Sustainable Lifestyles and the Quest for Plenitude

Case Studies of the New Economy

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Yale UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW HAVEN & LONDON

2014

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Chapter 4 How Community-Supported Agriculture Facilitates Reembedding and Reterritorializing Practices of Sustainable Consumption

Craig J. Thompson and Melea Press

Juliet Schor's *Plenitude* (2010) advances an alternative to a lon standing nexus of institutionalized economic policies that aim increase levels of material prosperity through the resource-intensi engine of incessant economic growth. Schor identifies two critic macro-level constraints that are making the "business-as-usua (BAU) economy increasingly untenable. BAU is socioeconomical unsustainable because wages are stagnating for most workers, wh have been largely unable to benefit from the significant productivi gains of recent years, and because their number of working hours rising. The combination of productivity gains for corporations an longer hours for employees has reduced the number of worke needed to attain a given level of economic production—a labor ma ket disparity that had been temporarily assuaged through credit, deb and the ill-fated housing bubble (Stiglitz 2010). As a consequence, th BAU paradigm cannot provide enough well-paying jobs to suppo the acquisitively oriented middle-class lifestyle that has become th hallmark of the world's developed modern economies. The fossil fuel driven BAU paradigm is also ecologically unsustainable owing t

anthropogenic climate change, the economic complexities of peak oil, water shortages, and ecosystem degradation. Though not due to the contradictions originally anticipated, Marx's famed dictum that industrial capitalism would implode under the weight of its own wealth-producing achievements seems increasingly prophetic (see Roubini 2011).

Schor's *Plenitude* has garnered considerable attention because it directly challenges the conventional cultural view of sustainable lifestyles as impositions of joyless austerity, personal sacrifice, and hardship. Instead, Schor reframes sustainable lifestyles as means to attain an abundance of rewards, including greater economic autonomy, stronger family and communal ties, and more time to invest in gratifying avocational interests. Unlike the BAU economy, the "goods" garnered through *Plenitude*'s four guiding principles also help to lay the foundation for a robust, decentralized, politically empowering, and sustainable economic system of production; it is Mandeville's (1723) *Fable of the Bees* reconstructed as a situation in which private virtues (coupled with requisite degrees of technical know-how and communal solidarity) can provide public benefits.

In this chapter, we wish to address another consequential but less widely recognized aspect of *Plenitude*'s lifestyle prescriptions. We propose that the plenitude paradigm provides a practical means for consumer-citizens to comprehend (and experience) efficacious connections between their localized actions and broader societal problems that are distributed across globally interlinked ecological systems, transnational political and economic organizations, and technological infrastructures (see Heinberg 2011; McKibben 2010). The cultural and practical logic manifest in *Plenitude*'s principles, however, enables these abstract, systemic conditions to be meaningfully understood (and acted upon) in the context of one's immediate social networks and local community: processes we refer to as the social reembedding and reterritorializing of the globally scaled problems emanating from the BAU economy.

In the so-called era of the world risk society (Beck 1999), consumers are reflexively aware that their lives are affected by interconnected ecological and technological systems that transcend national boundaries. In addition, these systems have global reverberations that easily dwarf the scope of individual action, as is shown by the increasingly volatile weather patterns and superstorms generated by anthropogenic climate change (Randall et al. 2007), the BP Gulf Oil disaster, and the tsunami-precipitated nuclear-reactor crisis in Fukushima. As discussed by Giddens (1991) and Beck (1999), such globally diffused problems raise reflexive awareness that omnipresent social-political-technological-cultural systems have effects that are uncontrollable and unpredictable. The flip side of this risk society awareness is that the global scale of the problems can lead to feelings of hopelessness, disempowerment, and futility in trying to combat these issues through personal lifestyle changes (Bauman 2007): why worry about the incremental contribution to climate change made by my daily commute to work when industrializing nations are ramping up their consumption of fossil fuels on a massive scale?

A related, though more subtle problem, is that policy experts often appeal to consumers through discourses that are pitched at a level of abstraction commensurate with the global scale of the problems being cited, as exemplified by the Sierra Club's climate recovery project goals: "For more than a century, we have depended on fossil fuels to run our factories, power our cars and trucks, and heat and cool our homes. Now we are facing the consequences. Six of the last eight years were the hottest on record. Polar ice and glaciers are disappearing, sea levels are rising, coral reefs are suffering, plant and animal species are disappearing. And the wilderness areas and wildlife that the Sierra Club has worked so effectively to protect for more than a century are being threatened and lost" (quoted by Kurt Hochenauer 2012).

At face value, such a narrative may seem like a motivating and compelling statement of the pressing climate change crisis that confronts humanity. However, this moralistic framing—"we" have sinned, biblical disasters are upon us, and now we must all repent—is strangely depersonalizing. The generic "we" refers to no one in particular and does not imply any direct personal accountability. As the old adage goes, when everyone is responsible, no one is responsible. Furthermore, such sweeping entreaties readily lend themselves to a resigned hopelessness (what can I do in the face of all that?) or simple denial. A 2010 survey conducted by the Pew Center found a significant decline in the percentage of Americans who believe there is solid evidence of global warming (Kohut et al. 2010). The survey found an even steeper decline in the percentage of Americans who believe that climate change, if occurring, is related to human activity, and a still steeper decline in those who regard climate change as a serious problem. The survey's bottom-line finding is that in 2010 a slight majority of Americans did *not* believe that climate change has an anthropogenic cause.

Tracking studies of Americans' outlooks on climate change exhibit a noteworthy degree of volatility. A more recent survey of 1,061 voting-age Americans conducted by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication (Leiserowitz et al. 2012) reports an increase in the percentage of Americans

who believe that climate change is both happening and is caused primarily by human activity (54 percent versus 47 percent) and a decline in the percentage of Americans who believe that there is a significant disagreement among scientists regarding the causes of climate change (36 percent versus 44 percent in 2010). While these latest public opinion trends can be seen as encouraging signs for mobilizing public support for carbon-reduction initiatives, they reveal a significant degree of entrenched cultural resistance and/or skepticism toward the preponderance of scientific evidence that anthropogenic climate change is occurring. (Imagine a study reporting as a sign of social progress that only 47 percent of Americans now believe the Earth is flat.) This variability also suggests that many Americans view climate change as an acute concern that is triggered by current-event salience—such as Superstorm Sandy or the wildfires and droughts that plagued the western United States in the summer of 2012—rather than a chronic problem that requires continual attention and effort, whether in the form of lifestyle changes, consumer activism, or political motivation.

Here we note a study by Smith and Leiserowitz (2012) indicating that Americans' views of climate change are highly susceptible to media imagery. From this standpoint, the increased number of Americans who express belief in climate change may reflect news media coverage of the extreme weather events of 2012. Conversely, Smith and Leiserowitz also find that the propagation of "naysayer imagery," such as the conspiracy images invoked by the so-called climategate affair (Inhofe 2012; Pearce 2010), can also generate equally significant increases in self-reports of climate change skepticism and denial. In sum, Americans' views of anthropogenically induced climate change remain far more malleable, volatile, and skeptical than warranted by the available scientific evidence. This volatility can also translate into an attenuated civic and political will to make the necessary transformations in the BAU economy.

This situation seems particularly puzzling given that American consumers have, over the last fifteen years, been inundated with graphic illustrations of climate change's deleterious effects as well as impassioned messages about the absolute necessity of lowering the carbon footprints of their everyday lives. (Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* was a widely viewed example.) However, this circumstance becomes more comprehensible once we take into account that these warnings depict a problem of such global scale and complexity that consumers can easily feel exasperated, overwhelmed, and fundamentally unsure about whether their actions are making a positive change or if they might somehow inadvertently be contributing to another systemic problem or—perhaps more disconcertingly still—be making no substantive difference at all (see Connolly and Prothero 2008). Under such conditions, consumers have psychosocial incentives to find existential solace in scientifically dubious counterexplanations (for example, sunspots are the source of global warming) or an array of conspiratorial tales that link climate change warnings and carbon-reduction initiatives to tyrannical political agendas (for example, Inhofe 2012).

Furthermore, the prevailing discourses of climate change enjoin sovereign consumers to combat these deterritorialized problems by making more socially responsible consumer choices. This individuating ideological frame divorces consumer actions from direct interpersonal ties and communal relationships and subtly reduces collective responsibilities to protect and preserve the commons to the vagaries of personal choice, lifestyle preferences and, somewhat paradoxically, the status value that can be garnered through the conspicuous consumption of green products. In this sense, the commonplace appeal for consumers to make socially responsible choices and to lead sustainable (consumerist) lifestyles has rhetorically reproduced the social disembedding and deterritorializing processes that have led to social fragmentation and retreats from civic life into privatized spheres of consumption (where individuals can at least experience some semblance of personal control) (Bauman 2007; Giddens 1991).

In regard to this latter point, our analysis takes an important cue from Michael Schudson's (1999) historically based argument that early twentieth-century reforms in voting practices and the corresponding rationalization (and privatization) of citizenship also significantly undermined the political sphere's value as a source of social connection and community engagement. According to Schudson, American citizenship in the nineteenth century was a quite different affair from the image of the rational and highly deliberative citizen that became a cultural ideal in the twentieth century. Voting was not a matter of calculated assent expressed by an autonomous citizen; rather, it was a statement of affiliation. As Schudson (2003, 52) aptly describes it, "Drink, dollars, and drama brought people to the polls" and, most important, feelings of social connection were imperative to civic participation. The Progressive reformers of the early twentieth century regarded these Bacchanalian elements as corrupting influences that needed to be excised from the American body politic. While transforming citizenship into a practice of detached information acquisition (which placed a premium on literacy) and the rational

evaluation of policy pros and cons, these Progressive reforms also served to distance political discourse from voters' social worlds and their practices of everyday life.

In parallel fashion, much of the discourse on climate change and sustainability encourages consumers to think about these global problems from a detached, rationalizing view-from-above in which they survey a spectrum of systemic complexities and trade-offs. Such a perspective also harbors another reflexive obstacle to practical action: consumers are encouraged to make sustainable choices from a menu of options whose actual effects are invariably clouded in a litany of ambiguous cost-benefit assessments and unintended consequences. Even the environmental consequences of seemingly simple choices—such as the conventional "paper or plastic?" decision at the checkout counter—present an endless array of contingent outcomes. Under these global risk society conditions (Beck 1999), individuals can easily feel disempowered (and perhaps even uninterested) because the effects of their consumer actions on these complex interlinked systems are both hard to gauge (the drop-in-a-bucket dilemma) and prone to reflexive doubt (for example, am I simply trading one bad action for another, or perhaps inadvertently making matters worse?).

Rather than importuning individuated consumers to confront systemic, global problems, Schor's *Plenitude* provides a more practical and human-scaled approach to creating a sustainable new economy from the ground up in a manner that resembles the decentralized yet loosely coordinated approach to collective problem solving and so-called crowd-sourced innovations (Howe 2008; Surowiecki 2004). To fully engage in this mode of praxis, however, consumer-citizens must first reallocate and generally reduce their time investments in the BAU economy. They break from the work-spend cycle of conventional paid employment and mass consumerism and devote their resulting free time to household- and community-based practices of high-productivity self-provision. Such undertakings also require that consumer-citizens cultivate, share, and/or barter for the requisite technical knowledge and skills. As a consequence of these activities, community ties should be strengthened because consumer-citizens are now reliant upon each other for provisioning and economic capital rather than on the market-based BAU economy.

Yet, consumer-citizens can also face significant barriers to reducing their economic reliance on the BAU economy, ranging from needs for employment-based insurance coverage, persistent debt obligations (which are often tied to the costs of treating chronic illnesses), or even the reluctance of other family

members to abandon familiar and comfortable lifestyle patterns. A profound sociocultural chasm separates the quintessential practitioners of plenitude—who are growing their own food, building their own homes using low-cost, low-impact natural materials or creating barter-based economies in a self-sufficient eco-community—and members of the proverbial social mainstream, who remain immersed in the BAU economy. Stated conversely, the BAU economy produces not just "goods" and not just the "externalities" of climate change, but also a population of deskilled consumers who are also economically insecure workers: a twin condition that paradoxically fosters structural dependencies on the BAU economy.

The path out of the BAU economy may not directly follow from a paradigm-shifting epiphany and radical lifestyle change. Consumer-citizens may instead pursue principles of plenitude in a more piecemeal, circuitous, and even serendipitous manner. In the following analysis, we show how this transformational process is mediated by an alternative market form—community-supported agriculture. For the consumer-citizens in our sample, CSA functions as a transitional institution. Through their participation and social interactions in the CSA market system, they gradually acquire new skills, ideological outlooks, and social relations that, in turn, alter their former status quo outlooks toward the BAU marketplace for groceries, fast food, and processed-foods options. In the course of deploying these new cultural capacities and ideological reference points, these consumer-citizens also begin to incorporate plenitude principles of communal sharing and collaboration into their daily lives, becoming more productive, skilled, and self-providing consumers and investing more time and other personal resources in productive activities that lie outside the provinces of the BAU economy.

COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE AS AN ENTRÉE TO PLENITUDE

Community-supported agriculture is one of the more well-established marketplace expressions of the local-food movement, which is generally organized around ideals of enhancing biodiversity, revitalizing local economies and the economic viability of small farms, reclaiming food production from corporate-dominated agribusiness interests, and rekindling communal connections that have been weakened by forces of suburbanization, increased geographic mobility, and the privatizing influences of consumer culture (Cohen, Comrov, and Hoffner 2005; Halweil 2002). CSA farms strive to enact

these ideals through their practices of production, distribution, marketing, and the social networks that they foster among consumers and between consumers and farmers. The CSA model has been gaining steady momentum in the consumer marketplace (Press and Arnould 2011b). In 1999, approximately 1,000 farms were operating on the CSA model in the United States (Lass et al. 2003). According to the most recent USDA census of agriculture, in 2007, this number had skyrocketed to 12,540 (http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/CenV1US1.txt). Notably, CSA did not even appear as a distinct category of farm operation in the preceding 2002 USDA agricultural census.

In a commercial marketplace that venerates consumer choice, breadth of selection, convenience and, above all else, the calculability of what one pays for goods, CSA diverges from models of economic exchange in just about every way imaginable. To participate in a CSA program, a consumer buys a share in a specific farm, with the share price typically ranging from $300 to $800, or becomes a worker member, where labor is substituted for some portion of the share cost. In return for these investments, a CSA member receives a weekly box of organically grown produce for five to seven months (depending on the region) that is delivered to a centralized pickup point. CSA farmers typically invite their members to visit the farm and they host periodic gatherings—potlucks, watermelon-tasting events, farm tours—that are designed to foster a sense of community among members and help them develop a personal relationship with "their" farm. These market-mediated communal connections are also premised on a model of shared risks and rewards in which consumers gain benefits when crops are bountiful and collectively absorb losses when crops are less successful or even fail (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007).

Unlike consumers who support local agriculture through purchases made at farmers' markets, local food co-ops, and now even major chains such as Whole Foods Market—which are seeking to catch the local-food wave in their branding strategies (Warner 2011)—CSA consumers forgo a considerable degree of choice and control over the mix of goods that go into their baskets. This mix is largely determined by farmers' planting decisions and, of course, the climatic factors that affect crop quality and even availability. Furthermore, the CSA model does not allow consumers to easily calculate just what they are paying for any given good in their weekly (or biweekly) basket, nor is it conducive to farm-by-farm price comparisons due to the unspecified and generally unpredictable variations in the volume and type of goods that go into a respective basket.

The CSA movement often claims the ideological mantle of being a much-needed alternative to the "organic-industrial complex" (Pollan 2001) that has adapted, and many argue distorted, the original ideals and practices of organic agriculture to serve the scale and efficiency needs of mass-acreage, monocrop corporate farming (Pollan 2006b; Guthman 2004; Sharp, Imerman, and Peters 2002). Often forgoing the corporate-co-opted term *organic* altogether, CSA farmers and proponents proclaim themselves to be "authentic" growers (Coleman 2002) who are leading sustainable food production into the "postorganic" age. This authenticating claim serves both political and promotional goals by suggesting that CSA is rekindling the original spirit of the organic food movement by enacting small-is-beautiful values in its scale of operation, by tailoring farming practices and planting decisions to local climate and soil conditions and, last but not least, by emphasizing bonds of trust anchored in face-to-face relationships and community connections rather than conformity to abstract regulatory codes and certification standards.

CSA is, therefore, an alternative system of distribution and economic exchange that echoes the core principles of plenitude. Indeed, many of the CSA farmers we interviewed can rightly be considered fully committed practitioners of plenitude. CSA farmers seek to minimize their consumption expenditures by using the barter economy (trading surpluses and skills) to meet household needs; they invest their time and skills in providing sustainably grown food through small-scale, high-productivity, biodynamic farming techniques; and they work to use their farms as a resource for building community connections.

The reflections of our CSA farmers also reveal the importance they attach to the processes we have described as the social reembedding and reterritorialization of globally scaled problems. This ethos is nicely expressed in the following quote from Caitlin, a successful CSA farmer (whose personal history with CSA evolved from member to worker member to apprentice to finally running her own farm):

> Maybe that's a personal thing, maybe that's what it's about. These things that I'm saying feel really small. I don't have this grand idea about the thing as a whole. I try to eat locally, I try to be really conscious about what I eat; it's very personal for me. I just read three articles in the *New Yorker* about global warming and that makes me really worry. But I have a hard time holding those issues present in my daily life. The way I hold them present is by making decisions about how I'm going to live my life and being consistent and thorough with those. What can I do—this is so tired but I'm going to say it—what can I do about Monsanto or Dole? I can choose not to buy food from them, got it, but I'm not in a position where I

> can have an effect on that big organization. For me it comes back to weeding the carrots in a timely fashion, that's what I can do about it.

Rather than feeling overwhelmed or disempowered by the enormity of globally dispersed problems, Caitlin invests in her CSA farm (and her shareowners), and this enables her to feel that she can make a tangible difference in the face of a seemingly indeterminate system of global interlinkages and the economic and political power wielded by transnational corporations that are vested in the BAU economy. As the consumer-citizens in our study become more immersed and vested in their respective CSAs, they similarly resonate with this cultural construction of CSA as a means to meaningfully redress globally scaled problems through local actions and to reduce their overall reliance on the BAU economy.

In the following section, we illustrate this transformative process through a set of vignettes drawn from longitudinal interviews with four first-year CSA members. These interviews document each CSA member's experiences and orientations toward the BAU economy (focusing mainly on the food sector) at the beginning, middle, and end of one CSA growing season (see Press and Arnould 2011a for a more complete description of the research methodology). Over the course of their CSA involvement, these consumer-citizens become increasingly sensitized to the personal, communal, and broader social benefits that can accrue from reducing reliance on the BAU economy while also reorienting their food provisioning and cooking practices in ways that directly incorporate plenitude principles into their everyday lives.

HOW CSA FACILITATES PRACTICES OF PLENITUDE

Tony is a forty-year-old single male with a bachelor's degree in engineering. He works as an engineer in a dark office, smokes, lives alone, and earns about $60,000 per year. Tony's primary reasons for joining a CSA were grounded in largely instrumental and risk-averse concerns over the inflationary effects that petroleum shortages could have on food prices:

> You know, it just seems obvious that transportation costs are a big part of food costs, and you know, for the longest time I figured, so what? You know, oil's cheap. But it's not really. I think you know that the rising gas prices last year sort of pointed that out, and if you go into the supermarket it's readily apparent to me that everything is more expensive than it was just a year ago. And so I think reducing the amount of miles your food travels before it gets to you is a great way to reduce the cost of your food. . . . I'd actually talked with people about it beforehand. And my mom said, "Oh, you should join [CSA name]." She looked at it [from] the food will be cheaper and better kind of perspective, but honestly, I looked at it as future-proofing myself. You know, like let's say the price of gas goes through the roof and the price of food goes through the roof—what are you gonna do? And I wanted to know what grew locally, what's available locally. . . . I mean, it's gotten to the point where I've actually entertained the notion of actually trying to learn how to grow food, because that seems like a pretty valuable skill to have now, but you know, I'm not really sure how good at it I would be . . . so I decided to see what was available locally.

Tony expresses a risk society perspective in viewing the production, distribution, and pricing of food as a petroleum-driven system that is not very adaptable to the demanding economic conditions that are emerging in this era of peak oil. While intrigued by the idea of growing his own food, his lack of skills (and confidence) poses a barrier to his enacting plenitude's principle of self-provisioning. By joining a CSA, however, Tony is able to find a practical means to hedge against these peak oil risks and shift his food-provisioning practices away from the BAU economy.

As the CSA season unfolded, Tony's viewpoint broadened from his initial concerns about peak oil and escalating food prices. He became more captivated by the CSA ideas of knowing where his food came from and supporting small-scale local production rather than mass-scale factory farms. Last but not least, his original goal of reducing his expenditures on food was displaced by one of supporting small-scale local production and local farms, even when this disengagement from the BAU system of corporate-controlled agriculture meant paying higher prices: "There is another farmer that comes by the [farm] and she sells prearranged products, you know, beef and pork, and I like buying stuff from her. I don't mind paying a little more for her stuff because it's not factory farmed. It's not coming from Texas or Colorado. . . . I think, like a lot of Americans, if you ask a lot of people, 'Where does your food come from?' they would say a supermarket. They are not growing food in the supermarket, it is coming from somewhere. [The CSA] kind of made me realize the chain involved. I think I'm a lot closer to my food when I buy it from the CSA than buying from the supermarket."

Mary is a married forty-two-year-old mother of two children. She holds multiple advanced degrees, including a PhD, and enjoys a well-paying career as a medical administrator. Her yearly household income is over $200,000. She lives in a new housing development that was built on farmland. She has a gourmet

kitchen and takes pride in her knowledge of food, nutrition, and cooking. In keeping with her high level of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986), Mary is a discriminating food consumer who avidly reads labels, compares prices, and proudly stakes a claim to teaching her children good food values. At the time of our first interview, Mary was also a conflicted consumer who struggled to reconcile her desires to consume in a more sustainable way with lifestyle practices that often stood at odds with this goal. For example, Mary expresses her extreme ambivalence over regularly buying her groceries from those paragons of the BAU economy—Walmart and its subsidiary Sam's Club:

> I think Sam's Club [*laughs*] has a lot of very good produce, although I don't always associate it with the healthiest food practices. I don't know why that is, I think it's just Walmart, my basic mistrust for Walmart, but I think that it tastes pretty good, so I do a considerable amount of my shopping at Walmart or Sam's Club. . . . I have no data to support this, um, feeling, and obviously it's not something that's inhibiting me, or prohibiting me from shopping there, but you know, I do have kind of a, um, a feeling of the fact that these, that Walmart is a big corporate entity that is very much interested in making money, and I certainly don't feel that their labor practices in our country are the best, and for that reason I have an uneasy feeling about, you know, I just don't know what their practices and growing food and meats are like. I never feel *good* about buying my meat at Walmart.

Later in the CSA season, Mary begins to alter her resigned view that there is an inherent trade-off between the convenience and low prices offered by Walmart and shopping in a socially responsible way that she can feel good about. Instead, she gravitates toward the idea that her participation in a CSA offers a practical means to redress larger-scale social and environmental problems while gaining an enhanced (and guilt-assuaging) sense of autonomy from the BAU economy:

> I think CSA to me represents a better way of doing things. I have very little control over better ways of doing a lot of things in the world. I have no control about the fact that my neighbors are going out and buying Hummers and Escalades. I have no control over the fact that 50 percent of my neighborhood doesn't recycle that much. I have no control over people using disposable diapers and they are using landfill space like there is no tomorrow. But this is something like I felt was environmentally sound that allowed me to participate in a sense of community, not like a nonprofit, but participate in a network that was beneficial to the community and allowed me to get something out of it. So I felt that I was participating in kind of a win-win situation . . . when I joined [the CSA] I joined to be doing something that I considered to be for the community and everything else. And, by the way, I happen to get all of these wonderful vegetables on top of it. That's the way I look at it. . . . I really respect people who farm around here. It makes me feel very good to support these people who I think are so important.

Sarah is a forty-two-year-old single mother of two young children. She has a bachelor's degree and currently works in the human services field. She is very concerned about peak oil and also an ardent believer in seed saving. She grows heirloom tomatoes and takes great personal inspiration from her friends who grow and forage for their own food. On her modest income of $25,000, Sarah struggles to make ends meet for basic needs like housing, food, and medicine, and receives state-sponsored WIC support that provides her with vouchers that can be exchanged for vegetables at the local farmers' market. Sarah is a type II diabetic who now places considerable emphasis on having a healthy diet that includes generous amounts of fresh vegetables.

Sarah joined a CSA in anticipation of no longer qualifying for the WIC program. Looking to stretch her food dollars, Sarah believed that CSA might provide a cost-effective way to maintain her family's supply of fresh vegetables:

> I'm under budget constraints, so, well, I get WIC up until—well, this is my last summer and they give some farmers' vouchers, which is really neat, from the state. So it's not a lot but I've always had those; I've had two kids under five. So I used to get $40 worth of vouchers and I was able to buy things at the farmer markets. But I'm losing that because the kids are gonna be over five [years old]. So that was a consideration too—I thought, jeesh, no more vouchers, and I weighed the costs and how much vegetables we would eat, and it seemed more cost effective. . . . I almost always have vegetables on hand now, which sometimes, you know, if grocery money was low that week, I might not pick up much of a variety. So yeah . . . plus I have type II diabetes so what I really need to be eating is vegetables—you know, it's one of the few things that doesn't take my blood sugar [high]. So that's been great. And right now [because of the CSA], I'm eating half a pound of vegetables a day.

CSA members commonly report that they begin investing more time in meal preparation and developing their culinary skills in response to the wide array of vegetables, often unfamiliar ones, that appear in their weekly boxes: a consequence that also runs counter to the processes of consumer de-skilling that are fostered by the convenience-oriented food culture (see Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). Sarah reports a similar shift in her consumption patterns, with the additional benefit of integrating her children into her

family's food-provisioning and food-preparation activities. These changes are also highly consistent with the plenitude principle of using consumption to enliven and strengthen familial and communal ties: "Yeah, the kids have gone with me every time I've gone out [to the farm]. . . . It's neat, they help me weigh everything and pick things out and we learn a lot about new vegetables. Like we never had bok choi before and, um, so I got on the Internet and looked up some recipes and stir-fried it with some other vegetables and chicken. . . . I've had several things that I hadn't had before—Swiss chard, rutabaga—so that's pretty neat. It's forced me to look up new recipes. . . . My son said to me recently—he was eating an apple we got at the grocery store—and he said, 'I like those apples from the farm a lot better.' He was saying he couldn't wait until we got apples again from the farm. That was neat."

As the season progressed, Sarah began to think about local to global connections related to problems posed by the BAU paradigm of corporate farming and extensive supply chains: "So there's not a lot of genetic difference. Like, I read somewhere that the corn crop, like, if some of these major crops that are grown all over the country were affected by some disease of fungus that the entire, you know, it could all be wiped out because they're genetically the same seed . . . so that's interesting to me too, like, I think there should be a wider variety of things that are grown. . . . It's scary. . . . I don't like to lose diversity. Most food is trucked hundreds of miles, so I wanted to prevent that. I wanted things that were fresh. The organic part wasn't so important but that's part of it too. And I thought it was neat that the money goes to the farmer, there's not so many intermediate steps."

As with CSA member Tony, Sarah's participation in CSA has also prompted a shift in her understanding of value. Initially, Sarah regarded CSA as a more affordable way to acquire nutritious vegetables. By the end of the season, she placed more importance on the broader societal value that derives from supporting this alternative to the BAU economy: "Just knowing that the farmer is getting a living wage. I mean, with produce grown in Mexico or whatever, which some stuff sold here is, you don't know. Yes, . . . [being a CSA member] is something you can be proud of, so the feeling you're doing something good for the environment and for your local community and your health. Those are all positive things."

Emily is a recently married twenty-nine-year-old with no children. She holds a master's degree, currently works as a librarian, and is passionate about comic books. Her annual household income is $64,000. Prior to joining a CSA, Emily and her husband's food-provisioning and cooking practices were highly segregated. This culinary division started when Emily's husband went on a strict low-carbohydrate, nonfat diet to lose weight, and Emily was not interested in learning how to prepare such meals, much less eat them. They purchased their food separately; each had designated spaces in the refrigerator; and they prepared and ate their meals separately.

Emily joined her CSA as a means to act upon her budding interest in the local-food movement. Early on, Emily's CSA membership led her to align her cooking practices with plenitude principles. Faced with a weekly abundance of perishable, fresh produce, Emily began to experiment with a variety of new dishes (and build her cooking skills in the process), and she began to take pleasure in cooking at home rather than eating out:

> So it's always in the back of my mind, "Well, I'm not going to go out to eat because I know that I have a pound of Swiss chard sitting in my refrigerator and it will go bad if I don't eat it." I'm eating more vegetables and I think I'm eating out less because I have more things to look forward to at home. I've always been pretty adventurous with food, but I think I've gotten even more so. I've just noticed from the kinds of things I'm cooking that I'm branching out a lot more and changing recipes. I look at the recipe and say, "Well, this is an ingredient I can substitute for this." Then I realize I've made a completely different thing. So I think I've gotten a little more comfortable doing that. . . . I am cooking more. Just going to the farm and seeing what looks good and what they have a lot of. . . . The ingredients are more of a surprise than I'm used to. I think I didn't do that as much when I was just going to the grocery store. I would look at the flyer and see what's on sale and plan what I was going to get. It's a little more fun to just say, "Okay, here's some Swiss chard. I don't know what to do with that, but I'm going to get a ton of it." . . . It's a little more time consuming, but it's a lot more fun too. I've definitely learned a lot. I've tried a lot of things that I've either never heard of before, like celery root, or things that I've heard of but never knew what to do with, like turnips. I didn't even know what a rutabaga was. Now we're having one like every week.

In *Plenitude,* Schor (2010) suggests that consumer-citizens will be able to enrich their familial and communal relationships by engaging in lifestyle practices that diverge from the standard practices of the BAU economy. In Emily's case, this benefit is quite evident. One of the major changes Emily reported over the course of the CSA season was that she and her husband started to share home-prepared meals together on a more routine basis: "I think my favorite thing is my husband and I have actually been eating together more because he's gotten into wanting to try some of the things I'm bringing home. . . . Now that I'm bringing stuff home, we're looking up recipes together

and he wants to try more. So I think we're eating more together even if we're not both home to eat at the same time. We're eating [more vegetables] and doing more cooking too. . . . Now he's actually doing more shopping with me. I'll go once at the beginning of the week and then he'll make a trip in the middle of the week for whatever else we need or whatever he wants. Now we're sharing food more than we were . . . he's actually starting to cook some of the stuff that I cook."

By the season's end, Emily became acutely aware of the deleterious effects the BAU food system has on the environment, personal health, and local farm economies, and she now sees local farms as critically important alternatives to support and maintain. Most significant, Emily reports feeling empowered in the face of these daunting systemic problems by the knowledge and experiences she has acquired through her CSA participation. As with our other interviewees, Emily has been fundamentally sensitized to the hidden costs inherent to the low price, chemical-laden foods produced by the BAU economy:

> And it's made me think differently when I go to the supermarket. If they have something that's local I will definitely buy that before I buy something that's from California or Florida, especially with lettuce, which they haven't had lettuce lately. It's not in season anymore. When I get a head of lettuce at the supermarket I almost stop buying it because when I would get it home it would go bad like the next day. It would be all slimy and disgusting. Then when I get the lettuce at [the CSA] it would last like a week in my refrigerator even if I don't touch it. . . . Before I would be like, these are cucumbers and these are cucumbers, so I'm going to buy the ones that are cheaper. Whereas now if they are local [I think] they will probably taste better and they will probably last longer. It's really something that I believe in and it's not using a big truck to get it here. . . . I'm actually spending more money because I'm more interested in food and cooking and I read the labels a lot more closely. You know, the weird things I can't pronounce I find myself, "Well, that's not good to buy." Where before I was, "Chemicals, whatever."

CONCLUSION

Our analysis has highlighted some of the more prominent ways that consumer-citizens can use CSA to reskill their consumption practices, enrich their personal and social lives, and gain a heightened sense of personal efficacy in the face of daunting globally scaled problems. CSA participation can also free consumer-citizens from the paralyzing pangs of reflexive doubt by allowing them to directly experience the farm, form trusting relationships with farmers, and enact plenitude principles of sustainable consumption through the new lifestyle patterns that are implemented and strengthened with every weekly delivery of CSA produce.

CSA farms constitute a decentralized network of localized small-scale operations that encourage consumers to build new capabilities, rethink the exchange logic and environmental consequences of conventional commercial exchanges, and forge new material (and moral) relationships to local farms, farmers, and food. Through their participation in CSA, consumers gain a reflexive awareness of the taken-for-granted preferences and orientations that have perpetuated their dependence on corporate-controlled distribution chains and their alienation from food production, not only on the farm but in their own homes. As CSA consumers begin to alter their food-provisioning and meal preparation practices in ways that are more consistent with the ideals, values, and goals that shape CSA's alternative market system (see Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), they also take consequential first steps down a path that leads away from the BAU economy, with its many hidden externalities. They are not only constructing more skilled consumer identities—thereby countermanding the broader trend toward consumer deskilling that has accompanied the dominance of fast food and convenience food (Jaffe and Gertler 2006)—but also exhibiting greater willingness to make investments of time, effort, and indeed money to support more sustainable marketplace alternatives.

These diachronic transformations are summarized in table 4.1 on the following page. In the initial stages of consumers' participation in CSA, they expressed conventional price-quantity type assessments about whether CSA was good value for the money. Over time, however, members began to adopt another exchange logic that defined value in ways that emphasized environmental sustainability (for example, how food was grown, biodiversity, trustworthiness of organic claims, shipping distances); the moral economy of CSA (fair prices to farmers and fair wages to workers, nontoxic working conditions); the social benefits of CSA (such as sharing excess food with neighbors, cooking and eating meals with family members); and finally, the health benefits that accrued from the changes in their diets and everyday eating habits that their CSA membership precipitated. Plenitude principles are highlighted in CSA exchange logic as shared work, shared risk, and shared reward, anchoring the CSA in community- and human-scale collaborative operations.

In contrast, the BAU economy is singularly predisposed to create tragedies of the commons (Hardin 1968) in which incentives for private profit lead to

Table 4.1. Consumer changes fostered by CSA participation

Consumers' business-as-usual food practices before participating in CSA	Consumers' (plenitude-oriented) food practices after participating in CSA
Taken-for-granted preferences for lowest-cost options and reducing expenditures on food	Viewing food expenditures as investments in local community and the value of supporting sustainable modes of food production
Taken-for-granted priority given to speed and convenience of meal preparation	Taking pleasure in cultivating new culinary skills and the sensory qualities of fresh produce
Experiencing mealtime as a chore and an activity to be fit into the schedule	Having skills, resources, and commitment to treat cooking and mealtime as enriching and rewarding social activities
Feeling that they lacked the skills, knowledge, and resources to create healthful meals	Feeling that they had gained the skills, knowledge, and resources to create healthful (and enjoyable) meals
Feeling alienated from deterritorialized, corporate-controlled distribution channels for food provisioning	Gaining a sense of autonomy and empowerment from direct connections to local farms
Low awareness and/or interest in the social and ecological consequences of the BAU system of food production and distribution	Heightened awareness and interest in the social and ecological consequences of the BAU system of food production and distribution
Feeling overwhelmed and disempowered by the scale of systemic ecological problems	Discovering ways in which personal and collective actions can make tangible differences at the local level

the exploitation and despoiling of shared resources such as wilderness areas, community green spaces, clean water, clean air and, last but not least, smaller, independent farms that play a vital role in maintaining the biodiversity (and hence security) of the world's food shed (see Halweil 2002). In a commercial marketplace dominated by agribusiness oligopolies and globalized supply chains, the tragedy of the commons also becomes a tale of complex global-local interlinkages and socioeconomic interdependencies that help to perpetuate the BAU economy's unsustainable and wealth-concentrating modes of production. In consumer-citizens' everyday lives, these interdependencies are manifest through the colonization of the local by global networks of power, such as the case of Walmart superstores dominating local food mar-

kets. On the production side, farmers become entangled in these expansive networks through seemingly mundane choices such as opting to plant Monsanto-patented seeds. Such a decision almost immediately subsumes their production practices and economic viability to the machinations of transnational intellectual property laws, corporate strategies, supplementary technologies linked to GMO production, unintended environmental consequences (including the production of superpests and herbicide-resistant weeds), and the exigencies of global commodity markets.

Unlike the practice of purchasing groceries in the BAU distribution system, membership in CSA does not surreptitiously embed a host of socioeconomic and ecological externalities in an instrumental appeal to an ostensibly low price for a basket of goods. Rather, CSA growers and members are collaboratively seeking to reappropriate localized marketplace relationships and economic practices from globally scaled power structures. To use Saskia Sassen's (2006) triadic framework, this decentralized, reterritorialized market system is organized by an economic and cultural *logic* that values the preservation and restoration of the commons (via a nexus of communal and collaborative practices). It has *capabilities* to enable growers and consumer-citizens to attain greater economic and provisional autonomy from the BAU agribusiness system. And as part of an expanding network of other small-scale entrepreneurial marketplace innovators, CSA can also contribute to a *tipping point* though which a confluence of loosely coordinated localized actions exerts transformative influences on distant and seemingly entrenched global power structures.

CSA narratives and marketplace practices are quite distinct from the standard eco-consumerist imperatives that beseech individuals to act as informed, socially responsible consumer decision makers. Owing to the imperatives of profit seeking and market expansion, these marketing-friendly discourses of consumer-citizenship remain heavily skewed toward the consumerist pole, rendering the citizenship aspects as optional or attainable through symbolic gestures (Johnston 2008). CSA alters this ideological balance by appealing to consumer-citizens as active participants in a collective project that is embedded in their social networks and face-to-face communal ties. Through CSA narratives and practices, consumer-citizens gradually transform their initial preferences for convenience and boundless variety as well as their susceptibility to the allures of commodity fetishism into a marketplace orientation that is steeped in a more pronounced sense of civic responsibilities to protect the (localized) commons and to support alternatives

to the corporate-dominated food chain. These concerns are readily linked to other issues of workers' rights, fair wages, biodiversity, and sustainable modes of production.

Consumers' investments and participation in CSA create a pathway for personal transformation that begins with processes of reskilling and becomes gradually immersed in the local movement discourses and sociopolitical goals that are articulated through the CSA market. CSAs also exhibit ideological affinities (in terms of underlying beliefs about the BAU economy and commitments to ideals of sustainability) and social linkages to other alternative market structures that function as plenitude enclaves, including raw milk producers, food co-operatives, artisanal craft enterprises, and other "communities of purpose" (see Schouten and Martin 2011). As consumers forge personal connections to other nodes in the broader network of alternatives to the BAU economy, their market relationships could eventually reach a tipping point where plenitude principles, rather than BAU orthodoxies, organize their lifestyles and identity projects.

At an institutional level, CSA—as a specific expression of the broader local-food movement and the backlash against corporate-dominated agriculture (see Pollan 2006b)—has reached a sufficient cultural mass that it has been able to influence the distribution practices of retail titan Whole Foods (Ness 2006) much in the way that the organic food movement has altered the product line offered by Walmart (Pollan 2006a). More broadly, forging stronger economic and cultural ties among these dispersed, decentralized, small-scale, entrepreneurial, plenitude-oriented enterprises may provide a means through which more peripheral but sustainable sectors of the economy can exert a progressive influence on the corporate-dominated mainstream marketplace. While corporate co-optation of countercultural ideals has long been condemned for debasing the original political values and objectives of these movements, these dynamics of incorporation can also precipitate logistical, production, and product-line changes that result in large BAU firms reducing the environmental and social costs of their operations.

By providing a necessary experiential and indeed pragmatic grounding to this reassembly of capacities, organizing logics, and tipping points, participation in CSA allows consumers to address personal health concerns, build deeper relationships with family members, and assuage guilt for other aspects of their lifestyles that structurally contribute to undesirable environmental or social justice outcomes. Moreover, this aspect of CSA is no mere therapeutic panacea. By enabling consumers to realize that they can incrementally and practically incorporate alternative principles into their lives, CSA helps to overcome not only the disempowering implications of reflexive risk awareness (Beck 1999) but also the "all or nothing" mindsets that can render the embrace of new lifestyle practices daunting or overwhelming.

In sum, CSA is a form of everyday and potentially transformative praxis that enables consumer-citizens to reembed abstract appeals and rationales for sustainable consumption into their social networks and thus to play a more proactive, empowering, and gratifying role in the broad project of creating a new sustainable economy. CSA consumers are able to direct their efforts toward more tangible goals rather than being one of many, relatively anonymous consumers who are seeking to change complex and interdependent systems, like the climate or the global economy, where the consequences of interventions are difficult to calibrate. Instead, CSA consumers maintain a specific plot of land that produces food in an environmentally responsible way. They help to sustain a way of life (the small family farm) that is a clear alternative to the business-as-usual global commodity chains that depersonalize and deterritorialize consumers' relationships to food production.

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