

Afterword

Thinking, and Becoming, Beyond Terroir

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The discipline of anthropology has long grappled with the challenge of developing theoretical forms while simultaneously grounding these concepts in concrete phenomena. Is kinship, for example, an empirically observable domain of human life; one model of relationship-making; or an ideological claim, only present in specific times and places, about the value of shared “blood” or genetic inheritance? Are rituals the ceremonial practices by which humans punctuate a collective temporal order, the communicative dimension of all social activity, or merely the artifact of utilitarian models of cultural life (that is to say, what remains after all “practical” activity has been accounted for can only be a “ritual”)? The notion of terroir, glossed as “the taste of place,” presents a similar conundrum. Is terroir best understood as a very specific attribute of viticultural performance; a cultural category of perception (perhaps one developed to evaluate precisely said viticultural qualities); or a framework for articulating the material connection between histories, modes, and techniques of food production and the communities of consumers who appreciate these goods?

The undoubted generativity of terroir as part of the anthropological tool kit over the last generation surely owes a great deal to this capacious ambiguity. It is appropriate that we offer a reflexive appraisal of this practice-cum-theory since—as the chapters in this collection clearly suggest—the limits and contingencies of terroir as a general model are also strikingly clear. In each of our own ethnographic studies of “local” food production in the United States, with artisan cheesemakers in Heather’s case (Paxson 2013) and pastured pork producers in Brad’s (Weiss 2016), the importance of terroir to communities of producers as well as consumers was something that we noted, but also noted as something less than self-evident or settled. For some American cheesemakers, terroir was a potential property of their wares to be “reverse engineered,” revealed, as it were, by paying attention to environmental stewardship in their dairying and cheese-making activities and by asking, “What production is suited to this land?”—and then drawing attention to these distinctive material conditions in their marketing

(Paxson 2010). Similarly, pig farmers and pork purveyors alike hoped to “educate” their clientele about the values and character of “the local,” highlighting ecological, communitarian, and species-specific (allowing pigs to express their “pigness” as a method of livestock husbandry) virtues that curious customers might come to discern in pastured pork (Weiss 2016). In each instance, a taste of place is less something that is readily and spontaneously perceived even by the most observant of connoisseurs than it is an aspirational category, one that might inspire both producers and eaters to greater heights of “good” (Jung, this volume) or “real” food, prized as a means of creating if not preserving the sort of “places” imagined to be a wellspring of shared values and virtues.

The very idea of a “taste of place” is necessarily built out of a conjunction of complex concepts. Taste itself is a perception and a judgment, a material set of properties and the cultivated capacity of an inquisitive subject. Place, too, is less a delimited location in space than a range of possibilities from which actions and events, undertaken by human and nonhuman agents alike, might unfold (Casey 1996). This productive ambiguity (terroir as an ethnographic category and as a generalizable model; or, terroir as a quality in the product and terroir as a goal toward which to aim one’s efforts) is what motivates our reassessment and suggestions in this afterword. Where the volume itself is structured around the range of locations where terroir-related claims are sited—lands, laws, bodies, imaginaries—here we take an alternative pass through the chapters’ case studies to call attention to the range of analytical moves that take us beyond terroir: disentangling place from territory; approaching the borders and boundaries between places as semipermeable thresholds; and emphasizing food’s capacity to remake (and not just represent) worlds. Thinking “beyond” the taste of place allows us to build on the problematics of making and eating, now well described across a range of fields, while seeking out alternative ways of imbuing the locales we inhabit with distinctive (often destabilizing) qualities, and grounding perception in the world.

Places Beyond Territory

When scholars and connoisseurs articulate the relevance of terroir, they generally make the assumption—sometimes quite naively, but often in rather nuanced ways—that sensory perception is (somehow) an expression of a material set of localized conditions. Whether that locality is characterized as a microclimate, a geologically distinguishable substratum, or a longstanding community of practitioners that inhabit these locations, place is pinned almost inevitably to geographic position: it can be located on a map. But the more we know about how food and all that attends to it—from craftsmanship to gastronomy—is made and assessed, the less inevitable this connection appears. In part, the characterization of “place” now widespread in uses of terroir suggests the resilience of certain

objectivist framings of time and space, framings that betray the Enlightenment commitment to supposedly underlying truths that are only subject to subjective “interpretation” after the fact (Casey 2013). Hence, “space” is a physically observable external object, a set of known coordinates, which can then be modified (within limits) by the various modes of practice through which people inhabit “it,” and so demarcate and define “places.” Like the divide between nature and culture now called into question by so much ontological turning, this notion of place—whether as a set of material limits, or a thoroughly culturalist order of relations—subtends a dualism that restricts the possibilities of what place and place making might offer. An alternative perspective, one supported by the work presented in this volume, suggests that anthropology and allied fields can draw out more than the way that localities format practice, but can further illustrate just how activity—such as preparing and serving “homemade” foods (Colquhoun; Graf; Sanders), or replicating the specific texture and feel of “proper” food (Simpson Miller), or creating new food products that concretize the natural-cultural advantages of a particular locale (Xiao)—can formulate and format the places in which they go on (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Munn 1986; Weiss 1996).

Although terroir is frequently used as a descriptor of the ways that food is an expression of place, it can equally be characterized as the ways that place is an expression of food. Gastronomic worlds are full of place making and place-claiming. An approach to taste and place that takes such an orientation reveals (as many of the chapters here do) that our sense of “place” need not be thought of as ineluctably geographical. Place is power that precedes territory. It need not be sought only in specific geographic zones, but in an array of place-making operations that create the horizon of the world (Lefebvre 1991). By putting place making (and the transformation of place, as discussed below) at the center of our concerns with food, we can further an understanding of the many ways that places come into being and become knowable.

Bodies, for example, are foundational to the creation of place. Above and beyond the fact that bodies are located in space and occupy situated positions, they are also perspectives from which activities emerge and events arise, and “into which” social processes, practices, histories, relations, and political economies are sedimented. Bodies and place are deeply interconnected, each constituting the other as such; it is impossible to imagine (except in the abstract) places without bodies, or bodies unmoored from places. This mutual grounding of body and place is expressly articulated in James Staples’s recognition that human well-being in South India is grasped as the proper “fit” between bodies and places, a fitness confirmed through moral substance that co-constitutes people and places. “Place was physical and portable,” he writes in this volume, “it was considered literally embodied in the people who emerged out of it” (213). In this way suitable foods are appropriate to suitable bodies. So, too, the textural qualities of *chop*, which Brandi Simpson Miller reveals to be a quality with tremendous perceptual and

material potential. The capacity to reproduce the textural form as a dimension of the taste of starchy foods, their *chop*, by Ghanaian women who prepare these daily staples is an embodied skill that further links up cooks (and by extension, eaters) to the lineages of which they are a part. Ancestral forces that protect the living and assure the reproduction of the lineage are also (and not surprisingly) concerned with the physical experience and activity of sexual intimacy. In each of these embodied ways, *chop* materializes connections among generations past, present, and future, and grounds them, as well, in the fertile fields where starchy cassava flourishes (Simpson Miller). Hanna Garth's account of the efficacy of *guarapo* as a sweet and icy cold drink beloved by *los Cubanos* also speaks to the ways bodies register deep historical connections, in her case to the labor of sugar plantation, sweat, and enslavement—but *guarapo* can also provide a respite from these burdens, reappropriating the potential of sugar through the reinvigorated Cuban body. Each of these cases (and others, including Colquhoun's account of making, sharing, and eating *domaće* cured pork, and Graf's demonstration of the links between embodied knowledge and cooking skill in Morocco) exemplifies the capacity of the active, eating body to recast the qualities of place through an encounter with food.

Another category from the study of “local worlds” that is repeatedly evoked by food producers and consumers alike is home. Here again, home need not suggest a geographical or regional specificity—*domaće* (homemade) cured pork is a clear illustration of this point; rather, as Anna Colquhoun notes, *domaće* connotes home as “a set of social relations that are at once economic and moral” (this volume: 119). Home is clearly a “place,” if perhaps one that is imagined or aspired to. It takes up a position, offers an orientation to the wider world, and so makes mere spatial forms into a place. Home can be literally anywhere, not bound to a concrete location. Home both is constituted by and always has consequences for relationships—for family and kinship, for domesticity, for household economy. Home cooking and domestic food production are often meaningfully gendered examples of labor. Perhaps above all, home is a familiar locality to and from which people come and go, a place from which social cohorts stand in relationship to their peers, each of whom occupies their “own” home. In this sense, home is a spatial position, but also a reflexive and a mobile one—an origin for moving and dynamic engagement. As Katharina Graf tells us, “*beldi* [the Moroccan sense of “homemade” as well as “local”] foods are situated and differ for every person depending on where they were born and grew up as well as where they temporarily moved and traveled to” (this volume: 174). This is exactly what *domaće* also traces, and what Sudanese meat traveling to and through Portsmouth is (Sanders)—as well as, perhaps, what *nostrano* (our local), also reflecting a scaled-up feeling of home, resists in remaining wedded to a shared place. Still, “the production of *nostrano* is an ongoing achievement, as the in-group it indexes is large, complex, and dynamic” (Cavanaugh 2023: 30). In all these ways, an emphasis

on “home” as a quality both recognizable and desirable further demonstrates the deterritorialized character of place making in food matters.

After all, it is precisely when people experience a loss of connection to geographical place owing to migration or exile—or when they lose direct access to land in the face of roadblocks or border enforcement (Meneley)—that the generational preservation of practical, embodied foodmaking knowledge gains heightened significance (de Silva 1996; Sutton 2000; Mankekar 2002), and bodies become home places. It is little wonder that grandmothers—so often repositories of both loss and nostalgia, generational passage, as well as heritage—figure frequently in the accounts collected here.

Borders and Boundaries as Thresholds

Thinking “beyond terroir” means recognizing the impossibility of territorially bounding what is meaningful about the place of a food. By inviting us to picture, smell, hear, and even savor smuggled Sudanese beef strung up to dry in a migrant woman’s kitchen in Portsmouth, England (Sanders), the *mestizaje* of “traditional” Cuban dishes that embody a tension between aspirational self-sufficiency and the reality of a global food system rooted in slavery and colonial exploitation (Garth), the songs and microbes circulating around Devon’s apple orchards (Pope and West), or the comfortably familiar cuisine of diasporic Chinese restaurants (Klein), chapters in this collection remind us that foods and recipes, no less than peoples and cultures, continue, as ever, to move and meld. As cheese refiners in Italy’s Val Taleggio told Cristina Grasseni, following decades of rural outmigration and depopulation, “no heritage foods would exist in Italy without migrant labor” (2023: 53). Borders need not be walls; they are also thresholds. And yet, as we are also reminded in these chapters, not all foods—and not all peoples—enjoy the same freedom of mobility.

Charlotte Sanders’s observation, for example, that Sudanese beef is subject to confiscation at the border of the United Kingdom, whereas beef from countries of the European Union is permissible, is consistent with why, in Croatia, Colquhoun tells us that the planned “Istrian sausage” Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) would permit the use of pork from across the EU: in each case, economic protectionism must also contend with meat’s propensity to harbor harmful viruses (such as foot-and-mouth disease or African swine fever) that, if released into the food chain, might infect and undermine national livestock industries. Food safety regulation of animal products enacted by both import restrictions and hygiene standards embedded in geographical indications thus share a concern with controlling “what circulates and how” (Bingham and Lavau 2012: 1591). The “disease geometry” of biosecurity, as Hinchliffe et al. (2013: 532) put it, is commonly “understood as practice of demarcating and

shoring up borderlines” by determining and enforcing who and what can and cannot pass through.

And yet, the futility of attempts to fully wall off “healthy” bodies and populations from microbiologically “unhealthy” ones has been widely noted and, indeed, widely experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) response has increasingly been to “move the border away,” as one food industry professional said to Heather. Not only must food producers the world over register with the FDA before their goods can be offered for importation into the States, US-based importers must now be able to verify that their international suppliers meet hygiene and safety standards set by US agencies (in addition to their own governments’ requirements). By externalizing the border as a regulatory threshold, US market regulation enacts a kind of culinary imperialism, imposing standards that would “clean up” ostensibly “dirty” agricultural industries and foodmaking practices in other parts of the world (Paxson 2019). Offshoring of this variety superimposes the “place” of US sovereignty onto the territory of compliant would-be food exporters. Although of a different imperial order than the “terroirism” of what Lissa Caldwell in this volume names Russian culinary colonialism—in which “Russian foods, sensory experiences, and bodies have been made by ingesting local, domestic products, by transforming foreign foods into local foods, and even by seizing and claiming foreign foods as rightful national patrimony” (this volume: 92)—here, too, the global hierarchies of political and economic power are unmistakable.

At the same time, the homogenization pushed by hygiene and other safety standards operates in tension with the heterogenous ideal concretized in Protected Designations of Origin (PDOs) and other appellation schemes that promote international appetite for other people’s “local” foods in the first instance. Regulated global markets inescapably reframe the “taste of place” by moving from localized, subjective ideals based on proximity and patrimony (*beldi*, *domacé*, *nostrano*, *nash*)—of being embedded “in” place—to a more objectivist typicality “of” place (terroir, *fengtu*). As such, PDOs can be viewed as “thresholding projects” (Paxson 2023) aimed at shoring up distinctions between the very places that “typical” products are today encouraged to traverse as commodities. As Simon Pope and Harry West suggest of the revival of cidermaking rites in Devon, UK, “boundedness” may be realized “through repetitive acts of demarcation that render visible the very shifts and movements on the land that such practices seek to forestall” (this volume: 54). Such boundaries are not only commonly breached by microbial, plant, animal, and human mobilities; they are continuously redrawn. Sometimes, as with Italian Taleggio or Istrian ham, the negotiated rules of a PDO designed to be compliant with EU hygiene standards and scaled for international markets bears scant resemblance to what Gisela Welz has described, for Hal-loumi, as the “gendered subsistence activity” (2015: 97) behind their namesakes of previous generations.

After Italy's celebrated Taleggio cheese "won" an expansive PDO that invites industrial fabrication well beyond the bounds of Val Taleggio itself, that valley's artisan cheesemakers came together to reinvent a more distinctive cheese, Strachitunt, in such a way as to promote the culinary status and economic interests of Val Taleggio as a place. In Strachitunt's strategically designed PDO guidelines, Grasseni writes, it was "the (non)treatment of milk that allows redrawing boundaries: raw milk worked at milking temperature (*a munta calda*) cannot travel far because it cannot be refrigerated, cannot be pasteurized, and cannot be reheated according to the protocol. This bound ecology also redefines its craft" (2023: 53). Although the fermentation time of raw milk may bound the territorial scale of cheesemaking: "Paradoxically, this hyperlocal protocol of production calibrates Strachitunt to a 'global hierarchy of value' (Herzfeld 2004): disdaining scaling up, keeping production niche, and commending a premium price for this distinction" (Grasseni 2023: 54).

The transnational trade in place-designated foods is rife with such paradoxes. Among France's most iconic cheeses is the delicately aged Valençay, whose AOC (France's version of PDO) rules stipulate that it must be made from unpasteurized goat's milk. To be permissible for import into the United States, however, cheese must be either made from pasteurized milk or aged for a minimum of sixty days at a temperature no less than thirty-five degrees Fahrenheit. In its country of origin, raw-milk Valençay may be sold as young as the eleventh day of maturation (Dumont 2016); by sixty days it would be overripened to the point of inedibility. How, then, can Valençay cheese be found (as it is) in upscale American markets? Thinking beyond terroir, enterprising French dairies have formulated especially for US export a version using pasteurized milk. Just as AOC Valençay (*au lait cru*) cannot be sold in the United States, what is available as "Valençay" in the United States cannot legally be sold by that name in the country of its manufacture (or elsewhere in the EU). In navigating both US safety standards and French AOC standards, Valençay had to become multiple, effectively redrawing the encounter between "Valençay" and the regulatory body of the United States.

Such creative maneuvers are surprisingly common. To offer one more cheese example, in order to get around an especially high US tariff and low quota on imports of classic Dutch Gouda, the Dutch dairy giant Uniekaas invented Parrano™, described as a Dutch cheese "with an Italian temperament."¹ Parrano™ is made following a procedure similar to Gouda but with the addition of adjunct bacteria cultures that give it a flavor reminiscent of Parmesan. The modification warrants a registered trademark, allowing it to enter the United States under a more favorable tariff rate. The very idea of Parrano™, or of Valençay *frais* (made with pasteurized milk)—not to mention the vegan cheese/cheez made by fermenting nut-based "milks" of which Sarah Czerny writes—is well beyond terroir in that the "place" of these mobile, explicitly commercial comestibles is an assemblage of sovereign regulations and entrepreneurial adjustments to customary

practice that in turn redefine their “tastes.” The quiet ubiquity in the market of such heterotopic goods puts into perspective the lengths to which food purists must go to insist upon what Roberta Raffaetà (2021) has called the “utopia” of “an ideal alignment between nature and culture” imagined to be found in a food “truly” typical of and embedded in a local place. And why, for some, that ideal seems worth striving for.

Remaking Worlds, Remaking Taste

Despite its clear limitations, the concept of terroir, as a heuristic, can also articulate a useful vision of how agricultural products, no less than the bodies that ingest them, are semipermeable to their environments. As much as this may be celebrated—most famously in wine—it can also sound an alarm. When pregnant eaters are warned against consuming tuna and other top-predator fish for fear of mercury poisoning, we would do well to query how and why heavy metals became part of their material (though hardly “natural”) composition (Mansfield 2011; Probyn 2016). In drawing attention to talk of the possible taint of tear gas spoiling the quality of Palestinian olive oil, Anne Meneley suggests that adverse conditions of a disordered political climate can register off-flavors in locally made foods. In such ways, the force of “the world” writ large can pull food substances beyond the logic of terroir: changes in the environmental conditions of agricultural production—drought, heat, fire, flooding, warfare, pollution—can lead to the development of flavors, odors, and colors in agricultural products that exceed thresholds of expectation and thus register as being “off.” Burgundian winegrowers have taken note, as Marion Demossier tells us in tracing a discursive shift “from terroir to viticultural bricolage” in their framing of the relation between taste and place. Juxtaposing Demossier’s observations with Yuson Jung’s account of the Bulgarian wine industry, it would seem environmental crisis is pressing the economic center of European winemaking (France) to resemble its periphery (Balkans), inverting expectations of a global hierarchy of value (Herzfeld 2014).

Similar to how Nadia Seremetakis (1994) famously pointed to the loss of taste—or rather, the loss of a particular taste (in her case, the disappearance of a local variety of peach from Athenian markets)—as an index of globalization’s homogenizing pressures, the “taste of contamination” points critically to place gone awry, whether owing to violent conflict, the toxic legacy of industrial agriculture and industry, or anthropogenic climate change. “Wildfire Loaf,” an art exhibit by the Center for Genomic Gastronomy,² which Heather and Katharina viewed at the MIT Museum in Fall 2022, invited just such contemplation: “Making a Wildfire Loaf is about capturing the taste of place when wildfires are on the rise. How do wildfires affect the smell, taste, texture and microbial diversity of sourdough bread?” How do food industries respond when valued elements of an



Figure 18.1. “Making a Wildfire Loaf.” Exhibit by the Center for Genomic Gastronomy at the MIT Museum, Massachusetts, 2022. © Heather Paxson

“environmental assemblage” of taste are no longer reliably “typical” to a place owing to the erratic conditions of a warming climate?

In the winegrowing and winemaking counties of Northern California, Brad found that agricultural extensions officers, laboratories, and vineyard management companies are all deeply concerned with the effects of smoke on wine-making. “Smoke taint,” as the phenomena has been coined, is seen by some as evidence for why more heat-tolerant grape varieties should be grown across Napa and Sonoma Counties—or, alternatively, perhaps winegrowing operations should relocate to the still-temperate climes of British Columbia. Taking to heart the opportunistic origins of Lapsang souchong tea as related by Kunbing Xiao, Napa winegrowers, as another strategy, might seek out an export market for the exotic flavor of smokiness. Indeed, many winemakers have already done something like this. Leaning on the strength of what Greg de St. Maurice would call Napa’s “place as brand,” they blend “tainted” harvests and cheaper, unaffected grapes into their wines, assuming that less-sophisticated drinkers (who make up the majority of consumers) will not be able to discern fire’s effects on wine purchased from the corner grocery store.

In all these ways and more—as place is reconfigured through national and supranational regulatory control, globalized markets and diets, military occupation, and climate catastrophe—tastes are also redefined, sometimes adapted to new conditions, sometimes pursued across distinctly different terrain, and sometimes simply lost altogether.

If off-flavors and discordant tastes can call attention to the disordering of places, what “political” effort is required for typicality to persist? Grasseni joins her cheesemaking interlocutors in asking precisely this question: what conditions will be necessary not only to allow artisan producers to be able to make recognizably *tipicità* products using (some) traditional methods while also complying with contemporary hygiene and other regulatory standards, but also for the *territorio* of Val Taleggio to persist economically, more or less as itself, without giving in to the temptation to sell out to game-changing Northern European conglomerates? In Latvia, Guntra Aistara finds by asking similar questions that the productive ecologies of coastal foodscapes are merging land and sea, terroir and *merroir*, and thereby reintegrate the local economy that Soviet state socialism had segregated into distinct fishing and farming taskscapes. As Grasseni writes, “the ongoing reinvention and rearticulation of place-based foods . . . goes beyond a simplistic evocation of authenticity and squarely addresses local needs of future-making” (2023: 51; see also Grasseni and Paxson 2014).

Rewriting terroir “in future tense,” as Sanders puts it, commercial foodmakers across varied cultural and culinary contexts continue to invest in the promise that, taken together, proper stewardship of ecological and social relations, devotion to craft, entrepreneurial ingenuity, and savvy branding will be able to sustain or create desired places and sustainable worlds. The politics and policies that such efforts entail are as situated as the tastes at stake in their undertaking, especially when the ideology of terroir continues to serve, too, as a “form of political dominance, aggression, and even violent ethnic cleansing” (Caldwell, this volume: 103; see also Meneley, this volume). The core themes we have identified in this chapter—more expansive ways of imagining “place,” the prominence of movement especially across borders of many kinds, and new material conditions wrought by environmental change that have in turn generated new tastes—all speak to the instability of what are assumed to be objectified features of food, location, and community. It is clear that some of these instabilities have been extremely disruptive and pose challenges that require concerted collective efforts to address. But rather than seeing such disruptions as necessarily exemplifying what has been lost, we might also think about what these new conditions make possible. As the fixity of categories, boundaries, and communities are unsettled, we might look to the kinds of opportunities that this creates, opportunities for new perspectives to emerge, and new modes of participation to be established. If we seize these opportunities, the politics that make the future may yet have a chance against the many challenges of the present.

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Notes

1. “Parrano,” Cheese.com, <https://www.cheese.com/parrano/> (retrieved 11 December 2024).
2. <https://genomicgastronomy.com/>.

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