

# Down-Home Global Cooking

## *A Third Option between Cosmopolitanism and Localism*

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### A COSMO-LOCAL PHOTO ALBUM

A snapshot: The municipal council of Lucca, Italy, rules that, “with a view to safeguarding culinary traditions and the authenticity of structure, architecture, culture and history, establishments whose activities can be tracked to different ethnicities won’t be allowed to operate” in the center of the town (quoted in Krause-Jackson). The ban affects all restaurants serving foods not considered a part of the region’s heritage cuisine, which runs to rabbit, salt cod, and beans. A discussion of the ban on the Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS) e-mail list finds me initially arguing *for* it, in the interest of what I’ve elsewhere called strategic authenticity.<sup>1</sup> The ban, I suggest, will give this cuisine a fighting chance to survive the onslaught of multinational fast food establishments—at least on its home territory. Others on the list point out that the ban is more pointedly aimed at the small, independently owned kebab shops that dot the town’s center and are operated by immigrants scrambling for a financial foothold in their new community. Responding to this motive, one critic of the ban notes that “kebabs and eggrolls don’t really belong in Italy . . . , really? . . . So the choice is between authentic, local, I am assuming long-ago, slow food, or fast food? Nothing in between? [And] how many people of a particular kind must be there for how long to represent a culture?” (Ray). The Lucca ordinance, many posters agree, is a case of culinary racism masquerading as the preservation of an authentic local culture. Many others are not so sure; they argue that there *is* a meaningful way to talk about the relationship between cuisine and place, and we ought to do what we can to preserve such links.



A snapshot: Interest in locally grown foods surges to the point that the word “locavore” is voted the term of the year for 2007 by Oxford University Press (“Oxford Word of the Year”). Responding to the almost-messianic fervor with which advocates promote locally grown food, critics point out that “local” does not always mean “better for the community” or even “better for the environment.”<sup>2</sup> Theorists critical of what they perceive to be the “local = good” equation coin the phrase “the local trap” to refer to the way in which the local is “assumed to be desirable. . . . What is desired varies and can include ecological sustainability, social justice, democracy, better nutrition, and food security, freshness, and quality. For example, the local trap assumes that a local-scale food system will be inherently more socially just than a national-scale or global-scale food system” (Purcell and Brown, 280). Criticisms aside, interest in local food grows, and “is it local?” becomes shorthand for “is it (environmentally, culturally, politically) virtuous?”

A snapshot: In Chicago’s Union Station, a small boy (six?), dressed in the clothing of the Old Order Amish, walks, beaming, through a crowd waiting for an Amtrak train. He carries a paper McDonald’s bag, thrust before him as if it were a pearl of great price. Seeing it, I’m struck by the almost parodically epic quality of the scene. Thinking about this snapshot several years later, in a season that brought us “Whopper Virgins,”<sup>3</sup> it’s hard to stop myself from creating a mental McDonald’s ad featuring a horse and buggy moving slowly down a dirt road, a Sunday dinner table ready and waiting to be laden with food. Cut to the arriving family, unloading bags of Chicken McNuggets from the buggy, where they’ve been kept warm with a heated brick and a horse blanket.

Parody, to be sure, but at times I have found myself taking very literally the notion that the world is neatly divided between Things (and People) That Belong Here and Things That Don’t.<sup>4</sup> At the time I witnessed the Amish McDonald’s tableau, for instance, I wrote a rather maudlin, tear-streaked piece about the ways it embodied the powerful allure of global industrial commodity culture *even* for those who actively choose not to engage with it. (The title of that piece could have been “Exposing Poor Defenseless Amish Children to the Horrors of McDonald’s.”) I concluded it with a quotation from environmental theorist David Orr, who writes that the largest challenge for those who seek to replace the mind-set of global, industrial agriculture with an agrarian approach is “the vast gap that separates sound agrarian culture from the daily lives most of us live now. Agrarianism simply doesn’t compute with the experiences of people whose lives are shaped by malls, highways, television, and cyberspace” (Orr, 97–98). I added, “The Amish child with the McDonald’s bag represents a companion challenge, namely that shopping mall culture exerts a terrible attraction, even to those outside it.”

So reads the version of the story told by my localist self. Fast forward a few years, throw in a “locavore revolution,” and the cosmopolitan me finds that version rather



hard to swallow. What if that Amish kid wanted to grow up to be a gay vegetarian and sing in a rock band? I find myself asking. Or what if he just wanted to be a hippie organic farmer instead of an Amish one? A Wiccan, maybe? What support for those life choices would he find in his community?

These three disparate photos cluster together for me not because of the motives of participants or the particular ethical, cultural, or environmental beliefs that underlie them. Rather, what join them are the ways in which examples such as these get conceived as skirmishes in a battle between cosmopolitanism and localism—and the ways they are deployed, defended, challenged, or otherwise used to shore up one side or the other in that battle. I've pasted the three into a conceptual photo album titled "The Cosmopolitanism/Localism Dichotomy," a fat collection of impressions exploring the multifarious ways that I've experienced this dichotomy giving shape to the world.

#### WHY COSMOPOLITANISM AND LOCALISM?

What can be accomplished by exploring this dichotomy using the medium of food? Cosmopolitanism is a concept with a substantial philosophical profile; it possesses a long and deep history and considerable political and moral significance. Can it be anything other than waggish impertinence to examine so significant a concept using food? On the other hand, considering the topic from the perspective of food studies, one might ask whether it is *valuable* to think about food and agriculture in terms of an arcane philosophical dichotomy, the terms of which are anything but clear and settled. What, precisely, can the study of food gain by thinking about food through the lens of such a dichotomy?

I can identify at least four reasons that such an investigation is useful, both for philosophy and for food studies. The first two are more practical or strategic; the second two more conceptual and substantive. First, as current public debates well illustrate, food and agriculture are subjects of no small moral and political significance (despite the nonchalance with which they have often been treated). It does neither food nor philosophy a disservice to reflect upon some of the most fevered public conversations about food and agriculture in light of this deeply influential, fraught, confusing, multipronged<sup>5</sup> dichotomy. Doing so can shed light on both this dichotomy and contemporary food discussions.

Second, cosmopolitanism is a topic of not only perennial philosophical concern but also considerable contemporary interest; it has received a flurry of attention from high-profile public philosophers like Martha Nussbaum and Kwame Anthony Appiah. For a philosopher of food, there's something both appealing and strategic about showing other philosophers that *food* has a meaningful part to play in such an ongoing philosophical conversation. (It's noteworthy that Appiah actually uses food examples quite often in his book *Cosmopolitanism*.)



My third reason points to the fact that the dichotomy, for all its seeming abstractness, has more than academic significance. I see it operating as a kind of moral/political sorting mechanism in contemporary culture, separating "us" (whoever we are) from "them" (whoever they are) with no remainder, and no overlap. For instance, no small amount of the *heat* generated by debates about the virtues and failures of local food movements can be attributed to the fact that participants, opponents, and commentators alike often discuss these movements in ways that suggest that the food choices available to growers and consumers *always already* neatly, completely, and unambiguously embody one side of the dichotomy or the other—and thereby illustrate the shortcomings of the other side. (Locally grown is seen as environmentally virtuous to its advocates and harmful to third world economies to its critics.) Similarly, cultural debates about cuisines often unfold in ways that presume that it is possible to distinguish clearly between local (authentic, traditional) choices and cosmopolitan (hybrid, transplanted) ones; evidence is kneaded, sliced, and diced in such a way as to support that presumption.

In short, we often bemoan or celebrate aspects of our food systems and foodways<sup>6</sup> by reading them as instantiating (or failing to instantiate) our vision (or nightmare) of a robust cosmopolitan or local society. (Apropos this point, Tim Lang argues that "the agro-food system is both a symptom and a symbol of how we organize ourselves and our societies. It is both a vignette and a microcosm of wider social realities" [218].) Making this particular dichotomy and its workings visible is one contribution philosophy can make to the project of understanding food and society.

Related to this point, I believe, fourth, that paying attention to the ways the dichotomy organizes and informs our food lives can have salutary effects both for the dichotomy and for food. To be more forthright, I mean that paying attention to and *transforming* the dichotomy can have such effects. As is no doubt clear from my opening snapshots, I believe that this dichotomy is problematic—for our attitudes to food and more generally as well. In looking at the ways cosmopolitanism versus localism shapes how we produce and consume food and how we talk about it, I want to try to glimpse—out of the corner of my eye, as it were—ways of thinking (and, more importantly, ways of *being* and *doing*) that escape both sides of the opposition, that give the lie to its tidiness. The dichotomy is an unhelpful sorting mechanism.

Analyzing this mechanism can contribute to the transformation of our food systems, by making the conceptual space within which to reimagine them. By coming to understand the effects on our food systems of a sorting mechanism such as the cosmopolitan/local dichotomy, creators and participants in those systems can, for instance, reconsider elements of them that resist such categorization.



In the remainder of this chapter, I attempt to substantiate my two-part claim: namely, that this dichotomy is problematic both because it is a dichotomy and because of the ways cosmopolitanism and localism have been constituted. Examining the snapshot examples that began the chapter can yield a rich set of characteristics that define (at least some forms of) cosmopolitanism and localism.

## COSMOPOLITANISM AND LOCALISM: SOME SKELETAL DEFINITIONS

### *Localism*

Josiah Royce offers a succinct definition of localism (which he approvingly calls provincialism) that can serve as a starting point for this discussion. Provincialism constitutes “the love and pride which leads the inhabitants of a province to cherish as their own [those] traditions, beliefs and aspirations [with which a province is associated]” (61). Understood in its most positive light, the action by the city of Lucca constitutes an effort to cherish a set of culinary traditions that are perceived as at risk from encroachment by other, more powerful traditions.

Royce calls upon a “province to possess its own customs and ideals” (61), a directive that suggests that local places come to be associated with a particular set of traditions, customs, and so on. Wendell Berry suggests a somewhat more elemental sense of connection between custom and place; his agrarian version of localism suggests that literal, physical, earthy place *shapes* culture to a considerable degree. *Deep* and *long* connection to a particular patch of earth, he argues, is the starting point from which to develop both a sound agriculture and a sound *culture*, the two being intimately linked. This understanding of soil-community links underlies religious communities such as the Amish.<sup>7</sup> Concrete connection to an earthy place—not a built environment or cultural group—forms the irreplaceable core of his agrarian localist thinking. Consumer/grower movements for local food explicitly and implicitly draw this link between strong agriculture and strong community. In particular, it is embodied in the concept of “terroir,” understood as a complex (sometimes almost mystical) connection between soil, methods of production, and community, all of which must develop over time. “Purity,” “integrity,” and “authenticity” are words that often get used to describe aspects of agrarian localism, which emphasizes a deep sense of “really” belonging to a place in the way that, say, a plant species is native.

For the agrarian localist, both agriculture and the culture intimately tied to it depend upon longevity in a *physical* place. Why? First, regarding agriculture, Berry argues that good farming can’t happen until the third generation on the land; it takes this long to build up a store of memories so that “the land [does] not have to pay the cost of trial-and-error education for every new owner” (193). To farm well, one must have intimate knowledge of this particular, very physical place: its



soil and its geographical contours, its plants and its weather. Intimate attention and connection to a physical place (in its most earthy sense) lie at the heart of agrarian localism.

The local food movement has at *its* heart a commitment to the health of local farmland in *every* locale. Consumers (in principle) can invest in stable, long-term farms, because (in principle) these farms serve as repositories of knowledge about how best to grow food in this place. Growers (in principle) can make the choices they believe best for the land, knowing that community members who share their concerns about the soil will support those choices, even if it means higher prices for their food.

Regarding the second goal—good culture—Berry asserts that good community grows up around good farming; it too is the work of the third generation. Such culture “would not be imported from critically approved cultures elsewhere. It would not come from watching certified classics on television. It would begin in work and love” (194). In pursuit of this goal, many agrarian and bioregionalist theorists argue for preserving the rights of people to remain on the lands of their ancestors and to know that their children and grandchildren will retain that right. For some, like Berry, it is more than a right; it is a responsibility, a moral injunction. We have an obligation to dig in for the long haul and make community. If we’re unfortunate enough to have been “unsettled” in a recent generation, we’re obliged to settle ourselves now, so that our children and grandchildren have a fighting chance at real community.

The local food movement also embodies, for localists, the ways deep and long attachment to place cultivates good community. CSA farms,<sup>8</sup> farmers’ markets, farm-to-table programs, and community gardens not only produce good food close to home, they also foster relationships among members of a community—relationships that begin as simple transactions involving vegetables and money. These transactions are economically important but are also important symbols and examples of the kinds of person-to-person, group-to-group connections that spin into the fibers of strong community. Indeed, advocates of these agricultural options have argued strenuously that, while local foods are not always the most sustainable choices, considered purely on environmental grounds, it would be wrong to evaluate them on environmental grounds alone; their cultural/social/political capacity to build sustainable *communities* is itself an enormous benefit of such movements.<sup>9</sup>

Cultivating deep and long connection to a place, the agrarian localist argues, promotes the kinds of justice and democratic faith that can only arise when people are “face-to-face”—when you know the persons on whom you rely, for example, for the production of your food. Such connection also enables deep, specific, contextualized *knowledge* of a place—local knowledge that can address the idiosyncrasies and nuances of a given locale. To preserve (and develop) this knowledge, it is necessary to preserve (and develop) the cultures responsible for its cultivation.



This emphasis on contextuality is again related to the “earthiness” of many forms of localism; the particularities of a physical place are not well tended with knowledge that is so general as to be universal; what is true of “growing corn in general” will not be of much help when it comes to growing corn on this field.

### *Cosmopolitanism*

Anthony Appiah describes cosmopolitanism as constituted by two “intertwined strands”; first, “the idea that we have obligations to others . . . that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by . . . even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship,” and second, “that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance” (*Cosmopolitanism*, xv). Note that these strands not only maintain their independence; they also often refuse to be reconciled. “There will be times when these two ideals—universal concern and respect for legitimate difference—clash” (xv).

If Berry’s agrarianism argues for rooting oneself by way of deep and long connections to a particular plot of land, Appiah’s cosmopolitanism acknowledges the inevitability of cultural exchange, interchange, and mixing. As he states it, “We have always been a traveling species” (*Ethics*, 215). While many of the world’s travelers are on the move only unwillingly, or under great duress, the “interpenetration of societies and forms of life is a very old phenomenon, one that is natural to us” (215).

The cosmopolitan’s interest in learning from diversity (as well as the cosmopolitan’s desire to uncover what is shared among humans) emerges from the recognition that all cultures are already mixtures. Human societies have always imported food supplies from distant locales. Furthermore, as examples like ketchup, satay, and curry suggest, those “supplies” haven’t only been agricultural commodities; cultures have treated each others’ cuisines as supplies—borrowing and stealing from them, adulterating and doctoring them up—probably since the discovery of fire. The notion that Lucca, for instance, can identify what is “truly, purely, authentically Luccan” about itself and protect that from “foreign influence” is an attempt to board a train that has already left the station. The best Lucca can do is to welcome the opportunity for cuisines to flourish, influencing and challenging each other culinarily in the process.

The idea of a “before,” during which a culture was “pure,” “unmixed,” or “purely local,” is as imaginary as Rousseau’s state of nature. Claims to purity are the *consequences* of efforts to sort out or separate Them from Us—to *establish* the boundaries that enable us to distinguish, for example, Their wheat-eating ways from Our rice-eating ones.

The cosmopolitan defense of intermingling involves more than “we’ve always done it that way,” however; there is also a moral value to this mobility and



detachment. The cosmopolitan understands cultures' relationships to their "places" and individuals' relations to their cultures as arbitrary. For Martha Nussbaum, whose cosmopolitanism emerges from the Stoic tradition of Diogenes, we are "citizens of the world," whose "first attachment" is to humanity in general (59). True, we must learn one language, not attempt to learn all, but our *attachment* to that language must always preserve the *detached* air that comes from realizing how arbitrary our speaking it is. Appiah translates this detachment into an argument for shared cultural patrimony: "there's something odd, to my mind, about thinking of a Hindu temple sculpture or Michelangelo's and Raphael's frescoes in the Vatican as the contribution of a people. . . . Which *people* exactly made that contribution? The people of the Papal States? The people of Michelangelo's native Caprese? The Italians?" (*Cosmopolitanism*, 127). Appiah observes that mobility also affords us greater exposure to alternative ways of being, doing and thinking: "if we want to preserve a wide range of human conditions because it allows free people the best chance to make their own lives, there is no place for the enforcement of diversity by trapping people within a kind of difference they long to escape" (*Cosmopolitanism*, 105). Appiah is making two claims here: first (implicitly), that free people are best able to make meaningful lives if exposed to many options for constructing those lives; and second, that people must be free to embrace—or cast off—cultures into which they have been born or otherwise inserted. The latter point bears underscoring, given the arguments of the agrarian localists; traditions are not to be preserved in the absence of people who wish to participate in them.<sup>10</sup> They have no inherent value; the freedom of individuals to opt in or out of a culture far outstrips any value that a culture might have in and of itself. The Amish child's right to choose to become a Wiccan is of far more importance than preserving any particular aspects of Amish culture. "There is no place for the enforcement of diversity by trapping people within a kind of difference they long to escape" (105). The virtues of family farms are not so great that they should supplant an individual's choice to flee said farm.<sup>11</sup>

If local food movements represent the clearest food-related manifestations of agrarian localism, then the diversity of ethnic restaurants, and the resultant culinary tourism, fusion cuisine, and other kinds of food borrowings and lendings, best embody the cosmopolitanism Appiah advocates. Urbanites in the United States can meet their ethnic and racial Others via plates heaped with the cuisines of dozens of cultures. Diners can also bear witness to an endless stream of new cuisine hybrids, created when chefs from one culinary tradition learn from traditions far removed from their own. What stronger testament to the virtues of life as "the world traveler, who takes pleasure in conversations [over dinner!] with exotic strangers?" (*Ethics*, 222). Indeed, food can be a nonthreatening medium to initiate dialogue with members of a culture far removed from one's own—a serious entry point into another's culture.<sup>12</sup>



Appiah's cosmopolitanism recognizes not only the reality but also the cultural value of transience and exposure to ways of life other than one's own. Furthermore, his is a *rooted* cosmopolitanism; it seeks to avoid at least one danger of other versions—the drive to an abstract, all-encompassing universalism. Proponents of Stoic cosmopolitanism sometimes see the qualities displayed by their own cultures as *just* the ones that ought to be universalized—a tendency leading Appiah to suggest that such cosmopolitans are themselves provincial. His cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, embraces the particular, the situated, the idiosyncratic. He notes, “Humans live best on a smaller scale,” and thus “liberal cosmopolitans should acknowledge the ethical salience of not just the state but the county, the town, the street, the business, the craft, the profession, the family *as communities*” (*Ethics*, 246). Rooted cosmopolitanism values the conversation with the stranger not as a means of confirming and expanding the reach of some set of universal maxims, but as a means of confirming just how different we sometimes are. In celebrating “conversations with exotic strangers,” and cultural borrowings, Appiah holds out a vision of a world in which communities of Others are not a problem to be solved, but an opportunity to be embraced.

#### DICHOTOMIES: A PRAGMATIST'S FIELD GUIDE FOR THE WARY

I've suggested that cosmopolitanism and localism exist in a dichotomous relationship to each other. What follows from this? Dichotomies and dichotomous thinking lie in the background or on the “garden level” of much of Western culture. Foundational dichotomies such as mind/body, self/other, subject/object, and reason/emotion make their way into everything from religious doctrines to scientific theories to commonsense beliefs, shaping our most treasured institutions and informing how we act. Of course they have also been subject to no small amount of criticism from philosophers and others.

My most important philosophical forebear is the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, and if there is any pattern of which Dewey was wary, it's the dichotomy, with its tidy, neat two-ness. I've inherited Dewey's wariness. Among the more serious problems I associate with dichotomies, three are particularly important to the cosmopolitan/local dichotomy.

First, dichotomies' tendency to set up not just a contrast but an antagonism between their two poles, such that to be *this* means to be *not that*.<sup>13</sup> Each pole gets defined in such a way that it contains nothing of the other. To be a mind is to be utterly unlike body. To be cosmopolitan is to reject, out of hand, all things “localist”—and vice versa. Fail to maintain this separation, and you risk contamination.

This feature, not surprisingly, leads to the second characteristic of dichotomies: their tendency to erase nuance; to eliminate the possibility of anything's existing in



*between their poles; to purify, to “clean up” ambiguous cases by shoehorning them into one extreme or the other.*<sup>14</sup> Dichotomous thinking requires understanding cases in the middle as ultimately being instances of one of the two polar extremes—or at least identifiable admixtures of the two. The poles are always the conceptual foundations in terms of which other things are defined; they, in contrast, are never explained in terms of anything else.<sup>15</sup> Dichotomous thinking thus encourages rigid partisanship; the belief that only one pole represents the right choice, the virtuous position, the thing worth caring about.

The debate about the merits of local food being vigorously carried out in the mainstream press illustrates this tendency. A recent opinion piece and the comments it engendered are typical of the sharp antagonisms that have arisen over this set of issues. In “A Bitter Reality,” Tom Keane argues that “the local food movement is an affectation based on bad logic and bad economics, one that, widely adopted, would actually harm the environment and potentially impoverish millions. Particularly here in New England, it would also turn mealtimes into dull, pallid affairs.” Keane dismisses local foods on all counts, including economic, culinary, and environmental ones, and argues unequivocally for the virtues of a globalized food system. Responses posted in the first two days were almost all critical—and almost all equally sweeping in their praise of local foods and their criticism of global food. This example interests me not because of the truth of any individual claims made, but because of the stark way it illustrates the partisanship.<sup>16</sup> A respondent to Keane’s “Bitter Reality” illustrates this tendency, even as this person attempts to challenge it. In an effort to nuance the issue, the commenter writes, “It’s not always about giving up things outright nor is it about trying to make the whole world filled with only small farms,” but in the same paragraph this person suggests that “for those who find the whole philosophy taxing to think about, you can boil it down to a simple A or B choice: if there are 2 apples for sale and one is grown in New England and the other in Washington State or New Zealand . . . choose the local one!”

The third and final relevant feature of dichotomous thinking is this: Particular groups of dichotomies operate together, such that they mutually reinforce each other to create a way of understanding the world that is more plausible because of its cohesiveness. I suggested earlier in footnote 4 that the cosmopolitan and the local operate in such a cluster. Some of the other dichotomies that cluster with it include urban/rural, culture/nature, global/local, industrial/agrarian, transience/rootedness, universalism/contextualism, individualism/communalism.

This clumping tendency magnifies the power of any individual dichotomy, while also often masking any implausibility it would have were it to be examined on its own terms. Consider, for example, how the binaries of mind/body, reason/emotion, and man/woman effectively created a worldview that long seemed more coherent and plausible because each pair relied upon and “stuck up for” the others. The local foods case also illustrates this gathering effect; naming something “the



local food movement" collects together a whole set of (perhaps previously only loosely related) practices and principles that partisans then tend to defend or criticize as an entire package. While it can be very useful to understand a set of concepts as related to each other, when doing so prevents us from seeing them as separable the salutary effects of this tendency are decidedly diminished. In the case of the local food movement, for instance, (more casual, less well-informed) defenders of the local resist acknowledging numerous studies that show that the environmental impact of our food is far more complicated than answering the question "how far was it transported?" Once "local" became associated with "environmentally superior," it became very difficult to decouple the two.<sup>17</sup>

Within any cluster of dichotomies, the relationships among dichotomies are complex; wormholes connect particular ones together in ways sometimes evident, sometimes hidden. Arguments that begin from one can slip, without notice, to another. This tendency strengthens the sense that particular dichotomies are in fact integrally connected to each other. In the cluster containing cosmopolitanism and localism, for instance, the path connecting "cosmopolitan" and "urban" is so broad and flat that sometimes the terms are practically understood as synonyms. The connection between "purity" and "localism," on the other hand, is more subtle and indirect and may require a journey through other concepts like "authenticity." (This kind of indirect link can be put to rather crafty uses, saying indirectly what can't/shouldn't be said directly. For instance, given the insidious associations with the concept of "purity," it can be handy to use the word "local" instead, knowing that it will make back-channel connections to purity.)

### SHARED TROUBLES

In *Cosmopolitanism*, Kwame Anthony Appiah suggests in various ways that we already occupy a cosmopolitan world; the question to ask is whether or not we are going to do it well. Elsewhere, he suggests that we have always been "a traveling species" (*Ethics*, 215). In response, Wendell Berry might well observe that we are already occupying a world of the local, the provincial, and that we have always been a "nesting species." If we look around us for evidence that the world "is" one way or the other, or that people "are" one way or another, we will find no shortage on either side.

Appiah identifies our travel (willing and unwilling), and our encounters with persons defined as Other, as the preconditions for cultivating that respect for "legitimate difference" that is one of the defining elements of his cosmopolitanism. His illustrations point to the various uses of Coca-Cola and McDonald's, halal goat meat, hot milky tea, sweets from India, and chocolate. Berry points to three generations of agriculture on one plot of land as a necessary condition for the cultivation of a strong, knowledgeable, *rooted* community. In true dichotomous



fashion, each side seems quite sure that the other is incapable of offering what it has—and what everyone should agree is necessary. The cosmopolitan—mistakenly, I believe—seems to think that meaningful encounters with legitimate difference are only likely to come as a result of travel (or exposure to travelers). The local—mistakenly, again—sees strength, rootedness as something that is only likely to develop by staying put. Both these mistakes, I believe, emerge as a result of the features of dichotomies I described earlier—particularly the clustering effect, and the tendency to define the sides as diametrically opposed to each other.

Cosmopolitanism is sometimes described in ways that suggest that it, alone, has a corner on difference—that the path of provincialism necessarily leads to a dangerous insularity of which racism is just one insidious form. Certainly this is true—some of the time. But by the same token, the travel advocated by cosmopolitanism as the essential precondition to “respecting legitimate difference” can also turn us into imperialistic cultural elitists, certain that our own way of thinking/doing/being is the only right way.<sup>18</sup> There is no guarantee that cultural exchange “broadens.”

Provincialism is sometimes framed in such a way as to suggest that only someone who has spent a long time in a community—and who comes from a long line of persons who have spent a long time in a community—has the kind of insight into that place that enables that someone to know how it differs from the norm, the generalization, the universal. In a way, the local, too believes it has a corner on difference. Localism suggests that only this kind of “depth work” will develop the potential of unique and particular places. It tends to gloss over the fact that “staying put” is *also* no guarantee that one will love a place, will come to know it in the way that enables one to take care of it—something that coming to a place with fresh, eager attention, *can* sometimes do.

#### ANOTHER PHOTO ALBUM IS POSSIBLE

What if we take seriously the claim that we, as a species, are always traveling *and* staying put—a state of affairs that surely both Berry and Appiah would acknowledge, even if they don’t necessarily like all of its implications? What if we moved away from seeing these features of human being as marks of (or arguments for) our being “truly cosmopolitan” or “actually local”—or even some complicated admixture of the two that is nevertheless defined in terms of them? What kind of philosophy can underpin and advance the development of food practices that value both local food and ethnic cuisine swapping? That can acknowledge the legitimate rights of communities to cultivate deep and long connections to the soil, while also recognizing and valuing the insights that come from newcomers? What kind of theoretical underpinnings can manifest the *connections*, rather than the disconnections, between the snapshots that began this chapter, the nuances of shading, rather than the broad contrasts of light and darkness? Where can we begin to glimpse the



outlines of a third option, the option of the “nested traveler?”<sup>19</sup> I conclude with some tentative suggestions in this direction.

To be adequate, a third option must achieve several aims. First, it will manifest literal “groundedness,” a nonarbitrary, nonoptional, earthy contextuality. I say “nonarbitrary” because, all appearances to the contrary, we are linked, literally, physiologically, to the soil, and we have very good reasons to dig into the *soil closest to us* much more intentionally—to *contextualize* our lives with dirt and its denizens. This digging in should be paired with an intentional interaction with ways of being and thinking that challenge one’s own. In contrast to Berry’s tendency to suggest that *only* deep and long local knowledge is valuable, the advocate of this third option recognizes that interchange with Other knowledges is *also* irreplaceable. Among the many uses of such interchange is that it cultivates community skepticism about the adequacy of its own understandings of the world.<sup>20</sup>

Second, this alternate option will recognize that no place is too small, local, and homogeneous to escape us/them thinking, nor is any connection between two people too tenuous to preclude the possibility that they will share a sense of being from the same tribe. That is, connections and disconnections are never simple matters of location or dislocation. Any number of factors can create in us the impulse to define someone as Other; so too, any number of factors contribute to our naming someone as One of Us. A nested traveler will be wary of both impulses and will work to identify those contributing factors.

An accompanying snapshot for these first two aims? The St. Paul, Minnesota, farmers’ market, where immigrant Hmong growers are now the “old-timers” sharing market space alongside Euro-American “newcomers”—lifelong Minnesotans whose familiarity with the land, and with the sheep, goats, and sixteen varieties of garlic growing on their patch of that land is less than ten years old. Which group constitutes the newcomers? Which group is rooted? The nested traveler is forced to notice that longevity has many layers; a Hmong farmer may be new(ish) to Minnesota, but her long experience with the soil makes her more of an old-timer on a Minnesota farm than the formerly suburban liberal arts college professor who has just bought her first goat.

A third option will also exhibit greater concern with the cultural than displayed by many agrarian forms of localism, and more concern with the agricultural than most versions of cosmopolitanism manifest. Wormholes connecting the cosmopolitan, the urban, and the “cultural,” on the one hand, and the provincial, the rural, and the “natural” (or the “uncultured”), on the other, need to be rerouted, and new ones bored, to attend to the fact that the cultural and the agricultural are interdependent, not independent; that cities, too, are “agricultural places,”<sup>21</sup> and “remote” country locations are also cultural crossroads.<sup>22</sup>

The snapshot here: An “American terroirist moment,” inspired by Amy Trubek’s book *The Taste of Place*. The concept of terroir, as it evolved in France, is a



self-conscious interconnection of culture and agriculture; it twines together soil, climate, production method, cultural heritage, and any number of other “natural” and “cultural” elements to give a unique cultural-agricultural “fingerprint” to a food—for example, a wine or a cheese. As it has developed (and been institutionalized) in France, however, the concept has tended toward “a nostalgic interpretation of the past,” in which “heritage becomes a fixed institutionalized fact,” and “the past . . . functions as the gatekeeper for truly tasting terroir”; and also toward an “essentialist” emphasis on “the importance of ‘location, location, location’” (247, 248). In short, French terroir shares much with agrarian localism. Trubek cultivates a new notion of terroir, designed in part to acknowledge America’s shorter history, but centered upon an older notion of the word, which simply meant “the earth from the point of view of agriculture” (248). “Tasting terroir means having a sensibility, adopting a set of framing values that inform agricultural practices and shape physiological tastes. . . . This vision of the taste of place certainly embraces Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash’s call for a ‘grassroots postmodernism,’ an orientation that neither clings to the past nor is mired in the present but looks toward the future” (248–49). While Trubek’s snapshot is still underdeveloped (more a glimpse than a clear photo), its potential is considerable.

A fourth aim of this third option is that it ought to help us think about how food practices could enable us both to *conceptualize* and to *enact* justice and sustainability—two sociopolitical aims toward which many eaters are attempting to aim our forks. Note that cosmopolitan options tend to emphasize that they alone are capable of safeguarding global justice, while localist options tend to suggest that they alone are concerned about environmental (and other forms of) sustainability. And note further that both of these concepts are the subjects of vigorous, often contentious debate—debate fueled by accusations that very much spring from provincial and cosmopolitan strongholds.

Photographs of committee meetings are notoriously dull, but the snapshot I would select to represent this aim would depict a meeting of a food policy council in a city somewhere in the United States or Canada—Knoxville, Tennessee; Toronto; Portland, Oregon. Food policy councils represent food democracy in action. They convene groups of citizens who represent broad arrays of organizations, interests, and expertise for the purpose of examining the food systems in their area and making policy recommendations about those systems. Members are consumers and producers, government and NGO representatives, and private citizens. Some are partisans of particular movements, while others might represent no one outside themselves. When councils are broadly and deeply representative, the issues they take up might run the economic, social, and environmental gamut, from improving access to fruits and vegetables for people in low-income neighborhoods (by providing bus service, creating affordable farmers’ markets, stocking neighborhood



convenience stores with produce), to providing nutritionally adequate meals for children in school lunch programs, to creating community gardens where growers can raise and share foodstuffs representative of their own ethnicities that are not readily available in mainstream supermarkets. Most importantly, councils foster cross-fertilization of food issues by convening representatives of such a broad sweep of interests and organizations. It is difficult to fail to see relations between producers' and consumers' concerns, or the concerns of environmentalists and of antipoverty activists, when "their" issues are laid out next to each other in the context of an organization whose focus is food.

The world we inhabit isn't either cosmopolitan or local in its organization and orientation—no matter how our theories might encourage us to think about it. How can campaigns and movements for local food, fair trade, and sustainably grown food, expanding interest in, and knowledge of, ethnic and regional cuisines (both one's own and "Others"), help us to think beyond cosmopolitanism and localism into a third option for food systems, foodways, individuals, and communities?

## NOTES

1. For a definition of strategic authenticity, see my *Exotic Appetites*.
2. An even more recent discussion on the ASFS list prompted a long, lively, and sometimes heated discussion about how to make tough choices among various "virtuous foodstuffs"—local, organic, fair trade, and so on. Even—or perhaps especially—among this learned group of food scholars and food professionals, there was nothing like consensus about which choice is the right one. Interestingly enough, there seemed to be considerable agreement that there *had to be* a right choice—the matter couldn't be in principle irresolvable.
3. The "Whopper Virgin" ads were a series of television advertisements constructed like ethnographic films, in which people from cultures without fast food participated in taste tests comparing Whoppers and Big Macs. The representatives of traditional cultures were decked out in their most "authentic" clothing and were presented as being, for the most part, utterly baffled by the burgers, unsure just what to do with them. But hands down, they preferred the Whopper to the Big Mac. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbNoofDM1rM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbNoofDM1rM) for a full-length video that includes comments from the "documentary filmmakers." One hardly knows when to stop putting words in quotation marks.
4. Later, I discuss the way in which dichotomous concepts cluster into "packs" so as to mutually reinforce each other. Here, I will note that "being from here" is also associated, more or less closely and more or less frequently, with tradition, stability, longevity, rootedness, the earth, the countryside, production, agriculture, preservation, purity and simplicity, homogeneous place-based community, provincialism, and agrarianism. "Not being from here" is variously associated with travel, mobility, leave-taking, consumption, multiplicity, variety, experimentation, the city, globalization, hybridity, and heterogeneous, "rootless" community. My discussion in the remainder of this chapter focuses on the member of the pack that I see as playing the most predominant role: namely, the cosmopolitan/local dichotomy.
5. How can a dichotomy be multipronged? Just this way: There is considerable fluidity with respect to what these terms encompass—and what relationship they bear to other, similar terms. What is the



relationship between globalization and cosmopolitanism, for instance? Between provincialism and localism? Because the referents in this dichotomy are less fixed than they are in, say, the mind/body dichotomy, I refer to it as “multipronged.” I chose cosmopolitanism and localism because these concepts seem the most inclusive; they can serve as collectors that gather together instances and ideas that might not seem particularly connected to each other at first glance.

More “iconic” dichotomies like mind/body seem to me characterized by this kind of gathering role; their power lies in part in their capacity to collect disparate instances and give them a shared meaning. The present dichotomy, while less familiar, also functions in just these ways. Part of what I understand myself to be doing in this chapter is explicitly pointing to this dichotomy as a dichotomy—as two concepts that exist in oppositional relation to each other. Partisans of both views make their cases against a real, if unstated opponent, lying across a seemingly unbridgeable chasm.

6. In choosing to use both the terms “food systems” and “foodways,” I mean to include both production and consumption aspects of food and food studies. While the usage may not be standard, I refer to “food systems” to address matters related to the production side of food and “foodways” when I focus on consumption-related questions.

The categories of production and consumption are themselves set up as a dichotomy and they map, albeit messily, onto the cosmopolitan/local dichotomy. For instance, the most vigorous advocates of localism among food scholars tend to work on questions about production—agricultural production most specifically. Advocates of cosmopolitanism tend to be more involved in questions about consumption. There are deeper reasons for these connections, among them that some of the most important arguments for the local assert that connection to literal soil—through agriculture, most importantly—is the foundation for community, the foundation for all that is powerful and good about the local. Likewise, arguments for cosmopolitanism often focus on culture and cultural change, which are manifested very clearly in patterns of consumption.

7. It should be mentioned that agrarianism was also, in some senses, the “founding philosophy” of the United States. See Thompson and Hilde’s *Agrarian Roots of Pragmatism* for essays exploring the agrarianism of early Americans, especially Thomas Jefferson.

8. CSA, or community supported agriculture, is a form of farming in which consumers buy a “share” in the growing season, and share its harvest—and its loss.

9. While I do not pursue the problem here, the theoretical limitations of localist philosophies begin with this matter of community formation.

10. Appiah heaps scorn on liberals who believe others should preserve cultural traditions they would be unwilling to save, in order that they and their children might enjoy them. I share his irritation, even as I worry about the ease with which he seems to distinguish choice from coercion when it comes to preserving or abandoning aspects of one’s culture. Is it choice that leads me to abandon some aspect of my culture that everyone around me regards as uncool? That I cannot practice without fear of public ridicule?

11. Appiah notes, matter-of-factly, “So the time of the successful farming family has gone. . . . But . . . we cannot afford to subsidize indefinitely thousands of distinct islands of homogeneity that no longer make economic sense” (104). Appiah’s form of cosmopolitanism, at least, seems willing to accommodate economic globalization.

12. I am skating over my own objections to the easy assertion that culinary travel is a fine way to encounter the Other; for an exploration of the ways in which such traveling promotes and reinforces colonialism, see my *Exotic Appetites*. For perspectives on culinary tourism, see Lang.

13. I assign agency to dichotomies, even though clearly it’s humans who deploy dichotomies in these ways. Part of what we seem to experience in the presence of a dichotomy, however, is that its two poles seem to suck us toward them; what were Scylla and Charybdis, after all?

14. Notably, in many Western philosophical accountings, just these features of dichotomous thinking are seen as its strengths.



15. One of the clearest illustrations of this feature comes from an arena unconnected to my present inquiry. Bisexuality and transgender are sexual identities that tend to be understood as “combinations” of hetero and homosexuality, or of maleness and femaleness; the latter are the foundational categories in terms of which these “hybrid” identities *must* be understood. I’ve suggested that it would be quite possible to reverse the order of explanation, to understand bi and trans identities as foundational and to define the others in terms of them. See my “Dear Kate Bornstein.”

16. Keane is hardly the strongest spokesperson for the views he espouses. Others—in both the scholarly and popular press—make the critical case much more strongly. I will not review that voluminous and ever-expanding literature here. Suffice it to say that, in the final days of work on this chapter, dozens more articles, blogs, and opinion pieces, both supportive and critical of the local food movement, came through my e-mail inbox.

17. On the matter of carbon footprint, for instance, research has shown that transport represents a relatively small percentage of the energy used in producing food, making the link between “local” and “green” considerably more tenuous. See Edwards-Jones et al. and DeWeerdts for both academic and mainstream explorations of this. For some of the first work on the relation between miles food travels and ecological effects, see the work of Rich Pirog and Iowa State’s Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Regarding the tendency to associate the local with all things positive, see Born and Purcell; and Purcell and Brown. And for instances of the persistent tendency to think “local = less energy intensive,” see any newspaper on any day.

18. How, after all, do we decide what a “legitimate difference” is? In a clash between Appiah’s two principles—universalism and respect for legitimate difference—when do we decide that this is an instance for universalism, not for appreciation for “Their” different way of doing things? In the face of an unpalatable difference, cosmopolitans can retreat to the comfort of a claim to universality. But this, of course, is just the charge brought against the provincials—that they refuse to engage with and respect difference. The cosmopolitans can find themselves guilty of just such a refusal.

19. Isn’t a “nested traveler” just a “rooted cosmopolitan”—Appiah’s term—in other language? While there are no doubt similarities, Appiah’s rootedness seems to me inadequate because, in the end, its roots do not lodge in any literal dirt—something that I suggest is crucial in a third option beyond the provincial and the cosmopolitan. I do not further explore the similarities and differences between our two positions here.

20. One theorist developing such an approach is art theorist Lucy Lippard, in her book *The Lure of the Local*. Of the work, Lippard writes, “I will continue to be an emotional nomad and a radical (the root of which means ‘root’), playing the relatively conservative values of permanence and rootedness off against restlessness and a constructed ‘multicenteredness’” (5).

21. Urban agriculture is again receiving considerable attention, thanks to movements like community gardening and guerilla gardening, aided by new and renewed techniques such as gardening on garbage heaps and “green [i.e., vegetal] roofs.”

22. Sarah Orne Jewett’s collection of stories, *The Country of Pointed Firs*, makes this point abundantly clear. Writing about a remote region of Maine at the turn of the twentieth century, she reveals a culture of people deeply tied to the natural world—particularly the sea—but also deeply knowledgeable about cultures far removed from them (thanks to the sea).

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