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**DISTANT LOCALITIES:
THE RHETORICAL CONTRADICTIONS OF LOCAL FOOD NARRATIVES**

by

ANNA G. ZIMMERMAN

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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MAJOR: COMMUNICATION

Approved By:

Advisor

Date

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my Mom and Dad.

Thanks for always believing that I had a story to tell.

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First of all, thanks to my patient advisor, Dr. Jim Cherney. When I grew weary of drafts or confused about my next step, he was always there to talk on the phone or work through a tough argument. His feedback was essential to this project. Additionally, his commitment to and investment in his own research motivates and inspires me. I am lucky to be his advisee.

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CHAPTER 1 A NEW JUNGLE: UNPACKING HOW THE FOOD EXPOSÉ CONSTRUCTS THE INDUSTRIAL FOOD SYSTEM

Introduction

At the turn of the 20th century, amidst the rise of industrialization, journalist Upton Sinclair spent six months in Chicago's meatpacking district, experiencing first-hand the working conditions inside the factory. Although industrialization may have promised an easier workday and a brighter tomorrow, Sinclair found that the treatment of both animals and humans was far from humane. In his seminal work, *The Jungle*, Sinclair constructed a narrative that reflected many of the harsh realities of these factories: long days, cramped quarters, and little to no regard for workers' safety. Sinclair wrote:

There were men who worked in the cooking rooms, in the midst of steam and sickening odours, by artificial light; in these rooms the germs of tuberculosis might live for two years, but the supply was renewed every hour. There were the beef-luggers, who carried two-hundred-pound quarters into the refrigerator cars – a fearful kind of work, that began at four o'clock in the morning, and that wore out the most powerful men in a few years. There were those who worked in the chilling rooms, and whose special disease was rheumatism; the time limit that a man could work in the chilling rooms was said to be five years. (110)

The Jungle was first published in serial form in *Appeal to Reason*, a socialist newspaper in 1905, and garnered much attention (Arthur). President Theodore Roosevelt launched several investigations into the working conditions inside these factories, which led to the establishment of the Food and Drug Administration and the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 (Nestle).

In *The Jungle*, food manufacturing operates mainly as an avenue for making broader arguments about society and the working class. As Anthony Arthur explains, "Sinclair made a calculated decision to use Chicago's slaughterhouses as the *setting* for his book because doing so would broaden his base of readers and appeal to their self-interest. His true *subject*, however, was to be the working conditions that he thought approximated slavery" (44). While Sinclair's

utopian vision at the end of *The Jungle* did not come to pass, his revealing investigation did effect real changes in the way food was and is produced. In the tradition of Sinclair, contemporary authors highlight that America has an ongoing controversy regarding worker and food safety. As Eric Schlosser argues, “The United States in the first decade of the twenty-first century bears an unfortunate resemblance to that of a century ago” (xiv).

Sinclair’s vivid description of the inner workings of the food system arguably marks the beginning of a particular genre of texts (ranging from best-selling nonfiction books to documentary films), that I label “the food exposé.” Over the course of the 20th century many authors sought to illuminate how we understand food, how it’s made, where it comes from, and who makes it. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, there was a marked increase in food-related texts. Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, and Marion Nestle’s *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*, explore new ways of thinking about how and what we eat. Nestle claims that this genre of texts created, “a revolution in the way Americans consume, think about, and produce food” (381). Further, she argues that, books like these “catapulted food into the mainstream of modern culture and advocacy for social change, and opened doors for scholars as well as journalists to write about the political, commercial, and health aspects of food in modern society” (381).

Many current questions or methods of contemporary food exposés are engaged in deconstructing and demystifying the factory in a similar manner to Sinclair. Nearly 100 years after the publication of *The Jungle*, the food exposé is thriving – offering a peek inside the problems of our food system in an effort to secure a better future. In this dissertation, I seek to understand how the narrative conventions of contemporary food exposés construct our food

system in order to advocate for specific solutions. In particular, I investigate the recent “local food” movement that has emerged as a popular response to perceived problems with food production and consumption. What was once the only way to procure food is now heralded as the best (and sometimes only) way to solve pressing issues. In the following sections, I review the literature in order to trace how the problems and solutions of our food system are constructed through the food exposé, drawing on popular books and films as well as academic journal articles.

I organize the food exposé around four arguments that pervade our discourses concerning our food system: 1) food advertising is dangerous and misleading, 2) Americans are fatter and sicker than ever, 3) industrialization is harming society, and 4) the globalized world is too big and unmanageable. Taken together, these arguments construct a powerful and often overwhelming narrative. Each of these arguments appears in popular film, best-selling books, and academic articles. These arguments frequently work together – sometimes all four are given equal weight within a narrative, sometimes only one or two. After tracing how these four arguments craft a dominant narrative about flaws in the American food system, I review the literature which argues for solutions to these problems.

Problem 1: Food advertising (“Tempting and confusing”)

Within the genre of the food exposé, many authors emphasize the insidious nature of food advertising, which includes both print and television advertisements, as well as the labels affixed to food products. Nestle argues that given the intense competition among food corporations, food advertising emerged as one of the only ways to stay competitive. She claims, “The food industry must compete fiercely for every dollar spent on food, and food companies expend extraordinary resources to develop and market products that will sell, regardless of their

effect on nutritional status or waistlines” (1). Nestle explains that food companies spend, “more than \$11 billion annually on direct media advertising in magazines, newspapers, radio, television, and billboards” (22). Many of these advertisements laud the nutritional value or functionality of the food. For example, Nestle describes how Tropicana brand orange juice is marketed for its potassium, vitamin C, and, “for its natural lack of saturated fat or cholesterol (which are found mainly or only in foods of animal origin)” (325).

These descriptions are not only found on television or in magazines, but also on the packaging of the products themselves. Walking down a grocery store aisle, consumers are greeted by a barrage of health claims, “no fat,” “no added sugar,” “high fiber,” “high protein,” “all natural,” etc.” Considering that, as omnivore’s, our food choices are already plentiful, these labels only add to the confusion. Explaining the omnivore’s dilemma, Pollan argues that, “When you can eat just about anything nature has to offer, deciding what you *should* eat will inevitably stir anxiety” (3). Pollan adds that our country’s lack of a stable food culture, “leaves us especially vulnerable to the blandishments of the food scientist and the marketer, for whom the omnivore’s dilemma is not so much a dilemma as an opportunity” (5). In critiquing the diet industry, the documentary *Hungry for Change* also details the harms of food advertising. Mike Adams, health journalist and author, argues, “Marketing essentially lies to you, because it presents you with the promise that you’re gonna be sexy and popular and cool. But in reality, you’re gonna be obese and miserable and sick” (Colquhoun, Ten Bosch, & Ledesma). Adams also critiques food labeling, arguing:

Many of the food labels at the grocery store are very deceptive. For example, there’s a cereal made by General Mills called Total Blueberry Pomegranate Cereal. It contains no blueberries and no pomegranates. It’s almost as if they’re naming them based on what they hope you might imagine you’re eating, rather than what’s really in the box. (Colquhoun, Ten Bosch, & Ledesma)

Ultimately, these authors argue that food advertising (on labels, television, etc.) creates confusion about what is good to eat and what is bad. As Raj Patel argues “If all we’ve got to go on is the label, we’re often led astray” (247).

Problem 2: Health (“We’re fat, we’re sick, we’re unhappy”)

In addition to critiquing the confusing nature of food advertising, many food exposés outline the declining health of the nation. We eat too much sugar, salt, and fat and as a result we are suffering from diet related illnesses, such as diabetes and high blood pressure. *Hungry for Change* posits that the industrial food system has fundamentally altered how we think about food. As a result, we eat too many calories and not enough nutrients. Nestle argues, “The principal nutritional problems among Americans shifted to those of *overnutrition* – eating too much food or too much of certain kinds of food. Overeating causes its own set of health problems; it deranges metabolism, makes people overweight, and increases the likelihood of ‘chronic diseases’ (2-3).

Another documentary, *Forks over Knives*, begins with clips from popular news programs, which argue that our food choices are negatively affecting our health. Diane Sawyer, on “Good Morning America,” states, “The average American now carries 23 extra pounds” (Fulkerson). Richard Carmona, former United States Surgeon General says, “We have an unprecedented amount of Type 2 diabetes in our children, and we’re starting to see hypertension in our children in grammar school” (Fulkerson). Katie Couric argues, “Clearly the “Western diet” is taking a toll. This should serve as a wakeup call. We have a growing problem and the ones who are growing are us” (Fulkerson). Lee Fulkerson, who directed and narrated *Forks*, claims that we are facing “a massive health crisis,” and that many of the foods that we believe are good for us are in fact making us sick and overweight.

Pollan also outlines this problem in his book, *In Defense of Food*, arguing that “the Western diet,” is at the root of our health woes. He argues, “Wherever in the world people gave up their traditional way of eating and adopted the Western diet, there soon followed a predictable series of Western diseases, including obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer” (11). Pollan describes the Western diet as “lots of processed foods and meats, lots of added fat and sugar, lots of *everything*- except vegetables, fruits, and whole grains” (10). In critiquing American’s eating habits, these authors highlight the food system’s responsibility in our failing health: too many food-like products and not enough *food*.

Problem 3: Industrialization (“It came from the lab”)

Another problem frequently raised in the food exposé is the way that the industrialization of food is harming our bodies, the environment, and society. For instance, in *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Pollan traces how food is processed in the industrial food chain. He begins the book with a seemingly simple question, “What should we have for dinner?” (1). The remainder of the book attempts to answer this question, because as Pollan notes, “The omnivore’s dilemma is replayed every time we decide whether or not to ingest a wild mushroom, but is also figures in our less primordial encounters with the putatively edible: when we’re deliberating the nutritional claims on the boxes in the cereal aisle; or deciding whether to sample McDonald’s newly reformulated chicken nugget” (289). In order to address these conundrums, Pollan traces a bushel of corn from an Iowa cornfield to a meal, “prepared by McDonald’s and eaten in a moving car” (109). His phrase draws attention to the technological mechanization of the industrialized world – eating food prepared by machines, in a machine, all while moving from some point to another. In the book, Pollan details some of the harms of industrialized food: monoculture, underpaid and vanishing farmers, pesticides, genetically modified seeds, and

factory farming. After talking to farmers and visiting a feedlot, Pollan reflects on the opacity of the meal he eats at McDonald's, arguing, "[This] is what the industrial food chain does best: obscure the histories of the foods it produces by processing them to such an extent that they appear as pure products of culture rather than nature – things made from plants and animals" (115).

Pollan's *In Defense of Food* crafts a similar argument. In this text, Pollan claims that the industrial food system has fundamentally altered how we conceptualize food. He argues that we think more about nutrients than whole foods, more about quantity than quality, and more about science than culture. Pollan attributes this shift in thinking to the industrialization of food and its partner, "the Western diet." Pollan argues that industrialized food, "is a pandemic in the making, but a most unusual one, because it involves no virus or bacteria, no microbe of any kind – just a way of eating" (136).

In many ways, Schlosser's *Fast Food* extends Pollan's argument from *Dilemma*, by tracing how food moves from the farm to the fast food table (or vehicle). He argues:

Hundreds of millions of people buy fast food every day without giving it much thought, unaware of the subtle and not so subtle ramifications of their purchases. I've written this book out of a belief that people should know what lies behind the shiny, happy surface of every fast food transaction. They should know what really lurks between those sesame seed buns. (10)

According to Schlosser, what lurks between those sesame seed buns is a food system that underpays employees, produces too much food, mistreats animals and the land, and is contributing to a growing health problem in the United States. Schlosser claims that, "The profits of the fast food chains have been made possible by losses imposed on the rest of society" (261). Ultimately, Schlosser's book details how the industrialization – which he calls

“McDonaldization” – of food is doing more harm than good, setting the stage for an alternative way of thinking about our food.

The documentary, *Food, Inc.*, builds its arguments with the aid of the aforementioned texts. As the film opens, the camera pans the aisles of an average grocery store, past seemingly endless rows of cereal, chips, and soft drinks. Michael Pollan narrates, “If you follow the food chain back from those shrink wrapped packages of meat, you find a very different reality. The reality is a factory. It’s not a farm, it’s a factory” (Kenner). The documentary works to unearth the secrets of the food system – how cattle are raised, how food is grown, and how workers are treated. Schlosser is interviewed early on in the film and reiterates his impetus for writing *Fast Food Nation*, “I’d been eating this food all my life – with no idea where it came from” (Kenner). With Schlosser and Pollan involved the film’s narrative progresses similarly to their respective books. Industrial food is shown to be secretive and harmful, from the consolidation of power to the “food-like substances” stocking the aisles of your local grocery store, the film highlights problems up and down the food system. Unlike Pollan and Schlosser, *Food, Inc.* focuses more closely on how food became big business. In particular, the film calls attention to the consolidation of multinational corporations, which *Food, Inc.* argues control how and what we eat.

The Future of Food, a film by Deborah Koons, argues that the industrialization of agriculture and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are hurting the planet and human beings. The film explores how large agro-corporations, such as Monsanto and Cargill, control most of today’s farmers and farmland – from seeds to pesticides, and sometimes both, the concentration of power in industrial agriculture is outlined and critiqued. While many industrialization advocates claim that GMOs help to feed the world’s hungry, Garcia argues that

this simply is not the case. She contends that industrialized agriculture and GMOs, which are now accompanied by patents, are harming farmers and erasing our pastoral traditions. These texts serve as representative discourses of how industrialized food is constructed as the enemy. According to Pollan, Schlosser, Kenner, and Garcia, industrialization harms our bodies (because we don't know what we're eating), harms the environment (because we don't know how our food is grown), and harms workers (because they are mistreated by large multinational corporations). This last claim becomes the basis for the fourth primary argument of the food exposé genre.

Problem 4: Globalization (“Too far from home”)

Finally, in exposing the problems with our food system, many authors and directors argue that the globalized food system does more harm than good. The globalized world affords consumers with tomatoes, pears, and strawberries all year long, but with a steep cost. Harriet Friedmann argues that, “The paradise of the eternal strawberries and ornamental plants for rich consumers depends on an underworld of social disruption and ecological irresponsibility” (342). Understanding and disrupting this “underworld” is the task of many food exposés. For example, in Deborah Barndt's *Tangled Routes: Women, Work, and Globalization on the Tomato Trail*, she provides a glimpse of the time, people, industries, and policies it takes for a bright, red tomato to wind up on a local grocery store's shelf in the middle of winter. From planting and harvesting, to selling and shipping, the tomato reveals a, “long and twisty trail,” which Barndt contends unearths the dynamics of globalized food (10). Barndt compares and contrasts the journey of the corporate tomato with its indigenous counterpart, arguing that the former necessitates twenty one steps, while the latter only requires five stages. The corporate tomato's journey highlights many of the problems of globalization: workers' rights (or lack thereof), unsustainable agriculture

(such as monoculture), and irresponsible environmental practices (the use of pesticides or the amount of oil needed to plant/process/ship a truck load of tomatoes). Barndt's analysis employs one of the many tropes of the food exposé: tracing a single commodity through the food chain. Authors such as Mintz and Pollan use this trope to complicate a seemingly innocent trip to the grocery store – allowing the consumer to see, read, or understand the difficult journey of the foods we eat.

Since the late 20th century, several solutions have emerged to deal with the ills of the current food system. I will consider how these proposed solutions solve for the aforementioned “problems.” Although there are many remedies that could be considered, I focus here are on four solutions that speak directly to the problems articulated above: 1) government guidelines/recommendations (such as the Food Pyramid and MyPlate), 2) vegan/vegetarianism, 3) organic food, and 4) local food. These four solutions offer varying degrees of solvency, from a small amount (government guidelines) to a great deal (local food).

Solution 1: Government guidelines/recommendations

The United States government works to remedy some of these problems. However, the clearest problem/solution pairing is arguably our confusion about food labels/advertising and government guidelines/recommendations. Although contemporary food labels and advertising may seem misleading, they are an improvement from the labels of the late 19th and early 20th century when producers were allowed to make wild health claims on just about any product. As Nestle argues, “Nostrums, panaceas, and patent medicines promised cures for every conceivable health problem. Many products contained alcohol or opiates that (not surprisingly) made people feel better, if only for a few hours” (233). In 1906, the U.S. government passed the Food and

Drug Act, allowing the FDA to regulate what could and could not be claimed or labeled on food products and nutritional supplements (Nestle 233).

For almost ninety years, this act reduced wild and often fraudulent claims, on supplements and food products. However, in 1994, Congress passed the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA), which ultimately, “deregulated dietary supplements and undermined the FDA’s regulatory authority over supplements and conventional foods as well” (Nestle 223-4). After Congress passed DSHEA, misleading health claims saturated the marketplace, and food manufacturers began producing food fortified with nutrients to meet (supposed) consumer demand. However, while these nutrients and labels were intended to help consumers, Nestle notes that, “Since the advent of DSHEA, surveys demonstrated increasing public confusion about diet and health” (291).

In another attempt to clear up confusion about diet and promote “healthy” eating, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) developed *The Food Guide Pyramid* in 1992. Nestle traces how the *Pyramid* came to fruition, and like most legislation in Washington, it involved several different interest groups: lobbyists, nutritionists, and politicians. She notes, “Indeed, *Dietary Guidelines*, is best understood as a *committee* report- the result of the interplay of give-and-take, bullying, boredom, and (eventually) compromise among a group of people who entered the process with differing opinions and agendas” (71). In essence, the *Pyramid*, “was supposed to help dispel public misunderstanding of nutrition advice, resolve conflicting interpretations of research studies, and clear up confusion even among experts about the applicability of broad public health recommendations to the dietary practices of individuals” (Nestle 67-8). However, Nestle notes that the *Pyramid* never did reach these goals. The hierarchical design of the *Pyramid* was confusing at best, and misleading at worst. In 2011, with

updated nutritional guidelines and a simpler design, the USDA introduced *MyPlate* (Vastag). Of course, it is too early to tell if *MyPlate* will lead to more understanding.

What these recommendations highlight is the lack of well-rounded solutions provided by the US government to the aforementioned problems. Legislation, help guides, or informational websites most often focus attention on issues of individual health, rather than larger, systemic issues of globalization or industrialization. Additionally, Phillipov argues that public health agendas, such as the *Pyramid* and *MyPlate*, “sow the seeds of their own resistance” (388). She claims, “In public health discourse, the emphasis on the moral responsibility of the individual to make ‘healthy’ choices essentially requires people to follow practices of self-governance that are essentially ascetic; that is, in order to combat the risk of diet-related health problems in the future, people must deprive themselves of foods they enjoy now” (388). Given the emphasis on individual restraint and a rhetoric of deficiency in public health agendas, Phillipov argues that instances of extreme eating (i.e., an 8,000 calorie meal from the Heart Attack Grille) are on the rise, serving as cultural transgressions against government oversight. From these examples, it is clear that government “solutions” have the potential to create more confusion about our food system.

Solution 2: Vegan/Vegetarianism

Another orientation toward food that attempts to solve the aforementioned problems is a vegan or vegetarian diet. While government recommendations offered a solution to food labeling, vegan/vegetarianism most often serves as a solution for diet-related illnesses. Although these particular diets differ (vegetarians abstain from eating nonhuman animal (NHA) flesh, while vegans abstain from eating anything made from NHA), they may be considered together for their positions regarding nonhuman animal rights. Additionally, both diets contend that

humans are healthier when they abstain from eating nonhuman animal products. Fulkerson's documentary *Forks over Knives* contends that a plant-based diet solves for many of the system's woes. However, its main point of solvency is the nation's health. After establishing the extent of our nation's health problem Fulkerson states, "But could there be a single solution to all of these problems – a solution so comprehensive, yet so straightforward that it's mind boggling that more of us haven't taken it seriously." Of course, this easy solution is a plant-based diet. Over the course of the film, Fulkerson, along with a few other people, transition from a Western diet to a plant-based diet, developed by two researchers, Dr. T. Colin Campbell and Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn. Along the way, these individuals lose weight, lower their chances of a heart attack, and reverse diseases, such as diabetes. While the film does address issues of locality, the dangers of factory farming, and the persuasive power of food advertising/labeling, it is clear that the most prominent solution that veganism/vegetarianism offers is a healthier body.

Further, in an analysis of veganism/vegetarianism, Hahn and Bruner argue that widespread acceptance of these lifestyles may be lacking due to their construction. As Hahn and Bruner contend, veganism/vegetarianism is often viewed as "'giving up' meat" (48). Stemming from this lack is a "rhetoric of 'deficiency,'" wherein arguments are continually raised about the lack of important nutrients within these diets, such as calcium and protein (Hahn & Bruner 48). Additionally, in considering the problems associated with the food system, veganism/vegetarianism does not engage as explicitly with issues of globalization or industrialization, as for example, the organic or local food movements do.

Solution 3: Organic food

Pollan argues that the philosophical foundations of the organic food movement extend back to the 1940 publication of *An Agricultural Testament* by Sir Albert Howard. Although

Howard did not use the term “organic,” he did stress the importance of imitating nature in agricultural practices. The movement as we recognize it today would draw on texts, like Howard’s, to build a countercuisine, one that opposed the problems associated with industrialization. Organic food would have little to no processing and no pesticides.

The organic food movement promised to solve most of the aforementioned problems – food would be less-processed, better for us and the land. Given this potential, organic food became an increasingly popular alternative to the offerings of traditional industrial agriculture. In fact, in 2001, organic food was a \$7.7 billion business (“Behind”) As Pollan contends, “The rapid growth of organic closely tracks consumers' rising worries about the conventional food supply -- about chemicals, about additives and, most recently, about genetically modified ingredients and mad cow disease; every food scare is followed by a spike in organic sales” (“Behind”). As many writers, including Pollan, argue, industrialized food corporations capitalized on the popularity of the organic movement before it had the chance to alter the system. Delind also bemoans the loss of the organic movement to industrialization. She contends that organic food that is shipped from all over the world runs counter to the movement, which emphasizes, “soil health, human health, and holistic or ecological farming practices” (123). Further, Guthman argues that although the philosophical foundations of organic farming were directly tied to aforementioned practices, the institutionalization of the movement altered the meaning. She claims, “After considerable debate, these organizations began to define ‘organically grown’ specifically as a production standard for farmers (and later processors), not as a food safety standard for consumers and surely not as an alternative system of food provision” (111). Therefore, while the organic food movement attempted to remedy the problems with our food system, its cooptation stunted its growth. As Pollan argues, “And so, today, the

organic food industry finds itself in a most unexpected, uncomfortable, and yes, unsustainable position: floating on a sinking sea of petroleum” (184).

Solution 4: Local food

As Thompson notes, the battle cry, “eat local,” is seemingly everywhere – both in everyday discourses of the grocery store and television programming, as well as in scholarly research. Gottlieb and Joshi explain that the call for locally sourced food is a core argument for most food advocates. They argue:

The turn to local food has assumed many forms. Politically, it has emerged as an oppositional argument to globally sourced food, including industrially grown and highly processed foods dependent on ingredients secured from multiple locations. Ethically, it holds that food grown locally and conveyed from the farm to the consumer without industrial processing is a manifestation of a region’s culture. Food grown locally also tastes better, its champions declare, helping eaters better appreciate the source of their food. (179)

To be certain, there are many scholars discussing the advantages of local food. In fact, many of the texts cited in the problem sections attempt to solve the troubling issues of our food system: advertising, health, and industrialization, with a call for local food. However, the problem that local food most clearly addresses is globalization.

In tracing the global food system, many writers create a dialectical tension between the menacing global and the idyllic (if frustrating) local, a recurring trope of the food exposé genre. For instance, Barbara Kingsolver and Gary Nabhan worked to step outside the food system and rely instead on local food. Their respective memoirs, *Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Food* (Nabhan) and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year in Food Life* (Kingsolver), follow each author’s attempt to disconnect from the food system. Nabhan traces his one year journey to eschew the global, industrialized food system. His goal, as he explains was to, “[fill] my larder as much as possible from the foodstuffs found in my own backyard,

within my own horizons” (27). While on vacation in Lebanon, Nabhan finds the meal he shares with family and friends unsatisfying and disconnected. He writes:

As the last sip of French cognac was sipped and the last Cuban cigar smoked by our party, I realized that the conversation and the cuisine had come into perfect alignment. They both reflected a desire for a life unsoiled by local, regional, cultural, or even nationalistic constraints, where one could pick and choose from the planetary supermarket without contact with local fishermen or farmers, let alone any responsibility to them. (22-3)

This meal provides the impetus for Nabhan to begin a yearlong experiment in eating only (or mainly) local foods. He contends that he wanted, “to escape the trap that I, like most Americans, have fallen into the last four decades: obtaining nine-tenths of our food from nonlocal sources” (34). Nabhan’s challenge in rejecting globalized food is that he lives in the Sonoran desert, where water is scarce and most plants require significant irrigation. However, he notes that although his garden would need a great deal of water and time, the globalized food system is “far more wasteful of water and energy in the field, in the warehouse, in transport, and in the supermarket” (38). His book, which oscillates between a memoir of growing one’s own food and an argument against globalizing forces, ends with a poem entitled “A Terroir-ist’s Manifesto,” which states:

We, as humans, have not been given
roots as obvious as those of plants.
The surest way we have to lodge ourselves
within this blessed earth is by knowing
where our food comes from. (313)

Kingsolver attempted a similar yearlong experiment with her family. Although Kingsolver’s goal was the same as Nabhan’s – eat locally, buy locally, grow locally – she begins by leaving the Sonoran desert in favor of a greener landscape. She states, “We wanted to live in a place that could feed us: where rain falls, crops grow, and drinking water bubbles right up out of

the ground” (3). Like Nabhan, Kingsolver paints the global, industrial food system as messy, unnecessary, and dangerous.

Food Fight: A Story of Culinary Revolt, a documentary film by Chris Taylor, describes the situation similarly to the aforementioned texts. In essence, this film is a profile of Alice Waters, a chef committed to local and organic foods, who opened the restaurant Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California in 1971. While the film highlights the revolutionary drive of Alice Waters and the restaurant, the film also serves as a critique of globalized, industrialized food – drawing on the expertise of famous food authors such as Michael Pollan and Marion Nestle. The film builds the narrative of Chez Panisse as a key player in the counterculture movement – against globalization, against green tomatoes shipped from Mexico, and against the modern food system.

As these examples indicate, there is a growing body of discourse which traces the problems associated with the globalized food system – distance from the land, from our food, and from each other – and what we might do to fix it. The yearlong experiments of Nabhan and Kingsolver explicitly advocate for locality – positioning local as the solution to the messiness of the globalized world. At the end of *Food, Inc.* “This Land is Your Land” plays in the background as the director reminds us that, “The average meal travels 1500 miles from the farm to the supermarket. Buy foods that are grown locally. Shop at farmers’ markets” (Kenner). *The Future of Food* also ends with a call for local food, arguing “It’s up to you” (Koons).

Further, after Nestle critiques United States’ food policies, she proposes that eating locally would release consumers from the confusing web of messages and influences constructed by food corporations and the United States government. She argues that, “buying locally produced, organically grown food not only improves the taste and nutritional quality of the diet, but also supports local farmers, promotes the viability of rural communities, and creates greater

diversity in agricultural production” (373). Additionally, after tracing how corporations use marketing and advertising to sell food, Nestle offers this advice, “Unless we are willing to pay more for food, relinquish out-of-season produce, and rarely buy anything that comes in a package or is advertised on television, we support the current food system every time we eat a meal” (374). Patel also praises the promise of local food, arguing that, “Food that doesn’t have to be grown or treated for long-distance travel tastes better, costs less to make and has a smaller carbon footprint” (305).

At the end of *Dilemma*, Pollan visualizes a world where local food is the norm: “Imagine for a moment if we once again knew, strictly as a matter of course, these few unremarkable things: What it is we’re eating. Where it came from. How it found its way to our table. We could then talk about some other things at dinner. For we would no longer need any reminding that however we choose to feed ourselves, we eat by the grace of nature, not industry” (411). Pollan’s solution, like so many others, is to leave the industry behind us – its labels, its advertisements, its two-for-one deals.

These are but a few examples of how local food solves for all of the aforementioned problems. Unlike the organic movement, veganism/vegetarianism, or government recommendations, local food is proposed as a solution to *all* of the problems associated with our food system. Considering the popularity of the “local,” one of the guiding questions here is quite simple: how is this work being done? How is local food constructed as the solution to all of our problems? How do these discourses create or recreate what it means to be “local?” For many texts, local food is the obvious solution. And yet, this answer carries its own weight, its own issues. As Born and Purcell, Dupuis and Goodman, and Delind argue, we need a more reflexive, critical understanding of what the “local” is, how it works, and its potentialities. It is all too

simple to shout solutions such as “eat local” without considering the myriad ways that this solution isn’t accessible or understood in the same way. Additionally, many critiques of the food system deal primarily with the material conditions, with little to no consideration of the rhetorical dimensions of the food system or our own work critiquing that system. Of course, this is not to say that this work is misguided or unnecessary. These works offer valuable contributions to the way we think about our food, our society, and ourselves. However, just as that work moves us forward, so too does a reflexive look into the rhetoric we are creating. What is needed is an exploration of the rhetorical construction of local food – both in popular culture and academic discourse.

In this dissertation, I propose that the food exposé, as a primary vehicle for making arguments about local food, is constructing an overwhelming narrative. These texts discuss so many of the problems associated with our food system: health issues, access issues, class issues, etc., that the central arguments become mired in the complexities of our food system thus creating more confusion than clarification. Additionally, quite often, the local lifestyle appears as if everyone can access it – if you just try hard enough and put enough time and effort into integrating key practices into your everyday life. And yet, there is so much evidence that local food is not as liberatory as it would seem. In fact, some argue that it is a practice fraught with inequality and unequal access (Dupuis and Goodman). By looking at the narratives surrounding/constructing local food, I intend to highlight how the rhetoric of this solution is limiting and counterintuitive. Let me be clear, while this work intends to highlight inequalities found in the construction of local food, it is in no way a treatise in staunch opposition to this practice. Clearly, we have made strides in access to good, healthy food, which does help communities and the people in them. It is precisely because of the growing acceptance of local

food systems that I am interested in how we talk, write, and think about local food. In fact, one of the goals of this dissertation is to consider how the narratives of local food might be more inclusive, with all its potentialities, local food might just need a new story.

In order to construct a different story, it is vital to understand the story that is currently being told. This analysis considers the narratives of local food through the dominant tropes used to tell its story. As previously mentioned, local food narratives are constructing an overwhelming story that makes it difficult for wider audiences to identify and engage with the movement. Local food is not of the people, for the people. Rather, I argue that it is a movement rooted in the elitism of exoticism under the guise of locality. In order to make this argument, I will explore how the tropes used to tell the story of local food are contradictory and confusing, how nationwide grocery store chains serve to promulgate this confusion, and how the identities tied to the movement highlight the elitism that is woven through every locally grown morel and zucchini squash.

This dissertation consists of five chapters. In Chapter 2, I outline the approach for analyzing the food exposé, which employs narrative theory to reveal the rhetorical dynamics and cultural significance of local food stories. In Chapter 3, I will analyze three texts (listed above) in order to understand how the food exposé is constructed through three dominant tropes: taking a long journey, desiring a nostalgic past, and dreaming of a tasty future. This chapter argues that the tropes used to tell these stories rhetorically generate distance from the local food movement.

Chapter 4 considers the intersection of the local food narrative outlined in Chapter 3 and grocery stores. By looking at Whole Foods Detroit, in Detroit, Michigan, I analyze how food is constructed as local by a nationwide grocery store. How does Whole Foods represent what it

means to be local to Detroit? This chapter extends the arguments from Chapter 3 by considering local food narratives in particular place.

Finally, chapter five considers local food and identity. Many argue that local food is elitist, and this chapter is an attempt to understand how food discourse (both past and present) crafts identity in general, and elite identities specifically. How does the construction of the locavore compare (or differ) with the elite food identities of Italy or England in the 1600s or 1700s? I will consider four texts: John Keay's *The Spice Route: A History*, Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, Michael Pollan's *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*, and blog, *Nourished Kitchen*. Finally, in this chapter, I draw conclusions about the project overall. Additionally, I also consider how the local food narrative might be reframed as liberatory and inclusive.

CHAPTER 2 TASTY NARRATIVES: THE FOOD EXPOSÉ GENRE THROUGH THE LENS OF KENNETH BURKE AND WALTER FISHER

As the previous chapter demonstrates, food exposés craft a narrative of how our food system currently works – the problems lurking within the factory or farm – and how it might work differently. Yet, these stories have more to say than, “Eat local!” or “Industrialization is harming society.” In unpacking food exposé narratives, I identify common tropes, similar arguments, and a particular narrative style that can be seen across a variety of texts. Drawing on the works of Kenneth Burke and Walter Fisher, I contend that a narrative analysis of food exposés elucidates how we understand, relate to, or reject arguments about food.

For Kenneth Burke, the stories we tell and how we construct them are key to answering our most important questions, such as, “Why do we wage war?” or “What motivates our distrust/dislike of other people?” In arguing for a method which would seriously consider narrative, Burke claims:

Art forms like ‘tragedy’ or ‘comedy’ or ‘satire’ would be treated as *equipment for living*, that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes. The typical ingredients of such forms would be sought. Their relation to typical situations would be stressed. Their comparative values would be considered, with the intention of formulating a ‘strategy of strategies,’ the ‘over-all’ strategy obtained by the lot. (304)

Throughout Burke’s corpus, he contends that in order to understand what motivates human beings to act we must understand the drama in which they are participating. In the *Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke argues that, “The general perspective that is interwoven with our methodology of analysis might be summarily characterized as a *theory of drama*. We propose to take *ritual drama* as the Ur-form, the ‘hub,’ with all other aspects of *human* action treated as spokes radiating from this hub” (103). Stemming from these ideas, Burke developed the method of dramatism, which, “invites one to consider the matter of motives in a perspective that, being

developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action” (*Grammar* xxii). For Burke, rhetoric is dramatic and his method provides a way to understand this drama.

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke explained that his approach to rhetoric centered on the mode of action he called “identification,” but he noted that, “traditionally, the key term for rhetoric is not ‘identification,’ but ‘persuasion’” (xiv). Burke justified his focus on the former term by arguing that persuasion is a function of identification. Burke claims that a speaker *persuades* an audience, “by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker’s interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience” (*Rhetoric* 46). Further, Burke noted that all identification stems from one central motive, which he described as the human need for “consubstantiality.” He explains:

A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so. (*Rhetoric* 20)

Although the term identification invokes images of understanding and “shared substance” or consubstantiality, Burke argues that, “to begin with ‘identification’ is, by the same token, though roundabout, to confront the implications of division. We refer to that ultimate *disease* of cooperation: *war*” (*Rhetoric* 22). Burke contends that identification necessitates division, arguing that “If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity” (*Rhetoric* 22). We are always separate from those around us, a terrifying prospect for most, so we symbolically construct identifications. In other words, rhetoric appeals to the basic need to share a connection with another person, even when that connection exists only in the minds of people identifying with each other despite having different interests.

The turn toward identification allows Burke's approach to escape the limitations of traditional definitions of persuasion, which emphasize a *speaker's* use of logic and rationality. In fact, Burke contended that identification does not necessarily have to be rational or be presented by a speaker. He argued:

Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is 'meaning,' there is 'persuasion.' Food eaten and digested is not rhetorical. But in the *meaning* of food there is much rhetoric, the meaning being persuasive enough for the idea of food to be used, like the ideas of religion, as a rhetorical device of statesmen. (*Rhetoric* 172-3)

In other words, Burke extends the definition of rhetoric, by seeing (and accounting for) the persuasive appeals of objects or nonverbal messages. We may identify with a speaker because of the way she or he is dressed, or with a plate of food because it facilitates identification with others (as family, fellow citizens, etc.). When considered by the traditional standards of logic, these points of identification do not appear rational. However, they often stand as "good reasons," to trust a speaker. Perhaps one of the clearest ways to understand how identification functions outside traditional notions of logic and rationality is to consider Burke's concept of the scapegoat.

Scapegoating and victimage are closely related to identification, for when a group or community chooses a sacrifice (someone or something that would bear the weight of society's ills) they do so to strengthen the bond (or identification) within the group. Again, in constructing an "other," the "us" becomes more closely united in its opposition. Burke contends that, "In keeping with the 'curative' role of victimage, each is apparently in acute need of blaming all its troubles on the other, wanting to feel certain that, if the other and its tendencies were but eliminated, all governmental discord would be eliminated" (*Rhetoric* 4). Burke offers many examples of this cycle – the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Hitler's scapegoating of the Jewish people, and the sacrificial slaughter of animals as offerings to various deities. All of these

victims, or scapegoats, stand in for whatever seems to be wrong within a given society. Yet their eradication only provides a brief reprieve as the guilt-redemption cycle has no end; for Burke we are forever guilty, thus forever looking for another sacrifice. He argues that, “The Bible teaches us that tragedy is ever in the offing. Let us, in the spirit of solemn comedy, listen to its lesson. Let us be on guard ever, as regards the subtleties of sacrifice, in their fundamental relationship to governance” (*Religion* 235).

Furthering Burke’s thoughts about the centrality of narrative to human experience, Walter Fisher posits that human beings are “story-telling animals,” and proposes a new metaphor for man, *homo narrans* (6). Fisher argues:

The idea of human beings as storytellers indicates the general form of all symbol composition; it holds that symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities in which there is a sanction for the story that constitutes one’s life. (6)

Fisher’s “narrative paradigm” privileges the human tendency to explain things through stories and provides an accessible avenue through which to understand public argument. Fisher argues, “By ‘narration’ I refer to a theory of symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them. The narrative perspective, therefore, has relevance to real as well as fictive worlds, to stories of living and to stories of the imagination” (2). Fisher contends that the narrative paradigm is more inclusive than other worldviews (namely, the rational world paradigm) for several reasons: narrative more closely resembles real world experience; one does not have to acquire special knowledge in order to understand it; narration and argument are substantively similar and only structurally different.

In the rational world paradigm, rationality must be learned and is, “a matter of argumentative competence: knowledge of issues, modes of reasoning, appropriate tests, and rules

of advocacy” (Fisher 9). Conversely, rationality in the narrative paradigm is contingent on human beings ability to understand *narrative probability*, or what constitutes a coherent story and the testing of *narrative fidelity*, do, “the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives” (Fisher 8). Further, narrative rationality, unlike traditional rationality, is descriptive rather than evaluative. As Fisher explains, “Narrative rationality offers an account, an understanding, of any instance of human choice and action, including science” (9). However, stories are still subject to evaluation. Just as there are better arguments, there are also better stories. Fisher contends, “Some stories are better in satisfying the criteria of the logic of good reasons, which is attentive to reason and values” (10).

Unlike formal logical reasoning, Fisher posits that narration/narrative is a universal form of argument, wherein the audience may participate more fully than in the rational world paradigm. He argues, “All persons have the capacity to be rational in the narrative paradigm” (10). Ultimately, for Fisher the narrative paradigm becomes a leveler between expert and audience – if we can all speak the same language, perhaps we can have more productive public debates, because, “reasoning may be discovered in all sorts of symbolic action – nondiscursive as well as discursive” (1).

Drawing on both Fisher and Burke, I will analyze local food narratives. As any analysis necessitates a vocabulary, a collection of terminologies, or “adventurous equipment” I draw on the Burkeian theories of dramatism and identification as well as Fisher’s narrative paradigm, paying particular attention to the concept of narrative rationality (Burke 171). First, I will outline the framework for the method, followed by a few examples of how these theoretical positions inform this project.

In order to understand how these food stories are being told – what resources are being used to craft these narratives – I will draw on Burke’s theory of dramatism. As previously mentioned, Burke suggests that literature can be viewed as “equipment for living” and that, “the typical ingredients of such forms would be sought. Their relation to typical situations would be stressed” (*Philosophy* 304). Dramatism facilitates an understanding and appreciation of the dramatic elements of a narrative, calling attention to the fact that these strategies are not only reserved for the stage. Specifically, Burke’s perspective draws attention to the common tropes being used within the food exposé genre. After positioning these stories in relationship to Burke’s dramatism, I will then tease out how these texts facilitate identification (i.e., through specific tropes). Within these dramas, how are we invited to identify with certain arguments, people, or places? Finally, extending the notion of identification, I will use Fisher’s narrative paradigm to think about the way that arguments for local food are being presented.

In considering texts by Pollan, Barndt, Mintz, and Schlosser through the lens of dramatism, a trope emerges: tracing a particular food – such as a tomato or corn - through the food system in order to complicate a seemingly simple journey. Another trope found within the food exposé genre is the construction of the dialectic between global and local. This is most often found in personal narratives about eating outside of the food system. Kingsolver, Pollan, Nabhan, and others employ this trope to encourage the audience to act similarly or at least think differently about the food system in which they participate. In Chapter 3, I will identify these tropes in more depth, as well as two more tropes: desiring a nostalgic past and dreaming of a tasty future, both of which can be found in a number of local food narratives. Considered together, these tropes craft a narrative that complicates identification with the local food movement.

Since identification necessarily entails division or a “them” in order to construct an “us,” I will consider how narratives about local food rely upon dividing it from the scapegoat of global and corporate food production. Although local food (shops, restaurants, farmers’ markets, etc.) did not originate in the early 21st century, the beginning of the decade saw exponential growth in the availability of local products. In fact, in the year 2000, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) counted only 2,863 farmers’ markets, but by 2013, that number had increased to 8,144 farmers’ markets nationwide. For many, local food is a form of resistance against large food corporations. In order to situate their interests, local food narratives (in films, books, and television) often construct large food corporations such as Nestlé, Kraft, or Coca-Cola as “them,” the dangerous other. These stories seek to disentangle our strong associations with industrialized foods and corporations, laying bare the problematic practices that bring food to our supermarkets and tables. In constructing an evil opposition – the nameless, faceless corporation – we are primed to accept a new identification – the locavore. This example showcases how food narratives often rely on identification through division, and while extricating ourselves from the globalized food system may be beneficial in some ways, there is a danger here. As Burke explains, “Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function as a *deflection* of reality” (*Language* 45). The terministic screen that creates seemingly strong identifications with the symbol “local,” *selects* a certain community-specific reality, while deflecting the larger reality of a globalized food system.

The concepts of scapegoating and victimage also illuminate how ingredients and processes are continually sacrificed to mediate a host of tensions present both inside and outside of the food system. Food corporations utilize a few key rhetorical strategies to alleviate guilt.

First, many corporations appeal to the rhetoric of personal responsibility by offering “ingredient sacrifices.” For example, by placing labels such as “Healthy,” “Low-fat,” or “Low cholesterol,” on the front of packages, companies position consumers as capable of making the “right” choice. The ingredient removed from the food was to blame (such as fat, sugar, salt, etc.) and now the consumer must choose accordingly. Bodies sick with heart disease or diabetes no longer disturb the corporation. The food system is not to blame – the ingredients are. As Burke argues, “One must remember that a scapegoat cannot be ‘curative’ except insofar as it represents the iniquities of those who would be cured by it” (*Grammar* 406). Ingredients that make us sick or overweight are inextricably linked to the food system. By distancing these products, a corporation may stand in dialectical opposition to the ills it created. Additionally, certain processes are ritualistically sacrificed within the food system: such as the use of pesticides, antibiotics, cages, or genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Many of these large scale practices remain (which are arguably bad for workers and the environment) yet, guilt may be assuaged with the sacrifice of one or more problematic processes. Ultimately, the sacrifice of ingredients and processes promotes an identification with the food corporation – it is “us” versus *trans* fat, high fructose corn syrup, or GMOs.

Finally, Fisher’s narrative paradigm, in conjunction with the aforementioned perspectives, extends how we might understand the work being done by competing narratives. For example, the popular Food Network show, *Unwrapped*, weaves a narrative about the wonders of the industrialization of food. Narrated by Marc Summers, the show enters the factory to showcase how everything from candy bars to potato chips is manufactured. On the other hand, the documentary, *Food, Inc.* crafts a different story, one in which the factory and the items that come out of it, are tainted. Both texts attempt to foster identification with audiences about

how our food is produced. In *Unwrapped*, the narratives of food production are often associated with a larger cultural narrative of progress and innovation or American ingenuity. In *Food, Inc.*, the dangers of this progress narrative are “exposed,” replaced by a narrative of individual responsibility. On the surface, these two narratives appear to be arguing for different ends. However, in considering the larger narratives that each text uses to establish identification – they are arguably stemming from the same root – the American way (progress, innovation, ingenuity, and hard work).

Fisher’s narrative paradigm provides a way of understanding how this work is being done. I argue that both of these narratives possess narrative probability and narrative fidelity. *Unwrapped* presents a coherent story of how our food is made (or it has narrative probability). Food is grown, shipped, processed, packaged, shipped again, and sold all over the country. The story is clear and makes sense. Additionally, *Unwrapped* frequently focuses on companies that started out fairly small (for example, Hershey) and grew into a household name. These stories possess narrative fidelity, for we *know* that given enough hard work and ingenuity anyone can be successful. In contrast, *Food, Inc.* criticizes industrialization, arguing that big business is to blame for a number of the United States’ problems. The film has narrative probability, for the story being told is clear. Similar to the *Unwrapped* narrative, food is grown, shipped, processed, packaged, shipped again, and sold all over the country. However, *Food, Inc.* highlights that only the multinational corporations can afford to play this game. Further, the film showcases the dark side of food manufacturing. Instead of conveyor belts of glossy chocolates, *Food, Inc.* pans over miles of crowded cattle feedlots. The film also possesses narrative fidelity. While we might not know all the details of food manufacturing, there is knowledge of food borne illnesses being caused by this sort of manufacturing. In this way, *Food, Inc.* confirms what is already suspected

– that there are problems associated with the way our food is being produced. In thinking about the structure of these two narratives, I argue that audiences could engage both texts and identify with both stories. Both stories make sense, ring true, and provide several points of identification. At first glance, these stories may seem very different. However, by using both Burke and Fisher, I can tease out commonalities and better understand how these stories work.

Ultimately, I contend that taken together, Burke and Fisher provide ways to understand how the food exposé is weaving a tale about who we are and who we might become. If Burke’s corpus hinged on the purification of war, my project aims to demystify food narratives and think through a more accessible construction. As Rueckert argues, in order to be a critic and more specifically a critic following Burke’s example, “You really do have to believe that the knowledge you produce and the means by which you spread it – the written word – will help to purify war, promote tolerance by speculation, and foster the principles of wonder, resignation, tolerance, and sympathy that are necessary for sound human relations” (101). To be certain, this is a complex matter; one that requires a number of perspectives and terminologies to make sense out of the chaos. This project is not as simple as illustrating what is wrong, offering some hope for change, and moving on. I argue that these perspectives create a space for new, potentially liberatory narrative constructions. By conducting a narrative analysis, I intend to disrupt and refocus the stories we tell about local food.

Texts

For this project, I will analyze several different texts. First, in order to consider the food exposé in more depth, I will analyze the documentaries, *Food, Inc.*, and *Food Fight: A Story of Culinary Revolt* and the book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. I choose these texts for a few reasons. As previously mentioned, narratives do not exist in isolation, nor do people interact with a given

narrative in a vacuum. Given the density of food related discourse, it is advantageous to consider a range of texts through which audiences engage local food narratives. *Food, Inc.* and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* garnered a good deal of attention upon release. *AVM* quickly became a New York Times bestseller, while *Food, Inc.* became one of the top – grossing documentaries (Black and “Box Office Mojo”). While not as popular, I chose *Food Fight* because of its close focus on restaurateur and local food advocate, Alice Waters. Many credit Waters, alongside her restaurant Chex Panisse, as the impetus of the local food movement.

I chose these particular texts, because they craft a broad narrative of what local food is and how it developed. Furthermore, these texts belong to the food exposé genre. As Thompson contends, “Numerous authors have carved a genre at the border of scholarly and popular literature that creates overnight best sellers about food” (58). In the endnote, he mentions Kingsolver, Pollan, Schlosser, and Nestle. These writers also play important roles in both of the documentary films. Nestle, Schlosser, and Pollan appear in both documentaries as expert witnesses to the problems associated with our food system. As I identify in subsequent chapters, the tropes that I delineate are woven throughout these texts and eventually come to life in a midtown grocery store.

I will also analyze Whole Foods Detroit, a grocery store located in Detroit, Michigan. The dynamics of this particular grocery store are of interest for several reasons. The context of midtown Detroit provides an interesting background to consider how the local is constructed. The discourse surrounding the opening of Whole Foods Detroit stressed the lack of food security in the area. However, research analysts at Data Driven Detroit found that while there are a few food deserts in Detroit, the majority of the city has access to at least one (if not more) full service grocery stores. In fact, their analysis shows that there are 115 full service grocery stores within

Detroit city limits (Devries & Linn). In considering Whole Foods Detroit, I analyze not only the narratives surrounding its opening, but also the store itself. How is the local constructed within this space? What rhetorical resources are used to promote identification with the city of Detroit, local food in general, and the Whole Foods brand? The space itself offers several texts from which to draw critical implications: signs posted around the store, labels, as well as the store's Facebook page and website.

In studying Whole Foods Detroit, I am furthering a line of research which asks questions about and emphasizes the importance of quotidian spaces. Eckstein and Conley argue that, "Places like health food stores, tattoo parlors, coffee shops, leisure centers, and shopping malls are not simply the background of our 'real' lives; they play a part in who we are and how we live" (176). There is a growing body of literature which analyzes food-related spaces, and in particular farmers' markets. For example, Eckstein and Conley analyze the Cherry Creek Farmers' Market in Denver, Colorado arguing that farmers' markets function as, "a rhetorically charged civic space" that is best understood through affect theory (172). Additionally, after considering 18 months of ethnographic data collected at the Davis Farmers' Market in Davis, California, McCullen contends that farmers' markets, "act as agents in perpetuating whitened American cultural myths and narratives about agriculture in the United States" (231).

These studies highlight the utility of analyzing food-related spaces, showcasing how these places speak to and interact with larger systemic issues. In addition to analyzing farmers' markets, there is a growing body of work that investigates the modern iteration of the market: the grocery store. For instance, Tracey Deutsch traces the history of Chicago supermarkets arguing that, "Food shopping was never a straightforward way of satisfying needs – not for shoppers, but also not for retailers" (6). Deutsch reveals that grocery stores have always been related to (both

directly and indirectly) political and social systems, as well as cultural ideologies. Of course, Whole Foods in general, and Whole Foods Detroit specifically, is not the average grocery store. WFD is not the place where people are doing the majority of their shopping. However, a spokesperson for WFD explained that the chain more than doubled its initial goals, but would not provide specific information on the stores profits (Bowean). Aside from its secret profitability, WFD's text heavy interior sets it apart from most chain grocery stores. As Pollan argues, "With the growth of organics and mounting concerns about the wholesomeness of industrial food, storied food is showing up in supermarkets everywhere these days, but it is Whole Foods that consistently offers the most cutting-edge grocery lit" (135). Furthermore, WFD actively engages and constructs the city right outside its doors. As Bowean argues, "Inside the store, the hits of Aretha Franklin, The Supremes, and James Brown are played over the loudspeaker. Shelves are made from refurbished wood and bricks, and the signs are written in gritty graffiti print." Given its text heavy, narratively driven interior, as well as its explicit attempts to construct locality, I argue that it's time to enter the store, grab our cart, and understand what work is being done in the aisles. More specifically, how is WFD shaping our understanding of food, and particularly local food?

Finally, I will consider four texts in order to think about how local food narratives facilitate the construction of an elite identity. As Greene and Cramer argue, "one of the most common ways that we utilize food is in the construction of our personal identities" (xi). In order to think through both current day and historical constructions, I will use John Keay's *The Spice Route: A History*, Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, Michael Pollan's *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*, and the blog, *Nourished Kitchen*. I

will conduct a homological analysis, comparing constructions of elite consumers of the spice trade, with contemporary constructions of “locavores.”

Drawing on Burke’s theory of identification and Fisher’s theory of narrative rationality, this project outlines the genre of the food exposé, explores how it is working, and more importantly, details how it is not working. Of course, I proceed with some trepidation in using the term “genre,” as many rhetoricians bemoan its formulaic approach to criticism. For example, Patton contends that generic criticism highlights, “a vast preoccupation with method as method” (7). Similarly, Conley laments, “the tendency of generic classifications to proliferate into tiresome and useless taxonomies” (53). Of course, these risks are still relevant even though rhetorical criticism has evolved since Patton and Conley wrote these critiques (see Gunn *Exorcism*). However, if genre is used merely as a tool to identify and understand recurrent symbolic action, the risk of “tiresome and useless” criticism is lessened. Genre should be emergent, not prescriptive; contextually bound, not generally applied. Campbell and Jamieson argue that, “The justification for a generic claim is the *understanding* it produces rather than the ordered universe it *creates* [emphasis added]” (18). Further, the authors note that, “the genre which emerges is a complex of elements – a constellation of substantive, stylistic and situational characteristics” (17). Gunn echoes these arguments, explaining that, “Genres are simply patterns that seem to emerge among texts or social forms in a given cultural discourse” (*Modern Occult* 17). Further, in his study of occult texts, Gunn notes that the patterns he sees are not “objective features but rather items that I have noticed tend to recur in my experience of reading occult texts, items that help us to better contend with the diffuseness of occult discourse in general” (18). I choose to identify the food exposé genre because it helps me contend with the ever expanding body of discourse concerning both food in general and local food specifically. As

Thompson explains, we are in a period marked by our discourses of and about food, which he terms “food talk.” Thinking about a particular genre of “food talk” makes it easier to address general questions about local food: How are these arguments being made? By whom? For whom?

While generic criticism does provide a rough frame for the critic, Campbell and Jamieson clarify that using a genre perspective alone is not enough. Indeed, most scholars use genre analysis in addition to pre-existing theoretical positions. They argue, “It is now manifest that a concern with form and genre does not prescribe a critical methodology. In short, generic analysis is an available critical option regardless of the critical perspective that one cherishes” (27). Therefore, while I identify the emergent genre of the food exposé, I use the theories of Kenneth Burke and Walter Fisher to isolate key components and think through the implications of stylistic choices. Taken together, Burke and Fisher provide a lens for seeing how narratives shape who we are and how we argue.

The first issue I engage is identification. Burke contends that, “Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity” (*Rhetoric* 22). In each of these three narratives, it is clear from the very beginning that there is an “other,” that is something from which we should be separated (most often, the industrial food system). Of course, identification can be more than simply creating an “other” or some sort of division. For instance, Burke also contends that identification plays a pivotal role in identity construction. He argues, “But we are clearly in the region of rhetoric when considering the identifications whereby a specialized activity makes one a participant in some social or economic class. ‘Belonging’ in this sense is rhetorical” (27-8). In many ways, food has become a

specialized activity – we talk about it in particular ways, grow it in particular ways, and think about it in particular ways – which positions us as belonging to particular food identities.

I develop my approach to identification from the *Philosophy of Literary Form*, in which Burke argues that critics can learn a great deal about who we are from various art forms. Specifically, Burke argues that literature is a window to the human experience, for human beings use stories to make sense of the world around them. In arguing for a method which would seriously consider narrative, Burke claims, “Art forms like ‘tragedy’ or ‘comedy’ or ‘satire’ would be treated as *equipment for living*, that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes” (*Philosophy* 304). In my analysis, the genre encourages us to see and understand food from particular ways and motivates identification with the goals of the local food movement. Specifically, I use Burke’s theories of identification and dramatism to isolate the common tropes that I argue compose the food exposé genre.

In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke outlines the Four Master Tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. Burke extends their meaning (or changes it) by substituting “perspective for metaphor, reduction for metonymy, representation for synecdoche, and dialectic for irony” (*Grammar* 503). While each of these tropes could be useful for this analysis, I focus on the first and fourth tropes: perspective and dialectic. As Burke explains, the “human role (such as we get in drama) may be summed up in certain slogans, or formulae, or epigrams, or ‘ideas’ that characterize the agent’s situation or strategy. Where the ideas are in action, we have drama; where the agents are in ideation, we have dialectic. (511-12). Throughout this chapter, I will be using Burke to inform how the food exposé genre makes its claims and connects with its audience to construct identification with the local food movement.

I also use Walter Fisher's concept of narrative rationality. This theory illuminates how arguments are constructed outside the realm of formal logic, specifically through narratives. According to Fisher, narrative is a more accessible form of argumentation, because "All persons have the capacity to be rational in the narrative paradigm" (10). In order for a narrative to be considered rational within Fisher's paradigm, it must possess both narrative probability (a coherent story) and narrative fidelity (a story that rings true). Narrative probability considers how well the story hangs together. Does it make sense? Narrative fidelity asks how "true" the story is. Does the story fit with what we know to be true in the world? According to Fisher, stories that do this generate a "logic of good reasons" that informs everyday decision making (274). He explains that, "The logic of good reasons maintains that reasoning need not be bound to argumentative prose or be expressed in clear-cut inferential or implicative structures: Reasoning may be discovered in all sorts of symbolic action – nondiscursive as well as discursive" (1). Fisher's theory provides a standpoint from which to analyze the logic employed in stories that do not rely on traditional argumentative rhetoric.

In constructing the food exposé genre, I draw on both Burke and Fisher to elucidate and explore certain elements that I argue are found within these texts. I use Fisher to think about the reasoning in these three narrative texts, and I use Burke to analyze the way that particular audiences are constructed within them and the role certain tropes play in this process. Identification is vital to both scholars, as Fisher explains, "narration works by suggestion and identification" (279). Combining Burke and Fisher throughout the project not only provides a frame for how the narrative works, but also how it does not. Ultimately, my goal is to understand how arguments are made for local food. Using Burke and Fisher, I find that narrative identification is one way that the movement advocates for this way of eating. In the following

chapter, I construct the food exposé genre by isolating three dominant tropes: taking a long journey, desiring a nostalgic past, and dreaming of a tasty future.

CHAPTER 3 TAKING THE LONG WAY: RHETORICALLY GENERATED DISTANCE IN THE FOOD EXPOSÉ GENRE

The first episode of the Independent Film Channel's (IFC) Original comedy sketch show, "Portlandia," finds a couple, portrayed by Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein, dining in a restaurant. The show, which satirizes the culture associated with Portland, Oregon, features sketches about feminist bookstores, competitive dodgeball leagues, brunch, and local food. In this episode, Armisen and Brownstein's characters are chatting in a restaurant when the server approaches their table, introduces herself and asks, "If you have any questions about the menu, please let me know." Brownstein's character asks if the server could tell them a little bit more about the chicken. She responds, "The chicken is a heritage breed, woodland raised chicken, that's been fed a diet of sheep's milk, soy, and hazelnuts." Armisen's character immediately interrupts to ask if the chicken is local. Following this initial inquiry both characters proceed to ask question after question – "Is it organic?" "Is it USDA organic, Oregon organic, or Portland organic?" "I'm going to ask you one more time...is it local?" "Are the hazelnuts local?" After asking several more questions, Armisen and Brownstein decide to leave the restaurant to visit the farm from which the chicken came. The sketch reaches a comedic crescendo when the characters join the cult which they find on the farm and stay for several years. The end of the sketch finds them returning to the restaurant only to ask another question about the locality of their food – and so the search begins again.

"Portlandia" is a satirical comedy series, and yet, this sketch reflects what often happens when discussing local food – a slip and a tumble down the rabbit hole. With so many different issues, causes, and concerns, local food discussions often wander in so many directions it becomes difficult to follow any direction at all. Although the discourses of local food argue that eating locally is a simple solution to our problems, the discussion often quickly escalates into a

more complicated, multivariate, and daunting dialogue. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I argue that the food exposé genre is one of the primary vehicles for making arguments about local food, and it is within this genre that we might understand how the story becomes unwieldy. This chapter highlights how these narratives construct an overwhelming and confusing industrial food system in order to construct its opposite: the easy, straightforward local food system. Using three texts, the book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life (AVM)*, and the films *Food, Inc.*, and *Food Fight: A Story of Culinary Revolt*, I delineate three tropes which dominate the food exposé genre. I chose *AVM* and *Food, Inc.* because of their popular appeal, as well as their attention to local food. Written by novelist Barbara Kingsolver, *AVM* traces her family's experiment of eating locally for an entire year. In her first nonfiction work, which quickly became a New York Times bestseller, Kingsolver weaves a narrative not only about her own family's experience, but also about the current state of our food system (Black). *Food, Inc.*, a film with the explicit mission of uncovering what is wrong with the industrial food system, ranks as one of the top grossing documentaries of all time ("Box Office Mojo"). Released in 2009, this film tackles issues such as diabetes, factory farms, and food borne illnesses, all while advocating for a different food system. Finally, although the film *Food Fight* did not draw widespread attention like the previous two texts, I chose to analyze this film because it traces the origins of the local food movement through the personal narrative of one of its founders, Chef Alice Waters. Famous for both her restaurant and food philosophy, Waters is the author of several books and cookbooks, including *The Art of Simple Food* and *Slow Food: The Case for Taste*, as well as the subject of several more, such as the biography *Alice Waters and Chez Panisse*. In advocating for local food systems, the film explores similar issues as *Food, Inc.* and *AVM*, and ends with a call to activism on behalf of local food, as well as a call to eat local. These three

texts, which on the surface are tackling different issues surrounding the industrial food system, all advocate for a return to the simplicity of local food. Considering these three texts through a generic lens highlights how narratives about/for local food often obfuscate more than they clarify.

In the following sections, I detail three tropes¹ of the food exposé genre, which I argue establish and articulate the need for a local food system: taking a long journey, desiring a nostalgic past, and dreaming of a tasty future. I use tropes to think about *how* these narratives are justifying local food, as well as how they construct what it means to eat locally. Considered within the body of discourse that I call the “food exposé” it becomes a bit clearer how and to whom these stories about local food are being told. All of these texts use these devices in an attempt to answer such questions as: What is wrong with the food system? Who is to blame? What does it mean to eat locally? What is the importance of local food? What is the future of local food? What can *we* do about it? What are the consequences if we don’t do anything? Ultimately, as I will detail at the end of the chapter, these tropes limit the range of this rhetoric and the audiences that these texts can reach.

Taking a Long Journey

Many popular food texts investigate our food system by conducting some sort of diet-related experiment for a specified amount of time. The goals of this type of experiment vary. For example, the film *SuperSize Me* follows Morgan Spurlock’s 30 day experiment to go exclusively to McDonald’s for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Through the film, Spurlock sought to unveil what a McDonald’s based diet does to the human body (and mind). On the other hand, Gary Nabhan’s book, *Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods*, traces Nabhan’s year-long experiment of only eating food which could be found within a 250 mile

radius of his home in Arizona. He explains, “I want to fully bear the brunt of what my own eating of the living world entails. I want to escape the trap that I, like most Americans, have fallen into the last four decades: obtaining nine-tenths of our food from nonlocal sources” (34). These stories of diet-related journeys speak to audiences about health, personal growth, and our food system. Within the genre of the food exposé, many authors and directors employ the trope of a long journey to describe how they set out to understand our food system. These journeys speak to audiences of what is possible: escape from our contemporary context. In what follows, I will consider how *AVM*, *Food, Inc.*, and *Food Fight* use the trope of “taking a long journey” to think about his or her (and our) relationship to food.

In *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle (AVM)*, Kingsolver acknowledges the way that her story follows a well-established narrative path, “All stories, they say, begin in one of two ways: ‘A stranger came to town,’ or else, ‘I set out upon a journey.’ The rest is all just metaphor and simile” (335). In this particular tale, Kingsolver chooses the latter option and moves her family to a farm to escape the grip of industrialized food. In the opening chapter of *AVM*, Kingsolver explains, “We would take a food sabbatical, getting our hands dirty in some of the actual dying arts of food production.” (21-2). With an ongoing drought and no family relations, she and her partner decide to leave Arizona and move to Southwestern Virginia, a place “that could feed us” (3).

In setting the tone for a yearlong experiment of eating only local food, Kingsolver questions the food culture of the United States, or lack thereof. She describes some of the problems associated with our food system: we produce too much food, our food travels too far (on average 1500 miles), we don’t know *how* our food grows, we don’t have the patience to wait for the peak season of a given food, industrial agriculture is bad for us and the planet, and the

majority of U.S. residents do not know where their food comes from – or how it is grown. She states, “We don’t know beans about beans. Asparagus, potatoes, turkey drumsticks – you name it, we don’t have a clue how the world makes it” (11). To solve these problems, Kingsolver moves to the farm where her family will rely on local food, including the things they grow themselves and food produced in the immediate locale. She states, “We had come to the farmland to eat deliberately” (23).

The narrative follows Kingsolver’s family as they transition to a local food diet. To Kingsolver, this yearlong experiment or journey meant that, “We were going to spend a year integrating our food choices with our family values, which include both ‘love thy neighbor’ and try not to wreck every blooming thing on the planet while you’re here”(23). Along the way, she describes the joys of harvesting asparagus, the overwhelming bounty of zucchini, and the frustration of turkey mating. The family plants heirloom crops, raises chickens, and makes their own bread. Kingsolver explains that, “We hoped to prove – at least to ourselves – that a family living on or near green land need not depend for its life on industrial food. We hoped a year away from the industrial foods would taste so good, we might actually enjoy it” (22).

In the second chapter of *AVM*, Kingsolver isolates a single food item in order to discuss how her family made the transition to eating locally. In a chapter entitled, “Waiting for Asparagus: Late March,” Kingsolver details the lifecycle or journey of asparagus to explore the patience required for her family’s own journey. Not only does asparagus have one of the briefest seasons, but also one must wait a full three years after planting to begin harvesting the shoots. Kingsolver explains that, “An asparagus spear only looks like its picture for one day of its life, usually in April, give or take a month as you travel from the Mason-Dixon line” (26). Kingsolver uses asparagus to do a few things. Since asparagus is the year’s first edible, she’s exploring the

beginning of the growing season, while weaving a tale of winter's end and spring's beginning. This is also the beginning of the family's journey to eat locally. However, she also uses this chapter, and specifically, homegrown asparagus and its grocery store counterpart to make a few key points about our food system. This is a food product that clearly demonstrates its world travelling abilities if one finds it in any month except April. And so, Kingsolver, in showcasing the journey of the asparagus, advocates for less food miles and more personal food journeys.

The film *Food Fight* takes its own journey, both through our food system and our food history, by following the life of Alice Waters, a pioneering chef committed to local and organic foods. Waters opened the restaurant Chez Panisse in Berkley, California in 1971, and it quickly became the symbolic center of the local food movement. While highlighting Waters' revolutionary drive, the film also serves as a critique of industrialized food – drawing on the expertise of the popular food authors Michael Pollan and Marion Nestle – and as a history of the call to join the local food movement. The film bases this call on the oft cited reasons: it's better for the environment, for us, and lest we forget, it tastes better.

The story is fast paced. Merely six minutes into the film and the director Chris Taylor has already touched on the following problems associated with our food system: the industrialization of food, diet-related illnesses, and corrupt food policy. Early on in the film, Pollan explains how the industrial food system is making us sick. He states that the most prevalent diseases in the United States are diet related illnesses - diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease. Immediately following this discussion, Taylor zooms through an explanation of several Farm Bills (the Agricultural Adjustment Acts of 1933 and 1938, as well as the Agricultural Acts of 1948, 1949, 1954, 1956, 1970, and the Agricultural and Consumer Protection Act of 1973). Taylor explains that during the Great Depression most Americans in the United States were starving and could

not afford to buy the food that farmers were growing. In order to keep those farmers in business, Congress began to subsidize farming, big and small. However, in the 1970s, Earl Butz, Secretary of Agriculture under Nixon and Ford, shifted the focus to corporate farming and put an end to a number of New Deal policies which had helped small farmers. The film then creates a link between industrialized food and war, specifically World War II, a time when food production needed to be able to feed soldiers across the world. This era introduced the K ration, the precursor to the TV dinner, as well as nitrogen rich fertilizers. After WWII, the U.S. possessed a considerable surplus of ammonium nitrate, which was used to make bombs during the war. As Pollan explains, “The chemical fertilizer industry (along with that of pesticides, which are based on the poison gases developed for war) is the product of the government’s effort to convert its war machine to peacetime purposes” (“What’s Eating”). The entire opening sequence bemoans the rapid growth of industry during the first half of the 20th century and the seemingly “tasteless” 50s. Taylor positions the local food movement as a reaction to the industrialized, war mongering 40s and 50s. In fact, Taylor places the local food movement and the counterculture movement hand in hand.

Food, Inc. also takes a journey, or rather, multiple journeys in order to trace the origins of McDonald’s hamburgers, considers the health risks associated with the rise of industrialization, and the dangers of corporate control. This film, one of the earliest food films to garner a large audience, explores almost every food rabbit hole you can: workers’ rights, food safety, GMOs, US legislation, mechanized factories, obesity, food costs, Monsanto, capitalism, local farming, and the rise of organics. The film is divided into several vignettes which focus on various aspects of our food system. For example, in one section titled “Unintended Consequences,” the film explores various cases of E.coli contamination, such as the 2006 “Spinach Scare,” and the 1993

case of tainted meat at Jack in the Box restaurants. In order to showcase the E.coli outbreak linked to tainted meat, the film begins with a news clip from the 1993 outbreak, followed by news clips from 1998, 2001, and 2002. Each news clip shows the same thing, a map of the United States and where the E.coli outbreak is spreading to and from. The film both shows a journey through time, as well as the physical journey of E.coli through the U.S.

The main focus of this section is one woman's story of fast food hamburgers and unexpected loss. Barbara Kowalcyk, a food safety advocate, lost her son Kevin after he ate contaminated meat in July 2001. As Kowalcyk narrates the story, old home movies show the two-year-old boy playing on the shore of a crystal clear lake. After this devastating tragedy, Barbara and her mother began petitioning the United States government to strengthen food regulations. In order to highlight this woman's journey, the film begins her story in the back of a cab in Washington, D.C. As imposing government buildings pass by, Kowalcyk and her mother discuss their plan for the day. The cab drops them off in front of the United States Capitol building, and the women walk up the stairs and through the marbled basement rotunda. After consulting a map, the women finally arrive at the offices of Diana DeGette, a Representative from Colorado. After speaking with DeGette about the death of her son, the women leave her office and walk down yet another marbled hallway. Immediately following this scene, Kowalcyk is traveling down an escalator to the metro. For most of this segment, Kowalcyk and her mother are moving, journeying from one place to another. This woman's journey parallels the film's larger narrative, which showcases how something terrible happened because of food system, and how we need to do something different in order to journey beyond our current circumstances. All three of these texts use journeys to explore our food system, to show us what is wrong with our current system so that we may construct a new path, a journey based on local food. In the next

section, I will analyze how these three texts call upon a nostalgic past to make arguments for a better future.

Desiring a Nostalgic Past

Another trope of the food exposé is to express a desire for a nostalgic past. I adopt Svetlana Boym's stance that "Nostalgia (from *nostos* – return home, and *algia* – longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (xiii). Scholars from all disciplines grapple with this concept. Boym explains its appeal arguing that, "Nostalgia tantalizes us with its fundamental ambivalence; it is about the repetition of the unrepeatable, materialization of the immaterial" (xv). In these texts, nostalgia crafts the present evil/industrial/global food system as the antithesis to the past innocent/pastoral/local food system. References abound about a "simpler time" or "returning to the land." Nostalgic references craft a powerful justification for escaping the industrial smog that seems to have descended on our cities and our food supply. Therefore, phrases such as "getting back to nature" or "living like our ancestors" advocate the local food agenda. This trope suggests that if we just eat this way, we can escape the problems of the 21st century. Each of these texts plays on this trope in some way. In the following section, I will explore how each text uses nostalgia to position local food as the antidote to the industrial food system.

In *Food, Inc.* the filmmakers establish a stark contrast between industrialized food and its counterpart. The dangers of our current system are highlighted in order to showcase the benefits of nostalgia rich local food. The section "Unintended Consequences" details several E.coli outbreaks linked to tainted beef, spinach, and peanut butter, positioning these outbreaks as a direct result of overcrowded feed lots or concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFO). For example, the film flashes a news report concerning the 1993 E.coli outbreak linked to Jack in the

Box hamburger meat that left two children dead in the Pacific Northwest. As the New York Times explains, fallout from this contamination was particularly damaging for the chain restaurant. “The 60 Jack in the Box restaurants in the state have been barraged by anonymous telephone callers accusing them of being baby killers. Customers are scarce. And local newspapers have carried advertisements by lawyers offering to represent poisoning victims” (“Jack in the Box”). Other news clips referenced the massive recalls of ground beef from companies like ConAgra and IBP (Kenner).

Throughout this portion of the film, the camera pans over packed cattle feedlots and meat processing plants, such as Beef Products, Inc. (BPI) in Nebraska. It is within this factory that the filmmakers construct both the scale and menace of industrialized agriculture. Inside the plant is a command center which regulates beef manufacturers in Chicago, Georgia, Utah, Kansas, Texas, and Ohio. Sitting in front of a bank of television monitors, a single man manages the day-to-day operations of plants across the country. As the camera moves inside the plant, the scene is dominated by silver machines, steam, and workers in masks and lab coats. Eldon Roth, CEO of BPI, explains that the plant uses ammonia to “clean” and process the meat thus lowering the risk of E.coli. The camera follows the cleansed meat all the way through its processing, when the ammonia-treated, sponge-like hamburger is put into a cardboard box. While inside the factory, Kenner emphasizes the shiny steel machines, the faceless employees, and the sterilized meat. It feels like a scene from the future, a time when all food is produced by machines in assembly-line factories such as this one. The film depicts a stark future to later highlight (and create desire for) a nostalgic past². In the past, food was grown from rich soil nourished by sunlight and clean rain, and raising animals was an exercise in careful husbandry and diligence. In this mechanized

present, food is processed, decontaminated, and manufactured. We have replaced produce with product.

The next section of the film, titled, “The Dollar Menu,” follows the Gonzalez family who cannot afford to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. Instead, this family eats fast food, such as Burger King or McDonald’s, because their dollar goes further at these restaurants. Pollan explains that farm subsidies make this food cheaper. Therefore, a head of lettuce or broccoli is more expensive than the heavily subsidized sweetened carbonated soft drinks (such as Coca-Cola or Pepsi). The film accompanies the Gonzalez family to the grocery store where they look at different kinds of produce and deem it too expensive - the price of broccoli is \$1.29 a pound, while Pepsi products are 4 for 5 dollars. Maria Gonzalez explains, “You can find candy that’s cheaper. You can find chips that are cheaper. The sodas are really cheap. Sometimes you look at a vegetable and say, ‘Okay, we can get two hamburgers over here for same amount of price” (Kenner). Following this scene, Pollan offers his concerns about the nation’s health as the filmmakers walk the aisles of grocery store past shelves of soda, sugary cereal, etc. He explains that in addition to the problem of expensive food, we see a growing trend of diet-related illnesses in lower income populations who rely on these cheaper calories to survive. At the end of this section of the film, the filmmakers bemoan that “1 in 3 Americans born after 2000 will contract early onset diabetes” (Kenner). If the previous portion of the film crafted a cold, bleak future to position the nostalgic past, this section draws on our fears about rising disease rates in our children. Linking our industrial food system with the rise in diet-related illnesses, the film highlights that this wasn’t always the case. In a nostalgic past, children and adults were healthier because they ate food grown close to home.

Immediately following these two sections is a portion of the film titled, “In the Grass.” Having just witnessed the cold steel of a meat processing plant and the day-to-day eating habits of lower-income Americans, the stage is set. The filmmakers contend our contemporary food system is not serving us well; in fact, it is making us sick. As this section begins, someone strums an acoustic guitar as the camera focuses on the sunrise over Polyface Farms in Shenandoah Valley, Virginia. The frames that follow showcase an old white farmhouse rising above clothes gently blowing in the breeze on a clothesline, an old red barn, and a tractor pulling a wagon full of bales of hay. Here is the America of days gone by. It’s rural, it’s simple, and it’s about as far as one can get from BPI and its ammonia processed meat. The owner of this farm is Joel Salatin, described as a farmer committed to growing healthy, sustainable crops and livestock. Salatin is himself a piece of nostalgia with his overalls and straw hat; he appears as the quintessential farmer. In the interviews, he is always outside among his herds of cows or pigs. Everything in these scenes seems to be running counter to the previous two sections of the film. Salatin butchers chickens by hand in the open air – with the mountains surrounding him. He eats a locally grown meal outside, instead of in a moving car. The scene exudes nostalgia for a time when this is where our food came from and how it was raised.

In *AVM*, Kingsolver uses nostalgia to justify both her yearlong experiment with her family, as well as local food more broadly. The entire book is peppered with reminiscent anecdotes of foraging for mushrooms on a crisp, spring day or making soup while the winter wind whips at the door. In the chapter titled, “Molly Mooching,” Kingsolver describes the historical significance of the practice of foraging. She explains, “The people of southern Appalachia have a long folk tradition of using our woodlands creatively and knowing them intimately. These hills have secrets” (77). One such secret is the “Molly Mooch” mushroom,

known as the morel to those outside of southern Appalachia. Kingsolver states, “Wild mushrooms are among the few foods North Americans still eat that must be hunted and gathered. Some fungi are farmed, but exotics like the morel defy all attempts at domestication” (78). Of course, these passages speak to the nostalgia of hunting, gathering, and foraging, but Kingsolver takes it a step further with the description of her family’s secret. “Where they [morels] do grow is in Old Charley’s Lot. We know that only because our friends who grew up on this farm showed us where to look. This is the kind of knowledge that gets lost if people have to leave their land. Farmers aren’t just picturesque technicians. They are memory banks, human symbionts with their ground” (78-9). The nostalgia of “keeping the secret history of a goat, a place, and a mushroom” reverberates through this passage. In a world where most mushrooms are purchased from chain grocery stores, Old Charley’s Lot seems about as far from the contemporary landscape as one can get.

The entire book is steeped in this sort of reminiscent imagery. Consider this passage wherein Kingsolver is describing winter on the farm, “The school bus would likely bring Lily home early. My sole companion was the crackling woodstove that warms our kitchen: talkative, but easy to ignore. I was deeply enjoying my solitary lunch break, a full sucker for the romance of winter, eating a warmed-up bowl of potato-leek soup and watching the snow” (297). Another instance (of many) dripping with nostalgia involves a family road trip. During the trip, the family visits a cheesemaker in Massachusetts, a local diner in Vermont, and a family farm in Ohio. In setting the scene for the farm in Ohio, Kingsolver explains that, “This rural county looked like a postcard of America’s heartland, sent from a time when the heart was still healthy” (159). She meticulously describes the farmers’ (Elsie and David) simple way of life. After ten pages of thick description detailing how Elsie and David do not use pesticides, only use horse-drawn wagons,

and can identify birds by their song alone, Kingsolver reveals that the couple is Amish. The Amish community in the United States, which follows a form of Protestantism known as Anabaptism, strives to live simply or “in the world, but not of it” (Gall & Hobby). Within these communities, farming is a way of life and traditional methods are still employed. Kingsolver uses this couple to advocate explicitly for a nostalgic past, arguing that, and “Farmers like Elsie and David are a link between the past and future” (169).

In addition to depicting a nostalgic local food system as the opposite of the modern industrial food system, many food texts position the solution of local food in contrast to its separate (and often evil) opposite: the globalized world. For example, *AVM* contrasts the local food economy of southern Virginia with the globalized industrial food system. The book addresses this issue in periodic sidebars found throughout the text, written by Kingsolver’s partner, Steven L. Hopp. In these sidebars, Hopp considers the impact of a globalized food system. For example, in a brief essay titled, “The Global Equation,” Hopp argues, “Global trade deals negotiated by the World Trade Organization and World Bank allow corporations to shop for food from countries with the poorest environmental, safety, and labor conditions. While passing bargains on to consumers, this pits farmers in one country against those in another” (67).

There are a few things to note about this passage. First, the physical location of this discussion is not within the main narrative, which helps distinguish its use of traditional argument from the story’s logic of good reasons. Arguments about the global system are separated by lines and written in a smaller font, so as not to be confused with the narrative of local food. Second, while Hopp’s description of the problem provides evidentiary support, his solution merely asserts “If you care about farmers, let the potatoes stay home” (67). From this, it appears that the solution to a multifaceted, global problem is to simply buy local, which relies

primarily on the narrative tropes for support. Moreover, his argument relies upon an overly simplistic global v. local dialectic, which trivializes significant overlap and interaction between these “separate” systems. The sidebars make the problem appear only to exist at the global level and that the only solution, or at least the best one, is local.

However, neither our food issues, nor the main narrative delineate such strict boundaries. When Kingsolver’s family first began the yearlong experiment each family member was allowed to choose one non-local luxury item they would continue to consume. For Hopp, the luxury item was coffee, a decidedly global commodity. The other family members chose items such as dried fruit, hot chocolate, and spices. Of course, Kingsolver notes that they would buy these products from fair trade organizations. The family would be supporting a globalized food economy, yes, but in a positive way. But this contradicts the superficial arguments of the sidebars, because fair trade that benefits the local economies of producers is one place where the global/local dialectic breaks down. It’s fairly clear that our food problems cannot be neatly solved by turning strictly to the global or the local, yet these sidebars argue otherwise. Finally, these sidebars, which present a highly politicized voice, highlight Kingsolver’s nostalgic position. She wants to leave the world discussed in the sidebar behind.

The film *Food Fight* also constructs the evil, industrial food system, as well as the global/local dialectic. Taylor weaves the narrative of industrialized food through the lens of war, while using nostalgia to think about 1960s counterculture. Waters’ narrative begins in Berkeley, California, which became a wellspring of the counterculture movement. Waters states that one of her earliest motivations to make food was to feed the activists who gathered to discuss important issues of the time: war, sexism, racism, etc. By positioning Waters’ narrative, as well as local food’s narrative, within this framework, Taylor crafts nostalgia for a simpler and more

communal time. This was a time when people gathered together to discuss ideas. It was also a time when people protested the government, they rallied and held demonstrations, and they cared about what happened to those around them. At the time of this film, movements such as Occupy Wall Street were still years away.

Waters points out that while people cared deeply about the counterculture movement, they were still drinking Coca-Cola and eating potato chips. They weren't connecting their politics to the food they ate. Waters notes that she wanted to feed the revolution with food that was not a part of the military-industrial complex. As one commentator explains, "There were direct intersections in the sixties between corporations that were profiting from the war in Vietnam and corporations that were profiting from the industrialization of farming and the poisoning of the nation's farm fields" (Taylor). The multinational Monsanto is a clear example of this intersection, as they were the company that developed Agent Orange, a deadly herbicide containing Tetrachlorodibenzodioxin which causes long-term health effects, as well as the most commonly used pesticide – Roundup (Glyphosate). Waters wanted her friends and fellow activists to find refuge in her food and her restaurant. As she explains, "I wanted it to be a political place. I wanted it to be a place where people brainstormed ideas and diverse groups of people gathered in conversation with good food." Similar to *AVM*, the film casts global companies and policies as dangerous, while local projects, like Waters' restaurant, are an ideal solution. Taylor's positioning of the local food movement within the anti-war, counterculture movement of the 1960s constructs a particular orientation to the globalized world – one in which the United States' interaction with globalized systems is negative and potentially deadly. Throughout the film, Taylor returns to local farmers' markets or a farmer's garden as a contrast

to the large, unwieldy world. In the next section, I will explore how each of these texts uses taste to make advocate for the local food movement.

Dreaming of a Tasty Future

The word “taste” denotes two distinct definitions: the physical sensation that determines flavor (“This tastes good”), and the social standard that demarks preference (“She has good taste”). In his seminal work, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Hugh Blair argues that the social taste is, “The power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and art.” Within the second lecture on taste, Blair inquires whether taste is solely an internal sense or “an exertion of reason” and finds that taste primarily exists outside the realm of reason. However, he adds that reason does play a role in taste’s development, arguing that, “reason assists Taste in many of its operations, and serves to enlarge its power.” Blair ultimately concludes that, “Good taste may well be considered as a power compounded of natural sensibility to beauty, and of improved understanding.” The third trope I identify in the food exposé works to collapse taste as a physical sense and taste as a developed cultural sense. Food exposés simultaneously advocate that local food tastes better, and that eating local food is in “good taste.” Ultimately, these texts argue that taste (of both body and mind) is central for both understanding and joining the movement.

Within each of these texts, the authors and directors speak to the audience’s desire for pleasure and good taste, often denigrating the mind in favor of the body. For many food writers, the mind is not capable of grasping or understanding the pleasures of good food in the same way as the body. On its face, it appears that this is more accessible way to advocate for local food. Seemingly, we all know what tastes good. However, as I will argue, these texts use taste under the guise of advocating for the primacy of the physical sense, while constructing yet another dimension of what it means to be in “good taste.” Many authors use taste to argue for a more

just food system. Often, after explaining reason after reason, the author, narrator, etc. will end with “and it tastes better.” For example, toward the end of *In Defense of Food*, Pollan outlines his “rules” for eating. He advocates shopping locally, arguing, “Local produce is typically picked ripe and is fresher than supermarket produce, and for those reasons it should be tastier and more nutritious” (159). In *Food Politics*, Nestle also uses taste, arguing that, “buying locally produced, organically grown food not only improves the taste and nutritional quality of the diet, but also supports local farmers, promotes the viability of rural communities, and creates greater diversity in agricultural production” (373). The trope implies that if the myriad reasons provided to eat local food is not convincing, then perhaps we should simply trust our physical reactions and gut instincts. As author and activist, Gary Nabhan explains at the end of *Coming Home to Eat*, “Whenever I have doubts about whether all this effort has been worth it, I go out to the wilds beyond my backyard. My mouth, my tongue, and my heart remind me what my mind too often forgets: I love the flavor of where I live” (304). Throughout the book, Nabhan positions taste as a primary sense. He explains, “There are moments in my life that I recall not as visual snapshots but as tastes and fragrances” (17). Taste is an interesting choice for these texts, for it speaks to both our bodies and our cultures.

To begin, Kingsolver’s tale of asparagus’ journey is also a lesson about taste. Because of its fleeting nature, Kingsolver explains that asparagus should be cut and eaten in the same day to enjoy its full taste. Fine flavor results from eating foods when they are ready rather than when it is convenient; taste is the reward for being patient about one’s food. She explains, “Waiting for foods to come into season means tasting them when they’re good, but waiting is also part of most value equations. Treating foods this way can help move ‘eating’ in the consumer’s mind from the Routine Maintenance Department over to the Division of Recreation” (30). Kingsolver speaks to

our taste buds, both in her encouragement to wait for spring's harvest, as well as in her description of what eating (and tasting) good food should look like. Further, Kingsolver states that buying asparagus in November is setting a bad example for future generations. She states, "We're raising our children on the definition of promiscuity if we feed them a casual, indiscriminate mingling of foods from every season plucked from the supermarket, ignoring how our sustenance is cheapened by wholesale desires" (31). Here, Kingsolver showcases that our physical taste needs to be constrained by a developed social taste for local food.

Kingsolver uses taste throughout the book, from her descriptions of asparagus, to a play-by-play of a typical Italian meal she infuses the narrative with opportunities to "taste." When describing the bounty of summer tomatoes and their grocery store brethren, she notes, "Fresh tomatoes are so unbelievably tasty, they ruin us utterly and forever on the insipid imports in the grocery. In defiance of my childhood training, I cannot clean my salad plate in a restaurant when it contains one of those anemic wedges that taste like slightly sour water with a mealy texture" (198). She continues, "The world apparently has tomato-eaters for whom 'kinda reddish' is qualification enough. A taste for better stuff is cultivated only through experience" (198). Throughout the book, Kingsolver teaches us through her experiences what good taste is and how much it matters. For example, when describing her failed attempt to make a pumpkin soup served in its own shell, she remarks, "My pumpkin soup was great. Really it was, by any standards except *presentation* (which I *flunked flunked flunked*)" (264). This story serves as a reminder that taste is really what matters, so important in fact that it becomes a part of who you are. As Kingsolver explains, "I do know that flavors work their own ways under the skin, into the heart of longing" (271). Finally, at the end of each chapter, her daughter Camille offers reflections about the year of eating locally followed by several recipes. The reader is invited to

experience the tastes discussed in the chapter at home from the failed pumpkin soup to the best way to sauté asparagus.

In *Food Fight*, when friends gathered at Waters' revolutionary restaurant, she began to shift their diets from processed junk foods to locally grown, whole foods. But Waters notes that she didn't set out to use foods simply because they were local. Instead, she was motivated by a desire for flavor. As she explains, "When I opened the restaurant, I wasn't looking for the organic, local farmer or rancher. I was simply looking for taste, and in the process of looking for taste I found those people" (Taylor). Waters, and other commentators in the film, explain that *taste* was the driving force behind the movement. Marion Nestle explains that "[Waters] just simply said I'm not going to settle for ingredients that don't taste good. Who would ever have guessed that the taste of vegetables would turn out to be the start of a revolution" (Taylor)? In constructing Waters' journey, the film highlights how clearly local food exhibits its worth, because even though Waters wasn't looking for it, she found it.

Throughout the film, Taylor draws on prominent food critics (Nestle and Pollan) as well as high profile chefs and organic farmers to explain why taste is so important. As Jack Algiere, a farmer in Tarrytown, New York, explains, "What gives taste is the soil. This is the part that everyone keeps forgetting about. Biology and minerals in a symbiosis create taste. `Cause they're really what are making the flavors. They're making the acids. They're making the esters. They're making all this stuff. We have no idea how to do that, as precisely as this earth can do it, without a thought" (Taylor). The film juxtaposes the "tasteless 50s," a time when "the food page was rejoicing over Pineapple Betty (marshmallows, pineapple, graham cracker crumbs, and nuts)" with this renewed interest and desire for taste, which Taylor constructs as beginning at *Chez Panisse* (Shapiro 5).

Food, Inc. also uses taste to justify eating local food. However, instead of highlighting the superior taste of local food, the film showcases the lack of taste in most industrial food products. Schlosser explains how major food corporations shape our tastes, “That mentality of uniformity, conformity, and cheapness applied widely and on a large scale has all kinds of unintended consequences. When McDonald’s is the largest purchaser of ground beef in the United States and they want their hamburgers to taste everywhere exactly the same, they change how ground beef is produced” (Kenner). In one of the first portions of the film, entitled “Fast Food to All Food,” we find Eric Schlosser (author of *Fast Food Nation*) sitting in a diner. As he deliberates about what to order, the server suggests a chicken club sandwich. Schlosser pauses and then asserts that he simply wants a hamburger and fries. He explains, “My favorite meal to this day remains a hamburger and french fries. I had no idea that a handful of companies had changed how we eat and how we make our food. I’ve been eating this food all my life without having any idea where it comes from, any idea how powerful this industry is” (Kenner). What follows is an exploration of how fast food revolutionized how and what we eat, paying particular attention to the McDonald brothers. Schlosser adds that McDonald’s is also the biggest purchaser of pork, tomatoes, lettuce, and even apples. As Schlosser discusses how the food industry changed to meet the demands of fast food restaurants, the camera pans over crowded feedlots and into a chicken factory with chickens moving up and down conveyor belts. The message here is that the “farm fresh” taste that is so often marketed directly on the package is a ruse. There is no farm, there is a factory.

This entire section of the film emphasizes the conformity of taste that is present and encouraged within an American diet. In the section entitled, “The Dollar Menu,” Michael Pollan states that most food manufacturers (and particularly fast food restaurants) engineer the food to

emphasize specific flavors, even when this encourages us to stray from a naturally balanced diet. As Pollan explains, “We’re hardwired to go for three tastes – salt, fat, and sugar. These things are very rare in nature. Now sugar is, you know, available 24/7 in tremendous quantities. We’re eating hundreds of pounds of the stuff a year” (Kenner). While other texts may use taste as a motivator for change, *Food, Inc.* uses taste to show how our industrial food system is failing us. It is manipulating our tastes – by speaking to these three dominant tastes. Further, it is streamlining how we taste our food (or not) by engineering uniformity in both crops and agriculture. The call to action at the end of the film states, “When you go to the supermarket, choose foods that are in season. Buy foods that are organic. Know what’s in your food. Read labels” (Kenner). In positioning an alternative to the tasteless conformity of the industrial food system, the film states that these foods will not be uniform, that they will taste better, and that they will be better for you and the planet.

Conclusion

Food exposés use more than these three tropes, but taking a long journey, nostalgia for the past, and the importance of taste pervade the literature. As previously mentioned, my goal here is not to prescribe generic constraints, but rather to question how this genre of discourse shapes our understanding of the industrial food system, as well as the currently popular solution of local food. As I argue, the food exposé is one of the primary vehicles for making arguments for local food, and yet, as evidenced in the analysis, this rhetoric is frequently convoluted, self-contradictory, and devoted more to the condemnation of a broken system than supportive of a better one. Further, these exposés primarily craft a narrative of good reasons instead of making formal arguments that provide substantial support. Considering the tropes collectively, I argue that under the guise of unveiling the industrial food system these texts construct larger gaps

between the audience and the narrative. I will consider each of the tropes separately before thinking about how they work together.

The trope of taking a long journey functions rhetorically in two ways, which together do more to degrade industrial food than to support a local alternative. First, the trope highlights the distance our food travels more than the proximity of local food, thereby directing more attention to the problem than to a solution. In my analysis, these journeys mainly engage the overwhelming complexity of the industrial food system, leaving simpler approaches to our food and the way it travels relatively unexplained. Further, this trope mostly ignores the fact that most people can't take the long journey of eating local food. It just isn't feasible for most people to take a year to eat local food, but little to no attention is paid to this fact. *Food, Inc.* spends most of its time unveiling the hidden truths behind the food we see in the grocery store. In tracing the long journey of chicken cutlets or pork sausage, the film seeks to break identification with the old regime, and yet spends very little time advocating for its replacement. It is only in the last nine minutes of the film that the explicit call to action or call to identification occurs.

Burke argues that division is identification's "ironic counterpart," and works to unite audiences against a common enemy (*RM* 23). In the food exposé, the industrial food system is constructed as the evil other or dangerous villain in order to construct identification through division with the audience. However, as Burke attests identification also necessitates consubstantiality or "shared substance." While this genre of texts may provide good reasons for uniting against a common enemy, it does little to build the identification needed to persuade wider audiences to adopt this way of life. Taking a long journey to a new way of eating is no easy task. For most people this journey is almost impossible, and the rhetoric of the food exposé does not making it any easier. The food exposé's contradictory messages create a barrier for

audiences, making it difficult to forge identification with the movement. A clear example of a contradiction in the food exposé is that the trope of a long journey takes a long journey to provide reasons against taking a long journey. The point of local food is that it does not travel, so by emphasizing a journey the narratives essentially contradict their central message. In the long, winding, and frequently overwhelming narratives of local food, there is little that speaks to the simplicity of the local. These texts spend so much time constructing the complicated journey of our food, that there is little time for constructing a new (and more local) destination.

Fisher's narrative rationality also sheds some light on why this might be problematic. If a story is to be rational or accepted as a sound argument by the audience, it should possess narrative probability and fidelity. The trope of taking a long journey rings true or it has fidelity. We know our food travels a long distance. Consider for instance the bright red tomato magically sitting on the grocery store shelf in January. As Deborah Barndt argues the path of the corporate tomato (21 steps) and its indigenous counterpart (5 stages) reveal the complicated path of industrialized food. Again, we know that most of our food travels. Therefore, the tension arises when audiences consider the probability of the story or if it is coherent. Sure, the majority of the story makes sense, but by spending so little time in the solution these texts leave out important considerations, thus threatening the coherence of the story overall. This problem becomes clearer in the remaining two tropes.

While the "taking a long journey" trope highlights an ironic twist in storytelling, advocating for a short journey, while taking the long way to get there, the "desiring a nostalgic past" trope crafts a narrative that is at glance both familiar and distant. As Boym contends, "Somehow progress didn't cure nostalgia but exacerbated it. Similarly, globalization encouraged stronger local attachments" (xiv). This trope works to construct identification based on both an

imagined past and present. Consider Kingsolver's construction of the Amish family in Ohio. In telling the story about her visit to the family farm, Kingsolver weaves the narrative to make it appear current. She writes, "Both David and Elsie are possessed of an ageless, handsome grace. [They] live and work in exactly the place they were born, in his case the same house and farm. It's a condition lamented in a thousand country music ballads, but seems to have worked out well for this couple" (161). For most readers, this lifestyle is imagined. We only know of it through mediated experiences. The food exposé appropriates a missing past, one that did not exist for most (if not all people) and constructs it as both accessible and desirable. Similar to the trope of the long journey, the narrative probability of this story appears lacking. Sure, some people farm and eat locally, but how is a wider audience of people supposed to make this work? What if I live in a city? What if there isn't a farmers' market in my town? In constructing a nostalgic past, these texts fail to make connections with a wider audience.

Finally, the trope of dreaming of a tasty future suffers from the same issue as the previous two. In many ways these texts attempt to use taste as a way of saying, "Look! Simplicity tastes better! Everyone can do it!" Consider once more Kingsolver's discussion of the taste of morels, the hidden secret on the hill. The elitism of foraging for wild mushrooms on her family's property is couched in the simplicity of "hunting and gathering" or the secrets of "southern Appalachia" However, these texts are always speaking to a higher level of sophistication, one that most people don't know or cannot afford. In this way, the trope of taste does not offer narrative probability – we don't know how to make the story fit within our own lives. If I'm a consumer that *likes* fast food (as my tastes have developed around it), you are offering an argument that does not speak to me. Also, if I don't see a clear way to make this work in my own life, then it isn't easy or straightforward.

As previously mentioned, taste speaks to both a culturally developed sense as well as an immediate, physical sense. In exploring taste in eighteenth-century British literature, James Noggle argues that there is a perpetual struggle between these two temporalities of taste: intense immediacy (taste of the moment) and a long process (slowly developed sense of taste). The food exposé highlights how these two prongs of taste work together to hide an elitist conception of taste. The development of aesthetic theory also speaks to this trope. As Ben Highmore explains, aesthetic theory was not always concerned with high art or elite taste. In fact, eighteenth century philosopher Alexander Baumgarten's conception of aesthetics was more closely concerned, "with material experiences, with the way the sensual world greets the sensate body, and with the affective forces that are generated in such meetings" (121). As Highmore explains, "Being generally untrustworthy and unedifying, this creaturely life has to be transformed and in the end (but also in the beginning) this is what aesthetics becomes – a form of moral improvement – where the improvement is aimed at sensation, sentiment, and perception" (122). Local food is in "good taste" and is viewed as morally superior to fast food burgers and soda pop. It is a developed taste, and yet these texts seem to argue that the taste for local food is readily apparent, easy, a no brainer. Under the guise of "it tastes better" these narratives collapse the elitist process of developed taste.

Who has the time for a long journey, or to ruminate about a nostalgic past, or to prioritize taste? An elite audience who has the time to make life-altering changes, whose past, real or imagined, is worthy of reminiscence and who possesses a sophisticated palate. These particular texts and tropes highlight how these narratives exclude more than they include. Division is one way that Burke argues that human beings identify with one another (in order for there to be an "us," there must be a "them"), and yet, as Burke explains there is more to it. As he argues, "A

speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify with the speaker's interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience" (*Rhetoric* 46). These texts primarily employ division to create connection with the audience. Additionally, the points of "shared substance" are not widely or easily shared. As Burke explains, "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (*Rhetoric* 55). These narratives do not speak a common language, nor do they provide a story that is probable for most audiences. If local food/knowing about our food system is crucial for our Earth/health – we need to consider how to open these narratives about food and its importance. While these tropes might emerge from texts such as these, they are implemented in the material world as well, namely at farmers' markets and grocery stores. In the next chapter, I will explore how these tropes operate outside the bounds of a documentary film or autobiographical journey by analyzing Whole Foods Detroit.

CHAPTER 4 EXPOSING THE FOOD SYSTEM ONE CHALKBOARD SIGN AT A TIME: WHOLE FOODS, NARRATIVE, AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A DETROITER

Everyone has a story to tell about Detroit – to some it's the birthplace of the automobile; to others it's the Paris of the Midwest or Detroit Rock City. It's been held up as a city on a hill and a cautionary tale. In his book, *Detroit: An American Autopsy*, Charlie LeDuff argues that, "Detroit is America's city. It was the vanguard of our way up, just as it is the vanguard of our way down. And one hopes the vanguard of our way up again" (33). Rebounding from one of the nation's most damaging economic declines has not been easy. Ameliorating what is "wrong" takes more than just one perspective or one task force, because the economic and subsequent population decline of Detroit was and is tied to many factors. The most oft-cited reasons for Detroit's descent are the decline of the Big Three Automotive Companies (General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler), loss of jobs, and mounting racial tensions, which were exacerbated by corruption in the police force. The tensions in the city between its people and its police force led to the now infamous 1967 riot. Over the course of five days in July 1967, 43 people died, thousands were injured, and hundreds of homes and businesses were burned. Robyn Meredith recounts, "Whole blocks had gone up in flames. Along 12th Street, smoldering piles of debris had replaced a bustling neighborhood of apartment houses, grocers, bars, a shoe store, a dry cleaner, a meat market and a bicycle shop."

While riots no longer plague the city, the contemporary landscape of Detroit is dotted with abandoned homes and businesses. Following the Great Recession, people left the city in droves. As Scott Martelle explains, "In 2008, Detroit had 101,000 vacant housing units, up from 81,754 before the recession, accounting for more than one in four of all available units" (232). Yet, as LeDuff intimated, the current narrative of Detroit speaks of rebirth. Like a phoenix from the ashes, many argue that Detroit is at the dawn of a new era. Perhaps nowhere is this "rebirth"

more evident than in midtown Detroit. This is an area anchored by a large research university, Wayne State University, as well as several hospitals. Not far away in downtown Detroit, several national businesses are flourishing, such as Quicken Loans, which moved its national headquarters to Detroit in 2010 (*Quicken Loans*). Additionally, there are plans for a new entertainment district located between midtown and downtown, which will be anchored by the new home of the Detroit Red Wings. Estimated at \$650 million, this new district will include theaters, restaurants, shops, and apartments. Further, in the past decade, many new businesses opened in midtown Detroit, including restaurants, boutiques, and breweries. However, perhaps one of the most anticipated new businesses for the area was not a new bar or restaurant, but a grocery store.

Whole Foods Detroit (WFD) opened in midtown in June 2013. Sitting at the corner of Mack Avenue and John R Street, the store is surrounded by several large buildings. Immediately to the right of WFD when facing its front door is a Wayne State University (WSU) parking deck, across the street behind it is a large WSU building, which houses the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, and the front faces an apartment building (The Ellington) with the bottom floor occupied by a Starbucks/bank/etc. To the left of the store is an older building which is home to the local Red Cross. While most grocery store openings feature free samples and discounts, the opening of WFD featured a bread breaking ceremony with Detroit Mayor, Dave Bing, live performances by local artists, and national coverage (“Store Opening”). In the previous chapter, I explored how the emergent genre of the food exposé uses certain tropes in order to advocate for local food. In this chapter, I consider this rhetoric in a particular place – Whole Foods Detroit (WFD). I choose to analyze this particular grocery store for several reasons.

First, WFD was one of the first national chain grocery stores to enter Detroit city limits since the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P) shut down its Detroit-based Farmer Jack chain in 2007 (Harrison). At its peak, there were over 100 Farmer Jack locations in metro Detroit. Between 2007 and the opening of WFD, no national grocery store chains were built within the city. Fears about the city's economic stability drove retailers to nearby suburbs that could support large grocery stores. WFD arrived when stores were leaving the city or going out of business altogether. As Alisa Priddle explains, "The city has been adding things most communities take for granted, such as major grocery stores to support the influx of residents to a city now seen as home of the hipster. Whole Foods, an upmarket organic chain, became the first major grocery store to open in Detroit last year."

The opening of WFD was not only news to Detroit residents, but also to the entire country. Large news outlets speculated about how Whole Foods would fare in Detroit – would it affect the brand overall? Would people even shop there? In constructing the narrative of WFD, many writers focused on the city's desperate need for grocery stores, highlighting the lack of fresh food within Detroit city limits or the aforementioned flight of mainstream brands. For example, in an article from *Forbes* magazine, writer Dale Buss argues, "The opening of a Whole Foods Market store in the retailing black hole of Detroit is a welcome development for a downtrodden city where 'fresh-produce deserts' and 'food insecurity' are daily realities." However, research analysts at Data Driven Detroit found that while there are certainly food deserts in Detroit, the majority of the city has access to at least one (if not more) full service grocery stores. They identify 115 full service grocery stores within Detroit city limits (Devries & Linn). Additionally, many of these stories failed to address the new grocery store's proximity to one of the country's largest and continuously operating farmers' markets, Eastern Market.

Founded in 1891, this 43-acre market has been selling fresh produce, meats, and nuts to the citizens of Detroit for over a century. In a press release from Whole Foods, the company did acknowledge Eastern Market and its commitment to maintaining the community, stating that WFD would be working with Eastern Market to renovate one of the farmers' market sheds.

Most writers bemoaning Detroit's lack of grocery stores were stressing the lack of familiar (read: nationally or regionally known) grocery stores. Blogger Jim Griffioen explains why this is problematic, "In focusing on the sensational, they often concoct maddening generalizations about what they've found here. In the time I've lived in Detroit, I've come to realize that the most sensational claims and the public perception they create often have little to do with the day-to-day reality of being a Detroiter." WFD emerges within this crisis narrative as a remedy to a failing city, a beacon of hope in the darkness, and a bridge between a national chain and a local community. Speaking about the opening of WFD, the company's website proclaims, "Experience a new taste of Detroit. We couldn't be more excited about the new store and look forward to being part of this vibrant and growing community" (*Whole Foods Market Detroit*).

In addition to this rich context, WFD specifically, and Whole Foods more broadly, demonstrates a commitment to narrating both the store and its products. In this chapter, I argue that the WFD narrative constructs locality to assuage our guilt about a complicated, monolithic food system, while simultaneously obscuring its involvement. To make this argument, I will first consider rhetorical identity and place, as well as the importance of analyzing narratives in everyday contexts (such as the grocery store). Then, I will turn to WFD, to analyze the place itself. Where is it located? What does it look like? What arguments does WFD make about

Detroit, globalization, or local food? Finally, I will reflect on the importance of considering narratives within a particular place.

Storied Places

By analyzing Whole Foods Detroit, I am furthering a line of research which values and questions our interactions in everyday places, such as the grocery stores we patronize. As Justin Eckstein and Donovan Conley emphasize, it is important to remember that these places do not merely play a supporting role in our day-to-day lives, but rather, they are active participants. Jessie Stewart and Greg Dickinson position the rhetorical importance of these places arguing, “Place making is deeply rhetorical even in – perhaps especially in – the banal spaces of everyday consumption and entertainment. Crucially, of course, place making practices are also and at the same time identity making practices” (283). Further, Stewart and Dickinson contend, “In real ways, place does not exist without the human efforts necessary to turn space into place” (283)³.

My examination of WFD engages the literature concerning rhetorical constructions of place, while also extending the study of the grocery store. The supermarket forms the central hub and most visible component of the food industry. Raj Patel refers to it as the “highest temple of the modern food system” and describes the supermarket chain as “an empire” in which the hierarchical arrangement resembles feudal lords ruling smaller fiefdoms (216). In *Stuffed and Starved*, Patel commits an entire chapter to deconstructing the grocery store: its history, its evolution, and its current state. Patel argues that contemporary grocery stores are so highly thought out and managed that, “outside an intensive care unit, there are few environments so obsessively monitored and reconfigured” (224). He explains that, “In fact, everything, including the smell of the air, the kind of lighting, the positioning of the product and wall coverings, has been pored over and dissected” (224).

In addition to being “obsessively monitored and reconfigured,” grocery stores are also highly political places (Patel 224). In her history of Chicago supermarkets, Tracey Deutsch argues that, “Food shopping was never a straightforward way of satisfying needs – not for shoppers, but also not for retailers” (6). Deutsch contends that grocery stores have always been related to (both directly and indirectly) political and social systems, as well as cultural ideologies. Deutsch argues that, “Politics must frame any understanding of grocery stores and of shopping more generally. In groceries, the formal rules of governments intersect with less formal power relations of social life” (3). Further, although the grocery store is connected to these larger systems, this fact is hidden behind its quotidian veneer. Greg Dickinson and Casey Maugh argue that, “The grocery store – as banal as it may be – is a crucial place for understanding every day, visual rhetoric in a postmodern world” (259). Additionally, they argue the grocery store provides a visual intersection to think about consumer culture, global capitalism, and marketing (among others). Through the packages displayed neatly on shelves, we can understand more about the, “transformation of transportation, production and packaging technologies, and the discourses of postmodern marketing” (Dickinson and Maugh 259).

I find Whole Foods particularly interesting because of its word saturated interior. As Michael Pollan argues, “[Whole Foods] conjures up a rich narrative, even if it is the consumer who fills in most of the details, supplying the hero (American Family Farmer), the villain (Agribusinessman), and the literary genre” (137). While other grocery stores may be following this trend, Whole Foods’ commitment is unparalleled. As Pollan argues, it is Whole Foods that “consistently offers the most cutting-edge grocery lit” (135), crafting a genre he names Supermarket Pastoral.

In order to think through how narratives and places construct each other I build on the framework established in Chapter 3, which uses Fisher and Burke to analyze how arguments for and stories about local food are constructed through tropes. Further, I draw on Dickinson and Maugh's work concerning locality, place, and visual rhetoric. In an essay analyzing the organic grocer, Wild Oats Market, Dickinson and Maugh argue that, "In the everyday, then, visual rhetoric includes the visual suasion of images, but must also include the visuality of the spaces in which we live. Yet these places are not simply or primarily visual, they are always material and concrete" (260)⁴. Of particular interest to Dickinson and Maugh are the ways in which the postmodern world alienates and fragments our reality so that we seek material comforts in places of consumerism. The authors contend that the organic grocer Wild Oats "provides a particular way of negotiating the discomforts alienating tendencies of postmodern, globalized consumer culture" (270). They argue that our fragmented selves yearn for a place of comfort and that Wild Oats provides this by appealing to all five senses, "Visual rhetoric in space becomes most compelling not simply when the vision is compelling, but when the rhetoric appeals to the intersections of all five senses" (272).

I agree that grocery stores, and certainly organic or natural food stores, construct certain visual appeals in order to foster identification with the customer. It is well-documented that grocery stores manipulate what shoppers smell, hear, touch, and taste during our visit (Patel). The arrangement of the store also speaks in particular ways. When entering the store customers are greeted by fresh flowers and produce, which construct an image of freshness that grocers hope stays with them as we walk through aisle after aisle of processed, boxed or bagged food. While visual rhetoric is an important dimension to consider, I seek to understand how grocery store narratives, whether constructed inside or outside the store, build a sense of locality and

identification. I argue that the story is told both through the signs located throughout the store, as well as through the physical place itself. Kathleen LeBesco and Peter Naccarato contend that “these representations actively *produce* cultural sensibilities,” despite the ways “food representations have historically been understood as mere barometers of cultural sensibilities” (2). Whole Foods exists not only as a place that reflects current social norms and trends, but also a place that constructs how shoppers understand food and the food system.

Before moving into the case study of WFD, it is useful to think about the way that food is tied to identity formation. Sidney Mintz articulates this idea in his book, *Sweetness and Power*, arguing that sugar demonstrated “the complex idea that one could *become* different by *consuming* differently” (185). Many scholars argue a similar point, highlighting food’s place in constructions of class and gender. At Whole Foods, the narrative invites consumers to participate in the store’s culture. In fact, at many Whole Foods locations (including WFD) there is a community room that hosts cooking classes, local speakers, cookie decorating workshops, guided meditation, and yoga classes. This store is no longer *just* a grocery store, but rather a place for civic interaction that invites locals to act in ways that one would not normally in such spaces. Of course, every grocery store, theatre, shopping mall, etc. is a space where people can come together to engage in commerce, but Whole Foods takes it a step further by linking consumerism and community. The classes and community events they offer are not so different than those at the nearby Detroit Public Library, which offers free courses such as an introduction to using Microsoft Word, and Crafting and Printmaking. WFD effectively replicates the more traditional civic space of the public library and invites members to enact community in a private business. In the following sections, I will explore in depth how WFD constructs locality in particular ways, as well as how consumers are invited to identify with the store/brand. It is a

complex dance that involves a well-researched and well-crafted narrative, which WFD presents in literary and visual rhetoric.

In arguing for the way that rhetoric frames how we understand the world, Burke (1966) contends that terministic screens direct the attention and that, “even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function as a *deflection* of reality” (p. 45). The terministic screen that creates seemingly strong identifications with the symbol “local,” *selects* a certain community-specific reality, while deflecting the larger reality of the globalized food system. The terministic screens invoked by the narratives of Whole Foods in general and WFD specifically, direct consumer attention to the locality of the store and the food within it. Repeated reminders that customers are in Michigan and more specifically, in Detroit, obscure the larger reality of the globalized food system that brought many of the products to this store in American Midwest. From the moment a shopper enters the store their attention is shaped by both the narratives and the space. Of course, many of the products that one finds in Whole Foods can be found elsewhere (other markets, other grocery stores), but the story that accompanies the product at a Whole Foods Market is filtered differently. The stories create a place wherein shoppers may identify as the conscious consumers they wish to be. These narratives direct attention to the ways that buying asparagus at a Whole Foods Market rather than at Wal-Mart becomes a way of doing good.

In addition to shaping customers’ relationships with food, Whole Foods offers material solutions to the problems posed by the food exposé genre. The signs found throughout the store, the arrangement of the products, and the story of the company itself seemingly answer all of the questions/problems about our globalized food system. Concerned about the amount of oil used to transport that cantaloupe? Have no fear, it did not travel too far. Worried about pesticides or

monoculture? Whole Foods is committed to organic growing practices. Throughout the store, answers to the issues raised by Pollan, Kingsolver, and Schlosser are consistently and clearly communicated. Considering this practice through Fisher's narrative rationality, one sees the ways in which Whole Foods connects to stories that consumers already know to be true (narrative fidelity). Many documentaries, news stories, and books tell the stories of food traveling too far, of pesticides giving people cancer, and of overcrowded, unsanitary factory farms. The shoppers *know* these stories. Whole Foods provides a way to connect these large and arguably unmanageable stories to our day to day consumer habits. Customers can absolve some guilt over participation in this system by buying Organic, Natural, Local, Hydroponically grown tomatoes. Further, Whole Foods stores craft a coherent tale about the Earth's resources and the globalized food system (narrative probability). In answering the problems posed by different writers and directors, Whole Foods is finishing the narrative, providing the solution to the food exposé. Overall, the store constructs a rational narrative in order to identify with consumers, who shop at stores such as Whole Foods in order to shape and define particular identities. As David Bell and Gill Valentine argue, "Many people make choices about the food they buy and eat explicitly from the perspective of a body-global nexus; as a way of making some kind of difference to the world (however small and illusory it may be)" (201).

Narrative in Context: Whole Foods Detroit

Just as the food exposé texts from the previous chapter relied on certain tropes and devices to construct an argument for local food, so too does WFD. Of course, all grocery stores have a particular way of constructing who they are and what they do. However, Whole Foods more broadly, and WFD specifically, provides an interesting case study to consider how a national chain is molded into a local place through narrative. Before the opening of WFD, the

company sent representatives to Detroit to work with community organizers and activists familiar with Detroit's particular needs ("Store Opening"). This was a yearlong process that involved many meetings with Whole Foods executives, including co-CEO Walter Robb. This commitment to understanding the context aided in constructing a narrative that would be (somewhat) familiar to local shoppers. The following sections will explore how WFD translated this knowledge of the city and its people to construct its locality. I will demonstrate this by moving spatially both outside and inside of WFD, starting in the parking lot before going inside to analyze both the place itself and the signs found throughout the store.

Outside

WFD is located in the midtown neighborhood of Detroit. Like most grocery stores in the city, there is a small parking lot out front. Looking around at the buildings that surround WFD, one sees shades of beige, brown, and gray. Arguably, there is no "Detroit" personality in this space. Standing in the parking lot, you could be anywhere, at any number of Whole Foods across the country. The store and its surroundings seem sanitized of character. Also, given the high rise buildings surrounding WFD, it is difficult to even see "Detroit" from the parking lot.

However, WFD does attempt to integrate the local. The back wall of the store is covered in four community specific murals. In order to see them, or for these murals to frame the shoppers experience at WFD, a shopper would need to enter on foot or by car from the back side of the building via John R Street. Discussing the purpose of these murals, Amanda Musilli, a community liaison for Whole Foods stated, "We wanted the store to reflect the city of Detroit on the inside and the outside in every way possible. The art murals represent another way the store is a reflection of the community" (Priddle).

Long before the store opened, local artists submitted proposals for the mural project. Four were chosen by a community panel. Although other Whole Foods stores have murals, this was the first time artists were chosen by the community. The first mural, by artist Jerome Ferretti, features various food stuffs (an artichoke, a fish, a baguette, etc.) alongside fanciful representations of famous Detroit skyscrapers, the Penobscot building and One Detroit Center. Nestled among these depictions, Ferretti placed a man working in a garden, a woman on a bicycle, and one of the artist's recurring cartoon cats. This array of people, places, and things all bask in the light of a blue/green Earth set against a starry sky. The whimsy of this mural is off-set by the realism of the adjoining panel. In this piece by artist Matthew Sharum, a range of people (young, old, black, white) are engaged in farm/market related tasks: picking vegetables from a garden, shaking a farmer's hand, or unloading a seafood truck, all in the shadow of the Renaissance Center (home of General Motors). In the lower right-hand corner, there is a small sign that reads, "Buy Fresh. Buy Local."

The next mural, by artist Tylonn Sawyer, depicts a young, black boy sitting with his legs crossed and his arms extended. His pose is a direct reference to one of Detroit's most famous statues, "The Spirit of Detroit."⁵ In the original statue, the man holds a group of people in his right hand and a bronze sphere in his left, representing the people of Detroit and God, respectively.⁶ The boy in the mural holds nothing in either hand. However, his left hand is above the formerly empty lot now occupied by WFD, while his right hand rests above radishes, cucumbers, tomatoes, and lettuce. It appears that the "Spirit of Detroit" can be found both in new development and fresh food.

The final mural, by Katherine Larson, illustrates three generations of women working in a garden in the shadow of the Detroit skyline. In this mural, skyscrapers, most notably the GM

Renaissance Center, sit a comfortable distance from the working women. In fact, aside from these buildings, there is nothing but farmland for as far as the eye can see. It appears to be an agrarian utopia – but in the ever-present shadow of the Renaissance Center. What is important about these murals is that they are tying cultural artifacts that are distinctly Detroit (e.g. the Detroit skyline and the “Spirit of Detroit” statue) to a for-profit business. Further, these murals showcase that WFD is doing everything they can to prove that they understand the situation, the area, and the people. In doing this they are both appropriating what it means to be local in Detroit, as well as framing what that might mean moving forward.

Aside from these murals, which are decidedly local, there is little about WFD’s exterior that is specifically “Detroit.” Again, judging by the pictures of the store and the buildings that surround it, one could be anywhere.⁷ In many ways the location of WFD highlights the gentrification of Detroit – a city sanitized for new residents. Seemingly the people from the surrounding buildings (from WSU, the Red Cross, Bank of America) are the desired shoppers for this new store. As previously mentioned, there is an apartment building directly in front of WFD, which blocks WFD’s view of Woodward Avenue. To people outside of Detroit, this might not seem like an issue, but to Detroiters, it is. Woodward Avenue speaks so much of “Detroit” within the nation’s narrative that in 2002 the Secretary of Transportation designated the road as a National Scenic Byway and an All-American Road (“Visit our Byway”). This program designates roads that are important to the United States’ narrative, such as the Ashley River Road in South Carolina which is lined with antebellum homes or the Billy the Kid Trail through New Mexico which traces the Lincoln National Forest and takes travelers on a tour of the Old West. In describing why Woodward Avenue is an All-American Road, the Department of Transportation website states, “If Broadway = Theater and Rodeo Drive = High Fashion and

Jewelry, then Woodward = the Automobile. America's automobile heritage is represented along this byway in famed industrial complexes, office buildings, residential mansions, world-renowned museums, and cultural institutions" ("Visit our Byway"). Given the large amount of available land plots and buildings in Detroit, Whole Foods could have easily found a lot on this street that speaks of and to "Detroit" (Carey). Instead of placing the new store on this road, Whole Foods chose a location that is practically hidden from view. One can postulate as to why Whole Foods chose this location (it was cheaper; they thought it would be safer; they wanted a parking lot in front of the store, etc.). However, as previously mentioned, its location presents an argument about who is expected to shop here and who is not.

While many news reports celebrate the rise (or return) of Detroit, lauding the new businesses, restaurants, and apartments, many bemoan the problems associated with gentrification. Yes, buildings are being renovated and new coffee shops are open for business, but the question remains, for whom? As Brian Doucet argues, "The problem is most Detroiters cannot afford to live here. And like everything else in Southeast Michigan, race is one of the dominant factors. In a city that is 85% African American, Greater Downtown is becoming increasingly white." In many ways, WFD sought to fight this growing trend, co-CEO Walter Robb, stated that "We're coming to confront the disconnect between the accessibility and the affordability in healthy food" (McMillan). However, this is easier said than done. As McMillan argues, "For anyone looking to address health and diet disparities, the lesson from Whole Foods in Detroit may well be that the problem is not food, but poverty. And that is a problem that requires more than a supermarket to solve" (McMillan).

Inside

The inside of the store speaks more about Detroit than the exterior. Once inside the store, one doesn't have to look very far to see the words "Detroit" or "Michigan" labeling a product or describing the store itself. In fact, the logo for the store includes "Detroit: Proud to be Here" next to the existing Whole Foods Market logo, alerting customers that this isn't just another Whole Foods. The logo can be found on the delivery truck parked outside the store, on the glass doors as you enter, and on various items for sale – water bottles, reusable bags, and stickers. This location is committed to locality in a way other stores in the metro area are not. For instance, there is a Whole Foods location in Troy, Michigan (a suburb just north of Detroit), but this location is not named or branded. At WFD, customers can buy totes and water bottles with the Whole Foods Detroit logo prominently displayed. The Troy location does not offer this kind of branding, nor does the name of the store reflect its locality. The website for this location calls the store, "Whole Foods Market *in* Troy [emphasis mine]." This particular location is not reflecting or shaping what it means to be local to Troy, Michigan.

The signs one first encounters when entering WFD give the impression that a graffiti artist was let loose in the store armed with markers and colored chalk. However, the art inside the store was only modeled after famous Detroit graffiti artists, such as Zak Meers, but implemented by on-staff artists, many from other store locations (Moutzalias). Interesting cartoon characters and swirly lettering advertise new sale items, an homage to the graffiti inspired by Detroit, Motown, and Woodward Ave, all of which sits a comfortable distance away. The irony of this choice is that the Detroit represented within the store is decidedly lacking from the surrounding area. Other signs found throughout the store feature typical handwritten lettering that can be found in Whole Foods around the country. One of the first signs in the store simply

reads, “Straight from Detroit.” Located directly beneath this sign, you can find asparagus from Peru, cauliflower from California, and Brussels sprouts from Mexico. Nearby, beneath yet another sign, which reads “Straight from Michigan,” one finds a single product (yellow beans) from Michigan, while the rest come from California or the decidedly ambiguous “USA.” As Pollan contends, “Shopping at Whole Foods is a literary experience. It’s the evocative prose as much as anything else that makes the food really special” (134).

To make these custom signs, Whole Foods stores hire full-time local artists. Seemingly every product is deserving of a handmade sign detailing its origin narrative. From the cucumbers in the produce department to the reclaimed wood of the café tables, everything is labeled. It seems that in order to be considered “natural” or “whole” a product needs a story – a sign – to tell it. Differing from the farmers’ market aesthetic of letting products speak to audiences of their freshness, Whole Foods crafts the perceptions of the audience/consumer from the moment they enter the store. Further, the full-time store artists are encouraged to be creative and reflect the store’s surroundings. For example, artist Katie Lanciano makes signs for Whole Foods in Philadelphia and works to incorporate local events, such as exhibits in local museums (Ulaby). WFD, like all Whole Foods Markets, employs an artist to make signs and displays. These idiosyncratic signs speak to audiences of the local. Yes, Whole Foods is a nationwide chain, but the locally crafted signage seems to refute or divert attention from this. The store proclaims its devotion to the community advertising the amount of money donated to local businesses and non-profits. Further, the motto for WFD is “Proud to be here,” suggesting that other grocery stores were not proud to be in Detroit (thus their reticence to build within the city limits). The motto is repeated on signs found the store – as you enter, “Proud to be here,” as you shop the aisles, “Proud to be here,” and as you leave the store, “Proud to be here.”

Signs in the store also describe just how local some of the food is. For example, in the ready-to-eat section of WFD, there are a few products from local delis, one of which is located in Eastern Market – Russell Deli. The sign above the soup from Russell Deli not only tells the customer that this product is from a local business, but also it details exactly how many miles away the business is (1.8 miles). In stating the exact mileage to the deli, WFD is borrowing locality from this space. The numerical distance proclaims that the store and its products are *very* local, less than two miles local.

Perhaps the most interesting group of signs can be found all the way at the back of the store above the dairy case. Here, above the yogurt and hormone-free milk, and below a large sign that reads “Detroit: Proud to Be Here,” there is a timeline (with pictures) of both Detroit and Whole Foods. Beginning with the founding of Detroit, this timeline integrates the narratives of the city of Detroit and Whole Foods Market. Narrative rationality, and specifically narrative fidelity, illuminate the ways in which WFD uses the story of Detroit (arguably a story that will ring true for most shoppers) to craft identification with its consumers. The integrated narratives of Whole Foods and Detroit provide both a believable and coherent story. The first frame displays old maps of Detroit and the year, 1701. The text reads, “The French officer Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, along with fifty-one other French-Canadians, founded the city of Detroit which developed from a fort and missionary outpost. Founded in 1701 it is one of the oldest cities in the Midwest.” The adjacent frame is dated 1830 and is accompanied by a photograph of a statue commemorating the Underground Railroad that can be found in downtown Detroit facing the shore of Windsor, Ontario. The following frame incorporates Detroit’s Eastern Market into the story, dated 1841, the frame reads, “The Detroit Farmer’s Market began at Cadillac Square in downtown Detroit, just east of Woodward. When it moved to its present location in

1891, it was re-named Eastern Market.” The next frame highlights one of Detroit’s largest contributions, the Model T.

Following this first collection of frames, the pipe holding the timeline dips down and shifts forward in time to the 1950’s. The first frame reads, “J.I. Rodale, founder of Organic Farming Magazine, popularizes methods of organic farming, providing a stark contrast to the rapid development of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.” Immediately following this moment in history (at least according to WFD’s narrative), Motown is founded by Berry Gordy, Jr. Next, Rachel Carson publishes *Silent Spring* in 1962, “shedding light on the environmental effects of DDT and other pesticides.” Then, in 1963, “Martin Luther King, Jr. and former Michigan governor, John Swainson, lead the Detroit ‘Walk to Freedom.’” Following this moment in history, the narrative shifts to showcasing the 1970s, and Mayor Coleman A. Young’s Farm-A-Lot Program which permitted residents, “to farm vacant lots in their neighborhoods.” The next frame asserts that in 1980 the first Whole Foods is opened. The next two frames highlight Whole Foods commitment to its stakeholders, as well as the Organic Foods Production Act, which established the U.S. definition of organic. The next frame, dated 1999, reads, “Whole Foods partners with the Marine Stewardship Council,” followed by a frame describing 2003, when Whole Foods becomes the first certified organic grocer in the U.S. The last two frames detail the years 2011 and 2013. In 2011, “Whole Foods Market partners with the Global Animal Partnership to certify meat producers’ animal welfare practices.” Then, finally, in 2013 these two worlds of food justice and civic justice joined forces as WFD opens its doors in June of that year.⁸

The WFD timeline represents Whole Foods integration of Detroit’s narrative into the Whole Foods culture. The pictures and text speak to the audience from above the dairy case,

arguing that Whole Foods' struggles or battles are not so different from Detroiters. This narrative highlights Detroit's role in American history – the Underground Railroad, the automobile, Motown, civil rights, and Martin Luther King, Jr. By highlighting these key moments in both U.S. and Detroit history, WFD connects local narratives with national stories. Further it ties such moments in our history – such as the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Organic Food Act (1990), creating a link between the two events. Each event on the timeline is constructed as equally important – the Underground Railroad, the opening of Whole Foods in Texas, the civil rights walk led by MLK, Jr., or Whole Foods commitment to sustainable seafood. In constructing the importance of their narrative, Whole Foods ties itself to pre-existing narratives with which most United States' citizens are already familiar. In fact, most people already know how they feel about the Underground Railroad or the civil rights movement – positively. By linking the Whole Foods narrative with Detroit's (and the United States) narrative, WFD is made consubstantial with the city. As Burke explains, “A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so. (20). By linking their narrative with the city of Detroit, WFD works to forge a strong identification with the people of this city.

The physical layout of the store also speaks to consumers about Detroit. Upon entering WFD, shoppers are greeted with fresh foods to their left, a smoothie/coffee bar to their right, and aisles of dry goods straight ahead. In many ways, this particular store is much smaller or more compact than stores found outside the city. This “cramped” layout reflects the city outside. WFD is certainly not a suburban store with large aisles and room to spare. Instead, this location is pared down, streamlined, with almost every nook and cranny devoted to something. In fact,

navigating the produce section or the aisles can be a bit difficult when the store is busy, and this closeness puts shoppers into direct contact with each other – a distinctly urban experience. Additionally, like most Whole Foods stores, the aesthetic inside the store is very industrial, stripped down and raw. By keeping the store simple and open – “exposed” duct work overhead, “exposed” brick and concrete – the store argues that there is nothing to hide. Of course, most Whole Foods (and many other grocery stores) use a similar aesthetic, but the Detroit context the motif emphasizes the fitness of the store with the industrial culture.

Detroit, also known as the Motor City, is connected to both an industrial past and an industrial future, and the store reflects this identity back to shoppers. Both the inside and outside of the store are partially constructed from pieces of former Detroit: old cars, old homes, and old factory windows. In the café area of the store, the tables, chairs, and walls are all made from reclaimed wood. One of the signs affixed to the wall reads, “Our booth seating and walls in the café area are constructed with reclaimed wood from Reclaim Detroit. Reclaim Detroit carefully dismantles houses and structures from throughout the Detroit area.” Additionally, some of the tables in the same area are made from pre-1970s scrap car hoods. A sign explains, “Made by Icon Modern, car hoods were given a new life as they were made into these gorgeous table tops.” A large piece of corrugated metal hangs above the cheese counter speaking to the automotive identity of the city. In using these literal pieces of Detroit the store both reinforces what it means to be a Detroiter, while constructing what it means to be a *contemporary* Detroiter. From this store, one might think that Detroiters are automotive loving, graffiti artists, who love listening to Motown records and making art and music in a repurposed industrial space.

Not only is WFD constructed to reflect/name what it means to be from Detroit, but also the products in the store are chosen as a reflection of the local context. In an article describing

the opening of WFD, Kate Abbey-Lambertz (2013) highlighted the “local and unusual tastes” at WFD. She argues, “There’s nothing conventional about graffiti eggplant! This may not be a local pick, but it certainly fits in with Detroit’s vibrant public art scene.” Graffiti eggplant is a fairly common variety and is so named for its purple and white speckled skin. Although this vegetable is not local, WFD uses it to fit within the narrative of Detroit. Other products highlighted in the story were local beer, cheese, and baked goods. As another article explains, “In addition to what can be called the usual suspects – Avalon Breads, McClure's Pickles, Simply Suzanne granola – this location will also carry products from smaller local producers like Ellis Island Tea, Good People Popcorn, Nikki's Ginger Tea, Chugga's Bakery, and the Water Station” (www.modeldmedia.com). These products reflect this location’s commitment to locally sourced products. In many ways, WFD uses these local brands to speak for the store, accompanied by Whole Foods omnipresent signs these products attest to the store’s locality.

Conclusion

In positioning the importance of representations of food, Anne Norton argues, “The need to eat remains. This preserve of necessity is no more free from representation than the remainder of American life. Indeed it is here that the ironies of representation show themselves most conspicuously” (28). So it is with WFD. In striving to be “authentically Detroit,” Whole Foods is constructing a representation of a city that may be safely consumed both through its products and the store itself. Tucked away from the traffic on Woodward Avenue, WFD borrows from familiar stories to position its brand and its products. Norton contends that, “We are fed not simply on the products of nature but on our own creations. In making the resources that sustain us our own products rather than simply the produce of nature, we make ourselves our own authors” (28). Whole Foods makes itself into an author of what it means to be from Detroit, and

to this company it means graffiti, reclaimed wood and cars, and Motown records. Under the guise of helping a city in need, WFD seizes the authority to construct what “Detroit” means. Norton explains that Americans, “are mindful of the authority of language over them, [and thus], seize the authority for themselves” (9). This seizure is made all the more convincing by the use of local narratives, and the tying of Whole Foods’ story to the story of Detroit.

Chapter 3 illuminated the ways in which the food exposé (in books and films) constructs arguments in order to advocate for local food, while this chapter highlights how that work is done both visually and in a particular place. On the surface, WFD appears like the solution to the problems posed in the food exposé. WFD emphasizes locality, health, a commitment to farmers and the land, as well as smaller companies. The store also uses the tropes from the food exposé to tell its story and the story of its products. Yet, in engaging with and deploying the tropes of the food exposé, WFD suffers from the same contradictory/confusing/elitist messages. Consider the omnipresent signs that alert customers to the distance a particular food traveled or the origin story of a particular brand. These signs reveal the long journey of a company or of a product, thus once again rhetorically generating distance in order to advocate for locality. Further, Whole Foods in general, and WFD in particular, use nostalgia to construct their brand. The inside of WFD, complete with homages to the industrial past of the city, might not seem nostalgic in a pastoral sense. However, the store is certainly calling upon an industrial past wherein Detroit was booming, jobs were plenty, and most people preferred to live within the city limits rather than outside them. Finally, the store emphasizes taste not only in its thick descriptions of its products, but also in its free samples found throughout the store. In an era when big box grocery stores are moving away from the free sample model, Whole Foods provides multiple opportunities for consumers to taste throughout their visit, cultivating consumers’ palates as they peruse the aisles.

WFD's commitment to "exposing" the origins of its products, as well as its attempt to create a "local" store, seems like the kind of steps we should be taking to ameliorate our food system. However, in order to craft this "solution" WFD co-opts the narrative of Detroit in order to position itself as both an advocate for local food and the city. Borrowing (or appropriating) locality does not a local make. Like the food exposé narratives, WFD creates more distance between consumer and product. There is a story to be read before one can pick up that tomato, and it is a story of which WFD is in charge – not the consumer. What it means to be a Detroiter and to eat locally is constructed by WFD through the murals outside and the décor/signage inside. This chapter illuminates the ways in which the construction of what it means to be local is largely out of consumer control.

In many ways, WFD is no different than other grocery stores. It attempts to be relevant to the audience it serves by providing products that consumers consider local and affordable. However, Whole Foods expressed a particular interest in making this store distinctly "Detroit." As Nicole Rupersburg explains, "While the five other Michigan Whole Foods locations are relatively generic, this location aims to be deeply and distinctly Detroit. 'We took the time and effort to really reflect Detroit,' says Amanda Musilli, Whole Foods Market Community Liaison." As evidenced in this chapter, WFD uses a variety of strategies to construct what it means to be from Detroit, as well as what it means to be "local" more broadly. In answering the problems posed by the food exposé, WFD assuages guilt over shopping at a decidedly "un-local" store. WFD constantly reinforces the message that the consumer is shopping locally – through signs and particular products. In effect, WFD appropriates the ethos of Detroit's narrative to sell non-local goods to an increasingly non-local audience, both crafting what it means it means to be local to Detroit, as well as what it means to buy local food.

How can WFD do this? Why is it seemingly so easy to “steal” the authenticity of the local more broadly and Detroit more specifically? Drawing on previous chapters, as well as the arguments presented within this chapter, I argue that this appropriation is possible for a few reasons. First, the majority of Americans do not really understand food production. We are so far removed from the factory, the farm, and the farmer that we are ready and willing to believe that our purchases are local. The majority of us do not understand where our food comes from, so a sign indicating locality seems trustworthy. As Barbara Kingsolver explains, “I usually think I’m exaggerating the problem, and then I’ll encounter an editor (at a well-known nature magazine) who’s nixing the part of my story that refers to pineapples growing from the ground. She insisted they grew on trees” (11).

Although audiences that engage with food exposé narratives, like *Food, Inc.* or *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, might know a little bit more about where their food comes from, there is enough ambiguity in what it means to be local for them to find comfort in the aisles of WFD. For some, eating locally means only eating food grown within a 200 mile radius, for others it means food grown within their home state or adjoining states, for others it means only food grown in their own backyard. Given that the term “local” is so fluid, it is no wonder WFD can claim locality, even though it is a company from Texas selling goods from all over the world. The result of this ambiguity is that audiences are happy to consume a brand that operates as “local,” without really changing how they eat. Eating locally at a nationwide chain might make consumers feel better, but that good feeling is where it ends. Audiences identify with the brand of Whole Foods because it claims to be a remedy to all the overwhelming problems posed by the industrial food system, but no policies are changed in this process.

WFD also appropriates the narrative of Detroit, borrowing authenticity from a city on the rise. As evidenced in the analysis, the store does this explicitly with the integrated timeline featured at the back of the store. WFD is not alone; there are many companies and people capitalizing on the rebirth narrative of Detroit. As Philip Kafka, a Brooklynite who sells Detroit on billboards throughout New York City, explains to the *New York Times*, “I want people to know that in Detroit you can afford to make art, be a chef, buy houses, start a business, do anything if you work hard” (Conlin). This perspective identifies Detroit as a city so broken and empty that it is just waiting to be filled. For WFD specifically, this narrative allows them to create a place where shoppers are not only helping the food system by buying locally, but also helping Detroit. WFD also proclaims its locality by emphasizing its physical and ideological proximity to one of the country’s oldest continuously operating farmers’ markets – Eastern Market. Within the store, WFD draws on the ethos of this market by including its origin narrative in the timeline at the back of the store, selling products from shops within the Eastern Market neighborhood, and proclaiming the store’s proximity to the Market (1.2 miles).

What are the problems or implications of WFD’s appropriation of Detroit’s narrative? In crafting Detroit’s narrative, WFD is leaving out people who cannot or will not set foot in this store – because they simply cannot afford it. If WFD is attempting to create a more local/more accessible place of consumption, they are doing so at the risk of rearticulating class identities that for many of Detroit’s locals means unequal access to food, shelter, and education. As previously mentioned, the food exposé crafts elitist messages that only appeal to certain audiences. In employing the narrative tropes of the food exposé, WFD suffers the same pitfalls of these elitist messages. However, in the material world of a city in need of access to grocery stores, the stakes are much higher. In appropriating Detroit’s ethos, WFD rewrites what it means to be a Detroiter

and writes most people out of the story. While this appropriation mainly affects consumers, it also has the potential to affect other local markets, such as Eastern Market. WFD uses the market's locality to construct its own sense of place, using its name to sell products. In appropriating the market's ethos, WFD might be writing Eastern Market out of the story. In the world of WFD, you need not venture to the market on Saturday, for you can find many of these products snugly sitting on the shelves of WFD.

Finally, if non-local companies get to decide what it means to be local, how does that affect locality more broadly? I argue that the "real" local becomes exotic, so rare as to be distinctive that most people cannot access it. Exoticism entices audiences with its lack of accessibility. For instance, not everyone has access to spices grown on a remote island in the Pacific Ocean, but those who do relish its rarity. While spices still carry an air of exoticism, I argue that local food is now exotic because it lacks accessibility both in the material and rhetorical senses. In the following chapter, I will explore how the exoticism of local food is constructed through the identities associated with the movement. I will also consider how the stories of local food might be reframed to be more inclusive.

CHAPTER 5 WHOSE STORY IS IT ANYWAY?: RETHINKING AND REWRITING THE EXOTICISM OF LOCAL FOOD

In 2012, *Strolling of the Heifers*, a Vermont non-profit and local food advocacy group, released its first Locavore Index – a definitive ranking of all 50 states’ (plus the District of Columbia) commitment to locavorism. Jessica Prentice coined the word “locavore” in 2005. In the midst of challenging the San Francisco Bay area to eat locally, a journalist, Olivia Wu, challenged Prentice to develop a name for this way of eating. A locavore is someone who strives to eat locally grown food whenever possible. In order to rank the states, the index considered the amount of farmers’ markets, community-supported agriculture operations (CSAs), and food hubs within a given state. In this year, the index included new data points, such as the percentage of farm-to-school programs. Although it considered new information, the top ranking state for the first four years in a row was also the home of the non-profit – Vermont. The next four in the top five varied from year to year. However, the area of the country where one finds these five states stays remarkably consistent – the Northeast. Of course, states such as Oregon and Washington have also made an appearance in the top five, but from 2012-2015 the top three have been Vermont, Maine, and New Hampshire.

The purpose of the index, as the founder and executive director Orly Munzing explains, “is to stimulate efforts across the country to use more local food in homes, restaurants, schools and institutions” (*Strolling the Heifers*). Yet, in analyzing the index’s findings it seems like the list only serves to remind us that the Northeast is the ideal location for the good life – with its beautiful landscape, wealth, and locally grown food. Given the commitment to local food in the area, as well as the demographics, it comes as no surprise that local food seems white washed and elite – because in so many ways it is.

What does this mean for the local food movement? Building on previous chapters, I argue that the local food identity that is constructed through books, documentaries, blogs, and indices such as Heifers operates largely as elitist and inaccessible rhetoric— thus creating a problem for the movement more broadly. Specifically, this chapter argues that narratives surrounding local food movements sustain and recreate this elitism through reversal. For ages, elite members of society coveted exotic commodities from all over the world, such as spices, fruits, and nuts, which brought with them status and distinction. However, today local food is exotic and carries with it all of the connotations of privilege buying of imported spices.

For this analysis, I will be drawing on Brummett's theory of rhetorical homologies, which facilitates an understanding of, "a number of texts and experiences that follow a formal pattern in significant ways" (258). Drawing on four different texts, I will construct how powerful, elite food identities are shaped both presently and historically in order to argue that the local is exotic. I will use: Michael Pollan's *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*, a blog by Jenny McGruther, *Nourished Kitchen*, John Keay's *The Spice Route: A History*, and Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. I chose Pollan's book because of his prominent role in the local food movement. In the early 21st century, Pollan emerged as an expert not only on what is wrong with our food system, but also what we can do to fix it. He has written several books, articles, and essays about our food system and appears in several food-related documentaries. The website, *Nourished Kitchen*, emphasizes eating locally sourced goods and preparing meals traditionally. As one of PBS' Best Food Blogs of 2014, this blog has a large fan base with over half a million followers on Facebook alone. Finally, the last two texts by Keay and Mintz offer well-researched historical texts about the spice trade, which help to construct what it means to be an ancient consumer of sugar and spice.

Using these texts, I argue that a rhetorical homology exists between these elite consumers and newly recognized “locavores.” It might seem that these identities are disparate, one that can be traced to the habits of the wealthy Roman Empire, and the other growing out of neighborhoods across the U.S. However, the patterns emerging from this analysis point to several important implications for the local food movement. Exploring this homology adds one more part to the story of how local food is far from the liberation that so many desire and need.

Rhetorical Homologies

Homologies are a way of understanding two seemingly disparate ideas, symbols, etc. Widely used in scientific studies, homological inquiry helps researchers recognize underlying structures that are not readily apparent. Although this perspective is popular in the natural and social sciences, researchers in the humanities also use homological inquiry or critique to understand underlying structures. According to Brummett, a homology “is a formal linkage among two or more kinds of experiences. It is a situation in which two or more kinds of experiences appear to be structured according to the same pattern” (39-40). Scientific studies seek these patterns on the cellular or genetic level, but Brummett defines *rhetorical homologies* as “a special case of formal resemblance grounded in discursive properties that facilitates the work of political and social rhetoric or influence” (3). Drawing on the work of Kenneth Burke, Brummett contends that discursive structures are forms that order our texts and experiences. By drawing out the formal characteristics of two or more different texts, one can, “explain in part how the text or experience came to be the way it is, and the rhetorical dynamics involved in how those texts offer motives and choices for living” (Brummett 455). Brummett also provides an everyday example of homologies at work. He describes an administrative assistant, who after a hard day at the office goes home to watch television. The show s/he watches reflects experiences

s/he had during the day with co-workers. Thus, “the text of the book or show would be homologous (linked, relevant) it would thus speak to her and advise her as to what to do and how to feel. Such a homologous text would have *rhetorical power*” (2).

Although similar, homological criticism differs from genre criticism in a few ways. Brummett explains that a homology “is typically a broader construct and is created entirely through formal resemblance” (455). Homologies can exist *across* genres, because the form or structure identified by the critic could transcend generic boundaries. Furthermore, whereas genres may appear similar in many different ways before the critic names the specific ways in which s/he sees these similarities emerging, a rhetorical homology does not appear similar at first glance. Only when the formal characteristics are drawn out and compared do we see two disparate texts or discourses function similarly.

While Brummett identifies several possible artifacts for homological criticism, he notes that “homological patterns will often be in narrative form,” or consist of “tropes, patterns of exigence and response, structures of alliance, opposition, domination and subordination” (43). Additionally, Brummett argues that interesting homologies make connections “among *disparate* orders of experience, such as texts, media, different kinds of material experience, and so forth. The more disparate, the more interesting and insightful is the homology” (2). Moreover homological critique provides a “linkage and connection among texts and experiences that are widely separated in time and space” (456).

One example of a rhetorical homology is Brummett’s analysis of hunting and gardening, going to the supermarket, original works of art, and mechanical reproductions (257). While these activities may appear different on the surface, Brummett argues that they contain similar logics. Hunting and gardening, as well as original works of art, use the logic of decision. Or, in both

instances it is entirely up to the individual to *decide* what to paint or what to plant. Whereas, the supermarket and mechanical reproductions operate within the logic of *choice*: we are given choices, but we do not ultimately *decide* what to eat or what to reproduce. Brummett brings these two logics together at the end of the paper by answering the question “So what?” He contends that these formal logics of choice and decision play a key role in our contemporary political system and in the capitalistic marketplace. Brummett argues that our culture is dominated by choice, which “leads to more consumption” (266). In the political world, he contends that we no longer feel like decision makers, instead, we are merely making a choice just as we decide between Coke or Pepsi.

I analyze the rhetorical homologies of two, seemingly disparate identities to reveal how they develop a logic of exotic appeal and elite status. I reveal the first in the Keay’s *The Spice Route* and Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power* , and the other second in Pollan’s book *In Defense of Food* and the blog *Nourished Kitchen* . Both Keay and Mintz construct a journey through the commodification of specific goods. While Keay’s history stretches back to the first century, Mintz’s exploration begins circa 1650. Both works provide an in-depth look at the consistent ways certain commodities developed relationships which remain visible today. Along with a deconstruction of the paths of imperialism and colonialism, Keay and Mintz paint a portrait of elite identities and those who ventured (or sent others) to distant shores in search of something new, distinct, and rare.

On the other hand, Pollan and *Nourished Kitchen*, craft a seemingly different identity for consumers. This identity eschews the globalized world in favor of something closer, more authentic, and in some instances, rarer. In analyzing these four texts, I illuminate that there is little difference between a spice explorer or an elite member of British society and a present-day

locavore. The following sections trace two formal characteristics that I argue construct both identities. Although separated by time and space, the elite consumer of sugar and spices has much in common with the contemporary locavore in how they emphasize *distance* and *taste and beauty*. Ultimately I argue this homology highlights the ways in which local food operates with a logic linking the exotic and the elite.

Distance

Mintz argues that for most of English history, “most basic foods did not move far from where they were produced; it was mainly rare and precious substances, principally consumed by the more privileged groups, that were carried long distances” (75). Sugar, which came to England from distant shores, immediately announced its role as different, distant. Mintz’s historical treatise closely follows the United Kingdom, and its role in the evolution of sugar. Therefore, in this text he constructs an identity largely shared by the British elite in the colonial period. He states, “Seventeenth-century England, like its Continental neighbors, was deeply divided by considerations of birth, wealth, breeding, gender, occupation, and so on” (154). While Mintz acknowledges that many hierarchies were already present before sugar took a prominent place on English tables, he explains that the consumption of sugar fueled this hierarchy. According to Mintz, “The rich and powerful derived an intense pleasure from their access to sugar – the purchase, display, consumption, and waste of sugar in various forms” (154). Sugar did eventually trickle down to lower class tables, and when it did performances with sugar changed. As Mintz explains elite consumers mixed sugar with gold and crushed pearls to make “medical remedies” (154) that revived its exotic qualities. Whereas lower class consumers were happy just to have a bit of sugar to go with afternoon tea.

Mintz traces the linguistic history of sugar through several literary references, noting that sugar carried with it a multiplicity of meanings. He claims that the meaning of sugar “was also revealed in language and in literature, and linguistic imagery suggested not only association of sweet substances with certain sentiments, desires, and moods, but also the historical replacement, in large measure, of honey by sugar” (154). This substitution of sugar for honey appears in several literary works that Mintz explores, such as Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* or Berowne’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. While this shift in meaning was only accessible to the literate, Mintz notes that metaphors using sugar began to permeate everyday talk as well. For example, Mintz explains that the quality of sweetness that was once described as “‘sugared’ or ‘honeyed’ speech has been supplemented by ‘syrupy tones’ and ‘sweet-talking’” (155). It is here that we see the power of elitism shaping not only consumption, but also everyday ways of speaking.

Keay’s work corroborates how distance shaped elite identities. He offers a view of cultures that traveled over land and sea, explored faraway lands, and plundered remote villages all in the name of spices. Although the explorers who ventured along the spice route were different than the British elite awaiting the arrival of such goods, the extensive travelogues written by explorers of this time shared a desire to communicate distance to the world. Keay notes that many travelogues were greatly exaggerated. Explorers claimed to have found exotic islands, tasted foreign fruits, or experienced indigenous cultures. This need to express distance through travel, specifically linked to luxurious commodities, is found in texts from a variety of different explorers. For example, Antonio Pigafetta, a Venetian explorer who claims to have sailed south of the equator, weaves a tale of “freakish peoples and improbable fauna” (Keay 211). Similar to other travelogues, Pigafetta regales readers with an island so distant and strange

that, “women become pregnant by the wind and kill all males and the little people with ears so big ‘that of one they make the bed and with the other they cover themselves’” (Keay 211).

Keay, like Mintz, explores the evolution of the term spice, which in its early usage referred to everything from Chinese silk to saffron. According to Keay, “This [broad application of the term spice] recognised the importance of spices in the preparation of not just food and drink but medicines, ointment, cosmetics, air-fresheners, aphrodisiacs, fumigants and dyes” (20-21). Over time, the term spice applied to less and less, so as to maintain its exoticism. Keay argues that, “This prestige function of spices can scarcely be exaggerated. Like fine silks and acknowledged works of art, exotic fragrances and flavours lent to aspiring households an air of superior refinement and enviable opulence” (28-9). Therefore, the shift from an all-encompassing term to one limited to the most exotic, served to reinforce the status of those with greater access. If all people could have pepper on their tables in the evening, then the term would not apply to such an everyday item. Indeed, “for most of history, what endowed spices with their unique appeal was the mystery of where they came from. They were not just exotic, but, in most cases, of quite unfathomably remote origin” (Keay 4). It was distance that created the exoticism. Keay explains, “Rare enough to imply distinction and distinctive enough to be unmistakable, spices unashamedly announced themselves as luxuries” (xiii).

Although focused on food grown locally, the locavore narrative similarly generates the appeal of the exotic using distance and exclusivity. At the end of Pollan’s book, *In Defense of Food*, he explains that “I have collected and developed some straightforward (and distinctly unscientific) rules of thumb, or personal eating policies, that might at least point us in the right direction” (143). Pollan’s guidelines for shopping and eating are performances of the locavore identity. Here are a few of his tips: avoid unfamiliar foods (namely, processed foods), shop

locally, eat greens, eat wild foods, spend more time preparing and eating your food, do not eat alone, and drink wine with dinner. The performances Pollan suggests articulate distance. Locavores should distance themselves from processed food, big box grocery stores, and from a fast-paced lifestyle. He states, “I contend that most of what we’re consuming today is no longer, strictly speaking, food at all, and how we’re consuming it – in the car, in front of the TV, and increasingly, alone – is not really eating” (7). According to Pollan, we need to distance ourselves from the contemporary food scene, while drawing closer to older ways of cooking and eating. This is how distance operates for the locavore – remove oneself from the industrial food system, while drawing nearer to local farmers, the land, etc.

Pollan’s book also constructs linguistic distance. For example, in encouraging readers to eat “food,” Pollan reconstructs what food might mean for his audience. He argues that most of what we see in the grocery store isn’t food, but rather, “an unending stream of foodlike substitutes, some seventeen thousand new ones per year” (147). Further, Pollan outlines what eating *real* food looks like. He tells readers, “Don’t eat anything your great grandmother wouldn’t recognize as food. Avoid food products containing ingredients that are A) Unfamiliar B) Unpronounceable C) More than five in number, or that include D) High – fructose corn syrup” (148 - 50). Of course, there are more ways that Pollan suggests that we can eat more *food* and less *foodlike* substances. We can stop buying food that makes health claims, shop at local farmers’ markets, and shop “the peripheries of the supermarket” if necessary (157). Pollan’s construction of a locavore depicts someone who is distanced from the masses because they define food differently.

The blog *Nourished Kitchen* is one woman’s attempt to “advocate for farm fresh foods and sustainable agriculture” (McGruther). On the blog’s food philosophy page, McGruther

explains that they (she and her husband) believe in a few key practices: “We believe that broth heals! We believe that meat is food for you! We do a lot of fermenting! We love raw milk! If you eat grains, try making them better by soaking, sprouting, or souring them!” Similar to Pollan, this blog constructs and encourages an identity that distances itself from the mainstream. For instance, in the section of the blog titled, “Nourished Kitchen’s Shopping Guide,” McGruther provides a list of all the items she prefers to use while cooking. From oils to oysters, McGruther details a thorough list of local and environmentally friendly foods. Perusing the list, one finds that McGruther uses distinct products, such as Einkorn flour. As she explains, “I favor einkorn flour, a nonhybridized heirloom wheat, for my baking as it’s richer in phytonutrients, minerals and protein than many hybridized grains and it is well-tolerated by those who may be otherwise sensitive to modern wheat.” Within the space of this blog, one finds an identity that is distanced from the industrial food system in its search for local and distinctive products.

Although these two identities may appear different on the surface, they both use distance to construct an identity separate from their contemporaries. Of course, elite consumers of sugar and spices thrived on obtaining goods from farther and farther away. Yet, locavores emphasize the long distances between their practices and those associated with the dominant food culture. Both of these identities resonate homologically in their celebration of distance. In the following section, I will consider how taste and beauty function in the construction of both identities.

Taste and Beauty

Mintz’s work details an identity that communicates taste and beauty through sugar. While sugar was used to sweeten desserts, tea, and coffee, for those with the purchasing power, sugar could be transformed into edible works of art. For example, Mintz examines cookbooks from the 16th and 17th century, which showcased intricate sugar sculptures of almost anything: buttons,

roses, letters, knives, and gloves. Mintz states, “While kings and archbishops were displaying magnificent sugar castles and mounted knights, the aspiring upper classes began to combine ‘course paste’ men-of-war with marzipan guns to achieve analogous social effects at their festive tables” (93). Furthermore, Mintz contends that sugar had, “five principal uses or ‘functions’: as medicine, spice-condiment, decorative material, sweetener, and preservative” (78). He explains that although sugar had these five different uses, they are difficult to separate. For instance, Mintz explains that when using sugar as a decorative material it is often mixed with other materials, molded, and then eaten. He argues that this practice has its roots in the medicinal use of sugar, which, “may well have first arisen from the observations of its nature recorded by physicians” (79).

The explorers and consumers of spices also valued and articulated the taste and beauty of their exotic finds. However, spices were primarily used to preserve different foods in times before refrigeration, therefore its aesthetic appeal revolved largely around taste. When citizens of the Roman Empire needed to save a piece of meat, spices were used to better the flavor or to hide the unpleasant aroma of bad meat. In addition to added flavor, spices offered color to dull meals. As Keay notes, “From kitchens savouring of a Gujerati eatery were borne boiled-and-spiced ostrich, curried crane, peppered parrot and roast flamingo with sesame seeds” (75). While perhaps not as elaborate as edible castles, spices did offer a colorful, tasteful aesthetic to mealtime. These spices were also kept in special containers. For instance, around the fifth century, small pots were crafted from silver and gold to hold the most highly prized spice of the times, pepper. These tasty accompaniments were kept beautifully.

In chapter three I argued that the food exposé uses the trope of taste to forge identifications based on an assumed equality – we all know what tastes good. Yet, as I indicated,

this deployment of taste carries with it the elitist connotation of “good taste.” The locavore identity also highlights the dual function of “good taste.” For example, Pollan calls upon the taste and beauty of local produce. He states, “Look at this food. There are no ingredients labels, no health claims, nothing to read except maybe a recipe. This is food, so fresh it’s still alive, communicating with us by scent and color and taste” (199). Throughout the book, Pollan contends that if we are to leave behind the “Western Diet” and become healthy again, we must remember that, “Food is also about pleasure, about community, about family and spirituality, about our relationship to the natural world, and about expressing our identity” (8). Pollan reminds us that fresh food is beautiful, it tastes better, and it is better for us. He claims, “Local produce is typically picked ripe and is fresher than supermarket produce, and for those reasons it should be tastier and more nutritious” (159). It is the taste and beauty of our food that communicates the locavore identity to those around us.

McGruther’s blog perhaps best captures how taste and beauty are used to construct the locavore. In a blog post from May, McGruther offers her readers a recipe for Farmers’ Market Risotto. She states, “After a long winter nothing is more welcome than the sight of fresh green springtime produce. My favorite way to showcase spring’s bounty is with a simple nourishing risotto.” In this post she discusses the advantages of white rice, the health benefits of making your own bone broth, and the importance of visiting the farmers’ market. This is the place where taste and beauty come together – the farmers’ market. She explains, “Growing up my grandmother always balked at grocery store tomatoes and said they didn’t taste like “real” tomatoes. It wasn’t until I started eating in-season produce that I understood what she meant. Nothing beats the flavor of fresh, sun-ripened, and just-picked produce.” Local produce, with its

fresh flavors and bright colors articulates a particular value set to those around us and announces, “I am a locavore.”

Ultimately, the sugar and spice consumers communicated their identity through the taste and beauty of their *exotic* finds, while the locavore communicates their identity through the taste and beauty of their *local* finds. In both cases, the association with flavor and taste is paramount for the identity. The two-pronged meaning of taste discussed in Chapter 3 resonates here. As previously mentioned, the local food movement uses taste to mean both the physical sensation of taste, as well as the developed social understanding. Food should both taste good and be in “good taste.” In advocating for the primacy of taste, today’s locavores further align themselves with an elite class. Sure, the locavore’s food may not travel across the ocean, but the desire for a particular aesthetic makes their farmers’ market finds exotic.

Brummett contends that, “the discovery of a homology, supported by ample evidence, is thus not a figment of the critic’s imagination but a discovery of the intersection between the word and the world” (34). Throughout this analysis, I argued that the identities constructed through Mintz, Keay, Pollan, and *Nourished Kitchen* were different on the surface, but resonated formally. First, *distance* is critical. While the British elite relished in elaborate meals, locavores rejoice in eating largely inaccessible food, thus creating an identity that is markedly different from the norm and distant. Further, elite consumers of sugar and spices altered meanings, allowing their tastes to stay above the rest of society. Locavores reinforce the same distance by encouraging others to leave the industrial food system and changing meanings as well. Second, taste and beauty played a large role in crafting both identities. British elite or wealthy citizens in the Roman Empire achieved this by crafting sugar displays, while locavores showcased their fresh, local goods from the farmers’ market.

While locavores may construct themselves as attempting to create common ground, this analysis shows that this is not case. The local is now exotic, and the identities shaped in and around local food movements serve to reinforce hierarchies rather than challenge them. Locavores may not travel to distant islands in the Pacific or craft scale models of Notre Dame entirely out of sugar, but their identity functions similarly to the elite consumers of sugar and spices. Ultimately, this analysis illuminates that while those critiquing the global food system are helping to deconstruct the complexities of eating in the 21st century, the construction of the solution is also problematic. Brummett argues, “We use formulae as guides to help shape, create, and manifest certain experience. This is rhetorical language, in the vein of determining and guiding what we have seen presented here. A homology guides an audience, it advises them, and is thus rhetorical” (16). Herein lies the danger of this homology. At a formal level, the locavore and the elite spice consumer are similar or homologous. Considering the implications of this homology, many questions come to mind: What does that mean for a practice which is intended to be open and inclusive? What does that mean for local food moving forward? In the following section, I will reflect on these questions, as well as the larger questions that I raised throughout the project.

Conclusion

The local food movement continues to grow – people talk about it, write about it, and ultimately, really care about it. More produce and goods labeled “local” fill grocery store aisles, and farmers’ markets can be found across the country. The range and size of the movement means that analyzing the food exposé genre, exploring Whole Foods Detroit (WFD), and engaging a rhetorical homology between locavores and elite consumers of sugar and spices develops a useful critique of the rhetoric of this significant social phenomenon. Additionally, the

possibility for further growth suggests that the movement needs to engage the issues I raise here to reach its potential. The narrative construction of local food, its representation in grocery stores, and the identity linked to its consumption all craft the movement in particular ways, provide opportunities for rhetorical praxis, and conceivably limit the movement's capacity to accomplish its apparent goals. Ultimately, this project highlights a key issue with the movement's rhetoric: In crafting the solution of local food, these texts rearticulate and reinforce the powerlessness audiences feel within the industrial food system and arguably within other oppressive systems, such as those that involve race, gender, and class. .

At the beginning of this project, I posed some fairly large questions about locality, our food system, and the power of narrative construction. Specifically, I asked the following questions: How is local food constructed as the solution to all of our problems? How do these discourses create or recreate what it means to be "local?" How are arguments for local food being made? By whom? For whom? These are by no means small questions, and of course, neither are the answers. This project provides *an* answer to these questions, a glimpse at how local food is operating through particular texts and in particular places. The rhetorics I explored in this project interact together in a few important ways, which complicates their relationships and reveals issues that lie beneath the movement's surface. Writers such as Kingsolver, Pollan, and Nabhan weave compelling stories about what is wrong with our food system, as well as how we might address these problems. These authors describe how we might leave the industrial food system behind, which after countless pages about how it is killing us and the planet, is very persuasive indeed. Of course, I want to eat food that tastes good, is environmentally friendly, and helps build community. While these narratives work well for selling books, they create problems for consumers both inside and outside of the movement. . As I detail throughout the project,

these narratives might work for specific audiences, but the majority of people cannot relate to the story local food has to tell. The contradictions present in the movement's rhetoric make it difficult to forge identification or for audiences to make sense of these stories in their own lives. Within these narratives, I do not have the power to craft my own solution or construct my own locality. In the following sections, I will tease out how these texts construct rhetorical contradictions, which serve to distance audiences and create problems for the local food movement and beyond.

The first contradiction is perhaps one of the most problematic –the movement needs to rhetorically generate distance to argue for locality. As evidenced in the chapters, the food exposé asks audiences to take a long journey, desire a nostalgic past, and dream of a tasty future. Similarly, locavores articulate and continually highlight the distance between their practices and the rest of the world. In constructing what it means to be local to Detroit, WFD constructs distance between consumers and the city right outside their doors. These narratives craft distance making local food fully accessible only to those who have the wherewithal – and resources – to make a long journey to a new life or to desire a nostalgic past or to develop a more sophisticated palate. Further, the movement's commitment to taste reflects a similar problem. Food that tastes good becomes the hierarchical good taste of the elite classes, so that the seemingly simple reason to eat local – it tastes better! – reinforces social structures that distance the upper classes from the lower. In advocating for a local food system, these rhetors focus so intently on distance –the distance from the industrial food system, the distance food travels, and the distance from an ideal way of living - that distance becomes the focus of the movement's rhetoric, rather than locality. This is evidenced in the way stories about local food are told and the tropes used to tell them; in the way a non-local store appropriates locality to construct what it means to be local; and in the

way that local food identities are bound up in a class position that is far from most people's grasp. Focusing on distance – however close or far the food might be – is not the answer to local food's problems. The movement becomes more interested in *making* distance – in distancing itself from the current system, requiring a long journey or reminiscing about a nostalgic past.

Another contradiction is the movement's inconsistent identity, which is seen through local food's attempts to identify with audiences through coopted identities. Local food can be many things. For instance, the movement appears to be grassroots, anti-corporate, and locally-based. However, I argue that the movement only masquerades as these things. Consider the food exposé's explicit anti-corporate stance. In these narratives, authors continually brandish the rise of industrialized food and its role in our growing environmental, health, and social problems. According to these authors, corporations such as Monsanto, Kraft, or Coca-Cola are part of a larger problem that we can resist and change if we adopt a diet based on local food. Juxtaposing this position with WFD's deployment of local food narratives reveals a problem for the movement overall. If I am to craft an identification with the movement based on a common enemy (the industrial food system), how can I shop at Whole Foods, a participant in the industrial food system? Adding to this inconsistent identity, the grocery store assuages our guilt through its cooptation of the food exposé narrative. We are united against a common enemy and WFD is the solution. The grocery store coopts the ethos of local food in order to sell goods to audiences (somewhat) identified with this movement. Whole Foods then is in control of what it means to be local, both regarding food and the city of Detroit. In this instance, the movement is neither grassroots, nor anti-corporate, nor locally-based. WFD's use of the food exposé highlights a top-down construction of what it means to be local, as well as an ambiguous identity.

Building on these ideas, another contradiction of the movement is the ambiguity of the word local. Many nationwide grocery stores beyond Whole Foods are now labeling products as “local.” Meander through your local Wal-Mart, Meijer, or Kroger and you will find many products designated as “locally grown.” From tomatoes grown a state away (for instance, Michigan grown produce is labeled as local in Indianapolis, Indiana), to products made in the same city, corporations recognize and exploit the power of this story. As Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi highlight, “Wal-Mart’s local strategy and the promotion of local Lay’s potato chips are examples of the food industry’s efforts to capture the term and use it to marketing advantage” (225). This appropriation of local ethos poses a problem for the movement more broadly, because its main term is so easily deployed by the corporations the movement confronts.

In addition to the aforementioned contradictions, another sticking point in the movement’s rhetoric is the reinforcement of class hierarchies. While the movement claims to be “of the people,” it is far from it. The situation reflects Dana Cloud’s explanation of how “counter” narratives may actually serve the status quo. In her critique of Oprah Winfrey’s biographies, Cloud argues that Oprah’s rags-to-riches narrative serves “the hegemony of liberal individualism in U.S. popular and political culture.” Although on their face these biographies and the persona of Oprah herself challenge the dominant culture, Cloud argues that these narratives reinforce existing structures. By depicting Oprah as a black American who overcame all odds these stories “resonate with and reinforce the ideology of the American Dream, implying the accessibility of this dream to black Americans despite the structural economic and political obstacles” (116). Similarly, narratives of local food reinforce class hierarchies through tropes both in the stories themselves, as well as in the aisles of WFD, as well as in the performance of a local food identity. The tropes of taking a long journey, desiring a nostalgic past, or dreaming of

a tasty future all work to sustain a class system that privileges the upper class, while distancing the lower class.

I am not alone in recognizing the problems associated with the representation of local food. Nor am I alone in seeking an alternative storyline, one that is more accessible to a wider audience. For instance, the very popular food blog, *Thug Kitchen (TK)*, attempts to recast the narrative of what it means to be a “foodie,” and specifically a vegan foodie. Started in 2012, the food blog stays true to form posting recipes alongside glossy photos. The difference between *TK* and a more traditional, highly stylized blog such as *Nourished Kitchen* is *TK*’s dedication to profanity. Every blog post, FAQ, and picture caption is infused with it. As the “About Us” section on the website explains, “Everyone deserves to feel a part of our push toward a healthier diet, not just people with disposable incomes who speak a certain way. So we’re here to help cut through the bullshit. Promoting accessibility and community are important as fuck here at Thug Kitchen” (*Thug Kitchen*). For almost two years, the blog’s authors remained anonymous, but in 2014, *Epicurious* revealed *TK*’s secret, which many had already guessed. The blog’s authors were two white, twenty-somethings living in Los Angeles. As the *Epicurious* article explains, neither author (Michelle Davis and Matt Holloway) claimed a sophisticated palate or culinary history. Additionally, neither Davis nor Holloway felt that they could relate to the slew of food blogs vying for attention. Holloway explains, “There were these paragraphs where the writer would wax poetic about recipes. The lifestyle, the food--we couldn’t identify with anything that was out there” (Ducker). So, Davis and Holloway set out to make a blog that was relatable, funny, and down-to-earth. *TK* uses profanity to create identification with an audience that doesn’t see itself as highly stylized or fancy. While the blog does create a greater space for identification for those who feel alienated by the movement’s rhetoric, it does not significantly

change the story. *TK* appears to be the same construction, same story, just infused with a little profanity to make it appear rougher, more on the fringe.

The rhetorical concerns of the movement – point to an important question – how do I advocate for something which is arguably better for the earth and its people? More importantly, how do I argue this in a way that is inclusive (closer) to a wider audience? It seems that what is needed is a more empowered narrative about what we *can* do that doesn't require the ability to spend so much on food or to make a long journey across the country to buy a farm. In listing all the ways that our industrial food system is failing us – on film, in books, and in stores – it seems that we are creating less access. Given that local food primarily exists as a movement narrated by chefs and upper and upper middle class people, it seems fairly simple to argue that what the local food movement needs are more stories, more viewpoints, and more ways for audiences to construct identification with local food. So, instead of a well-known novelist explaining her yearlong experiment of eating locally, audiences might read a story that hits closer to home: a story of someone of lesser note negotiating what local even means and how eating this way works in his or her own life. Stories should be less of a treatise of how it is done and more of an exploration of how it *might* be done. Instead of corporate appropriation to sell non-local goods, local partnerships would be encouraged/highlighted. As Patel argues, “Supermarkets simply aren't the venues through which this kind of change can be enacted, no matter how much they claim to be” (311). Instead, these goals must be articulated by organizations from within the community. However, as Patel argues, “Reclaiming the food system, reclaiming our choices, isn't something to be done individually. The way we become singular is plural” (319). How might the movement reach these goals? One way the local food movement might reach wider audiences is to rewrite its story, rewrite its identity. As Robert Ivie argues, “Humans, living

within language and defined through symbolic action, may hope to reform their identities and relations to one another by means of tragicomic narratives and ritual dramas—that is, by inventing humanizing narratives and rites of reconciliation to remediate demonizing images of adversaries and deifying rituals of redemptive violence” (242). As human beings framed by and constructed through stories, we always have the opportunity to rewrite our story, to write the world the way we want it to be. One concept that might help in this rewriting is food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty is a concept that, while widely disputed as to its definition, provides the local food movement with some important ideas. As Patel explains, “Food sovereignty is a vision that aims to redress the abuse of the powerless by the powerful, wherever in the food system that abuse may happen. It is very far from a call to return to some bucolic past, bound by tradition. By laying particular emphasis on the rights of women farmers, for instance, food sovereignty goes for the jugular in many rural societies, opening the door to profound social change” (302). First framed by La Via Campesina, the international peasant movement, food sovereignty also asserts that, “people must reclaim their power in the food system by rebuilding the relationships between people and the land, and between food providers and those who eat” (“What is Food Sovereignty”). What makes food sovereignty’s approach attractive is the power it gives the audience to construct their own story, to see themselves as central characters in their relationship to food. Within this framework, individuals have the power to make their own choices – whatever those might be. Perhaps you strive for a mainly local diet, while still allowing yourself the occasional fast food hamburger. Or, perhaps you try to maintain a vegan diet, or an organic diet, etc. The point is it’s *your* story to write whatever it is. While most activists call food sovereignty a vision for how we might participate more fully in our food system, I argue that food sovereignty is a powerful way of thinking that asks consumers to be more present in their

food stories. Of course, everyone has a story even if they do not ascribe to this particular philosophy. However, the difference with this particular orientation is that this way of thinking asks consumers to think about their relationships with food outside of corporate control and again, be mindful of whatever that story might be.

The industrial food system does not create a space for people to be actors in their own story, and after analyzing the narratives surrounding local food, it appears that the movement is guilty of this as well. For example, the food exposé places the industrial food system as a central character, giving more agency to the villain than to the hero (the local food producer). Further, the main characters in many of these stories are just as distant from audiences as Monsanto. What we see through these narratives is a collapsing of what the “local” means and the ways that we might all access it. Food sovereignty reopens these closing channels, because it “implies a diversity of solutions, not a single monoculture, not an approach owned and patented by a single corporation” (Patel 317).

Further, rather than focusing on the locality of our food, food sovereignty prioritizes people’s relationship within the larger food system. Of course, this movement has certain goals, but they are not prescribed in the same way as the local food movement. As Patel argues food sovereignty is a powerful solution because of its fluid definition. It asks people to engage with it, define it. There is not one solution. So, the middle class family living in downtown Minneapolis reclaims and writes a different food story from the single mother living in southern Georgia, and that is the point. This is what the local food movement misses. It creates so much rhetorical distance, so many hoops, so many journeys, that it becomes too overwhelming to even try Food sovereignty, while a bit more slippery, provides a space for people to try new foods, new ways of being and thinking without requiring an elitist journey. Furthermore, since it is primarily a way

of thinking, perhaps food sovereignty can avoid the pitfalls of corporate cooptation that befell other such movements.

Many writers, Kingsolver included, bemoan the amount of apathy regarding our food system. From this analysis it appears that this apathy may be stemming from most people's small or nonexistent role in these food stories, as well as the host of contradictions present in the movement's rhetoric. In the food exposé, audiences are asked to identify with contradictory, inaccessible stories, making it difficult to associate with the movement. WFD appropriates what it means to be a Detroiter and what it means to eat locally. Finally, the elite identities tied to the local food movement make it difficult for most people to see themselves as active agents within the movement. The common thread here is that most people do not or cannot see themselves in these stories, which poses a big problem for the local food movement more broadly. As Burke argues, "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his" (*Rhetoric* 55). The local food movement is not speaking a common language, nor is it constructing a logic of good reasons which would motivate people to take action. Borrowing from food sovereignty, the local food movement should empower audiences to define their own relationship to food and write their own narrative. While this analysis mainly attends to the ways that the local food movement is crafting contradictory messages for elite audiences at the expense (and confusion) of everyone else, there are several ways that what I've argued here extends beyond the realm of the local food movement. In this section, I will consider how this analysis informs broader notions of class and agency. First, I argued that the local food movement reinforces pre-existing class hierarchies, and while there are several ways to think about how this work is being done, there is one way that has repercussions beyond local food: the collapsing or confounding of production and

consumption. As indicated throughout the project, local food rhetoric emphasizes the accessibility of this way of life. The “everyone can do it if they just try hard enough” message permeates local food discourse, promoting the ease with which we can *produce* local food (grow a garden, can your own tomatoes, etc.). Yet, what the movement is really emphasizing/arguing for is the ease with which we can *consume* local food. These texts highlight all the ways that you can purchase your way into the movement, thus replacing one form of consumption with another more acceptable form of consumption. While purchasing products that were grown closer to home does cut down on the oil expended to ship foods across the country or across the ocean, it simultaneously re-emphasizes that only those with the necessary purchasing power deserve to eat well. The local food movement confounds production and consumption. On its face, local food appears like a movement that emphasizes the power of the producer, while it really re-emphasizes the importance of conspicuous consumption.

There are several harms that we can see through this collapsing of production and consumption. First, while texts arguing for local food make it seem that it is accessible for everyone, this confounding of production/consumption highlights that it is not as accessible as it might seem. What is an effect of this collapse? The movement scapegoats those who cannot afford/make time for this new way of life. Returning to Burke’s concept of the scapegoat, the local food movement rejects or sacrifices those who do not/cannot make this way of life work for them. Everyday consumption habits (buying a bag of chips or a hamburger) become instances in which people invested in local food can mark someone else as different/outside the group. As Burke argues the scapegoat bears the ills for society, for the movement sees in the scapegoat that which is wrong with them. Local food becomes yet another instance to scapegoat people who cannot afford to live a certain way. These people take the brunt of so much of what is wrong with

our world – violence, food insecurity, mismanagement of government funds – and yet, this analysis highlights once again that there is a larger system which sets many of these problems in motion.

This analysis also highlights some important considerations about linguistic agency. First, reconsider the ease with which a symbol of resistance (in this instance the word “local”) is so easily placed within a dominant narrative highlights a problem that is broader than the local food movement. Perusing the aisles of any grocery store, one finds words that once existed outside the corporate framework – words like organic, natural, and whole – that are now assuaging our guilt about buying pre-packaged food. Corporate cooptation of social movements, especially of food-related movements, seems inevitable. How does this affect these movements and what are the implications for the study of movements generally? Speaking to the first question, some authors argue that this cooptation provides greater access to these products, while others highlight the contradictions of organic food that is shipped across the country, while others seek to deconstruct the dichotomy of inside the grocery store – bad and outside the grocery store – good (Johnston, Biro, and MacKendrick). However, there are some movements where corporate cooptation is also an issue. For instance, there are many authors grappling with the GLBTQ movement’s place in both popular and consumer culture. Elizabeth Whitney reflects on a drag show in New Orleans, “This, I thought, is the moral for the heterosexual consumption of queer America: Queer identity is acceptable as a product, as a performance that offers partial entry into the world of an “other,” as long as this performance remains under the unpredictable jurisdiction of heteronormativity” (38). Clearly, there is a tension in the way that queer identities become commodities. Additionally, given the shift in queer acceptance many companies are now targeting the GLBTQ community as a consumer base. In their edited volume, *HomoEconomics*,

Amy Gluckmand and Betsy Reed reflect on the intersection of queer identities and capitalism, arguing “Gay men and lesbians as a group have long been entangled in a contradictory relationship with capitalism. Open homosexuals face occupational segregation and discrimination, but they also owe much of their newfound freedoms to economic trends” (xiii). Similar to the local food movement, there is undoubtedly something positive about companies incorporating different identities/different ways of being. However, one has to wonder at what point the movement is completely subsumed within the capitalistic structure that it was once working to challenge. It seems that more work could be done to address the ways that corporations coopt social movement agendas for both good and bad.

Finally, this analysis calls into question who gets to frame locality and what it means to be from a place. As I argued in Chapter 4, Whole Foods Detroit was able to frame and construct what it means to be from Detroit. Drawing on local ethos and narratives, WFD placed itself in the larger story of Detroit, establishing its own importance within that story. This has implications beyond this analysis, for it asks who has the agency to name/construct what it means to be from a particular place. If corporations are in charge of constructing our cities and towns, what do we lose? Of course, companies want to appear connected to the places that they serve. However, what are the implications of this practice? If the locals are no longer involved with constructing what it means to be from a place, what does it mean to be local?

Extending food sovereignty to the stories we tell about food is an important step in reclaiming our own stories about where we are from, what we eat, and who we are. As previously mentioned, the food exposé or WFD has just replaced the industrial food system as the dominant narrator of our food stories. For instance, food exposés and WFD still tell us what is best for us and direct our diets in particular ways. Of course, many of these choices are better

(for example, minimally processed food versus pre-packaged food filled with high fructose corn syrup). However, audiences are not given agency within these larger narratives, because most people cannot live these stories. Ultimately, these stories are great for selling books, but not for advocating for the movement. Local food needs a wider range of narratives, so that we might reclaim and rewrite our own food stories. I acknowledge that I critique the ambiguity of local food and then offer a solution that could be considered even more ambiguous. How might one practice food sovereignty? Who has the time to play with the definition? Is this not another elitist conception of food? I acknowledge these shortcomings. However, I do think that there is considerable potential in the philosophy of food sovereignty. Perhaps it does not solve for the ambiguity presented by local food, but it does privilege individual ways of knowing, while giving audiences the power to construct their own food stories, something the local food movement does not currently do.

Further, perhaps the phrase “local food” is not working for the movement given the baggage that I unpacked throughout this project. Similar to the word “organic” “local food” might already be too far gone. At least as “local food” is considered within the narrative structures that I identified, it does not appear to be working. What if instead we referred to our food by how it is actually produced – for example, this cucumber was sustainably grown or this bag of chips came from a factory. Local food can still be produced unsustainably, industrially, and non-organically. Just because a food item carries the mark of locality does not mean it is suddenly the most ethical or environmentally friendly product on the shelf. Perhaps if we began naming our foods by the practices that really brought the food to the table, we might construct closer relationships with the food we eat. This is how I envision food sovereignty working. I am in charge of naming and describing the food I eat. That doesn’t mean I don’t eat industrially

produced fast food, but if I do I name it as such. This dissertation speaks to a few audiences. First, it engages the multitude of work being done in food studies. As a burgeoning field that transcends disciplines, there are many voices discussing how our food system might work better and be better. Analyzing the rhetorical construction of local food narratives is an important addition to the work being done. For instance, Depuis and Guthman call on scholars to offer more reflexive understandings of the word local – what are its drawbacks or potentialities? They contend that the term local has become so synonymous with resistance that our understanding of it lacks any real depth. This project is an attempt to answer that call, to craft a particular understanding of what it means to be local through narrative constructions. Obviously, there is more work to be done concerning what it means to be “local” as well as how it is being coopted and deployed by corporations. One of the goals of this project was to analyze what the phrase “local food” meant, how is it constructed? While I offered an answer here, there is still more work to do concerning this construction. More and more big box grocery stores are calling on the phrase “local food,” as are other companies. For instance, Reynolds Wrap, maker of aluminum foil, recently released an advertisement declaring/calling on its locality, stating, “You take the time to know where your food comes from. Same goes for your foil. Reynolds Wrap - Made in the USA” (Twitter – Reynolds Wrap). Building on this analysis, future projects might consider how locality is appropriated and employed in other contexts. For example, a clear extension of this project would be to analyze how locality is constructed through big box grocery stores (such as Wal-Mart, Kroger, Meijer, etc.). As previously mentioned, nationwide stores are using locality to sell products that are decidedly un-local. More work about the ways that corporations appropriate “local flavor” could help the movement think about ways to resist this cooptation.

Furthermore, as the popularity of “locally made, built, grown, sewn, etc.” continues to rise, there are a variety of contexts to study that could inform our understanding of locality. For instance, the online DIY community seems like an interesting place to think about locality. The DIY movement speaks to a desire to acquire not only local goods, but homemade, handcrafted goods. However, there are spaces online, such as Etsy, a website devoted to handmade items that offer a place to sell locally made, handmade goods to people all over the world. What might locality mean in this digital realm? If I buy something “local” from half way around the world does it still speak of the “local?”

Additionally, in Chapter 4, I started to think about the ways that grocery stores operate as a space for civic action and civic performance. There is clearly more work that can be done here as grocery stores, alongside farmers’ markets, are beginning to offer services/spaces for this type of interaction. Future projects might analyze the shift in civic engagement to consumer spaces. While the grocery store might be one place where this type of interaction occurs, there are undoubtedly other consumer spaces where civic engagement is invited – such as corporate coffee shops or restaurants.

Finally, this project focused mainly on intersections of locality and class, and while I think there is more to be explored about this interaction, there are more intersections that could be explored. For instance, how does locality speak to issues of race, gender, and ability? Specifically, one could analyze similar narrative texts to think about the ways that the local food movement interacts with other systems of oppression. Future projects could consider the ways that certain groups of people are written out of these stories – both in the narratives and in the grocery store.

Finally, this dissertation highlights how considering narratives across several texts reveals rhetorical inconsistencies that undermine both the rhetorical and material goals of a given movement. In exploring the narratives of local food in their textual form and in their material realization, as well as through the identity constructed from the overarching narratives, I uncovered the ways in which the movement's rhetoric contradicted itself and created gaps in understanding. The movement, which is considered by many as grassroots, anti-corporate, and locally-based revealed itself to be something else. Narratives do not exist in a vacuum, but rather transcend boundaries, speaking to one another in important, if contradictory, ways. Specifically, considering the food exposé within the physical space of WFD revealed the ways that the anti-corporate stance of the narrative is in direct contradiction to the place in which the narrative is being used. This analysis offers a framework for future analyses that seek to understand narrative constructions within movements. This project highlights that there are interesting and fruitful ways to draw on Fisher's theory of narrative. For instance, using narrative probability and narrative fidelity to think about how stories provide (or do not) good reasons for acting provides an interesting way to think about motivation. For this dissertation, I extracted the notion of narrative rationality to think about the ways that local food discourse appeals to certain audiences and constructs its story. Using Fisher, I was able to highlight and understand many of the contradictory stories and arguments. Burke's insights about identification, storytelling, and scapegoating rounded out Fisher's theory. Using these theoretical positions together facilitated a greater understanding of the ways that distance is used to argue for the movement overall and speaks to and supports the distance that is created between upper and lower classes in the construction of local food. At the end of the day, food stories are still written by someone else -

if not by Wal-Mart, than by Whole Foods or Barbara Kingsolver. This project argues that it is time to consider how these narratives might be rewritten and reframed.

APPENDIX

¹ It should be noted that “tropes” can be used two ways. Earlier, I referenced Burke’s discussion about the Four Master Tropes. Burke’s traditional use of the term refers to using language figuratively for instance, through the use of metaphors or irony). In contrast, I use the term in its broader and more contemporary sense, where: “tropes” includes commonly used themes, rhetorical devices, or motifs.

² Science fiction films frequently pair mechanized food processing with concealing the nature of the food itself. In *Soylent Green* (1973) and *Cloud Atlas* (2012), such processing is used to make human flesh into products eaten by the unwitting population.

³ Drawing on Stewart and Dickinson I choose to describe WFD as a “place” within this chapter. As the authors argue, “Place making is a distinctly communicative practice, for it is through a series of (often nonverbal) forms and signs that places make a claim to placeness. More than communicative, place making gestures are always rhetorical. While the built environment and its surrounding discourses and embedded practices create this particular sense of place these objects, discourse, and practices do not make any other particular sense of place. Thus the landscape nominates a particular sense of place as appropriate, affective, and persuasive. Finally, this sense of place is not simply an “aesthetic” construct (if, indeed aesthetic constructs can be considered simple). Instead, place making strategies always offer very particular frames for seeing and acting in the world. In the strongest Burkeian sense, by saying yes to this vision and, by implication, no to all the other possibilities, place making takes on a directly hortatory consequentiality” (283). While there is much more to be said about space and place, my focus in this chapter is the narrative (and rhetorical) construction of a particular place. For more on the space/place discussion see for example, Dickinson, Blair, & Ott and Agnew.

⁴ Dickinson and Maugh use place and space interchangeably throughout this particular article. See above note for clarification on my position on the place/space debate.

⁵ <http://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/spirit-detroit>

⁶ <http://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/spirit-detroit>

⁷ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/05/whole-foods-detroit-developer-peter-cummings_n_3388891.html

⁸ <http://www.newretailblog.com/can-retail-rescue-a-dying-city/whole-foods-detroit-history/>

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ABSTRACT**DISTANT LOCALITES:
THE RHETORICAL CONTRADICTIONS OF LOCAL FOOD NARRATIVES**

by

ANNA G. ZIMMERMAN**December 2015****Advisor:** Dr. James L. Cherney**Major:** Communication**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

This dissertation explores the rhetorical construction of the local food movement through the narrative genre of the food exposé. On its face, local food appears to be a grassroots movement, and yet, through an analysis of the tropes used to describe and construct the movement, another story emerges – one intended for elite audiences. Using narrative critique, this project explores both the narratives of local food, as well as the deployment of that narrative into the material world and in the construction of particular identities. Ultimately, I argue that the narratives of local food give the impression that this way of eating and living is for everyone, while simultaneously entrenching an elite position that threatens the movement's ability to forge identification with a wider audience. Thus, this dissertation highlights how considering narratives across texts reveals rhetorical inconsistencies that undermine both the rhetorical and material goals of the local food movement.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Anna G. Zimmerman currently resides in Indianapolis, Indiana and is an assistant professor of communication at Marian University. She also serves as the director for the school's Speaking Center. Born in Cleveland, Tennessee, she lived in four different cities before her parents settled in Snellville, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta. She attended Berry College in Rome, Georgia and earned a B.A. in French, with a minor in Journalism. After competing on Berry's Speech and Debate team, she went on to coach Forensics at the University of West Florida in Pensacola, Florida, where she also earned an M.A. in Strategic Communication and Leadership. She started her doctoral studies in the fall of 2011 at Wayne State University in Detroit, and will complete her degree in December 2015.