of their produce (far more common for fruit than for vegetables, for obvious reasons). Most fruit vendors will simply leave out a container of cut fruit for customers to try. They will also respond to requests, depending on how busy they are, and wash and cut a piece of fruit for customers to try if the samples have run out. At the stand I worked at, however, we worked much harder to push our samples onto passersby. We stood in front of our tent engaging everyone that walked by, whether or not they showed any interest. Twice a week for the duration of the summer, we told people that they were tasting the absolute best of the season.

Early on, I asked about this. The stand I worked for was one of several stone fruit vendors at the market, and the most expensive (we sold for \$2.50 per pound while other vendors were selling at \$2 or even \$1.50). But it seemed like Cipponeri was the most popular. I was told that it was because they (we) put more time and energy into selling at the market than the other vendors. They brought more people to the market than other vendors -- usually three or four people, plus me during peak hours from 10am to 4pm. During those hours, we spent

most of our time cutting and handing out samples for everyone who walked by. Instead of (or sometimes in addition to) the small tubs of samples that other vendors put out on the tables next to the fruit, we filled much larger tubs with samples and carried these out from our tent. We were supposed to announce what we were doing, loudly, so that people could hear us throughout the market (I was bad at this part). And one of us was always picking, washing, and cutting samples to go out (I was eventually demoted to this job most of the time because everyone else was so much louder).

Most of these interactions with consumers and fruit samples were unremarkable. They thanked us and kept walking, or they thanked us and went to buy some of whatever they had tried. Sometimes, they said something like “oh that was great” and asked for another sample. We were supposed to tell them at this point that they should buy some if they liked it (“\$2.50 a pound, but right now you can get 5 pounds for \$10!”) but I almost always just handed them more. More rarely, people would ask the kinds of questions we are supposed to ask at farmers markets -- where is the farm? is it organic? do you use pesticides? -- and I would do my best to answer before handing them off to a coworker (Turlock, about 100 miles away, not organic but no pesticides, Nick/Josi/Miguel can tell you more).

Sometimes, people wanted to talk about what they had just eaten, which initially didn't make sense to me. They told me about how amazing the peach or the nectarine I had just handed them was, and now I was awkwardly thanking them for the compliment which did not seem quite right. Eventually, I learned the right response from listening to my coworkers: Yes, these peaches are incredible, and you can buy some right here! I remember being a little bit resistant to that line. It seemed so clearly like a sales pitch (which, again, I was terrible at) and thus disingenuous. But the important clause is the first one. What I eventually figured out was that people were not telling me about the taste of the peach (as if I did not know) or

complimenting me on a job I had actually not done (producing such peaches). They were telling themselves that the peaches were great -- exercising their senses, enjoying them, testing them, performing a ritual -- and maybe looking for some confirmation from someone like an authority.

Foodwise Kids

Over the course of my year and a half conducting fieldwork in San Francisco, I participated in a variety of different activities. One of the shortest was the time I spent as a volunteer for the Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture's (CUESA) Foodwise Kids program. CUESA manages the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market and organizes educational programs at the market for children. The Ferry Plaza market is the most famous farmers market in the city. It was highlighted in both Duane's (2009) "Foodie Beware" article discussed in Chapter 4 and Orenstein's (2004) "Food Fighter" profile of Alice Waters discussed above and in Chapter 3. One recent *Huffington Post* headline called it "San Francisco's Church of Food" (Fineman 2015). CUESA's "Foodwise Kids" program at the Ferry Plaza hosts field trips for elementary school classes (grade 1 through grade 5) and, as in the Alice Waters story above, much of the programming is designed to encourage children to try new and unfamiliar foods. I was a volunteer for this program three Tuesdays in a row, from 10:30am to 2pm, starting in late April of 2015 and ending at the end of the school year.

Here is what we did. The students arrived and were seated in a small demonstration room directly adjacent to the market in the Ferry Building. The staff member who organized the volunteers then gave a short presentation on the market -- what a farmers market was, where the farmers came from, why it was important for healthy eating and a healthy planet. They asked the class: Can anyone tell me what season it is? (Spring, not yet summer). Can someone tell me, what is your favorite fruit that grows in the spring? (Apples are delicious! I love apples! But we won't have apples here until the winter. That's their growing season. Anyone else?)

Then, the kids were told that they will be going out into the market to see and try new things. At this point, the staff member would explain how important it was to be open to trying new foods (I love trying new foods but it can be scary, even for me!). Before the kids arrived, we had prepared something in the oven in the back room (I remember kale leaves toasted with salt and olive oil) and, after everyone had washed their hands, the kids were given a chance to try it out.

The staff member explained their system for trying something new, before just putting something into your mouth, organized around the five senses: Look at the food with your eyes. What colors do you see? What other foods do you know that are that color? Touch the food with your hands. What is the texture? Is it rough or smooth? Soft or hard? Smell the food. What does it smell like? Does it smell sweet? Or earthy? Bring the food up and listen to it with your ear. Maybe shake it or squeeze it a little. What do you hear? (I never understood this part, but maybe it is because elementary school students just know that there are five senses so it is stranger for them to skip one.) And finally, take just a little bit and taste it. Try to taste it with different parts of your mouth, starting with the tip of your tongue. Even if it tastes strange at first, think about it carefully. Maybe it is strange in a good way! And now, if you really don't like it you can spit it out, knowing that you gave it a real shot. But you should be proud that you tried something new! How often do we get to do that?

After this lecture, we divided the class into groups of 5 to 8 students (depending on the size of the class and the number of volunteers) and took them around the farmers market with a worksheet and \$7 in market tokens. I always had to steer the kids away from the prepared foods because they immediately wanted the caramel popcorn or some other snack. As we went around the produce stalls, I had the kids try different samples of fruit and fill out the worksheet as a group. Then, we decided what we would buy with our tokens to share with the rest of the class. The kids were generally only interested in the fruit. That was fine with me, but a basket of

early season cherries or blueberries would cost the entire \$7, so I always had to convince them to get citrus instead. Back in the classroom, we all lined up to wash our hands again at the sink and then sat with our groups to cut and season the things we had bought with special knives that were adequate for cutting produce but somehow not dangerous to handle. If something needed to be cooked, the volunteer would take it to the oven. Then we would plate it and present it to the class before everyone got a chance to eat a little bit of what everyone had prepared. The experienced volunteers knew to steer the students toward some vegetable that would toast well, or would at least make a different kind of salad. My groups made a citrus-heavy fruit salad every time. At the end, they would ask the class if anyone had tried anything new today, and we would applaud for them. Then the kids would head back to the school and the volunteers would clean up.

The Limits of Taste

These stories give some indication of the kinds of investments and coordinated efforts that have to be made in order to realize something that we take to be “natural.” Even the best local peaches at the peak of their season are not quite enough on their own to guarantee the natural response. Adults use social cues, feedback and affirmation, to develop their tastes and learn to have confidence in them. Children benefit from literal training programs that help them develop (and acquire) their tastes early in life. What this suggests is that perhaps the confidence in direct sensory knowledge of real food is misplaced, and that “unmediated” knowledge of nature does not really exist.

But the real problem with valorizing direct sensory experience, of course, is that this mode of knowing has limits. I think it is generally true that fruit that is picked ripe is more flavorful than fruit that is picked early and ripened with the help of some chemical agent over weeks of transit. I am also happy to concede that it is possible for people like Alice Waters to be

able to make accurate inferences about the health of the soil from the taste (or smell or texture or look) of the produce that grew from that soil. But most of us will never get to that point, even with training. We will continue to lean on other indicators (like organic labelling or even just price) to give us clues about that. And moreover, no matter how sophisticated someone's palate might be, some things about the "health of the food chain" are simply impossible to taste -- wages or working conditions on the farm, for example, or the effects of the market itself on rental housing in the neighborhood, or the fuel efficiency of the trucks that carry produce into the city from the San Joaquin Valley.

The health of the eater may well be connected to the health of the food chain, as Michael Pollan suggests, but only in limited ways. The food chain can be sick with a virulent strain of labor harassment and exploitation contracted through the border policies of a racist state, but that sickness will not touch the fruit. Promoting the idea that knowing food through direct sensory experience is somehow the truest or most natural way of knowing, then, serves to eclipse these other things we might otherwise want to know by making the limits of that natural way of knowing a little bit more obscure.

Knowing Your Farmer

There are two aspects to the epistemology of real food. The first is the idealization of direct sensory experiences -- a method of knowing food that comes directly from nature and would be the only guide we needed if not for the deceptions of modernity. Farmers markets are valuable because they allow this natural way of knowing to flourish by excluding fake foods, but there are limits to how much we can know with that approach. The second aspect is the store of traditional wisdom regarding diet, health, and nature in the form of culture, transmitted through the domestic authority of mothers and grandmothers. For Pollan, farmers markets are the durable social relations that replicate the role of traditional cultures for modern eaters --

immersive sites that transmit wisdom through their own domesticated authorities and edifying practices and rituals. These practices are organized around the injunction to “know your farmer” -- the bearer and communicator of traditional-natural wisdom in the new food culture.

Unfortunately, this second aspect is equally limited, and even more obfuscating. Pollan laments how the “story and identity of the food” gets lost when the “only information communicated between consumers and producers is a price” (2008, p. 160). Elsewhere, in the 2010 essay that praises farmers markets as the a “new public square,” Pollan (2010) elaborates on the aspiration to overcome “the traditional role of consumer”:

Though seldom articulated as such, the attempt to redefine, or escape, the traditional role of consumer has become an important aspiration of the food movement. In various ways it seeks to put the relationship between consumers and producers on a new, more neighborly footing, enriching the kinds of information exchanged in the transaction, and encouraging us to regard our food dollars as “votes” for a different kind of agriculture and, by implication, economy. The modern marketplace would have us decide what to buy strictly on the basis of price and self-interest; the food movement implicitly proposes that we enlarge our understanding of both those terms, suggesting that not just “good value” but ethical and political values should inform our buying decisions, and that we’ll get more satisfaction from our eating when they do.

What Pollan has in mind here is an alternative market arrangement that replicates the naturally given “web of relationships” that constitutes a healthy food chain. In this market, the “neighborly footing” of exchange enables enriched communication in a way that parallels the natural systems of communication that have evolved between eaters and their foods. The problem is not only that consumers, as consumers, are notoriously bad at knowing in this way (they mostly just want to buy what is healthy and feel good about it), but also -- more importantly -- that the pretense of “neighborly footing” actually makes honest communication more difficult.

San Francisco Locals

Once, when I was working for Cipponeri Farms passing out stone fruit samples at their farmers market stand, I was on the other end of a field trip worksheet. A small group of children, perhaps late elementary school, approached me and started asking questions about the farm and our fruit. I directed them to a coworker, Miguel, who could answer their questions better than I could. The first few questions were typical of this kind of exercise: What is the name of the farm? What do you grow? Where is the farm? How far away is it? But then: Why do you come to San Francisco? Josi, another coworker who was evidently also listening in, started giggling at this last question, which made Miguel start laughing. A third coworker came over to ask what was so funny, and Miguel repeated the question for him: Why did they come all the way to San Francisco? For some reason this made Josi laugh uncontrollably, and then everyone was laughing too hard to talk.

Cipponeri Farms is located about a hundred miles away from San Francisco in a San Joaquin valley town of about 70,000 people called Turlock. On good days, it takes about three hours to drive into the city in the mornings and four hours to drive back. When traffic is bad, it can be much longer. Turlock, is also, unsurprisingly, very different from San Francisco in most ways (population, incomes, rents, demographics, education levels, industry and employment opportunities, etc.). The fruit that Miguel, Josi, and their coworkers grow, pick, pack into the truck at 3am, drive into the city at 5am, unload and set out on tables, and cut for samples all day -- that fruit is unquestionably local in San Francisco's farmers markets, but Miguel and Josi themselves are decidedly not locals in San Francisco. When they come "all the way to San Francisco," for them, it really is a trip to another sort of world, and they make the trip for the obvious reason. They do not come to San Francisco because this is part of their "local economy," because their own health depends on the health of eaters in the city, because they

do not want to lose sight of the “actual eaters” they grow for, or because they want to teach the city’s youth about the benefits of local, sustainable agriculture. They make the trip to the city because this is where inexplicably wealthy and alien people live -- people who will lecture them when they are eating Doritos behind the register, who seem to care an inordinate amount about the pesticides on their produce but have no sense of what it takes to actually grow anything at scale, who -- above all -- will buy what they grow for \$2.50 per pound.

What struck them as funny in the question, I think, is that they were embarrassed by the answers that came to mind. Perhaps it seemed inappropriate to explain that they were there for the money to children who only wanted a pat answer for a worksheet. Or perhaps they knew the kinds of answers they were expected to give presumed that the city and its people were somehow in their care, and it was in the moment too ridiculous to say out loud. Eventually Marissa, our sort-of boss, came over and sorted it all out. She came over from the scales to see what was going on, smiled, and told the rest of us to get back to work. Then she took the worksheet from the kids, led them away from the front of the tent, and helped them fill out what they needed. Incidentally, I still do not quite know what Marissa’s role was. She was the only white person I worked with besides Nick Cipponeri (the owner). She did not have a role on the farm and was not an employee. She also did not live in Turlock -- she met the truck in the city on market days, like I did. She was more like a partner or a consultant that helped them out at farmers markets. She initially trained me and seemed to be in charge of the stand when I first started. Then, at some point in the summer, she was gone and Nick started showing up instead. Later that summer, I saw her at a different farmers market in Half Moon Bay, about 30 miles south of the city, working a stand for a different farm. In any case, she was very kind with the kids, and fluent in the language that was needed.

More smiles? More money.

Miguel knows to yell “Fresh local peaches! Hand-picked! Peak of the season!” as he passes out samples. He is charismatic and engaging. When people accept a sample, he addresses them directly, seriously: “It will change your life,” and then immediately picks his head up to address everyone in earshot: “Life-changing peaches here!” It is a performance that is obviously a performance -- he is not trying to trick anyone into thinking he is their neighbor, he is putting on a show. Most farmers market interactions are not quite so dramatic, of course. Most farms do not employ enough people to have people out in front of their stalls shouting down the market in the way we did. Most markets discourage or prohibit their vendors from doing that anyway. But these interactions between vendors and customers are basically versions of the same performance.

The Miguel that shoppers at the farmers market get to know is a real person, of course. Over many weeks shoppers will learn his name and his way of handling himself in the market. They will perhaps find his mannerisms endearing, and perhaps also come to care on some level for his well-being -- or at least notice when he is not his usual self on a Sunday morning because he drank too much the night before. If they are attentive, they might even realize that Miguel is not the “farmer” they expect to encounter but rather an employee who has much less autonomy on days when the boss is present. But that relationship is not qualitatively different from the relationships that regular customers can have with other service workers. It is edifying in the same way that learning to care for bartenders or waiters can be edifying for rich people who have no personal experience with service work. The trouble comes with the real food fantasy’s invocation of community -- a discourse that, like nationalism, flattens differences across class lines (or geographic, racial, or gendered lines) to assert a common fate.

In this fantasy discourse, farm work is redefined as a kind of labor of love -- an expression of the care that emerges naturally in those who work the land, performed in service to the community. This labor is almost always understood as performed by "farmers." In contrast, employees have transparent interests (e.g. in wages) that make them awkward fits for the naturalizing narrative. Pollan, Waters, and other advocates of real food often articulate sentiments along these lines as a kind of respect for the labor that farmers perform, but this respect is patronizing. In particular, redefining farm labor in this way has the effect of not only obscuring the interests and presence of farmworkers, but farmer-owners as well. Casting the work of the farm as a natural expression of care has the effect of writing over the farmer's actual motives and rendering their self-interest obscene. Casting the work of the farm as a natural expression of care has the effect of writing over the farmer's actual motives and rendering their self-interest obscene. This warped understanding becomes a presence in the market when it is the ideological basis for formal programming, or when it is carried into informal interactions by those well-meaning consumers who hear Waters or read Pollan and aspire to take their advice. In those circumstances, the shared understanding that makes Miguel available to be known as a service worker is pushed away, replaced by a warped view that carelessly lumps him in with his employer and demands an altogether different kind of performance centered on a reified conception of "community interest."

This redefinition of farm labor is obfuscating in the same way that the 1970s demand for wages for housework was clarifying. It is true that in the case of farm labor, advocates of real food already insist on paying the "real cost," but that does not dispel the parallels here. (Indeed, this is a comparison that Pollan invites in his invocation of "mothers and grandmothers.") As Federici (1975) notes, the demand for wages is not really about the money itself: "When we view wages for housework in this reductive way we start asking ourselves: what difference could

some more money make to our lives?” Rather, the demand is a “political perspective” that exposes the common understanding of housework as a natural expression of love and care performed in service of the family for the manipulation that it is. Likewise, the insistence that farm labor is a labor of love, that bringing the fruits of that labor to market is an act of community service, and that all of this is somehow the product of some natural process, erases labor conditions as a matter of legitimate concern. Paying the “real cost,” then, is no more than a kind of gift bestowed by legitimate moral agents to unreflexive others who perform “natural” roles in service of “our” present and future.

Waters’ exhortation to “support the people who are taking care of the land so we’ll have a pure source of food in the future” (Plummer 1992), it seems, is little different from the patronizing support from conservative circles for wives and mothers who care for “our” children. The parallels are evident also in the reactions to women who violate the norms of motherhood and to vendors who violate the norms of farmers markets -- both are greeted with all of the unreflexive alarm generally reserved for perceived violations of the natural order. Against the modern food science and nutritionism that erodes their authority, Pollan defends “mothers and grandmothers” as keepers of culture and traditional wisdom. But as noted, this view sees women as appendages of a biocultural evolutionary process rather than as full moral agents. Thus women who fail to conform -- who are seen feeding their children junk food, for example -- can face rather severe sanctions. Notably, they are not presumed to know what they are doing, to be weighing the various factors that shape their lives and making difficult but informed tradeoffs (cf. Bowen et al. 2014). Similarly, farmers market vendors who violate norms cut deeply unsympathetic figures, as we have already seen in prior chapters. If those vendors were understood to be real people we might try to understand where they are coming from and

perhaps even reexamine the structures that constrain their choices. Instead, we cannot even really hear what they are trying to say.

In short, “farmers,” like “mothers,” do indeed play an important role in that essential acculturation process between nature and culture. When they fulfil their roles, they represent a kind of contact point with the natural order for the rest of us. But they are not quite the respected authorities of the interchange between nature and culture that they are represented as. Instead, their treatment in cases of violation reveal that they are ultimately regarded as mere appendages of the natural within that interchange. And because their failures or rebellions are on some level understood as violations of a pure and natural normative order, the only sensible recourse is to cast them out.

Conclusions

As noted in Chapter 3, the trauma that allows the discourse of real food to operate as a fantasy in the Lacanian sense is narrated as the loss of a kind of knowledge. In this chapter, I have filled in some of the details of that narrative of loss. First, we are said to have lost the ability to know food through the direct, unmediated experience of our natural senses, bestowed on humans as part of an “ancient evolutionary bargain” between eaters and their foods. Second, we are said to have lost more complex knowledge about diet, health, and ecology that had been codified in the form of “traditional cultures” -- itself a product of “biocultural evolution.” The advent of industrial food and modern food science is said to have rendered these ways of knowing unreliable -- the first because of the sudden availability of foods that “lie to our senses,” and the second because the “mothers and grandmothers” who were bearers of traditional knowledge, not realizing what they had, allowed the ideology of nutritionism to shake their “confidence” in their own wisdom. Crucially, farmers markets are said to play a central role in the recovery of both of these types of knowledge. Farmers markets revive the first way of knowing by excluding the foods that lie to

our senses and create the conditions for a version of the second way of knowing by installing farmers as the new keepers of wisdom for our contemporary food culture.

Drawing on fieldwork experiences, I then recounted some of the ordinary practices through which these ways of knowing have been instantiated in farmers markets and identified their limits. The first way of knowing is instantiated in practices that encourage sensory engagement with produce and is limited by the obvious narrowness of that kind of engagement. Of course, it does not take any special insight to realize that we cannot detect injustice in the food chain simply by tasting its fruits. What was surprising, however, was just how much it seemed that people wanted justice (or at least “sustainability”) and taste to align in this way -- and moreover, organized their practices as if they might be so aligned. The second way of knowing is instantiated in practices that encourage people to incorporate farmers market visits into their regular routines and, as part of these, to get to “know their farmers.” The difficulty here is not that the vendors at farmers markets are intrinsically unknowable. Instead, vendors -- or more specifically their interiority and their agency -- are rendered unknowable by the characterizations of farmers market transactions as “communal” and “neighborly” (to the extent that consumers go into these interactions with that in mind).

This chapter adds to the arguments made in previous chapters by illustrating the centrality of farmers markets to the real food fantasy -- why they are not simply one market arrangement among many, and thus what is at stake in struggles over the “character” of the market. I noted that it is not an accident that the figures who are said to be bearers of natural wisdom in both traditional cultures and farmers markets -- “mothers” and “farmers,” respectively -- are those that are depicted as extensions of a nurturing natural order. This understanding of farmers markets as sites which ideally effect a recovery of a kind of natural inheritance adds to the explanations in Chapter 4 regarding how farmers markets became such affectively charged

sites, and how concerns with the atmosphere of the market came to be understood in terms of “contamination.” The understanding of farmers as naturally caring agents of that recovery project makes clearer why vendors who violated market norms were met with so much anger and so little sympathy.

Finally, this chapter illustrates how the perhaps abstract exclusions attributed to localism in earlier chapters work their way into actual market practices -- not through discriminatory attitudes or behaviors, but rather through background discursive practices of reification and naturalization. People in the market are cast as appendages of a natural order or outsiders who contaminate that order, while the labor of both shopping and selling is obfuscated and mystified. The result is a kind of undercurrent in local food discourse that effectively strips some people of interiority and withholds from them status as full moral agents, while holding them accountable to a regressive natural order. It may not be explicitly racist or anti-feminist but it is in these ways compatible and resonant with racist and anti-feminist thought.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

Over the past few years, I have attended more than a few conference presentations on local food. Many of them start the same way, with images of the devastation wrought by the global food system: Giant mono-cropped fields being sprayed with some sinister chemical, anonymous brown agricultural workers suffering under the sun, uncomfortably dense crowds of animals waiting to die, aerial shots of massive pig shit lagoons (now overflowing as of this writing in September 2018 in North Carolina thanks to flooding caused by Hurricane Florence), and so on. Sometimes these montages include an image of a Walmart to indicate the concentration of corporate power or the death of community. The series may be capped off with a satellite image of the Earth to indicate some kind of link to global climate change. Finally, the speaker turns to local food and asks some ordinary question about its “promises and limits,” and smartly charts a middle path -- of course local food is good but it ought to be better. They never return to the global devastation.

In many ways this is understandable. If you study local food, you spend time with people who are, for the most part, serious, earnest, smart, generous, etc. They are doing what they can with what they have. The problems with the global food system are daunting in scale and scope, and to return to them would feel cruel and unfair -- like asking those people to answer for problems they did not cause and have little hope of solving. In this sense, neglecting to return to the problems is less a presumption that local actions will somehow add up to a resolution of global crises over time than a tacit admission that local food is simply not an answer to those crises. Indeed, it seems to me now that part of the power of local food is the way it imposes constraints on ways of knowing and intervening in the world that make the food system’s problems feel accessible. Anything that is not knowable in the prescribed way and cannot be addressed through the prescribed interventions is allowed to fade from view, leaving a world

organized by apparent certainties -- a bounded collection of facts, values, and actions from which to build a politics.

In this conclusion, I return to two problems introduced early on in the dissertation in order to clarify how the argument here differs from past evaluations of localism. The first concerns the role of satisfaction or enjoyment in local food. In general, popular writers (likely taking their cue from the Slow Food movement) often take enjoyment to be important and useful for drawing people to local food, while academics tend to be more concerned about the way a focus on individual satisfaction can be counterproductive for movement goals. These academics often posit “community” and “place-based” politics as antidotes to self-interest (e.g. Schnell 2013, DeLind 2011), but these (often uncritical) celebrations of community and place miss the constitutive role of enjoyment in producing each. I argue that the problems posed by these latter satisfactions deserve at least as much concern as self-interest. The second problem concerns the relationship between localism and democratic governance. Here, the mechanism for that relationship tends to be either simply presumed via a conflation of spatial and social relations (c.f. Hinrichs 2000) or filtered through a conception of “civic engagement” (e.g. Lyson 2004). The latter is acknowledged as problematic for the way it privileges locals who are white and middle class. What I add here is an argument for why we should be skeptical about projects that (implicitly or explicitly) seek to engage the privileged first and extend democratic participation to the margins second. These are the projects that are commonly defended as “better than doing nothing” and “offering a starting place,” but inscribe exclusionary logics and aesthetics that cannot be undone.

The most influential critiques of localism suggest that we can address its limits through reflexive localism (DuPuis & Goodman 2005) or strategic localism (Born & Purcell 2006). Although I have found both positions enormously useful as critique, the problems of enjoyment

and governance illustrate why I am less optimistic about them as solutions. My differences in these areas have implications for the kind of food politics I believe we should be struggling for. I conclude with a discussion of what that might look like.

On the Satisfactions of Localism

For many advocates of local food systems, the qualities of the food itself is decidedly secondary to local food's potential as a locus for a more communal, "place-based" organization of social life. For them, the emphasis on health from Michael Pollan or pleasure from Alice Waters misses the point. As DeLind (2011) in particular argues, these emphases come at the cost of narrowing the field of concerns -- instrumentalizing and individualizing local food so that it becomes about right and wrong acts of consumption rather than an avenue toward living a life in connection to a place and its community. Against this narrowing, she highlights a case in which a local food systems entails "daily negotiations... that lead to a sense of collective responsibility and ownership -- and to diversity," and adds that her locals "understand themselves as belonging to a place, simultaneously creating it and being created by it" (p. 280). Schnell (2013) similarly writes that for the CSA consumers that he interviewed, local food is "about the broader and more complex concept of place, and how to relate to, responsibly belong to, and identify with it" (p. 623). Kloppenburg et al. (1996) describe it simply as "becoming native to a place" (p. 34).

DeLind specifically decries what she calls the "Pollan emphasis" in local food movements but notes that her critique has to do with how his writings have been taken up in public -- how his "rules" on what to buy appear "context free... like magic bullets and self-help manuals" -- and not necessarily with "what Pollan had in mind" (p. 279). My own complaints with Pollan, by contrast, are almost the opposite. I find his advice on how to shop for food to be fairly innocuous and would much prefer if it remained in the world of individualized self-help. As I have indicated

throughout the dissertation, that advice becomes troubling precisely when his arguments exceed the narrow concerns of what to buy. I find his suggestion that we can resolve food safety issues and rid ourselves of pesky “regulations” by just “shaking the hand that feeds you” (2008, p. 160-161) frustrating and ridiculous for the way it romanticizes “connection.” I find his laments over how “the rise of fast food and collapse of everyday cooking... has damaged family life and community by undermining the institution of the shared meal” (2010) infuriatingly regressive and more than a little sinister. But it is precisely Pollan’s articulation of localism’s place-based emphasis that I find most damaging. Throughout his *In Defense of Food*, Pollan articulates his “food rules” as a project of recovery that can essentially be summarized as the recovery and renovation of a lost natural-cultural order in which people inherited knowledge of how to live in harmony with their places through an unchanging capital-C “Culture” (p. 3), itself a product of “a kind of biocultural evolution” (p. 174).

It is possible that DeLind’s characterization of the public uptake of Pollan (as individualized and context-free) is more accurate than my concern with the discursive production of an influential public seduced by his ideological claims -- at least most of the time. I do not really think that many shoppers are in self-conscious pursuit of a restored natural order as they go about their ordinary business. But first, I do think (and believe I have shown) that the general project of real food in which Pollan plays a leading role casts a kind of shadow over ordinary farmers market interactions -- in the nagging worry among some significant number of shoppers that they are inhabiting the market “incorrectly,” for example. Following Butler, I describe this effect in terms of the power of discourse to “set the trajectory” of desire. Tellingly, I find that simply viewing farmers market shopping as part of ordinary foodwork has the interesting effect of dispelling much of the anxiety associated with “right” ways of inhabiting the market. Second, I believe I have also shown that this deeper project is influential in those

specific and crucial times when there is a problem to be identified and articulated, when something (or someone) is singled out as a problematic presence, and when violations are identified and solutions need to be found. I have argued that my account makes sense of what would otherwise appear to be unmotivated affective excesses -- what is at stake is the enjoyment of a community, not the changing applicability of some shopping rules.

It is true that academics have been better at avoiding the explicit essentialisms and reifications that litter Pollan's writing, emphasizing instead the messy, the uncertain, the diverse, and the contingent. Kloppenborg et al. (1996) tout their foodshed work as a "project, not a blueprint" that "we must build... as we go" (p. 41). DeLind (2011) warns that "[a]s the local food movement grows more popular and more publicly manicured, the local food movement risks ignoring or dismissing diversity, necessity, and cultural pluralism" (p. 278). Schnell (2013) similarly emphasizes the "complex reality" of eating locally, arguing that the particularities of place-based practice take precedence over any generalizable definitions or principles (p. 625-626). But all of this sensitivity to process and complexity is deployed in the service of goals that are difficult to distinguish from Pollan's -- "community" and a "sense of ownership" and "becoming native to a place" -- which I have characterized as a Lacanian fantasy. Thus, while Pollan may be more prone to naturalizing, he is at least as sensitive as academics to the affective appeal of local food -- the existential anxiety that comes with contradictory "expert" nutritional advice, the sense that "culture" (and "family" and "community") are being lost, and the allure of an essentialist bedrock for knowing and belonging. When he writes that his "aim in this book is to help us reclaim our health and happiness as eaters" (2008, p. 7), he is simply being clearer and thus more honest about what localism really promises.

To be clear, I do not accuse academic advocates of localism of endorsing atavistic views of being and knowing (although I find that many fail to be adequately careful about such matters).

Nor does the argument presented here demonstrate that it is somehow theoretically impossible to imagine a localism which resists articulations with essentialist notions of nature and community (the point of many of the critiques of localism which seek to rehabilitate it). But in practice, such articulations are not only not resisted, they are rather at the core of the appeal that local food has today. Where local food is successful in capturing imaginations and motivating behavior in a way that exceeds narrow consumer self-interest, it is these essentialisms that make it possible by providing aesthetic and affective substance. The appealing essentialisms of the local are more than simply entryways into a more comprehensive and more nuanced understanding of food politics, as is often implicitly presumed. Inevitably, they contribute to the constitution of political subjects and political publics with essentialist sensibilities, committed to some definite notion of purity and corresponding fear of contamination.

In making this argument, this dissertation offers a challenge not only to localism but to its most influential critics as well. As much as I have learned from DuPuis and Goodman (2005) -- and especially their critique of what they call the "romantic anti-politics of localism studies" (p. 360-364) -- I find their argument for retaining localism as an organizing idea to be both shallow and short-sighted. As I noted, this argument rests more or less entirely on the fact that localism has proven to be a "powerful political force against the forces of globalization" (p. 364). But the local is made compelling (i.e. a "powerful political force") precisely through its articulation with the romantic notions of purity they warn against. Thus, while they argue for a "reflexive localism" which can address exclusions through the institution of inclusive democratic processes which remain open to continuous revision of goals and means, the findings here suggest that localism is itself an impediment to the kind of reflexivity that they call for.

On Local Governance

More than the carbon calculation of food miles or more sustainable agricultural practices (emphases on which can tend to produce singular “best practice” answers), the idea that local food systems are more amenable to democratic governance than the global food system is what sets local food apart. Kloppenburg et al. (1996), for example, list “food policy councils” alongside “community supported agriculture, farmers markets, sustainable farmers, [and] alternative consumers” as “building blocks for developing foodsheds” (p. 34). It is the prospect of governability that, in theory, makes local food systems adaptable to the complexity of particular places and the uncertainties associated with the preferred processual accounts.

Much of the common sense about the association between local food systems and democratic participation comes from Thomas Lyson’s (2004) influential *Civic Agriculture* (cf. Lyson 2000), which presents the argument that a localized food system results in a “higher level” of “civic welfare.” But it is important to be clear on what that latter term means. Lyson himself was not confused -- in a brief but crucial subsection titled “Theoretical Underpinnings of Civic Agriculture” (p. 64-66), he equates localized agriculture with “many small, locally owned firms,” and argues that this is preferable as an “economic base” for a “community” because it supports an “*economically independent middle class*” (emphasis original). That empowered middle class is then cited as the single most important variable and “driving force” behind democratic engagement and “civic spirit.” It is an unapologetic reduction of membership in democratic participation to small business owners and other members of the middle class -- for Lyson, it is only their “engagement,” “spirit,” and “welfare” that counts.

This, of course, offers little assurance for those who are concerned with intra-local power relations, as Rachel Slocum (2006) discovered when she tried to bring anti-racist practice to food policy councils. Notably, neither working class engagement in civic life nor the effects of

racism merit a mention in Lyson's book. Allen (2004), for example, warns that powerful locals can reify their own interests as the interests of the "community" -- an argument entirely consistent with Lyson's so long as you omit (as he does) any concern with the "engagement" of anyone less privileged. DuPuis and Goodman (2005) note specifically that privileged engagement "universalizes and elevates particular ways of eating as ideal" and warn that "possessive investments in our own racial privilege influences how we define problems and solutions" (p. 362). The findings in this dissertation are generally supportive of such claims, although the story here is complicated. What the findings here describe, I think, is the constitution of a public that reasons and desires using the categories defined by real food discourse. Much of the work here has been dedicated to illustrating how the books and articles I cite might inspire new understandings and incite new desires in their readers. Taken together, moreover, I have shown how these comprise a set of political-aesthetic sensibilities that are coherent enough (and shared widely enough) to shape norms regarding right ways of eating, shopping, and inhabiting markets -- all understood as expressions of something like a deeper natural order, once lost and struggling to reemerge.

This account adds to the concerns expressed by Allen, DuPuis and Goodman, and others by illustrating how privileged interests, tastes, and experiences acquire their material force through the way they shape intuitions about things like the "character" of a market or a community. These intuitions may appear to be relatively innocuous aesthetic judgments but, as I have shown, they inform the way that problems are articulated and solutions are proposed, and even help determine what sorts of issues are problematized at all. In other words, these are the judgments that often precede and channel explicit problematization by determining beforehand who is accorded status as a full moral agent and who is just a figure in someone else's narrative, who is understood as a rightful inhabitant and who is regarded as only a tourist or

worse. They are aesthetic judgments that twist how labor is perceived, ensuring that border and migration issues are excluded from the concerns of local food and contributing to the mystification of ordinary foodwork. Such intuitions are nebulous enough to provide an easy alibi for the exclusions they effect, while remaining robust enough to inspire vigorous defense when threatened.

In short, on the issue of local governance, my concern is that Lyson is right, that local food systems do indeed promote civic engagement from an empowered middle class, and that this is precisely the problem. Because if that works the way I suspect -- through the articulation of a public that is empowered and engaged because they understand themselves as rightful arbiters of community bounds and community norms in the service of some larger cause -- then localism is in reality more an obstacle than an aid to true democratic governance. The mechanisms of exclusion described by other critics imply that more diversity in local food spaces would do much to resolve the issue because it would make it more difficult to represent privileged white interests and experiences as universal, and I do not doubt that this would help. But on the account presented here, reform must contend not only with self-interested cynicism or ignorance but also, more perniciously, a commitment to a social order that is understood as somehow natural -- one that, as it happens, proliferates exclusions, erasures, and obfuscations along classed, raced, and gendered lines without ever having to be explicit about such things.

Eating in an Uncertain World

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that “the identity categories often presumed to be foundational to feminist politics, that is, deemed necessary in order to mobilize feminism as an identity politics, simultaneously work to limit and constrain in advance the very cultural possibilities that feminism is supposed to open up” (p. 200-201). The claim is that the categories

presumed necessary for mobilization limit feminist politics by inciting refusals and foreclosing intelligible expressions. Butler argues for a politics that is radically open to other possibilities:

The task here is not to celebrate each and every new possibility *qua* possibility, but to redescribe those possibilities that *already* exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible. If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old. Cultural configurations of sex and gender might then proliferate or, rather, their present proliferation might then become articulable within the discourses that establish intelligible cultural life, confounding the very binarism of sex, and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness. (p. 203)

But this has the effect of replacing seemingly straightforward questions that are essentially strategic in nature (e.g. what is best for women?) with questions that seem a step removed from more pressing political concerns (e.g. how to represent an open-ended proliferation of cultural configurations?).

In this dissertation, I have argued against the practice of taking “local” as a foundational category in food politics. I have attempted to illustrate how the substance, appeal, and foundational status of the category of “local” are not naturally given, but rather effects of specific discursive practices. While local has been “deemed necessary” for mobilization, I have argued that what makes it effective is also what limits “in advance” its emancipatory potential. Other thoughtful critiques of localism argue that the local can be deployed “strategically” (Born & Purcell 2006), or “reflexively” (DuPuis & Goodman 2005). What these miss is how local works as a category of desire. This means that politics organized around the idea of the local cannot easily shed its prejudices because it accumulates meanings and affects that exceed strategic ends and impair reflexive evaluation of ongoing exclusions. In the preceding chapters, I have shown how the fantasy of real food produces these effects by (1) valorizing “knowing consumption” as a mode of intervention, rendering issues such as farmworker concerns difficult

to acknowledge; (2) contributing to an affective environment in farmers markets in which problems are cast in terms of contamination, unhelpfully channelling dissatisfactions that might otherwise prompt reflexive appraisals into decidedly unreflexive purification projects; and (3) valorizing specific and limited ways of knowing food as naturally given, rendering any knowledge unavailable to those ways of knowing less intelligible.

But if, following Butler, we give up the “political syllogism” of mobilizing around the interests of a ready-made subject (a local community, for example), where does that leave local food? Or food politics in general? I do not have a full answer, but the arguments here suggest that we ought to resist the allure of accessibility and certainty offered by foundational narratives because these actually make the world less intelligible. The loftier articulations of eating “as an agricultural act” make it harder to think about shopping as ordinary foodwork. Nostalgia for invented food traditions make it harder to remember that feeding and eating has always had more to do with the structure of power in any given society than in wisdom bestowed by nature. Fantasies of connection and belonging make it harder to recognize the position of farmer-owners as capitalists or incorporate labor issues into food. The fantasy of community makes it harder to acknowledge the deep asymmetries at work in localized food chains. The construction of “local” spaces itself makes it harder to recognize the constitutive presence of nonlocal people and things. These contradictions and effacements become apparent in the little frictions that arise in ordinary practice, indicated by minor discomforts and nagging insecurities or even feelings of betrayal and outrage. It would be good to be reflexive about such things, to wrestle with whatever anxieties arise and reevaluate the commitments that produce them. But it is important to be clear about what such a call for reflexivity is actually asking. It would mean giving up the fantasy of authentic knowing and belonging, and the allure

of bounded problems and accessible action. It would mean reorienting politics to attend to the frictions rather than the satisfactions.

“Attending to the frictions” may not seem like much of a foundation, but it would make for a very different kind of food politics. It would lead us away from the kind of politics that starts with a defined and privileged center and works to “extend” rights or recognition to the margins. This includes not only the middle class empowerment of Lyson’s *Civic Agriculture*, but also every variation that is organized around “adding diversity” to an already presumed “community.” As we have seen, that center becomes the inevitable standard, rendering the subjects and concerns of the margins illegible. Instead, attending to the frictions means starting with the margins -- those subjects and subject positions that have been written out of dominant narratives. Such an effort would link food politics to a diverse set of political concerns and mobilizations that have proceeded too often without our help -- labor politics, social reproduction, borders and migration, climate change, and more. Attending to these alternatives inevitably lead us outside the confines of the local because, as a rule, they present multiscalar problems that call for multiscalar solutions. Finally, such a politics means staying with the margins -- the ambiguous subjects, the unruly threads, the uncertainties -- instead of rushing to consolidate contradictory interests into a new narrative.

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