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## The Values of Local Food

### Theoretical and axiological approaches

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Philosophy of food is a relatively new entry among philosophy branches, which is rapidly expanding in multiple directions, involving scholars working within different philosophical schools. The five papers collected in this special issue bear witness to this general picture, while focusing on the specific topic of *local food*.

A growing literature on the so-called locavorism (or, equivalently, eating local) suggests that local food can be the key for changing our food system in a more sustainable way, enhancing community values, and establishing a new and more conscious relationship to the environment (e.g., (Ho 2020)). However, in recent years, the concept has been subject to growing criticism since it has been considered not empirically well founded (Ferguson and Thompson 2021), vague (Schnell 2013), and even unjust toward indigenous communities (Navin 2014).

Reacting to these conceptual threats while acknowledging the shortcomings of the current takes on the concept, many scholars have tried to restore “local food” providing a more nuanced and rigorous philosophical foundation focusing on its conceptual structure (Borghini, Piras, and Serini 2021b), its ideological assumptions (Werkheiser and Noll 2014), and its political and economical implications (Scharber and Dancs 2016).

In particular, recent philosophical scholarship has targeted four main areas of research, which deserve to be even more carefully explored.

The first area is ontology which, starting from general metaphysical questions on the nature of food (Borghini and Piras 2021; Kaplan 2020), brings us to the question on what are the referents of “local food” often ending up in answers that smack of Aristotle: locality can be said of in many ways, covering single food

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items, entire diets, consumption patterns, timing of dining, and so on. In fact, as we have already highlighted in our (Borghini, Piras, and Serini 2021b) and (Borghini, Piras, and Serini 2021a), the very concept of local food rests on at least three different understandings: locality as typicality; locality as proximity; locality as social closeness.

The second area regards the moral dimension of local food. Scholars have wondered whether eating local is a moral obligation (Young 2021) and what is the relation between sharing local food and our sense of community (De Bres 2016).

The third area is related to political considerations which, by and large, can be framed within two different domains: whether public policies should protect and foster local food systems in order to improve local economies, public health and food sovereignty exerted by local communities (DeLind 2011); whether typical local food should be protected by means of legislation even when they fail to match sanitary requirements due to their traditional production methods, e.g., fermented foods (Paxson 2013).

A fourth area of inquiry is the aesthetics of local food which has recently investigated the relation between local food and landscapes (Adams 2018; Ravasio 2018), whether local foods own their own flavor due to the specific properties of their terroir (Todd 2012), and what kind of distinctive aesthetic experience is brought about by local food (Borghini and Baldini 2021; Engisch 2022).

Drawing also on such a philosophical background, this special issue puts the notion of local food under new philosophical scrutiny.

In *Ungrounding Terroir*, Bob Valgenti argues for the relevance of the concept of terroir, despite its common polarized understanding, which exalts it as absolute measure or reduces it as a mere fictional market label. For Valgenti, the concept resists representation, and due precisely to its fluid and contingent foundation – its “ungroundedness” – it can serve as an empowering tool for those who are mis- and under-represented in the global market.

In their paper *Pigs in paradise: local happy people raising (happy, local) pigs?*, Vaughn Baltzly and Colleen Myles explore the intersection between local, ethical, and sustainable food. In particular they ask whether a locavore should support particular kinds of agricultural practice, like *Cinta Senese* pigs farming in Tuscany, or not. They will argue that – from a welfarist and conservationist perspective – the endorsement of such forms of local meat production is reasonable.

*What is tradition? A phenomenological study of how tradition is kept alive in the context of local food* by Liselotte Hedegaard takes on foods rooted in local history as a lens to understand the meaning of tradition. Starting from extant interdisciplinary scholarship on tradition, Hedegaard uses *Abondance* cheese manufacturing as a case study to show the three-layered structure of tradition, where

the corporal, sensory, and emotional dimensions interact at a pre-reflective level.

In *Thinking Food in Poetry: Research on the Chinese Poet Lu You's Food Philosophy*, Siyang Zheng and Hongcheng Zhou analyse the lifelong passion for food expressed in Lu You's work. Throughout the paper, Zheng and Zhou present Lu's approach and thoughts on food consumption, offering a valuable perspective into ancient Chinese food culture.

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## What Is Tradition?

### A phenomenological study of how tradition is kept alive in the context of local food

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**ABSTRACT** | This paper aims at presenting an initial inquiry into the meaning of tradition through a study of how tradition is preserved in the context of foods that are rooted in local history. The framework is a phenomenological approach, supplemented with interdisciplinary insights. Departing from definitions of tradition in selected academic disciplines, the paper presents a phenomenological study of tradition. It involves three dimensions of tradition. The corporal dimension of tradition addresses the corporal “I can” as a *savoir-faire* that is essential to the mastering of a traditional craft. The sensory dimension of tradition is directed at the complexity of taste-experience and the syntheses that allow for understanding taste as a palatable whole and for establishing connections to a social reality. The emotional dimension of tradition uses the strength of taste-experience as the point of departure for examining the sentiments of identification and attachment that are linked to tradition. Together the three dimensions add a layer of incorporated knowledge, skill and sentiment that works at a pre-reflective level but has fundamental impact on our relationship to the past – and thereby our understanding of tradition.

**KEYWORDS** | Tradition; Local Food; Phenomenology, *Savoir-Faire*, Taste; Identification

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“[...] un lien particulier entre l'éleveur, l'animal, ses produits et la montagne, (un lien qui fonde) l'identité régionale.” (Lizet 1998, p. 36)

## 1 Introduction

Cultural heritage has received increasing attention over the past decades. In the context of food, traditional craftsmanship such as the seasonal droving of live-stock in the Alpine areas and Korean kimchi-making as well as social practices such as the French gastronomic meal and the Japanese *Washoku* are protected by conventions (UNESCO 2003). Food products inscribed in local cultural practices are protected by labelling schemes in order to protect producers and honour the quality of place-related products (Jacquet 2009; Bérard and Marchenay 2004, pp. 45–48; Hedegaard 2018), to conserve traditional knowledge (Tashiro, Uchiyama, and Kohsaka 2018) or to support socio-economic developments (Heng and Chheang 2017). Such practices and products are often presented as our legacy from the past and what we pass on to future generations, but recent policy recommendations attest that they are seen as means to encourage economic growth through tourism as well (CoR 2015). The effort to safeguard and the commercial agenda are not mutually exclusive, but it raises questions regarding the interplay between the rootedness of foods in the history of a local area and the (hi)stories attached to foods in order to add commercial value to a product.

In this context, tradition constitutes an interesting research theme. It implies continuity in the sense that it bridges the past and the present – and presumably the future due to the intentions of passing cultural practices on to future generations. There are potential pitfalls, however. If tradition becomes a mere repetition of the past, it risks becoming a folkloristic cliché (Ricoeur 1961). And, if seen only as a commercial agenda, tradition easily transforms into storytelling. Despite such challenges, tradition as a phenomenon is intriguing. It constitutes a reference to a shared past, but how is this past remembered? Individual recollection does not seem sufficient as it is unique to every single human being and limited to individual lifetime. It seems, hence, that tradition implies the existence of historical memory, but who is the subject of such memory? How does tradition become a collective reference and how is it maintained?

This paper aims at presenting an initial inquiry into the meaning of tradition through a study of how tradition is preserved in the context of foods that are rooted in local history. Hence, it is not the intention to address the outlined questions in their entirety. The framework will be a phenomenological approach, sup-

plemented with interdisciplinary insights. The first part of the paper will ask what tradition is and use approaches to tradition in other academic disciplines as a point of departure for the phenomenological study. The second part of the paper will present a preliminary phenomenological study of tradition within the context of local foods. This part will use the Abondance cheese as an example and relate the manufacturing of this cheese to three dimensions of tradition: the corporal dimension, the sensory dimension and the emotional dimension. Since the aim of this paper is to study the preservation of tradition, the third part will use the preceding parts of the paper to outline how tradition is kept alive.

## **2 What Is Tradition?**

But what is tradition? A number of academic disciplines have addressed this question. In historical studies, tradition has been viewed as structures, for instance economies, institutions and cultural practices, that remain stable over time within a given area (Braudel 1966, pp. 7–8, pp. 498–499). In anthropology, tradition has been approached as a system of handed over patterns that communicate meaning (Geertz 1973, pp. 10–13) or as practices and relations created with the purpose of establishing steady points of reference in increasingly complex living conditions (Appadurai 1996, p. 44). In the field where ethnology and agronomy intersect, tradition has been studied through culturally embedded production methods (Bérard and Marchenay 2004). And geographical studies have engaged in studying tradition and cultural identity with regards to the ‘terroir’ (Pitte 1999). Across definitions, the overall consensus points towards tradition as referring to a past that groups of people share, that has emotional impact and is related to places. In line with the aforementioned interplay between commercial agendas and rootedness in local areas, it is noticeable that tradition has a dual reference as well, in the sense that it can refer to a genuine historical past as well as invented practices (Hobsbawn 1983). Common to these approaches is that tradition is studied as objects, structures or cultural practices, meaning that the studies are about representations of tradition. At a deeper layer, however, human experience is involved as objects, structures and cultural practices are attributed meaning. In this context, a study of tradition transforms into a questioning of the nature of memory, because – paraphrasing Maurice Merleau-Ponty – it is concerned with not only the subject’s temporal experience, but also with a social horizon and with a collective history that the subject passes on (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p. 495). In this respect, phenomenology seems to constitute a particularly relevant approach to study tradition.

Nevertheless, phenomenological research has shown limited interest in tradition. There is mentioning of a *Gemeingeist* (Husserl 1965, p. 55) through which the subject is embedded in a historical context that surpasses subjective experience. And there is reference to a distinction between the collectivity in the continuous progression of civilization over the *longue durée* and that of the fragmented and pluralistic development of cultures (Ricoeur 1961). This indicates that tradition refers to a phenomenon that situates the subject in a social reality. It involves historical memory in the sense that there is a historical context that cannot be recalled in a strict sense but resides in handed over artefacts and narratives (Schutz 1972, p. 209). But there are questions regarding the ways in which the past can be recalled that remain unanswered.

Two phenomenological works outline a way of approaching the unanswered questions through a study of the act of commemoration, namely Edward Casey's work on remembering and Paul Ricoeur's work on representations of the past (Casey 2000; Ricoeur 2000). According to Casey, commemoration provides a reference to people and/or events that have taken place in the past and have had important impact on society, for instance the ceremonies honouring the fallen soldiers on D-Day in Normandy. None, or very few, attending such ceremonies have actual recollection of the event and, hence, he asks what historical memory is. He accentuates that recollection is involved in the sense that even if the subject has no recollection of the actual commemorated event, there is recollection of the historical narrative of the event and perhaps of being present at former commemorations (Casey 2000, pp. 216ff.). In this respect, it is also a shared experience of being gathered with a particular purpose. In addition to being marked by such purpose, both Casey and Ricoeur refer to commemoration as events that are being held in a particular way, are associated with specific places and with a fixed time in the calendar (Casey 2000, p. 218; Ricoeur 2000, pp. 51–52). But Ricoeur adds to the account that the historical memory embedded in commemoration ought to be considered with caution as accounts of the past are selective in the sense that certain perspectives are chosen at the expense of other perspectives, thus risking what he refers to as an abuse of history (Ricoeur 2000, pp. 104–105). Consequently, commemoration illustrates the aforementioned point that there are questions regarding the interplay between subjective recollection, shared experience and historical memory that remain unresolved.

In other words, when studying tradition there is reference to a past that retains an impact in the present and there is questioning as to how individual recollection is associated with historical memory; precisely as in the examples concerning commemoration. Furthermore, when studying tradition in conjunction with local food, the risk of abusing tradition reappears in the aforementioned interplay be-

tween the historical rootedness of local foods and the (hi)stories attached to foods in order to add commercial value. How is it possible to distinguish clearly between the two? And, if insisting on tradition being different from storytelling, is there a risk of signing up to an understanding of tradition as static and primordialist? One way of addressing these questions is to study the role of food in the preservation of tradition through a phenomenological approach.

### **3 Outline of a Phenomenological Approach to Tradition and Local Foods**

To approach this preservation of tradition and to support the phenomenological investigation of tradition, the production of the Abondance cheese will serve as an example. The Abondance originates in the French Haute-Savoie. It is considered a local speciality, rooted in the terroir and, hence, carrying both natural and cultural significance. The Abondance obtained an “*Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée*” in 1990, but the production of this type of cheese in the area can be traced back to medieval times (Lizet 1998). The production requires a specific race of cattle, and it requires migration of the cattle through the high-altitude pastures during the summer, roughly from late May to mid-September. In these months in the high pastures, the cattle must be milked at various times during the day and night in order to produce the cheese on-site. A manufacturing-process that is carried out manually and requires considerable experience. One example is that the curdling time has to be determined after each milking as the coagulation-processes vary with the type of herbs available to the cattle and the composition of the herd in terms of age and physical status – a process that is carried out by plunging the hand into the fresh curd to determine the stage of curdling. Other examples are the adjustment of the drainage to achieve the desired texture in the cheeses, the second extraction that is carried out by the use of cloth and adjusted according to the presumed number of cheeses to produce, the addition of salt after twenty-four hours and the process of refinement of the crust achieved by the use of a cheese smear during the process of ripening (Bérard and Marchenay 2004, pp. 33–34).

There are, however, other ways of producing an Abondance cheese. With an enlargement of the zone of production, the natural barriers for production have been minimised and thus allowing for year-round industrial production (Bérard and Marchenay 2004, pp. 34, 77). The industrially produced Abondance can bear the name but does not have to conform to the locally embedded cultural practices of manufacturing. In other words, there is a double standard for the Abondance cheese: one that can claim its origin in the alpine pastures of the Haute-Savoie

and one that can claim its provenance in the Haute-Savoie. Origin and provenance are not the same, however (Hedegaard 2018). Origin is more than simply issuing from a place. The AOC-labelled Abondance constitutes an example of a local food connecting the farmer, the cattle, the alpine pastures and the cheese - a link that communicates a regional identity through taste and typicity (Lizet 1998, p. 36; Hedegaard 2018).

To approach a more detailed understanding of what makes the manual manufacturing of the Abondance a tradition, there is a need to move beyond the statement *that* a local food produced according to inherited practices constitutes a bond between a region and its people. Instead, by putting the human perspective at the centre, a gateway is provided to understand *how* tradition is maintained and *how* meaning is attributed to tradition. In the context of an inherited cultural practice as the production of the Abondance, the human perspective can be studied by focusing on the corporal skills making up the *sine qua non* for mastering a traditional manufacturing method, the sensory experience underpinning the embeddedness of the food in a collective history and the emotional attachment fostered by traditional local foods.

## 4 Corporal Dimensions of Tradition

Using the manufacturing of the Abondance as a point of departure, there can be little doubt that corporal skill is involved. In a phenomenological study, such skill is not merely understood in terms of a bodily capability that can be observed and described. The interest is in the fundamental structures of experience - and experience is corporal. This means that being an experiencing subject is being situated in a persistent relationship with the world and with other beings in the world (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p. 113). And, it means that rather than encountering the world through an “I think,” our most fundamental experience originates in an “I can” (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p. 160).

### 4.1 Savoir-Faire

This “I can” is experienced in everyday life. We are capable of talking, walking, eating and interacting without having to re-learn at every instance. These corporal skills are available and ready to be mobilised whenever needed (Ricoeur 2000, p. 32). In this sense, such everyday skills constitute a type of savoir-faire. However, savoir-faire unfolds at multiple levels. With a cursory reference to Bergson, such everyday skills resemble what he refers to as “*mémoire-habitude*”, the actions that are repeated according to a certain pattern and gradually transformed

into memorised lessons or incorporated movements (Bergson 1903, p. 76). There are no specific references in such skills; they are mere skills, available at all times and indispensable in our daily lives. This, however, does not mean that incorporated repetitive action is carried out in a void. The surrounding world is a horizon that accompanies our perceptions and actions permanently (Merleau-Ponty 1945, pp. VII–VIII). This horizon not only leads us to marginalise certain profiles when directing our attention towards objects, it also situates our experience in a temporal perspective where the relationship to the world appears as a continuum in which the present is a product of the past and the future is an outcome of the present (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p. 470). In this sense, a *savoir-faire* can have a historical reference.

Transferring this latter type of *savoir-faire* to the manufacturing of the Abondance cheese, the mastering of each part of the process represents such repetitive action that is embedded in a historical horizon. The determination of the stage of curdling, the physical handling of the second extraction, the addition of salt and all the other manual procedures are skills that are incorporated as a tacit knowledge. It is not about conjuring up an image of an action that has been carried out on previous occasions and then repeating it, but a corporal dimension that cannot be translated into an image or a verbal expression, precisely because it is incorporated (Merleau-Ponty 1945, pp. 167–168). This kind of *savoir-faire* is about corporal knowledge in the sense of being a pre-reflective and pre-articulate dimension of experience that is rooted in previous encounters of a similar type (Casey 2000, p. 149). But the horizon of this *savoir-faire* is enriched by the history of the region and the cultural practices connected to the manufacturing of the Abondance.

## **4.2 Temporal Dimensions of Savoir-Faire**

Based on this view of *savoir-faire*, the mastering a traditional craft consists in the acquisition of a corporal habit – an incorporated “I can” that is accompanied by a horizon that positions the craft in the past and the present at the same time. This temporal dimension is significant because it sets the traditional craft apart from mere repetitive action. The type of *savoir-faire* that is fundamental to the manufacturing of the Abondance is repetitive in the sense that there is a set of skills that is needed in order to perform the various actions, for instance the determination of the curdling. But it is at the same time a craft that represents historically embedded cultural practices. It is not just a specific way of performing a set of tasks, but a living cultural heritage which means that the horizon accompanying perceptions and actions is open to variation, for instance when working on the refinement of the crust during the ripening process.

Acquiring the necessary corporal knowledge is, hence, more than repeating a set of actions. It is learning and doing in the present with reference to a past through specific manoeuvres that are rooted in tradition. This handing over of a traditional craft may be communicated directly through participation (Schutz 1972, pp. 182–183). It can take place between close relations, either family or community, in which case it represents a way of working alongside someone who already possesses the corporal skill. In this process, experience is made, repeated action allows for incorporation of skills and a horizon for possible variation is provided. The handing over can also be communicated through historical sources (p. 209). These may consist in narratives and descriptions, discarded tools or written testimonials. Contrary to the participatory handing over, there is no acquisition of corporal skill, but rather a conscious establishment of a horizon of knowledge to accompany the corporal skill. The two ways of handing over of tradition are not mutually exclusive, but they refer to ways in which the inclusion into a social reality consisting of contemporaries and predecessors takes place.

## **5 Sensory Dimensions of Tradition**

As mentioned earlier, the AOC-labelled Abundance constitutes an example of a local food manufactured according to tradition, that communicates a regional identity through taste and typicity. In a phenomenological study, taste is not merely a sensation caused by external stimuli and resulting in a compilation of mental states (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p. 240). This fragmented understanding of sensory experience is characteristic of the empirical sciences, whilst a phenomenological study brings forth the complexity of our sensory encounter with the world. This complexity has the capacity for shedding light on how taste is indispensable in uniting the subject with a collective history.

### **5.1 Taste as Sensory Experience**

The complexity of taste-experience resides in our incomplete experience, meaning that our experience of our surroundings unfolds as a correlation between present and absent profiles that we are capable of making appear in a continuous process where different profiles are synthesised into an understandable whole (Merleau-Ponty 1945, pp. 270–272; Hedegaard 2019). All senses are part of this synthesis and in the process – to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty – they translate into one another without the need for interpretation (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p. 271). When considering taste as a synthesis of multiple sensory impressions, it emerges as being



much more than a transitory experience in the mouth. Each of the five senses contributes to the synthesis and provides a range of aspects that merge into the full taste-experience. Vision provides shapes and colours indicating the ripeness of a fruit, the progress of a cooking-process etc. Tactility offers not only impressions communicated through the use of our hands when for instance examining the viscosity of a soup, but also impressions in the mouth where the texture changes in the process of mastication. The olfactory sense enables us to identify ingredients and informs about possible decay. Sound is closely related to tactility as every texture has a sound when being prepared and when the first bites are taken. Only at the point in which the food enters the mouth is taste as it is most commonly referred to part of the experience, providing impressions that we experience as basic tastes. In all these profiles, the horizon of experience intervenes in the sense that past experience blends with the present and enables us to form expectations and to pronounce judgements of taste (Hedegaard 2019).

Transferring this synthesis of sensory impressions to the manufacturing of the Abondance, all senses contribute to the course of the process – from leading the cattle to the alpine pastures to the final taste-profile of the cheese. Vision and smell provide impressions enabling the identification of herbs and thereby guides the migration of the cattle to higher or lower pastures. Tactility is essential when the hand is plunged into the fresh curd to get an impression of the stage of curdling. And tactility merges with sound when the cheese smear is used to refine the crust in the process of ripening. Taste in terms of basic tastes play a less prominent role in the manufacturing process but is crucial for the palatable whole of the finished cheese. The step in the manufacturing process where basic tastes intervene is when salt is added to the curd. However, rather than making up a literal, gustatory experience, taste is guiding the corporal gesture that accompanies the salting. This corporal gesture is the manifestation of a knowledge that is literally at hand – a gesture that allows the correct salting with a swipe of the hand. This interplay between sensory experience and corporal knowledge is present throughout the manufacturing-process in the sense that gestures and actions are carried out to bring forth the desired gustatory qualities. This synthesis does not transpire in a void either. The horizon that accompanies our perceptions and actions provides a temporal perspective – a blend of past and present profiles that indicate a collective history.

## **5.2 Time and Taste**

In other words, there is a temporal dimension in the sensory synthesis that unites the experiencing subject with the past. This embeddedness of experience in a

temporal dimension adds to the complexity of the gustatory experience, but it also provides insights into the ways in which sensory experience may be shared. This is basically what Marcel Proust's narrative of the taste of the madeleine tells us (Proust 1988/1913, pp. 44–47; Hedegaard 2019). The passage in the book refers to a moment when the narrator tastes the small cake and through the taste-experience is transported back to his childhood, the people who populated it and the place that he associates with the taste. What Proust essentially tells us about taste is that the momentary sensory experience can connect the subject to a collective history. Meaning that taste-experience not only serves as a gateway to individual recollection, but it provides access to a social world through the references to people and places (Hedegaard 2018).

In the context of the Abondance, the temporal dimension of taste emerges in various ways. There is a close association to the temporal dimensions of *savoir-faire* which is unsurprising insofar as taste-experience involves corporal ability. However, taste-experience not only influences the manufacturing-process, it also relates to the finished food product. In terms of the manufacturing-process, there can be little doubt that the synthesis of sensory impressions in its entirety has crucial influence on the artisanal execution. And that taste-experience bridges the past and the present in the sense that previous experience transforms into incorporated tacit knowledge that enables the manufacturing of a cheese that is recognisable over time. Concerning the finished food product, the taste-experience can bridge the past and the present as Proust told us. Like the madeleine, the taste of the Abondance cheese can bring about a present experience that has a strong reference to the past. This past may involve close relations who have handed over traditions related to the manufacturing of the Abondance and its place in the local food culture, but it may also speak into a larger context of cultural heritage where the Abondance is a medium for identification with the region without close relations as intermediaries.

## **6 Emotional Dimensions of Tradition**

The phenomenon identification was introduced in the presentation of the Abondance cheese as a local food connecting the farmer, the cattle, the alpine pastures and the cheese and communicating a regional identity (Lizet 1998). This statement implies not only that a product can be identified with a geographical area, but also that human experience is involved in the sense that such identification must have a human reference and must be attributed meaning. Following the previous presentation of the corporal and the sensory dimensions of tradition, this meaning

may be established and maintained in two ways: through the corporal gestures and the sensory experience guiding the manufacturing process and through the taste-experience accompanying the matured Abondance cheese. Both indicate a relationship between a food and a place that links present experience with a past that involves human relations and cultural heritage in the form of tradition.

## **6.1 Identification through Tradition**

However, the reference to the past in present experience does not explain the identification with and attachment to a region that is communicated through cultural heritage. To approach an understanding of this emotional layer of tradition, it seems pertinent to depart from the notion that experience always has a place of reference. This may seem evident, even trivial, as a human being inevitably is positioned in a place. There is, however, more to place than being a location determined by name or by reference to longitude and latitude, even if philosophy has treated place in this way for the most part. By viewing place as a spatial position, a 'where' a given location is, philosophy has ignored the interplay between location and lived experience (Ricoeur 2000, p. 186). In terms of experience, our point of departure is the place from which we see the world and from which we form our opinions. And as experience is situated it follows that our point of departure has a reference. This place of reference might be a place that we only occupy for a limited space of time in which case identification is unlikely to come about as it leaves little if any lasting imprint. But it may be a place that we inhabit in the sense of putting down roots in which case the attachment to place is formed – it evokes a sense of belonging (Hedegaard 2021).

When considering this meaning of place in the context of the Abondance, the attachment to and identification with the region seems closely related to the corporal and sensory experience that guides the manufacturing-process. And, as the temporal dimension of sensory experience indicated, the taste of the Abondance has the potential to bring about references to the past that bring to mind not only experience related to close relations but also to a social world of predecessors. It seems, however, that there is an additional layer in the taste-experience. If tasting the Abondance for the first time, it seems unlikely that there can be a reference to its place of origin inherent in the taste-experience. This does not mean that there is no horizon influencing the experience, only that the link between the taste and the place of origin must come about by intermediary – for instance a narrative. But Proust told us that the taste-experience itself has the capacity for connecting us to a place and a collective history. To do so, there must have been previous taste-experience that has left a corporal imprint – an imprint that is then revived in the

present taste-experience as a confirmation of the link between the taste and the place. In other words, the taste-experience related to tradition is an instance of re-taste (Hedegaard 2018).

## 6.2 History and (Hi)stories

There can be little doubt that the inscription of taste into a place and a collective history has emotional impact. Our attachment to places is evident in everyday language when describing how we put down roots when we feel at home in a place and how moving away from such a place is a process of pulling up roots. The significance of rootedness resides in the situatedness of experience – it is not a coincidence that everyday language speaks of events as taking place (Ricoeur 2000, p. 49) and that we place ourselves somewhere (Ricoeur 2000, p. 185). It means that unless we occupy a place transitorily, the place we dwell in is likely to mean something to us. Likewise, the pulling up of roots signifies that the move away from a place that means something to us has emotional impact as well. Such a place is likely to remain a reference even after being left behind. In terms of taste, there are indications that this complex sensory experience leaves corporal imprints that provide strong references to places and a collective history. Such indications are echoed in expressions such as the *“goût de terroir”*, the taste of place that unites cultural heritage and gastronomy (Csergo 1995). There is nostalgia in such references, an underlying desire to be transported back (Casey 2000, p. 201) – in time or to a place that can confirm a sense of belonging.

In the context of the Abondance, this sense of belonging materialises in the corporal knowledge guiding the manufacturing of the cheese as well as in the taste-experience. There is a double reference, though. On one hand, the alpine pastures, the corporal knowledge guiding the manufacturing and the taste of the matured cheese have strong references to a cultural heritage that is specific for the place. On the other, the industrially produced Abondance refers to the same tradition, but involves neither the alpine pastures that are essential for the quality of the milk, nor the corporal knowledge that is essential for the manual manufacturing. This discrepancy between the Abondance as a cheese with a specific origin and a cheese that issues from a place of the same name displays a tension that may be expressed through the differentiation that Eric Hobsbaw established between tradition as genuine historical references and invented tradition (Hobsbaw 1983). Whether this discrepancy influences the taste-experience remains an open question, but in terms of the emotional dimension, it seems likely that both types of Abondance may bring about sentiments of attachment and identification. Only, the references to the past differ. The Abondance that is manufactured manually

in the alpine pastures refer to history – to the cultural heritage of a region. The industrially produced Abundance refer to (hi)stories – to a commercial agenda.

## **7 Keeping Tradition Alive**

At the beginning of this paper, the question was asked as to how tradition is preserved. The corporal, sensory and emotional dimensions of tradition provided a framework for addressing this question. The corporal dimension of tradition established that there is a *savoir-faire* that is essential to the mastering of a traditional craft. This *savoir-faire* consists in corporal knowledge that is pre-reflective and pre-articulate; it is corporal knowledge that is at hand in the sense that it is incorporated through repetition. This repetition, however, is open to variation because it is accompanied by a horizon that positions the *savoir-faire* in the present at the same time as the specific manoeuvres related to the manufacturing process are rooted in a living cultural heritage. The sensory dimension opened towards the complexity of taste-experience. A complexity that consists in the synthesis of multiple sensory impressions involving all senses that are merged into an understandable – and in this case palatable – whole. But this synthesis does not account for the complexity in its entirety. As with the corporal dimension, the synthesis of sensory experience is accompanied by a horizon that serves as a gateway between individual recollection and a social world of contemporaries and predecessors. In this synthesis of present experience and past reference, taste-experience leaves a corporal imprint that seems particularly strong. It seemed to be the strength of taste-experience that formed the foundation of the sentiments of identification and attachment that characterises the emotional dimension of tradition. On one hand, this is because taste not only provides a gateway between individual recollection and a social world of shared experience. It also speaks into the context of rootedness in places that have meaning and thereby evokes a sense of belonging. On the other hand, the examination of taste indicated that taste in the context of tradition is an instance of re-taste. That is, an imprint of a previous taste-experience that is revived in a present experience, thereby confirming a relationship between the taste and a place.

In the same way as impressions provided by each sense are synthesised in order to merge into a palatable whole, the three dimensions of tradition merge into a renewed understanding of tradition in the context of local foods. Instead of limiting the examination of tradition to representations in the form of artefacts, structures and observable practices, the involvement of corporal, sensory and emotional dimensions adds a layer of incorporated knowledge, skill and sen-

timent that works at a pre-reflective level but has fundamental impact on our relationship to the past – and thereby our understanding of tradition.

But is there a risk of flirting with a language of geographical determinism when suggesting that these layers forge a bond to places in which tradition is kept alive through agricultural production and supplementing with an emphasis on rootedness as an essential emotional dimension? And, is there a risk of signing up to an understanding of tradition as static and primordialist when putting forward that tradition is different from storytelling? It seems at least that there is a possibility for such misinterpretation. However, suggesting that tradition encompasses a close relationship to the land is not the same as asserting identification between the land and an alleged uniqueness of a regional character by reference to the “*genius loci*” of a place. And, putting forward that tradition is more than an added layer of narratives is not the same as asserting that tradition is an unchangeable and objective fact.

The narrative dimension indicated here refers back to a question that was asked in a previous section, namely how it is possible to distinguish between the product rooted in tradition and the product that is produced industrially. A question that resurfaced in the examination of the emotional dimension of tradition. A way of addressing this question in a tentative manner is to take the three dimensions of tradition as a point of departure and examine tradition as a double movement. In the first movement, historical memory establishes a tradition as a cultural practice that is rooted in a place. In the case of the Abundance cheese, historical memory is documented in the form of written sources that dates the manufacturing of the cheese back to medieval times. The historical memory is kept alive in the sense that the tradition is handed down in the area through generations, thereby transforming into shared experience. Meaning that the manufacturing of the Abundance constitutes a living cultural heritage in the sense that the craft is kept alive by handing over of the tradition by working side by side and gradually incorporating the skill and the horizon for possible variation. This incorporation marks a passage from shared experience to individual recollection. This recollection, however, is not merely intellectual, but resides in the corporal, sensory and emotional dimensions that constitute the synthesis in its entirety. A synthesis that provides a gateway for uniting the corporal gestures and the taste in a sense of belonging. In the second movement, the corporal, sensory and emotional experience constitutes the point of departure in the sense that the corporal gestures and the taste are united through a horizon that bridges the present with a past that adds a layer of identification. In the case of the Abundance, this means that the present corporal and sensory experience of manufacturing has to be accompanied by a horizon that unites the present with previous experience and his-

torical memory. Only then is the manufacturing experienced in terms of tradition. In other words, keeping tradition alive necessitates a double movement through which historical memory, shared experience and individual recollection interact and constitute tradition as tradition.

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## Pigs in Paradise

### Local happy people raising (happy, local) pigs?

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**ABSTRACT** | This paper approaches the topic of *local*, *ethical*, and *sustainable* food, an alimentary conception that is particularly salient at present, given recent trends regarding thoughtful, environmentally-sensitive consumption. And yet each of these concepts – *local*, *ethical*, and *sustainable* – can have multiple interpretations. In this paper, we articulate and defend a somewhat surprising claim about some potential implications of such alimentary commitments – namely, that they may lend support to some varieties of “conscientious carnivorism.” We focus on an especially illustrative instance of (potentially) moral meat-eating: the case of *Cinta Senese*, a once-endangered pig that holds a special place in the cultural and environmental landscape in Tuscany, Italy. In Tuscany, *Cinta Senese* constitute a robustly local food product (in a genealogical sense), where they, plausibly, lead quite happy lives (in a welfarist sense), and the recent revival of their dwindling populations clearly represents a “sustainability success” (in a conservationist sense). Thus, we argue that locavores with welfarist and conservationist proclivities may actually find that they have considerable reason to support (rather than to oppose) this form of animal agriculture – as well as others relevantly like it.

**KEYWORDS** | Local Food; Food Ethics; Welfarism; Sustainability; Conservationism; Cinta Senese Pigs; Tuscany

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Our subject is what one might term “*local, ethical, and sustainable food*” – an alimentary conception that is surely of interest to many readers (and eaters), both lay and learned. Such a conception is particularly salient at present, given recent trends in both food scholarship and popular sentiment regarding thoughtful, environmentally-sensitive consumption (see, for example, (Furrow 2016; McWilliams 2009; Oppenlander 2013)). However fashionable such a conception might be, it still stands in need of significant elucidation. For each of these concepts – *local, ethical, and sustainable* – can have multiple interpretations. Herein we will articulate and defend a somewhat surprising claim about some potential implications of such alimentary commitments – viz., that they may lend support to some varieties of “conscientious carnivorism.” But to do so, we must first unpack our key terms.

In this paper we are concerned with “local food” in what we term the *genealogical* sense of that phrase.<sup>1</sup> On this conception, food is *local* insofar as its character is thought to be at least partially, and significantly, constituted by its etiology. Local food in the genealogical sense is food *from* a particular place (and maybe also a particular time); it could not be (re)produced by just anyone, growing or making it just anywhere, at just any time. Foods that are “non-local” (in this sense) are, by contrast, spatio-temporally “generic,” place-less.<sup>2</sup> Such foods could be of, or from, anywhere – or nowhere. They might be mass produced, assembled from geographically diffuse inputs, or produced via processes that are indifferent to their origins. Food that is local in the genealogical sense bears the indelible stamp of the time, place, and manner in which it was produced – and, perhaps, sometimes literally, the stamp of the persons who produced it (Figure 1). Foods that demonstrate *provenance* are conceived of as “local” in the genealogical sense precisely because the particular circumstances of their production impart a certain *terroir* (Trubek 2008). Certain flavors, aromas, and/or textures distinguish that food as being *from* or *of* a particular time or place; these properties are valued explicitly because of their place- and production-based characteristics.

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<sup>1</sup> Local food can be conceptualized in multiple ways (see, e.g., (Morgan, Marsden, and Murdoch 2009)). Three familiar specifications are as follows: locality as geographical distance between producer and consumer; locality as typicality; and locality as a short social distance between producer and consumer. (For a recent, careful, and thorough analysis of these three specifications – there termed the “relative spatial,” the “absolute spatial,” and the “social” dimensions of locality – see section III of (Borghini, Piras, and Serini 2021).) The conception employed in this paper is most closely attuned to “locality as typicality” – though, as explained in the text, it incorporates further elements as well.

<sup>2</sup> This “place-less” state being part and parcel of a wider “geography of nowhere” (Kunstler 1994) and postmodern “global sense of place” (Massey 1994) that has been thoroughly discussed in geography circles and beyond.



Figure 1: Five-point crown stamp of certified Parma prosciutto ham, a geographically-indicated food product from Italy (image from [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/food-safety-and-quality/certification/quality-labels/eu-quality-food-and-drink/prosciutto-di-parma\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/food-safety-and-quality/certification/quality-labels/eu-quality-food-and-drink/prosciutto-di-parma_en)).

We are furthermore concerned with “ethical food” in an *animal welfarist* sense of the phrase. According to this perspective on the ethics of food production and consumption, it is unethical to consume – let alone produce – food whose production involves undue levels of harm for the (sentient) animals involved in that production.<sup>3</sup> The welfarist perspective allows wide latitude for different conceptions of the relevant sorts of *harm* involved here. For example, is a non-human animal “harmed” by having its life artificially (albeit, perhaps, painlessly) shortened? Do deprivations of opportunities for species-typical behaviors qualify as harms, even if these deprivations aren’t associated with physical pain? Or do only physical

and emotional pain and anguish qualify as harms in the relevant respect? (And so forth ...) Likewise, the welfarist perspective is compatible with a wide range of practical conclusions *vis-à-vis* animal-consumption practices. (For instance, persons committed to welfarism may be led on those grounds to embrace, in turn, a *vegan* lifestyle, or a *vegetarian* lifestyle, or a pescatarian lifestyle, or a “happy meat” lifestyle, or ...)

Finally, in this paper we are concerned with “sustainable food” in a conservationist sense of that phrase. This conception rests on what, among environmental ethicists, is frequently called an *ecocentric* axiology, whereupon various biotic (and maybe some hybrid a/biotic) *collectives* are understood to be the bearers of inherent, or at least intrinsic, value.<sup>4</sup> One type of hybrid biotic/abiotic collective

<sup>3</sup> Admittedly – at least on its “consumption side” – this rendering of the welfarist perspective assumes a (perhaps overly naïve) ethical premise: what Anne Barnhill, Mark Budolfson, and Tyler Doggett call (in introductory material appearing in both of their jointly-edited volumes) the “Simple Principle” (Barnhill, Budolfson, and Doggett 2016) about consumer ethics. As these authors put it in their (Barnhill, Doggett, and Budolfson 2018, p. 9), this principle holds that “if something is produced in a way that is wrong, then it is always wrong to be a consumer of it.” They go on to argue persuasively, though, that this principle appears inadequate, and that, as a consequence, the ethics of consumption are considerably more complicated.

<sup>4</sup> On our understanding, something has *inherent* value when it bears that value “objectively,” independently of the valuing activity of any “value-able” subject. Something has *intrinsic* value, on the

entity that might bear value, on this view, is the *ecosystem* – jointly composed of a collection of (abiotic) soils, air, and waterways, together with the (biotic) populations of organism residing in and around them. But the paradigmatic example of a (wholly biotic) collective entity thought to bear inherent value, standardly cited by ecocentrists, is the *species*. Species (and their preservation) are often claimed to have a kind of inherent or intrinsic value, over and above the value borne by each of their individual members. A collective entity, like a species or a population, may have interests that are served by events that are contrary to the interests of (some of) their individual members – as when a herd is benefited by the culling behaviors of predators in a fashion that forestalls overpopulation and its concomitant resource depletion.<sup>5</sup>

Our principal contention is that the conjunction of locavorism (in the genealogical sense), welfarism, and conservationism generates a position in *culinary* or *cultural ethics* that is as theoretically well-grounded as it is under-appreciated: viz., that certain sorts of “local meats” are to be *supported* on ethical grounds. That is, certain animal-raising and -slaughtering practices may deserve our ethical approval, precisely *because* of the welfare and conservation effects that they generate for the animals involved—not only for the non-human animals that are (humanely) raised and (painlessly) slaughtered, but also for the *human* animals that derive their livelihoods, their identities, and perhaps even tremendous satisfaction from the roles they play in this practice as well.

Whether or not any such locavorist practices actually are justified on welfarist and conservationist grounds, we cannot say – the authors ultimately will remain agnostic on the question. But we do believe that this is a plausible possibility, worthy of serious investigation. So our aim in this paper is simply to illustrate how one might attempt to defend certain versions of (carnivorous) locavorism on animal welfarist and conservationist grounds – using the example of *Cinta Senese* pigs in Italy as a case study. We shall proceed as follows: In Sections I and II we adapt Roger Scruton’s encomium to the lifeways of the English countryside (and the “happy meat” produced thereby) to the context of Tuscany – explaining why we think *Cinta Senese* pigs provide an even better illustration of Scruton’s thesis than

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other hand, insofar as it is valued intrinsically (rather than *instrumentally*, or “extrinsically”) by some valuing subject. (Rolston III 1994) offers one example of the former view – an ecocentrism premised on the objective, inherent value of the non-human natural environment. (Callicott 1986) defends a more “subjectivist” account of the (intrinsic) value of various a/biotic collectives.

<sup>5</sup> Our embrace of both welfarism (in the preceding paragraph) and ecocentrism (in the present) indicates that, in terms of broad moral frameworks, our analysis proceeds in a largely *consequentialist*, or at least *teleological*, vein. For a defense of the sort of consequentialist framework that might successfully comprise both the specifically welfarist and ecocentric commitments that we’ve taken on here, see (Hiller 2016).

do Hertfordshire cattle. In Section III we articulate and address the most obvious objection to our thesis: *viz.*, the seeming (and unfortunate) parallel to arguments that might have been used to justify, e.g., human chattel slavery. Our response to this objection also provides an answer to a different criticism: *viz.*, that the pigs' premature deaths would still constitute a harm, even if it were shown that their captivity doesn't lessen their welfare. A brief Section IV concludes that – *if* our arguments in Sections I and II are sound, and if our responses to objections in Section III are successful – we will have shown that eaters with *locavorist*, *welfarist*, and *conservationist* tendencies may have heretofore underappreciated reasons to endorse certain forms of animal husbandry.

## I

(Scruton 2004) has argued persuasively that livestock raised in the traditional manner of the English countryside, at least as he has depicted it, lead lives that are not only wholly worthwhile in their own rights, but are also centrally constitutive of a shared form of (human and non-human) life with much to commend on ethical, humanitarian, ecological, environmental, and even aesthetic grounds. It is therefore worth quoting him at length.

Consider the traditional English beef farmer, who fattens his calves for thirty months, keeping them on open pasture in the summer, and in warm roomy barns in the winter, feeding them on grass, silage, beans, and maize, attending to them in all their ailments, and sending them for slaughter, when the time comes, to the nearby slaughterhouse, where they are instantly dispatched with a humane killer. ... Such animals, tended in the traditional way, by a farmer who houses them together in the winter, and allows them to roam in the summer, are as happy as their nature allows. (Scruton 2004, p. 87)

Understood in this way, Scruton argues,

Livestock farming is not merely an industry – it is a relation, in which man and animal are bound together to their mutual profit, and in which a human duty of care is nourished by an animal's mute recognition of dependency. ... Anybody who cares for animals ought to see this kind of husbandry as a complex moral good, to be defended on the one hand against those who would forbid the eating of meat altogether, and on the other hand against those carnivores who prefer

the unseen suffering of the battery farm and the factory abattoir to the merest suggestion of personal risk. (Scruton 2004, pp. 88–89)<sup>6</sup>

After allowing that this form of agriculture is not always as idyllic as he has just portrayed it, Scruton proceeds to argue that

Nevertheless, as with all forms of husbandry, cattle farming should be seen in its full context – and that means as a feature of the total ecology of the countryside. Traditional livestock farming involves the maintenance of pastureland, properly enclosed with walls or hedges. Wildlife habitats spring up as the near-automatic by-products of the boundaries and shady places required by cattle. This kind of farming has shaped the English landscape, ensuring that it retains its dual character as producer of human food and complex wildlife habitat, with a beauty that is inextricably connected to its multifarious life. In this way, what is, from the point of view of agribusiness, an extremely wasteful use of land, becomes, from the point of view of the rest of us – both human and animal – one of the kindest uses of land yet devised. (Scruton 2004, p. 89)

Scruton concludes his paeon to the English countryside with a gesture towards the existence of yet other similar practices un-analyzed, and yet further benefits not elucidated: “I have abbreviated the story. But it could be expanded into a full vindication of livestock farming, as conferring benefits on all those, the animals included, who are part of it” (Scruton 2004, p. 89). Just such an expansion is what we shall attempt to effect in the next section – illustrating how the localized (as well as distant) welfare gains created by (genealogically) local food are exemplified to a perhaps even greater extent by the porcine practices observed in Tuscany, Italy.

## II

Some foods are iconic; they represent a people or a place so fully that we cannot think of one without the other: maple syrup in Vermont, cheese in Wisconsin,

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<sup>6</sup> For all intents and purposes, Scruton’s allusion to the “battery farm” is a reference to what will be, for many readers, the more familiar notion of a “factory farm.” It is of course important to acknowledge that pigs raised under industrial conditions on such so-called factory or battery farms may be so badly mistreated over the course of their upbringing that to consume their flesh is perhaps to be complicit in great wrongdoing. However, we follow Scruton in simply setting aside such cases, and focusing on the case of so-called “happy meat.”



wine in California, lobsters in Maine. The concept of terroir indicates that some places make tastes, and while originating with wine (Sommers 2008), the concept has been more widely applied more recently, being recognized as pertinent to an array of local and regional foods and products (Trubek 2008). The proliferation of geographical indications attests to the salience of the linkage between place and taste, whether culturally, economically, or environmentally driven (Morgan, Marsden, and Murdoch 2009).

One especially illustrative instance wherein these place-taste linkages are in evidence can be found in Central Italy, where pigs hold a special place in the cultural and environmental landscape. Porcine products are core to the foodways of the place. Moreover, human-animal interactions with one species in particular provides a salient example of (potentially) moral meat-eating: the case of *Cinta Senese*, a once-endangered pig, in Tuscany, Italy. The near-extinction status of *Cinta Senese* (Franci, Gandini, and Bozzi 2004), recognized in conjunction with the overall environmental (and cultural) importance of preserving and promoting biodiversity within livestock species, especially among indigenous breeds (Franci, Gandini, and Bozzi 2004), led to a place-based porcine population resurgence founded on a purposeful reinvigoration of their agricultural production. In Tuscany, *Cinta Senese* constitute a robustly *local* food product (in a genealogical sense), where they plausibly lead quite happy lives (in a welfarist sense), and the recent revival of their dwindling populations clearly represents a “sustainability success” (in a conservationist sense). We shall therefore look at their case in some detail.<sup>7</sup>

At least as traditionally depicted,<sup>8</sup> these animals and their caretakers jointly exhibit the many virtues we have just seen Scruton attribute to English farmers and their cows. The following account, from a web series covering “Italian delicacies,” describes the life of the *Cinta Senese*, the “pigs in paradise,” pretty well (**emphasis** in the original):

These animals are reared strictly out-of-doors, in woodlands of various tree species, especially acorn bearing holm oaks. The pigs are reared in **wild or semi-wild conditions**, where they are left free to pasture in woods planted with small shrubs. Outdoor farming ensures that these animals grow healthy and stress-free. A sow has no more than 6-8 piglets per year compared to the 25 piglets produced by the Large White, the most widespread Italian pig breed.

<sup>7</sup> As a theoretical, philosophical undertaking, this paper rests on extant representations of pigs and published reports on their caretaking rather than on direct observations or other primary data.

<sup>8</sup> One such traditional depiction can be found at <http://cintasenese.blogspot.com>.

Regulations stipulate that no more than **ten adult animals can occupy one hectare of land**. Another important norm regulates their feed: **60% of their nourishment must come from Tuscan products**. In their woodland pastures, they find leaves, acorns, olives, and locally grown grains. Finally, the animals may not be butchered before one year of age. The resulting product is a small pig of average size, with thin black bristles and a characteristic white band around its breast and forelegs. Its snout is elongated and narrow and its ears hang over its eyes to protect it from bramble bushes and brushwood.<sup>9</sup>

Based on this description, these pigs seem to live as good a life as a pig could expect to live. They are also, presumably, *happy* – at least insofar as they are well-fed and living a peaceful, authentic life. Moreover, these pigs live a life that is enriched by – and enriches – the local food system, especially insofar as it supports healthful eating and a tidy profit. The high-flying reputation of the animals allows growers to earn a similarly high return, fostering an opportunity to glean even greater value from an animal that is often used “from snout to tail,” both as fresh cuts of meat and as cured meat products. The online “taste atlas” describes *Cinta Senese* this way:

The gamey meat of pasture-raised Cinta pigs isn’t built up with toxins, but packed with healthy unsaturated fats and, compared to other pork, it can cost up to three times as much! Apart from common pork cuts, the exceptional quality of this succulent meat makes it well-suited for charcuterie of all kinds, including the remarkable *Soppresata Toscana*: an uncured brawn-like salami made from boiled pig heads and leftover parts (nothing goes to waste!).<sup>10</sup>

As the preceding demonstrates, *Cinta Senese* pigs foreground several concepts at play in this analysis. First, locavorism is betokened in multiple senses: these pigs create products with a distinctive *terroir* largely because *they themselves* eat predominantly locally (in every sense of that term). Further, we observe valorization of the local environment via the quality of the pigs and their resultant food products.

As for the welfarist perspective, and the wider consequentialist framework in which it is embedded: we might augment our previous observation regarding these animals’ tranquil lifestyle – replete with species-typical behaviors – with some

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.finedininglovers.com/article/italian-delicacies-cinta-senese>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.tasteatlas.com/cinta-senese-1>

rather “indelicate” ruminations on the culinary *delicacies* that they are used to generate, post-mortem. *Cinta Senese* pigs are typically grown for geographically-indicated cured meats like salami and prosciutto. Such meats are considered something of a delicacy, and accordingly are sold, served, and consumed in small portions – but to considerable enjoyment and gustatory delight. (And, as just noted, at considerable per-unit cost!) Thus, pound-for-pound, *Cinta Senese* pigs punch above their weight class (relative to, say, Hereford cattle, most likely) when it comes to producing Epicurean pleasures. One pig raised in the central Italian countryside might yield enough servings of prosciutto to satisfy the (highly - cultivated) tastes of many more consumers, compared to what might be similarly effected by the slaughter of a single English cow. Simply put, each *Cinta Senese* pig is a more efficient generator of (marginal<sup>11</sup>) culinary or gustatory pleasure than is each Hereford cattle – or so one might argue, at any rate, and not without plausibility – and thus perhaps each sacrifice of a single porcine life generates comparatively more resultant pleasure, and contributes more greatly to hedonic welfare.<sup>12</sup>

However, it’s of course worth noting that the pleasure-maximization argument might wind up going the other way too. For “pound-for-pound” pleasure is not the same as “life-for-life” pleasure, and it can only be this latter dimension that gets priority in the welfarist calculus. A slaughtered cow yields far more meat than does a slaughtered pig ...and so it may still be the case that – though the slaughtered pig wins the “pound-for-pound pleasure” competition (because each pound of its cured, dried flesh yields a greater degree of pleasure (and income) than does the correlative pound of beef) – the cow generates a sufficiently greater volume of beef, such as to correspondingly generate a greater “volume” of overall gustatory pleasure. And thus, on this view of things, its sacrifice purchases for its future human consumers and even *greater* aggregate quantity of pleasure – and it therefore “wins” the “life-for-life” competition.

Finally, the welfarist position is augmented by a conservationist perspective

<sup>11</sup> The “marginal” pleasure created by a portion of prosciutto is the surplus pleasure that serving generates, over and above the next-best option that its consumer might expect to derive from any alternative food item. The *marginal* pleasure created by a serving of meat, then, should not be confused with – and is always smaller than – the “total” or “absolute” level of gustatory pleasure it creates. This recognition affords the anti-carnivorous welfarist an important maneuver in her arsenal, as it restricts evaluations of meat-generated gustatory pleasures to their (smaller) marginal values – and thus diminishes to a considerable degree the hedonic welfare accruing from meat-consumption to which the defender of omnivorism might wish to appeal in defending his preferred animal-consumption practices.

<sup>12</sup> For an illuminating analysis of the notion of *culinary value* being deployed here, see Engisch (forthcoming). It should be noted, though, that Engisch ultimately rejects the “Hedonic Model” of culinary value we may be seen here as tacitly endorsing. We thank an anonymous reviewer for calling this paper to our attention.

since, in the case of *Cinta Senese*, the pig production is indeed a form of species preservation. If it weren't for the consortium convened to protect them (or at very least, the wider social movement that eventually gave rise to this consortium), they may well have gone extinct.<sup>13</sup> (At any rate, there would likely be far fewer specimens of them currently in existence.) But for the parties raising and selling these pigs and their products to people willing to eat them, *Cinta Senese* would not have flourished – and might not even have persisted – as a species.

### III

Our argument thus far relies on a pair of empirical claims, *full* defense of which lies outside the scope of our analysis. These two claims are that (i) *Cinta Senese* pigs do not themselves experience undue harm or suffering in the course of their customary upbringing; and that furthermore (ii) the lives of the Italian farmers who raise them (to say nothing of the Italian – and international – consumers who enjoy their products) betoken a significant amount of value. For pig farmers in Central Italy see themselves as heirs to, and preservers of, a long and noble local tradition – a longstanding embodiment of certain agrarian ideals. This lifestyle's disappearance would be the disappearance of an irreplaceable source of genuine human cultural value. Thus, to implement – or even to urge – a blanket prohibition on the consumption of pigs would be to effect a significant disruption of local agricultural life, insofar as the practices of pig-raising (no less than the practices of pig consumption) constitute a central facet of this lifestyle.

However, such an argument invites an obvious objection, particularly insofar as one focuses on the second empirical claim set forth above. Namely: the objection from Odious Analogy. It goes like this: Like the raising and slaughtering of pigs, human chattel slavery was *also* central to antebellum life in the southern states in the United States; discontinuing the practice of human slavery would (and did) have disastrous consequences for that way of life. However, this fact was no reason whatsoever to oppose (or lament) the elimination of the institution of slavery! But then, why should we think matters stand otherwise with the role of pigs in Italian agricultural life? If slavery's central role in plantation life in the US south provided no reason not to end the institution of slavery (as clearly it didn't), then why should the disruptive effects of eliminating *Cinta Senese* pig production give us any pause, if the mistreatment of the pigs involved is severe enough?

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<sup>13</sup> The (Italian-language) website of this consortium can be found at <https://www.cintasenesedop.it/>.

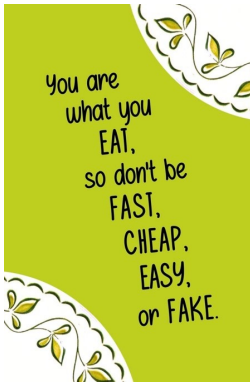


Figure 2: Popular meme that reads: “You are what you eat, so don’t be fast, cheap, easy, or fake” (image results from google search).

There is one relatively “cheap” or “easy” response to this criticism, which we would do well to resist. (After all, as the popular foodie meme suggests (Fig 2), when it comes to food, one should avoid that which is “fast, cheap, [or] easy...”.) It goes roughly as follows: “Well, actually, there *weren’t* any cultural aspects of U.S. antebellum plantation life that were particularly valuable and worthy of preservation; the destruction of this way of life, attendant upon the elimination of legalized slavery, did away with a great deal of injustice, and *nothing* in the way of countervailing loss of valuable forms of life. *All* parties – enslaved persons and enslavers alike – stood to gain (in terms of morals and values) from the elimination of this inherently unjust and soul-distorting way of life.” Now, this may or may not be apt as a diagnosis of the moral calculus attendant to the elimination of the legal institution of slavery. But even if so, this response succeeds only in evading the central issue at play here.

For surely there are *some* cases where some human practice passes out of existence, and where such passing is – all things considered – an instance of collective moral progress ... but where such passing nevertheless represents the elimination of some forms of human excellence or virtue, the absence of which represents a genuine loss. Consider, if you like, the following example: the passing away of the forms of life and social organization that formerly underlain the *courtly* or *chivalrous* virtues. A life of courtly virtue might represent a genuine mode of valuable human flourishing. But such a life, while perhaps genuinely embodying value, requires as a prerequisite certain inegalitarian modes of social organization incompatible with life in a modern liberal democratic polity. We may therefore endorse the passing away of various forms of social organization (serfdom, knighthood, the maintenance of the social status of *nobility*, etc.) that formerly made possible the exercise of various courtly virtues. But we may still, at the same time, lament the loss of the opportunities for certain parties to exemplify these virtues.

So let us simply grant, for the sake of argument, that antebellum Southern life did involve the partial embodiment of certain virtues – as, plausibly, certain other (all-things-considered) unjust modes of human life have done. (We are not thereby granting that slavery *per se* embodied any human values or virtues, of course.) Nevertheless, even so, *no one* would today (reasonably) maintain that

such virtues served to *justify*, or to *outweigh*, the great injustice of slavery. And in parallel fashion, some might argue, the “objectification” of pigs inherent in the very idea of animal husbandry – the fact that some pigs are created for the express purpose of being slaughtered, and (however “pain-free” their lives may be) are destined to serve as nothing more than instruments of human (cultural and gustatory) pleasure – serves to undermine the moral defensibility of this way of life, full stop ... just as the injustice of slavery served to undermine whatever alleged “values” may (or may not) have arisen from southern plantation life.

We argue, however, that this chattel slavery comparison is invalid since enslaved persons (even those – if such there ever were – who were extremely “well-treated”) could never have “as good a life as a human can have.” Autonomy is clearly a central and constitutive value of a good human life, and slavery clearly is not compatible with this value. But no parallel considerations preclude the claim that the life of a happy *Cinta Senese* pig – even though this life essentially involves captivity – is close to a fully flourishing one. Some animal advocates might argue that a pig could never achieve the level of well-being that it deserves, or reach its full hedonic potential, if it is ultimately destined for slaughter for human consumption. They might, in other words, argue that a “kept pig” still represents a moral wrong, even if the pig would never know it. (McWilliams 2014) offers a powerful expression of this position, arguing that – *contra* the central commitments of “food movement” luminaries like Michael Pollan, Mark Bittman, and Jonathan Safran Foer – small-scale, non-industrial animal agriculture is not, and *cannot be*, “humane,” so long as the eventual slaughter of its captive subjects is its central organizing concern. As well-treated as the animals on these family farms may (or may not!) be, says McWilliams, it is *not* after all possible for those farmers to (in the evocative words of his title) “love animals to death.”

We are not certain we agree – at least insofar as we are operating from within the welfarist paradigm (rather than, e.g., adopting the sort of rights-based approach associated with figures like (Regan 1983)). Scruton himself had considered this objection. We can little hope to improve on Scruton’s formulation of the basic relevant considerations here, so we shall quote him at length:

Surely, such a farmer [the “traditional English beef farmer”] treats his cattle as well as cattle can be treated. Of course, he never asked them whether they wanted to live in his fields, or gave them the choice of lifestyle during their time there. But that is because he knows – from instinct rather than from any philosophical theory – that cattle cannot make such choices, and do not exist at the level of consciousness for which freedom and the lack of it are genuine realities. (Scruton

2004, p. 87)

Beyond thusly dispensing with the “heteronomy” concern – to the effect that livestock “were not asked,” and therefore “could not have consented” to their lives of captivity – Scruton contends also with the “harm of premature death” concern – what’s now often called the *deprivationist* account of the badness of death. This refers to the claim that the principal harm visited upon (even putatively “humanely” raised) livestock is – not the suffering they endure during their (artificially shortened) lives – but the loss of that portion of their lives that they do *not* get to experience, owing to their untimely demise at the hands of the slaughterer. This worry is arguably much more on-target than the heteronomy one, particularly insofar as it *does* seem possible to firmly ground it within the welfarist framework. (For one especially clear and careful attempt to do so, see (McMahan 2008).) Once again, we can little hope to improve on Scruton’s response to this concern, so here again we shall quote him at length. Here is what he has to say on this matter:

Human beings are conscious of their lives as their own; they have ambitions, hopes, and aspirations; they are fatally attached to others, who cannot be replaced in their affections but whose presence they feel as a need. Hence there is a real distinction, for a human being, between timely and untimely death. To be “cut short” before one’s time is a waste – even a tragedy. We lament the death of children and young people not merely because we lament the death of anyone, but because we believe that human beings are fulfilled by their achievements and not merely by their comforts. No such thoughts apply to domestic cattle. To be killed at thirty months is not intrinsically more tragic than to be killed at forty, fifty, or sixty. (Scruton 2004, p. 88)<sup>14</sup>

The most promising means of resisting Scruton’s conclusion here (from within the welfarist paradigm) is to appeal to some version of what (following (Parfit 1984, p.

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<sup>14</sup> Expressed in the vocabulary in which some contemporary debates are couched, Scruton is here denying that the “deprivationist” account of the badness of death applies in the case of livestock. We must note here that this position is controversial, however. In recent years, a number of writers (e.g. (Harman 2011; Bradley 2016; DeGrazia 2016)) have argued that deprivationism about death *does* generate the judgment that livestock slaughter (even when painless) counts as a harm for those animals whose lives are prematurely ended. (Belshaw 2016), meanwhile, is perhaps the most prominent critic of this stance, arguing that such animals lack the sorts of “categorical desires” (a notion tracing back to Bernard Williams) that are required to sustain the claim that their loss of a valuable future constitutes a harm. (Bower and Fischer 2018) critique Belshaw’s argument, citing livestock behaviors they believe to ground the attribution of such desires.) (Solis 2021) provides a helpful overview of this debate – satisfactory resolution of which unfortunately lies beyond the scope of this paper.

387)) we might term the “Impersonal Total Principle,” or what philosophers sometimes simply call “the Total view.” This is the claim that (in Parfit’s formulation) “If other things are equal, the best outcome is the one in which there would be the greatest quantity of whatever makes life worth living.” But any such invocation is, at least in this particular case, likely to founder on the *conservationist* consideration previously described. Namely (and as Scruton alludes to in some of the above-quoted passages, in reference to English cattle) that each of these pigs – like all domesticated livestock, everywhere – owe their very being to the agricultural practices whose persistence has called them into existence. In the case of the *Cinta Senese* this is true, not only in the (welfarist’s) individualist sense that applies in the case of each individual organism, but also in the (ecocentrist’s) *collectivist* sense, which arises for the species as a whole. For, again: were it not for the extant (and recently-revived) practice of *Cinta Senese* pig farming, the species may well have gone extinct. The species (and the individual members thereof) ostensibly to be benefited by calls (like McWilliams’s) to eliminate pig-farming might not exist to be benefited in the first place, absent this agricultural practice.

#### IV

Putting this all together, our tentative argument runs as follows: that (a) assuming *Cinta Senese* pigs are not generally mistreated and do not suffer much physical pain or emotional anguish during their upbringings, and (b) since pigs (even notwithstanding their relatively advanced cognitive capabilities, especially relative to other forms of livestock) do not (and indeed cannot) experience their “captivity” as an autonomy-undermining form of harm, and (c) since their slaughter-induced premature deaths fail to constitute a genuine harm or mistreatment, then (d) the elimination of certain traditional agricultural practices related to the production of (genealogically) “local meat” in Tuscany would represent a “net loss” from the animal welfarist perspective: no grievous harms would be eliminated on behalf of – nor would any welfare-enhancing benefits be created for – the sake of the *Cinta Senese* pigs themselves. And at the same time, the lives, livelihoods, and interests of the non-non-human animal pig producers would be set back, resulting in (non-negligible) human harms.

The foregoing reasoning relies essentially on a number of empirical premises, of course. Our paper is not meant to be dispositive with regard to these important and difficult matters.<sup>15</sup> We leave the adjudication of those matters to another time

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<sup>15</sup> As an example of one of the difficulties in this neighborhood, we must acknowledge the existence of doubts recently raised in certain quarters regarding the veracity of the commonly-



and place – and, perhaps, to other parties, better-equipped than we to comment intelligently about, e.g., the empirical realities of Tuscan farm life or about animal psychology. Our point is merely conditional: *Granting* the truth of the empirical claims embedded in premises (a) – (c) – empirical truths that seem not implausible – locavores with welfarist and conservationist proclivities may actually find that they have considerable reason to support (rather than to oppose) this form of animal agriculture, and any others relevantly like it.

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proffered claims regarding Italian pigs' idyllic lifestyles. One recent exposé, released by an organization called Eurogroup for Animals, alleges widespread mistreatment of Parma pigs. (An industry group, the Parma Ham Consortium, of course disputes these allegations, and the representativeness of the images and footage released by Eurogroup for Animals.) This dispute is chronicled at <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/mar/30/row-erupts-between-italys-parma-ham-makers-and-activists-over-pig-welfare>.

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## Ungrounding *Terroir*

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**ABSTRACT** | This essay examines the concept of *terroir*, or “the taste of place,” from a philosophical and broadly hermeneutic standpoint. I argue that *terroir* is a concept that can be reduced neither to its empirical, geological characteristics nor to the various human interventions that use the landscape and geographical region to produce distinct comestibles (such as wine, cheese, etc.); rather, *terroir* is a concept that captures a tension between taste and place that resists representation. My goal is to explain how *terroir*, despite its traditional uses to perpetuate hierarchies of wealth, status, and power, or its more recent deployments as a tool to open or assert economic and political imperatives, can nonetheless operate as a critical concept. I first present a definition of *terroir* that draws upon a number of recent studies to highlight its polysemic nature and its inherent yet productive tension. I then examine analyze this tension – one that can undermine foundations and resist its reduction to either a descriptive or a constructive function – by drawing upon the work of thinkers who have theorized a type of geophilosophy. In the essay’s final section, I suggest that *terroir* operates like a utopia and thus provides an impetus for the critical evaluation of our claims to territorial identity and aesthetic uniqueness.

**KEYWORDS** | Terroir; Taste of Place; Populism; Local Food; Nietzsche; Deleuze; De-territorialization

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## 1 Introduction

The expansion of global food economies has instigated, somewhat paradoxically, an appreciation and demand for food with distinct local character – a by-product of competitive markets and the inexhaustibility of consumer desires. Comestibles that convey the unique physical and cultural features of a local region – that deliver a “taste of place” – are often said to represent that region’s distinct *terroir*: a term that originated within the winemaking practices of France but now transgresses its geographical and gastronomical boundaries to describe an ever-increasing range of local products. Despite the term’s growing popularity and use in recent decades, the very idea of *terroir* is no stranger to criticism from various quarters. Beyond its overtones of Old World traditionalism and gastro-elitism, it has also been criticized as scientifically dubious, politically motivated, or simply another marketing ploy in a hyper-competitive marketplace.

A good deal of recent scholarship documents these trends: alongside those who promote the promise of *terroir* as a means for local producers and small economies to keep up with consumers’ voracious desire to discover new and uncharted tastes of place, there are others who recognize in its appeals to authentic taste and protected foodways the darker voices (and problematic history) of colonialism, exploitation, and even fervent nationalism. Bruno Latour’s passing condemnation of the blind nostalgia for *terroir* (Latour 2018)<sup>1</sup> highlights a justified concern: as the world faces crises brought on by human-induced climate change, mass migrations, increasing wealth disparity, market exploitation, and the proliferation of misinformation through various media channels (all of which make us feel more alienated from each other and our own world than ever before), the tendency to seek value in *terra firma*, in the nostalgia for place and kindred identities, risks slipping into extreme expressions of tribalism and xenophobia which have been on the rise over the past decade across a number of continents. The political expression of these tendencies is populism, “the permanent shadow of representative politics” (Müller 2016, p. 101) which most often arises within democratic contexts as a “crisis of representation.” Populism is not an ideology, per se, “but a political logic” (Judis 2016, p. 14) defined by a conflict between the *populus* who feels their interests are not represented, and the establishment that benefits from the status quo. I want to suggest that analogous forces are at work in the expansion of *terroir* outside of its Old World domain (France and more broadly Western Europe) into new markets and territories where a crisis of representation does not target an intransigent political or social elite (Judis 2016, p. 17), but

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<sup>1</sup> His reference occurs in the context of his critique of populist “revolutions” fifty years after the revolts of ‘68.

the relentless homogenization and alienation brought about by global capitalism: when a product's unique cultural, social, and gastronomic value – along with the unique identity and voice of those who produce it – is threatened by a reduction to its infinite exchangeability as a commodity at the mercy of market demand. One need only glance over its relatively short history to find that *terroir* has been deployed as an ideological device to create social hierarchies, to distinguish markets, and even to assert ethnic imperatives. But the goal of this investigation is not equate the growing desire to produce and consume GI wines or single origin coffee with a radical political ideology or rapacious market capitalism; rather, I want to articulate how the concept of *terroir* responds to a crisis of representation in this landscape – namely, how *terroir* reveals the processes by which essential connections are dissolved and identities are formed in an ever-changing relationship between taste and place.

The conceptual space in question is one that exists between descriptive concepts (which assume that the world is a factual given readily available to our understanding) and constructive concepts (which views knowledge of the world as a product of human relations and conventions that is always mediated and never direct). At the heart of descriptive accounts of *terroir* is a basic yet powerful essentialism grounded in the necessary connection between a particular product and its geographical location – a sense of place that is defined and cultivated by human actors but that is employed as if it were the natural (and thus undeniable) origin of identity and authenticity for those individuals and the fruits of their labor. Constructive accounts of *terroir* emphasize the human element – a combination of individual artisanship, cultural knowledge, and agricultural practices that actively shape the product and the territory that gives rise to it. Neither explanation, however, fully captures the phenomenon of *terroir* as a living relation between taste and place. Recent scholarship, along with testimony from producers in the field, illustrates how the formation and deployment of *terroir* within a complex global market exposes and undermines the very grounds of *terroir* and its reduction to either a natural description or a social construct, to the point that any sense of a natural territory – an authentic or real ground – is replaced by something more vital, fluid, and contingent.

This essay argues that *terroir* should be understood as a critical concept whose function draws into question purely descriptive claims, on the one hand, and on the other, resists a reduction of a product's value to relative measures of taste or market demand. I will first present a definition of *terroir* that draws upon a number of recent studies to highlight its polysemic nature and its inherent yet productive tension: a tension that results from the incommensurable relation it forges between place and taste. I will then analyze this tension by drawing upon

the work of thinkers who have theorized a type of geophilosophy: Friedrich Nietzsche, who provides the tools for understanding the concept as anti-foundational; and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who provide a conceptual framework to explain the relational nature of a territory and its fluid de- and re-territorialization. In the essay's final section, I suggest that *terroir* operates like a utopia and thus provides an impetus for the critical evaluation of any claims to territorial identity and aesthetic uniqueness that reduce taste to place or vice versa.

## 2 What is *Terroir*?

A great deal of the literature on *terroir* takes note of the concept's untranslatability – as if the word, like the products it represents, resists the very idea of a transgression beyond its origins on the gentle slopes of Burgundy. Of course, the notion of a wine's taste being connected to its place of origin, let alone the very soil in which it grows, existed long before the cultivation of wine in France; moreover, the power of the idea has, in recent decades, stretched well beyond the “Old World” boundaries of France and its neighbors, firmly rooting itself in the imaginary of global consumers as an indicator of local provenance, gastronomical authenticity, and cultural identity in “New World” contexts around the globe – traits that assert uniqueness in the face of the homogenizing forces of global capitalism. Trubek (2008) translates *terroir* as “taste of place,” capturing not only an element of its history in the expression *goût de terroir* (and revealing, as part of its patrimony, a markedly negative connotation), but also an essential – and potentially productive – tension in the term if one considers the double sense of the genitive “of taste”: taste *that belongs to* a place (suggesting an origin within a specific locale) and taste *that is about* a place (suggesting a supplemental or even subjective judgment of taste). A crisis of representation – what the term describes and to whom or what it can be attributed – seems to be built into *terroir*'s undeniably “multivocal and polysemic” nature (Ulin 2013, p. 70).

If the definition of *terroir* reflects a certain multivocality, and at times, even a certain mysticism about the ambiguous relation between taste and place, we should view it not as a problem of translation, but rather as one of interpretation. As with all interpretations, the goal is not solely to carry meaning over from one language to the next, or to describe a certain state of affairs, but to reveal and articulate a meaningful relation between a set of incommensurable or irreducible differences. This type of understanding creates new knowledge through a reciprocal movement of thinking and experience that Hans-Georg Gadamer describes as a hermeneutic circle (Gadamer 1989, pp. 190–192). A definition of *terroir*, therefore,



does not look to resolve, once and for all, the tensions that exist among its various elements; rather, its definition strives to articulate how those tensions illustrate the many factors at stake when *terroir* is employed to describe or construct the relation between taste and place. Rather than simply describe a phenomenon or construct a set of normative practices, such a concept functions to disrupt any necessary relation between taste and place and thereby reveals how *terroir* resists a simple reduction to the measurable qualities of a physical place or to a set of guiding principles or cultural practices.

A closer look at the wide array of definitions and deployments of the concept not only reveals a contentious discourse within and outside of its academic study, but also a set of basic tensions or dichotomies that provide a basis for the concept's critical potential. In fact, if one were to sketch out a loose topography of *terroir* and its many definitions, one could trace a continuum of meaning that, at one end, employs it as a descriptive concept that aims to identify and even quantify the various natural features (soil composition, geological formations, climate patterns, etc.) responsible for a product's inimitable taste, and at the other end, as a constructive concept that highlights the role of human intervention, inventiveness, and aesthetic sensibilities in the expression of *terroir*. Thus, earlier examples of the term, particularly in the sense codified into French law and carried forward into the 1990s, focus on the particular characteristics of the land and the unique characteristics it imparts to its products. Here, a *terroir* is typically defined as "...an existing (often still unknown) relationship/interaction between the natural environmental factors viz., climate, topography and soil which have the potential (also often unknown) to induce a specific character into an agricultural product (not necessarily wine)" (Bohmrich 1996, p. 33).<sup>2</sup> More concisely, it is "an area or terrain, usually rather small, whose soil and microclimate impart distinctive qualities to food products" (Barham 2003, p. 131). In recent decades, however, there has been an increased focus on the human element involved in the production of a *terroir*'s unique products: "Broadly defined ... as the fortuitous result of the relative influences of geology, climate, biology, cultural preference, technological developments, emerging markets, and evolving consumer tastes... *terroir* has come to designate a stable set of geo-spatial conditions and human practices whose ultimate products express those unique factors" (Whalen 2010, p. 117).

If, however, there is a trend in the scholarship that provides a path to follow in this inquiry, it can best be expressed, to invoke a chapter heading from James Wilson's study of *terroir*, as the contentious issue regarding "The Part that Man

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<sup>2</sup>Bohmrich attributes the definition to D. Saayman's lecture "Soils and Climate of the Western Cape" (Saayman 1995).

Played" (Wilson 1998, pp. 50–54) in the development of the taste of place. And while there are extreme expressions that focus solely on the empirical analysis of geological features and their impact on taste, or on purely human expressions of *terroir* (an idea taken to its extreme in French chef Thierry Marx's claim that geography is not crucial, and that "my *terroir* is inside me" (Druckman 2008, p. 14), the majority of accounts dwell in vast middle regions and broker between the natural and human contributions to the taste of place. This negotiation reflects a certain tension that cannot simply be represented by a description of either the natural or the human element in isolation.

More traditionalist accounts note that *terroir* embodies a *patrimoine naturel* that consists not only in air, land, water, and geographies of the French countryside held within certain boundaries, but includes along with "nature" the presupposition that human agents have an interest in such goods: "more than just material in the world to be encountered, cared for, and exploited, the natural heritage is a *socially meaningful affair* ... [that] ... connotes the local spaces and soils, and also symbolic relations of goods and services production ..." (Douguet and O'Connor 2003, p. 238). Others provide a slightly more balanced definition, noting that *terroir* captures "the correspondence between the physical features of a place – the soil and slope of a vineyard, the local climate, and the blend of grapes – and the character of its final products, often mediated by human experience accumulated over centuries ..." (Fourcade 2012, pp. 525–526). Refinements of the human element note that the intersection of physical environment, agricultural technique, economics behind production, and symbolic representations capture "the tension between the physical properties of a given location and the human efforts to coax certain aspects of *terroir* out of the land and into the bottle" (Sternsdorff-Cisterna 2013, p. 53). Sarah Daynes' ethnographic work on Bordeaux winemakers reveals that wine producers tend to disrupt the opposition between the physical ensemble of geological features and the effects of human knowledge and intervention, interpreting *terroir* as "the human 'reading' of a given natural milieu" (Daynes 2013, p. 16). Thus, one can deduce from her work that while both physical nature and human intervention are necessary aspects of *terroir*, neither one alone is sufficient.

More human-centered accounts tend to emphasize the cultural, if not spiritual elements of *terroir*, "the customs and ceremonies that sanctified it and put it, so to speak, in communion with the drinker" (Scruton 2010, p. 135), or "a way of being alert" (Kramer 2016) that cannot be reduced to a scientific analysis of a *terroir*'s geological and chemical components. Wilson, whose work also provides a scientific basis for *terroir*, nonetheless notes that it also and more importantly invokes a "reverence for the land which is a critical, invisible element of the term. The true

concept is not easily grasped but includes physical elements of the vineyard habitat – the vine, subsoil, siting, drainage, and microclimate. Beyond the measurable ecosystem, there is an additional dimension – the spiritual aspect that recognizes the joys, the heartbreaks, the pride, the sweat, and the frustrations of its history” (Wilson 1998, pp. 55–56).<sup>3</sup>

Studies of *terroir* that examine the concept’s life outside of its Old World confines in France (or perhaps Europe as a whole) seem to rely more heavily on the human element and its contributions to the taste of place. Robert Swinburn’s study of winemaking *terroir* in Australia argues that the concept of *terroir* retains a certain integrity (Swinburn 2013, p. 38) and that the truth of “deep *terroir*” that lies in the reverence of place “relates not to achievement as it is generally understood, but to difference, to process, to humility, and to emotion” (Swinburn 2013, p. 49) – to the things “that count.” J. A. Halvaksz’s examination of *terroir* in Papua New Guinea relies on a descriptive account of *terroir* as a local characteristic that resists national consciousness and global hegemony, but also notes that *terroir* is not just in the soil but also the result of skills and practices (Halvaksz 2013, p. 149). And even at the level of language across cultures, Sarah Cappeliez’s analysis (Cappeliez 2017) illustrates that despite the difficulty of *terroir*’s translatability, all versions of it retain the core aspect of human skill and intervention in the natural process.

When this human element of *terroir* takes on a distinctly more cognitive or even ideological role, the concept reveals its constructive limit. The concept of *terroir* in such cases trains its focus more intently on extrinsic goals – whether those are goals of cultural identity, marketing, political power, or even simply knowledge for its own sake. Amy Trubek explains how she grew to understand that “...*terroir* was not simply a word but a category for knowing and discerning wine” (Trubek 2008, Trubek 2008, p. 2; Nicolas Sternsdorff-Cisterna echoes this idea, employing *terroir* not “as that which needs explaining, but rather as the lens through which to explain” (Sternsdorff-Cisterna 2013, Sternsdorff-Cisterna 2013, p. 54). Robert Feagan notes that *terroir* involves a conscious and active involvement of the imagination whose “valorization of place through food (as well as language, crafts, landscapes, etc.) in the culture economy is tightly coupled to spatial ideas of the local community, economy, and territory” (Feagan 2007, p. 27). In a more

<sup>3</sup> Wilson goes on to quote a number of wine experts, whose definitions emphasize various notes of the concept, such as its “mental aspect” that allows the wine grower to produce wine that captures the “natural” taste the land is supposed to produce (Kramer); the aptness of certain grapes for certain locales (Johnson); the literal and metaphorical deep-rootedness of the vines that captures an “unknown something” that makes a wine what it is (Querre); and even its ability to link the consumer to the producer, and in a number of ways, undo the fetishizing of wine as a commodity.

critical vein, the work of Bohmrich (1996), Barham (2003), and Demossier (2011) and others demonstrates how *terroir* within the cultural and economic sphere is never just simply a celebration of place, but an effective strategy serving ends that have nothing to do with the supposed grounds of *terroir* in itself: "The discourse on *terroir* has over the years become omnipresent, but the politics of *terroir* refers also to a process in which a wide range of actors have become involved in the social construction of the present, which, in turn, provides a platform for self-identification..." (Demossier 2011, p. 687).<sup>4</sup> Heather Paxson's arguments (Paxson 2010) regarding the "reverse engineering of *terroir*" by local, artisanal producers in the United States is perhaps the most revealing analysis of the process through which place is constructed and deployed not as a reflection of an inherited tradition or an intrinsic authenticity, but as an instrumental relation between food and place that asserts political, social, aesthetic and/or economic ideals.

These analyses – in their diversity, but more importantly, in their ability to exploit the term's semantic ambiguity – suggest that a crisis of representation occurs when *terroir* articulates a set of practices, a way of life, and a relationship with the natural world that asserts its identity within a market. The attempt to represent a product's unique value and identity brings the concept's critical function to light – here allowing the concept of *terroir* to articulate the tension between taste and place in varying degrees, exposing and even undermining any exclusive claim to description or to construction. The crisis of representation is therefore more than just a by-product of *terroir*'s seeming untranslatability: beyond the limits of a cultural and linguistic particularity, *terroir* points to a radical incommensurability that centers upon the taste of place (once again taken in the double sense of the genitive). It is the taste that belongs to the inimitable particularities of a locale, which includes those tasters who inhabit the space and cultivate its products; but, it is also the taste (the physiological experience, and the cultural norms) that always remains removed from what is being tasted, the common measure, however subjective, that is the condition of possibility for the experience of *terroir* as a taste of place. These two orientations – one that represents the more objective situatedness of place, and the other that navigates the more subjective vicissitudes of taste – comprise a tension inherent in *terroir* examined by some of the more recent scholarship on the topic. This tension is exposed, but not necessarily resolved, through an analysis of its productive and potentially problematic aspects. But if there is some degree of promise in the use of *terroir* as a critical concept, it rests in its ability to reveal the possibility for an anti-foundational and pluralistic representation of the taste of place that resists essentialist claims and

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<sup>4</sup> See also (Bohmrich 1996, p. 33)

its dissolution into merely relative value.

### 3 Overcoming “Soil Addiction”

While Immanuel Kant is considered the father of critical philosophy, it is Friedrich Nietzsche who provides the conceptual tools for a more radical overturning of foundations. In order to decouple *terroir* from the idea of a stable foundation it is then perhaps appropriate that we follow the path of a philosopher who was obsessed with the effects of foods on the mind and body, and who considered thinking a kind of “digestion.”<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche’s infamous proclamation that “God is dead!” heralds a way of thinking (if not an age) where the idea of one singular and absolute origin, principle, or ground has run its course, and thus, the world appears only as a contest among competing claims to origin. The only “truth” it provides is a validation of the idea that an absolute or dogmatic truth claim reveals whose narrative has been victorious, whose “will to power” prescribes the normative worldview. More than a century later, Nietzsche’s ideas resonate in our current age of culture wars, fake news, and the reduction of social life to pure politics. But Nietzsche’s aim is not simply to devalue all value and leave us adrift in a world of relative truth, or to provide an accurate description of what would now call a postmodern condition; for Nietzsche, the “revaluation of all values”<sup>6</sup> illustrates a process necessary to life, signaling not only the contingency of values and changing worldviews throughout history, but also an existence that actively promotes that process. If he provides an ethics, of sorts, it represents a reversal of traditional philosophical method: it supplants foundations and prioritizes the vitality of experience, rejecting dogmatic claims to origin and seeking in the concrete and specific experiences of human life practices that embrace and promote difference – a pluralism that does not slip into mere relativism, but understands those truths within the contingent contexts that produce them.

For Nietzsche, our notions of geographical place are not immune from this revaluation. In the chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil* entitled “Peoples and Fatherlands,” Nietzsche (2006) undertakes a geographical (and not just genealogical) critique of morality by coining the term “soil addiction” to describe the dogmatic and over-zealous nationalism he sees developing in Europe of the 19th Century. His analysis is not, however, a flat out critique of fervent nationalism in favor of an Enlightenment ideal of universal cosmopolitanism (Morgan 2006, pp. 458–459).

<sup>5</sup> I refer the reader to my study of Nietzsche’s use of gastronomical language in his philosophy: (Valgenti 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche undertakes a “genealogy” of the history of moral concepts in order to expose their historical contingency and transformation over time. Cf. (Nietzsche 1998).

His goal is rather to find a way to capture the movement, vitality, and force of national cultures in the active process of growth, ones that strike a balance between the rich soil of tradition and the creative direction of open possibility and self-actualization. Nietzsche critiques the German people's lack of vitality, for while they "are from the day before yesterday and the day after tomorrow, – *they still have no today*" (Nietzsche 2006, p. 132). In other terms, caught between the fixed traditions of the past and the empty conceptual abstractions of possible futures, the Germans represent a static existence incapable of *living* in the fluid and vital sense so commonly emphasized in Nietzsche's work. Yet, even nations with a more vibrant sense of identity (Nietzsche cites France as an example) fall victim to his more general critique of nations as immature constructs: "what gets called a 'nation' in Europe today (and is really more a *res facta* than *nata* – every once in a while a *res ficta et picta* will look exactly the same – ) is, in any case, something young, easily changed, and in a state of becoming ..." (p. 141) Any connection between nation, people, and place is at best a compelling fiction (*res facta*) that is made by humans rather than an integral union born spontaneously and unavoidably from the soil. Nietzsche's point is not, however, that we should hope for a nation born from the soil, but rather that we should question and view with suspicion any such claims about an essential connection to place.

Nietzsche's depiction of the "good European" as a "moderate" and "free - spirited" vanguard of a new age therefore relies neither on essentialist claims to nationalistic origin, nor to an empty universal idea of world citizens without distinct identity – as each side represents a reductive position analogous to the tension at the heart of *terroir*: one direction would create a hyper-Europeanism that pits a unified Europe against other nations and continents, or, more broadly, reasserts the hegemonic norms of the West as "natural" or necessary; and the other direction would merely exchange the nation for ever-tinier regional identities – such as the move to *climats* in Burgundy (Whalen 2010) or micro-*terroirs*. In response to these logical extremes, Nietzsche's moderate position suggests that we consider any essentialist claim of *terroir* as, at best, a contingent claim to identity – an organizing principle that is not an absolute ground, or the mark of authenticity, but instead a means of representing the emergence of a new identity and the productive tension between geographical description and cultural construction.

Recent studies of *terroir* – particularly in a global context – develop this critical trajectory to reveal how it both represents and problematizes the inherent tension in the idea of the taste of place. Tamara Whited's work on cheese in the French Pyrenees expresses the general spirit of this critical orientation, which strives to "reclaim the materiality of *terroir* without essentializing it and to demonstrate the causal role of food choices in its evolution" (Whited 2018, p. 826). The contingency

of these locales is thus the driver, with place denoting not just a physical space, but “a way of thinking about the contingent ways in which spaces are imagined and acted upon and how they constrain and condition the choices for their users” (Sternsdorff-Cisterna 2013, p. 65). This occurs in several ways, but primarily in *terroir*’s placement as a mediator between the local and the global. Within the original context of French winemaking, Marion Fourcade demonstrates that *terroir* is never simply a representation of the soil or place, but “the geographic entrenchment” or active attribution of value to a territory by actors and processes that are “deeply historical, as well as economic and sociological” (Fourcade 2012, p. 534). Thus, diverse and competing practices, such as the fixed boundaries in Burgundy and the moveable boundaries of Bordeaux (Fourcade 2012, p. 531; Daynes 2013, pp. 24–25) problematize the very notion of *terroir* as a singular descriptor.

Some studies of *terroir* also reveal how differences between Old and New World *terroir* reject any notion of a singular definition for the concept. As Demossier and others have pointed out, the conceptual deployment of *terroir* for economic, political, and social advantage is nothing new, and the emergence of New World *terroir* merely brings these grounds to light for open examination and shows them in their fluid, rather than static, form. This revelation occurs most markedly in the ways that *terroir* has been marketed to American consumers. Rather than represent the features of a cultic mysticism of place, they expose how the tension between “...the local and the global feed upon and reinforce each other rather than being mutually exclusive, and the production of locality relies on imagination mediated by local agency, but articulated differently by individuals depending on their social positioning at local and global levels” (Demossier 2011, p. 287). Robert Ulin works in a similar vein, arguing that *terroir*’s construction – rather than reflection or idealization – of place “offers a partial but nonetheless important corrective to the ubiquity of separating commodities totally from the social conditions of their production, circulation, and consumption” (Ulin 2013, pp. 67–68). Some degree of grounding (however contingent) is crucial, as the promotion of local provenance contributes to “a more general process that allows us to challenge mass-produced commodities divorced from the social and historical conditions of their production” (Ulin 2013, p. 82). The grounding leverages the “taste of place” in the objective sense of the genitive, positioning a product through the force of its unique point of origin.

This practice both reveals and participates in the tension between Old and New World versions of *terroir*: those who wish to identify and protect *terroir* call for the preservation and identification of a rich, pluralistic tradition of gastronomic particularity and diversity; yet, this diversity often serves (in the worst possible way) the ends of potent essentialisms: the protection of regional and

national identity (Old World *terroir*) on the one hand, and on the other, the infinite exchangeability of commodities in a free market economy (New World *terroir*) – what Fourcade describes as a persistent tension between “a liberal political logic rooted in democratic rights, inventiveness, and self-promotion” and a “corporatist-conservative logic rooted in privilege, experience, and tradition” (Fourcade 2012, p. 539). And while these two sides are often presented as alternatives, both strategies rely on a problematic understanding of a given product’s origin and uniqueness as natural, authentic, and inimitable. Both logics of *terroir*, in response to a crisis of representation brought about by the pressures of a global economy, rely upon and exploit a (seemingly) essential connection between food and place while thriving upon a conceptual malleability that allows *terroir* to be deployed in ever-changing social, political, and economic dynamics.

#### 4 Deterritorializing Taste

If we follow Nietzsche’s lead, the distinctiveness of a *terroir* can no longer be found in its essential connection to a given locality. How then does one avoid a notion of the “taste of place” that provides little more than a relative measure, namely, a representation of *terroir* that has no remarkable quality other than its distinction from other tastes. The crisis of representation here emerges from the subjective sense of the genitive where it risks a universal, and thus empty, exchangeability that concedes *terroir* to the whims of market economies. The philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari offer some insight into a more substantial measure through their notion of “geophilosophy” and the use of concepts that are “syntagmatic” – connective and relational – rather than merely “paradigmatic” or merely reflective of a general way of being. For the purposes of this investigation, one might consider the exclusivity of the *connection* between taste and place captured in the concept of *terroir* as “syntagmatic” one, that is, a living and irreducible interpretation (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 91).<sup>7</sup> The authors argue that “Geography is not confined to providing historical form with a substance and variable places. It is not merely physical and human but mental, like the landscape. Geography wrests history from the cult of necessity in order to stress the irreducibility of contingency” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 96). This irreducibility of contingent places, coupled with the fluidity of its connections to cultural forms, gives a more distinct shape to Nietzsche’s anti-foundationalism and critique of nationalism and

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<sup>7</sup> They argue, moreover, that the creation of a concept means “to connect internal, inseparable components to the point of closure or saturation so that we can no longer add or withdraw a component without changing the nature of the concept...” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 91).



fatherlandishness. Beyond the simple critique of claims about an essential origin or to a necessary connection between taste and place, the relation between place and taste remains fluid and open because geography is considered to be an active participant in the process.

Once freed from necessity, the challenge is to capture and articulate this contingent and evolving movement. What for Nietzsche was the living, creative force and energy of the present moment, Deleuze and Guattari fashion as a movement and reorganization of relations through the idea of a territory: a *milieu* or set of social relations that are formed and re-formed through acts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. As they state in *What Is Philosophy?* (1994), “thinking, or the construction of concepts, takes place in the relationship of territory and earth,” two zones of indiscernibility that are often understood as unchanging geographical markers of particularity and totality (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 85), respectively, but that in fact record how we map out relational spaces, orient ourselves within a terrain, and establish tentative grounds for our own identities. The movement between these zones occurs in two directions: *deterritorialization* moves from a specific territory or set of relations to the more general totality of earth, signaling acts that undo and reformulate those relations (such as a connection between a particular people and the place they inhabit); *reterritorialization* moves from earth to territory, re-establishing the connection between certain conceptual forms and a particular territory or place, re-inscribing particularities within the more general totality of lived experience. If we think of these terms in relation to *terroir* as a constructive concept, the former entails a recognition of a founding condition that is not absolute but both conditional and conditioning (a first step already achieved in a more general way with Nietzsche); the latter builds upon and through that contingency, emphasizing the particularity of new forms and relations but always in relation to the ones that preceded them – underscoring a certain contingent process within lived history.

This strategy suggests that *terroir* need not be committed to existing hierarchies or to perpetuating the alienation of the commodity form. In a study of wine-making in Spain, the authors Gonzalez and Dans refer to an example of this type of resistance as “The Spanish Exception” – the rejection of territorial distinctions that allows Spanish wine makers to reflect “new social movements, novel trends in consumer desire, and populist origins” (González and Dans 2018). But the broader trend has been to cultivate and express the unique contributions that place can make to wine and to other food products, in effect, rescuing products from their complete commodification and re-connecting them, in a meaningful way, to place. This is a definite challenge, as the construction of *terroir* often obscures the relationships between a locality and the humans who toil to make it productive. Sarah

Besky's study of the Geographical Indication for Darjeeling Tea illustrates for the "immaterial labor" of building "authenticity" and a sense of the "natural" actively misrepresents the history of the region and the conditions under which the tea is produced (Besky 2014, p. 86) – an obscuring of human labor that, as Besky notes, can also be seen in more traditional *terroirs* (Guy 2010). But localities can also be sites of resistance to the imposition of national identity and the demands of the global consumer (Halvaksz 2013, p. 146); moreover, it would be correct to say that the source of the resistance is "the result of skill and practices" (Halvaksz 2013, p. 149) rather than just the locality itself. And as Szilvia Gyimóthy argues, new Nordic cuisine represents a reinvention of *terroir* that develops an ontology of place by constructing a relation to the external world through the use of narrative and a culinary imaginary that resonates with global market demands (Gyimóthy 2017).

Daniel Monterescu's study of border wines gives us what is perhaps the most detailed account of this strategy of de- and re-territorialization. Through an examination of how *terroir* is defined in politically contested areas and, to a certain extent, how *terroir* is "denaturalized" in politically contested regions and reconstituted through a "territory effect" (Monterescu 2017, p. 128), one sees the possibilities for *terroir* beyond the reification of natural geology or the heartless promotion of a marketable commodity. The active constitution of *terroir* in contested regions provides an opportunity to give voice to traditions and populations often obscured by the commodity itself. Monterescu examines three contested regions (the Tokaj region between Hungary and Slovakia, the Judean Hills/South Mount Hebron in Israel and Palestine, and the cold war buffer zone between Bulgaria and Greece) and in them identifies three strategies for *terroir*-making in contested regions: the territorialization of *terroir*, in which a region is actively divided to draw new political boundaries; the terroirization of territory, through which a border-zone is actively branded; and *terroir* expansion, through which *terroir* is reverse engineered to occupy new zones. These modalities of border configuration reveal that the human element in *terroir*, "ridiculed by Latour as a provincial form of strategic essentialism," is more than custodial or blindly nostalgic: "the *terroir effect* actualizes in practice a yearning for value, meaning, and identity" (Monterescu 2017, p. 137).

In this conceptual schema, one finds a formulation for representation that rejects any claim to an authentic or absolute origin. There is no "territory" in the original sense, but only ever a retroactive constitution of an absent origin as de- and re-territorialization. Any original or authentic notion of territory is illusory and filtered through the contingencies of history, and all attempts to find an original ground or foundation take the form, as I have argued elsewhere, of a *de jure* rather than a *de facto* argument about the right to possess and use such con-

cepts freely and openly as a foundations or grounds.<sup>8</sup> One cannot merely point to tradition, or possession, as the origin of the rule because every description of place is always already the formation and deployment of place – its de- and re-territorialization through the filters of individual and cultural identities looking to find representation.

Even though the claim to a specific *terroir* rejects the homogenizing tendencies of a global market, it nonetheless partakes in an aspect of its anti-essentialistic logic: by exposing its own groundlessness and engaging in the self-aware process of *terroir* formation, the concept can be activated as a critical principle with significant disruptive potential. *Terroir* is meaningful because, in the end, no one can lay an absolute claim to its boundaries – it undermines all factual claims to possession and counters “the taste of place” with “the place of taste” – an arena for *de jure* arguments about its significance.

## 5 *Terroir* as a No-Place

*Terroir*, when removed from its purely descriptive or constructive claims about the value of its products, reveals that it is, in a certain sense, a “no-place” – a utopia that represents the incommensurable tensions between place and taste, material and artisan, geography and identity that continually seek recognition and validation in a global marketplace that threatens to reduce them to commodities whose value is determined by the vicissitudes of supply and demand. It marks a way of life that seeks, and actively constructs, its expression. When *terroir* embraces its contingency and deterritorializes the relation between taste and place, the concept of place is strangely nowhere, but as seems to be the case today, everywhere: it marks a deterritorialization of *terroir* itself, in that it has become a constructive concept, a category for thinking about taste and existing in a locale rather than just the brute fact of a geographical location or ideological framework.

The terror of “*terroirism*” – in its past, present, and future forms – exists when *terroir* is deployed as an undeniable point of origin tied to a physical territory, or as a malleable instrument of ideology, in order to maintain the political and economic status quo. And yet, it is in these expressions of the uniqueness of place, and in the very submission to market valuation and the relative measure of taste, that the critical function of *terroir* emerges: the invocation of *terroir* in the gastronomic marketplace and, more broadly, in the attempt by cultural entities to express their unique identities in the face of indifferent economic and political systems, is a response to an ongoing crisis of representation. For those whose

<sup>8</sup> Ref. to author's earlier work (Valgenti 2009).

voices are not heard, whose plight is at the mercy of others, or who simply crave aesthetic difference, *terroir* is not a solution, but an expression of a certain hope that power – in all of its forms – is neither simply a fact of nature nor the result of a determined will. We might, in the end, simply refer to *terroir* as a utopian concept – a “no-place” whose narrative, like the many great utopian narratives of our shared traditions, performs a critical function that ultimately asks us to turn our gaze inward and evaluate the grounds that support our actions.

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## Thinking Food in Poetry

### Research on Lu You's food philosophy

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**ABSTRACT** | Lu You is the Chinese poet with most extant poems. Many of his over 9,000 poems are in some way related to food, thus representing a significant source for the research on food culture and philosophy in the Song Dynasty. This paper analyses Lu You's poetic remarks on food, and summarizes their gist, which can be categorized into four precepts: control food and avoid gluttony, choose vegetables over meat, eat lightly, and use food to keep fit. In this way, the paper contributes to our understanding of Lu You's poetry, which in turn reflects the viewpoints on food of the literati and officialdom class in the Song Dynasty.

**KEYWORDS** | Lu You; Poetry; Food Philosophy

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## 1 Introduction

During the Song Dynasty, the ethnic fusion of the North and the South, the emergence of the public class and the prosperity of the business culture all greatly contributed to the development of Chinese food culture. Meanwhile, the literati and officialdom class showed an unprecedented interest in food. Almost every poet of this period talks about it. Apart from describing food and culinary techniques, they also focus on personal feelings, suggesting in their poems deep emotional responses to food, and thus elevating food into a sort of philosophy. Lu You is a typical example. Born around the fall of the Northern Song Dynasty, the upright poet's persistence in fighting against the Jin Dynasty resulted in an unsuccessful career. Lacking opportunities to serve the country, he had to spend lengthy time at home. His verses are imbued with ardent patriotism, while real life is also a central topic. Food is a recurring motif, thanks to his unique insight in this field. Among the over 9,000 poems preserved today, nearly 400 pieces are directly on food, and as many as over 3,000, or one-third, contain references to food. These works tremendously facilitate our understanding of food culture in the Song Dynasty, while revealing the food philosophy of the literati and officialdom class at that time.

## 2 Eat Simply and Frugally, Avoid Gluttony

Food was Lu You's lifelong passion. The decades-long official service in Fujian, Sichuan and Hangzhou allowed him to savor tasty dishes in various regions. Nevertheless, he always kept in mind to avoid hedonism and act frugally. In his article *Ju Shi Ji* 居室记, Lu You writes: "Don't consume more than you can at each meal. You don't have to finish all the dishes on the table. Just stop eating when you are slightly full." (Lu 1976) He thereby echoes Confucius's "A gentleman is not a greedy eater." In the poem *Zong Bi* 纵笔, he announces that "I don't have anything on my mind. There are always books in my eyes. Half full is sufficient. Excess food or clothing should not be expected." (Lu 2005) In these lines, Lu You articulates the idea that a well-fed and well-clothed life is not what he aims to accomplish. Indeed, his actions speak louder than words. The food poetry displays his preference for vegetables over expensive alternatives, and that he constantly made himself aware of the importance of enduring hunger and abstaining from greed. The writer compares food to a formidable adversary and warns himself not to allow free rein to the pleasure of eating: "The emotions and desires might be harmful, but that's because you are obsessed with them. I would say food is a strong opponent in daily life. The troubles induced by spoons and chopsticks could be more severe



than the affairs. It is wrong for a six-feet tall man to be enslaved by the satisfaction from food.” (Shu Jing 书警, from (Lu 2005)) In *Xi Yong Xiang Li Shi Wu Shi Lin Qu* 戏咏乡里食物示邻曲 (Lu 2005), another poem that portrays the gourmet food from his hometown Shanyin, he lists Euryale ferox seed, red bayberry, fiddlehead fern, jelly ear fungus, sweet potato, etc., while still reminding himself at the end that “I am feeling less capable in my senior years. I deserve the ridicule when I already have one but greedily expect ten. I will get rid of the obsession, live a simple life and be content with poverty, just like Yan Hui 颜回.” (Lu 2005)

“The sound of laundry can be heard in the remote village at night. Sweet potato porridge is being cooked on my shabby stove. Dwelling in poverty is not something I purposely want, yet a scholar is supposed to feel comfortable in any cold and hungry conditions.” (*Dong Ye* 冬夜, from (Lu 2005)). From his perspective, thrift and abstinence from greed are the self-consciousness of a scholar. These virtues not only assist one to build a strong will and set a high standard of morality, but also help to avoid misfortune and keep fit. According to *Shu Zhong Bei Chuang Zhou Wo You Zuo* 暑中北窗昼卧有作 (Lu 2005), “I was a sickly child and nearly died many times. This might be a test and a warning from the God. I start to limit desires and avoid indulgence in sensual pleasures in my middle age, and control food in my senior years ... Although life and death are pre-destined, there is something one can do. In a kaleidoscopic world, all the disasters are originated from greed.” By saying this, he expresses confidence that a pure heart, few desires, and moderation in eating once one reaches midlife, contribute to longevity. In the second piece of *Bing Zhong You Shu Er Shou Ge Wu Yun* 病中有述二首各五韵 (Lu 2005), he explains that “our generation should learn how to stay healthy. Self-control is necessary on all matters. Most entertainments are not suitable for the elderly. The sole thing needs attention is food. You may inscribe some texts on the tableware to remind yourself that any food is your enemy.” The feeling gets deeper as he grows older: “Ancient people always say the patient should eat less. If one fails to do it, even panacea could not help. Now I have experienced a lot as an old man, I definitely agree with it.” (*Za Gan* 杂感, from (Lu 2005)). Thrift and abstinence from greed are the family tradition he wished to pass to the future generations. In the first piece of *Dui Shi Xi Zuo Er Shou* 对食戏作二首 (Lu 2005), he writes: “The lettuce, water shield and other vegetables are soon consumed after the red millet and the fragrant Japonica rice from Taizhou are steamed. I spend thriftily not because I am no longer an official, but because it is a family tradition.” Furthermore, he clearly instructs the descendants in *Fang Weng Jia Xun* 放翁家训 (Lu 1985) that “You just need enough food to fill your stomach. Offer a bit cleaner and exquisite food for guests. It would be childish to seek precious and rare food just to show off. Do bear in mind and stay alert!”

### 3 Choose Vegetables over Meat

Apart from tea, wine and alcohol, the most frequently depicted items in Lu You's food poetry are vegetables. More than 40 vegetable types are referred to in *Jian Nan Shi Gao* 剑南诗稿, covering almost all the regular choices in the Song Dynasty and heavily outnumbering meat, staples or other categories. Calling himself an advocate for vegetables, the comparison and praise are widely found in his poetry. For example, "A mouthful of mountain vegetables beats eight delicacies" (*Chun Jin* 春近, from (Lu 2005); "A plain garment is as warm as a fox fur. The winter vegetables are as crisp and sweet as the bear's paw." (*You Ju* 幽居, from (Lu 2005)); "The pigweed and amaranth in the wooden plate are so savory that I feel like eating from a jade plate." (*Dui Shi* 对食, from (Lu 2005)); "The raw fish fillet neatly place in the jade plate is not as delicious as the mild boiled cabbage." (*Zhuo Kuai* 斫脍, from (Lu 2005)); "The aroma of the regular Japonica rice is identical to the pricey rice. The chives taste better than the roasted lamb." (*The second piece of Xin Liang Er Shou* 新凉二首其二, from (Lu 2005)); "I don't mind the simple food offered by villagers at all. I just love how fresh and delicious the wild vegetables are." (*Ji Meng* 记梦, from (Lu 2005)). Meanwhile, many vegetable-themed poems (e.g. *Shi Ji Shi Yun* 食荠十韵, *Yi Yi* 薏苡, *Cai Geng* 采羹, *Shu Shi* 蔬食, *Su Fan* 素饭, *Shu Shi Xi Shu* 蔬食戏书, *Shan Zhong Zuo* 山中作, *Zi Shan Zhong* 自山中, *You Ju* 幽居, *Qiu Qing Mei Zhi Yuan Zhong Zhe Di Mu Xi Shi Er Zi* 秋晴每至园中辄抵暮戏示儿子, *Gui Tang Dong Chuang Xi Nong Bi Mo Ou De Jue Ju* 龟堂东窗戏弄笔墨偶得绝句, *Xi Zuo Pin Shi* 戏作贫诗, *Shi Ji Shen Shen Mei Gai Shu Ren Suo Wei Dong Po Geng Ye* 食荠糝甚美盖蜀人所谓东坡羹也) record his favorite varieties (e.g. coarse dishes, taro soup, fiddlehead, wild rice stem, wild vegetable soup, okra, water shield, legumes, bamboo shoot, Job's tears) and convince us that Lu You enjoyed vegetarian food from the heart. However, he was not blindly prejudiced against meat. His view on meat is well-expressed in *Za Gan* 杂感, "There is an ancient saying that meat is playing a part in the elder's health. Nevertheless, why get obsessed with the pleasure of eating after the self-cultivation for decades? Isn't it nice to have mountain vegetables as breakfast and wash with spring water at noon? A seven-feet tall man should not just seek the satisfaction to the mouth." He admits that meat is also good for health, especially for the elders, but one must not indulge, and vegetables should be a priority in the dietary structure.

Lu You's advocacy in vegetables is not only a personal choice, but also a trend of his time. His poor and humble life experience, the concern and compassion for the nation and the people, as well as the willingness to suffer poverty and embrace whatever life throws at him, all naturally match with the refreshing vegetables. These are the reasons behind his vivid portrayal of fruits and vegetables.

For example, “The vegetables in the garden are fresh and digestible, the taste is not inferior to the pork or the lamb, too.” (*Xue Ye* 雪夜, from (Lu 2005)); “The host does not have to buy wine. The arrow-like bamboo shoot and the tender fiddle-head are as sweet as honey. No dish could beat that.” (*Tao Shan Yu Xue Jue Lin Qian An Zhu Jian Zhao Bu Guo Wang* 陶山遇雪觉林迁庵主见招不果往, from (Lu 2005)). The appearance of these vegetables and fruits are exceptionally inviting, too. “The wild vegetable soup and the bamboo shoot are as beautiful as jade.” (*Chun You Zhi Fan Jiang Xi Shi Zuo Ke* 春游至樊江戏示坐客, from (Lu 2005)). The analogy between jade and two growing plants in the springtime highlights how mellow and clean they are.

It is worth noting that Lu You’s advocacy of vegetables over meat is influenced by the food culture of the literati and officialdom class. The Buddhist vegetarian culture and the neo-Confucianism shifted from the meat-oriented trend of the Tang Dynasty to a vegetable-oriented tendency in the Song Dynasty. At this time, vegetarian restaurants and recipe books started to get popular. For instance, although few literati or officials were strictly vegetarian, almost everyone praised vegetarianism, since it embodies the willingness to suffer poverty and the pursuit of otherworldly ideals.

The example of Yan Yuan 颜渊, a student of Confucius, is indicative of this philosophical attitude toward vegetarianism. Neo-Confucianists of the Song Dynasty highly praised Yan Yuan, and regarded him as a sage second only to Confucius. Yan Yuan’s diet was famously very simple, consisting almost entirely of vegetables, and yet he still enjoyed it. This ascetic spirit was highly praised by people. Many literati and scholars in the Song Dynasty also imitated Yan Yuan and believed that drinking and eating meat was a way of indulging in material enjoyment and a form of degeneration. The experience of compressing material needs to the extreme by eating vegetables and drinking only water helped them understand life and find real happiness. For example, Yun Xingzong 员兴宗 claims: “I regard vegetables as the king of food, not because of their taste, but because of their virtue.” Vegetables represent the virtue of noble morality, which was widely recognized in the Song Dynasty. Zhang Lei 张耒 also wrote in one of his poems that, after a vegetarian meal, “I stretch and feel that my whole body and mind have been released.” Finding pleasure in simple vegetable food became one of the pursuits of scholars in the Song Dynasty. Sima Guang 司马光, Huang Tingjian 黄庭坚, Su Shi 苏轼, and other leading writers of the time eulogized vegetarian food in a great deal of masterpieces. Lu You, in particular, adopted vegetarianism to keep fit and refrained from meat or fish in his later years. Such a choice is the expression of a philosophy, rather than being a mere physiological pursuit.

“The Song people get not only health benefits, but also transcendental expe-

riences. By versifying the vegetarian food and mild taste, scholars express their deep thoughts on the politics, gains, losses and life meanings, and illustrate their transition in attitude, purpose, ideal and aesthetics.” (Liu 2016) Of course, there is still a big difference between this and strict vegetarianism. People in the Song Dynasty regarded eating vegetables as the symbol and pursuit of personal noble morality, but they did not preclude themselves entirely from eating meat. In fact, except for religious reasons (Buddhism and Taoism), most people only paid more attention to vegetable food as an expression of a general set of values, rather than because of a strict commitment to vegetarianism.

#### 4 Prefer Mild Flavors and Be Skilled at Seasoning

“There is nobody who does not eat and drink, but there are few who truly savor the taste.” (Zisi 2016) The possession of a discriminating taste is one of the highest praises to an epicure since ancient times. As *Cao Pi* 曹丕 states, “Only the aristocratic family that has passed three generations knows how to dress, and only the aristocratic family that has passed five generations knows how to eat.” (*Yu Qun Chen Lun Bei Fu Shu* 与群臣论被服书). In this remark, the difficulty of developing a discriminating taste is emphasized. The process requires solid financial strength, decent political status and good cultural literacy. Although Lu You practiced frugality, and did not consider the enjoyment of food a life goal, his cultural literacy and noble morality helped him develop a unique appreciative style. His appetite was on the mild side, as suggested by many of his poems. For example, “Frosted vegetables are mild and sweet. The new green shoots unfold as spring is around the corner. Simply boiling in water and adding no condiment, the taste is amazing.” (*Dui Shi Xi Zuo* 对食戏作, from (Lu 2005)); “I did not buy salt and cheese in town. The bland vegetable soup is delicious enough.” (*The first piece of Lao Shen Zi Yong Er Shou* 老甚自咏二首其一, from (Lu 2005)); “Meat and rice are yummy, but the light food calms my soul.” (*Qiu Ye Guan Yue* 秋夜观月, from (Lu 2005)); “Drinking is delightful, while eating mild food is satisfactory.” (*Dui Shi You Gan* 对食有感, from (Lu 2005)). When using seasoning, “A bit of salt and vinegar boost the flavor. A dash of ginger and cinnamon lift the spirit.” (*The third piece of Shi Ji San Shou* 食荠三首其三, from (Lu 2005)); “Enjoy the big taro baked in high heat with a pinch of salt.” (*Bing Gao Zhong Yu Feng Xue Zuo Chang Ge Pai Men* 病告中遇风雪作长歌排闷, from (Lu 2005)). The ancient Chinese political and philosophical text *Guanzi* 管子 holds that “it is the mild flavor that enables the five flavors to co-exist.” The pursuit of a mild flavor is actually a tribute to original taste of the food. Likewise, Lu You’s poetry is plain, unpretentious, free of rhetoric, and yet emotional, vigorous and

touching.

Without doubt, Lu You clearly realized that the mild flavor does not fit all occasions. His food poetry demonstrates that the foodie usually prefers mild flavor in the vegetarian dishes. Lu You has tricks for meat that needs complicated seasoning. In *Fan Ba Xi Zuo* 饭罢戏作 (Lu 2005) he elaborates: “Buy pork rib at the East Gate, then season it with vinegar, sweet paste, zest and scallion.” Pork rib is quite common, usually baked, stewed or roasted, whereas Lu You is the only one to be found that cooks it with sour sauce prepared with zest and scallion, featuring the writer’s unique aesthetics in food. According to *Xi Yong Xiang Li Shi Wu Shi Lin Qu* 戏咏乡里食物示邻曲 (Lu 2005), the terminal bud of the palm tree is edible and tastes a bit bitter. After steaming or boiling, eat it with condiments made from vinegar and soy sauce. The taste is terrific, and it helps to activate blood and dissolve stasis. In the poem *Su Fan* 素饭 (Lu 2005), he chooses jade-white premium-level plump rice, cooks by pine twigs and Osmanthus shrubs slowly to induce the fragrant smell, steams the fresh and tender eggplants, and later adds refined vinegar and soy sauce. The silver and white crystal-like eggplants are tempting. This recipe is identical to the Shaoxing modern cuisine “rice steamed with eggplants 饭捂茄子” today, where the well-steamed eggplants are tender and succulent, and taste fabulously paired with the rice aroma when served with vinegar and soy sauce.

In addition, Lu You was an expert in preparing all kinds of sauce or paste as condiments. He “snaps lotus seeds to brew vinegar and picks broad bean to make sauce.” (*Cun She Za Shu* 村舍杂书, from (Lu 2005)). He describes how “the green pickled cucumber is nicely put in the plate”, where he slices the cucumber, and then marinates it with salt and soy sauce. To date, his hometown fellows are used to have porridge or rice soaked in soup or water with pickled cucumber for breakfast.

## 5 Use Food as Therapy and Keep Fit

Food regimens are the most common way to keep healthy in ancient China. Food is utilized to adjust the body functions so that people can prevent or cure diseases and stay healthy. In other words, people take care of the body by eating. The theory of “homology of medicine and food” is recurs in traditional Chinese medicine. Many foods are also medicines, and there is no absolute dividing line between the two. Ancient Chinese herbalists apply the “four properties and five flavors” theory to food, and hold that each food carries medicinal value and belongs to a traditional Chinese medicine kind. In the book *Huangdi Neijing* 黄帝内经 of the Tang Dynasty, it was stated that “the same thing is food for hungry peo-

ple, and medicine for people who are sick". The so-called "four properties" refer to the four different properties of medicine: cold, hot, warm, and cool, reflecting the tendency of medicines to affect the internal Yin and Yang and the change of cold and heat of the human body. For instance, if the disease is cold, such those that induce cold limbs and pale complexion, it should be treated with warm and hot drugs, which can improve the *Yang Qi* 阳气 in the human body and enhance human function. The five flavors refer to the five medicinal flavors of sour, bitter, sweet, pungent, and salty, which correspond to the five internal organs of the human body: liver, heart, spleen, lung, and kidney. The taste of the food itself, as well as that of the condiments, affects the five internal organs. Although five-flavored foods have their own benefits, excessive or improper consumption can also have negative effects. They should be eaten according to one's individual constitution. If you eat too much spicy food and your constitution is dry and hot, you will have sore throat and acne. In practice, food with given therapeutic characteristics can be cooked properly into a "food therapy", depending on the individual constitution or illness.

People started to notice food's effects on longevity since the pre-Qin periods. Health experts since the Han and Jin Dynasties invented numerous food regimens. This trend gained strength during the Song Dynasty, a period when lots of food therapies and lifestyle tips became available, and several food therapy books were written. Food therapy became a common practice, particularly among literati and officials.

Deeply troubled by illness in his teens, and believing himself to show signs of premature senility, Lu You attaches great importance to the maintenance of his health. A set of food regimens are summarized and practiced in his 85 years long life, such as avoiding gluttony, and choosing vegetables over meat. Moreover, he thoroughly understood the medicinal value of food and frequently used food therapy for health benefits.

Lu You claims to be familiar with *Chinese Materia Medica* 本草<sup>1</sup> since childhood. Being an expert in the most common medicines, he gathered medicinal materials now and then, and planted some medicinal herbs in his garden. His expertise in *Materia Medica* 本草 is proven in the poem *Shan Cun Jing Xing Yin Shi Yao* 山村经行因施药. While taking a break in a lodge to feed his donkey, he was approached by several old farmers and expected to tell the growth status of medicinal plants and the seedlings. More than happy to help, he showed the illiterate farmers how to identify seedlings just broken through the soil. He states several times that his

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<sup>1</sup> *Materia Medica* 本草 is the first Pharmacopoeia issued in the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618-907). The original book has been lost in the Chinese Song Dynasty (960 – 1279), and only some contents have been handed down into other Chinese literatures.

food routine is guided by Chinese herbology, for example: “My everyday recipe follows the Chinese herbology. It is such a gastronomic delight that I can’t put down the chopsticks.” (*Dong Ye Zuo Duan Ge* 冬夜作短歌, from (Lu 2005)); “I look at Chinese Materia Medica when I eat, the wisdom of this book is incredible.” (*Ming Zuo* 铭座, from (Lu 2005)). Hence, many healthy food categories appear in his works, of which the most typical one is porridge. He shares its advantages from time to time throughout the poetry: “Everyone wants to live a long life, but not aware that the secret is under their nose. I learn from the poet Zhang Lei (alias Mr. Wan Qiu)’s simple regimen that porridge alone will make you immortal.” (*Shi Zhou* 食粥, from (Lu 2005)). He also advises the elderly that gruel is good for digestion, absorption and longevity: “I am not starved now that my senile body is fueled by porridge” (*Bo Zhou* 薄粥, from (Lu 2005)). Besides, there are verses such as: “I love the pigweed porridge as I grow older, and brewed millet sour soup when I am sick.” (*Cun Ju* 村居, from (Lu 2005)); “A bowl of pigweed soup is sweeter than honey.” (*Wu Fan* 午饭, from (Lu 2005)). Inspired by this theory, Lu You put various medicinal materials (Chinese yam, wolfberry, beans, and vegetables) into the porridge, which are digestible and nutritious. Wolfberry porridge is a wonderful option for breakfast since it improves the eyesight and nourishes the lung, liver and kidney, “The bell rings in the thatched cottage after the snow stopped, I have a wolfberry soup after getting up.” (*Yu Ji Zhai Shu Shi* 玉笈斋书事, from (Lu 2005)). Chinese yam porridge is ideal for the evening, “Chinese yam porridge beats other delicacies in a famished long autumn night” (*Qiu Ye Du Shu Mei Yi Er Gu Jin Wei Jie* 秋夜读书每以二鼓尽为节, from (Lu 2005)), it is an effective food therapy because it invigorates the spleen, nourishes the stomach and lung and promotes bodily fluids.

## 6 Conclusion

Food is a special subject in the history of Chinese poetry, for it is present in secular life as well as in poetic life. A concern for the topic of food is evident throughout Lu You’s writing. The massive quantity of extant poems, as well as the broad range of food kinds discussed, make Lu You’s poetry a treasure for the study of ancient Chinese food culture. Endowed with philosophical thinking, he records traditional food inheritance, articulates insights and reflections on the vicissitudes of life, and to an extent leads the development of food aesthetics and thought in the Southern Song Dynasty. Undoubtedly, this is a grand legacy in the evolution of China’s food philosophy.

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Philosophy of food is a relatively new entry among philosophy branches, which is rapidly expanding in multiple directions, involving scholars working within different philosophical schools. The five papers collected in this special issue bear witness to this general picture, while focusing on the specific topic of local food.

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