

INTRODUCTION

Susie Khamis (Founding Editor)

Macquarie University

This first issue of *Locale* marks a timely contribution to what has become one of the most dynamic and prominent topics in contemporary life, in both academic circles and popular culture generally: food. As a biological necessity, food has always preoccupied societies with regard to how it is procured, distributed, manipulated and marketed. As such, the case for the importance and appeal of food for human societies is hardly one worth making here. Still, over the last few decades, and especially since the early 2000s, a growing number and range of food-related topics have surfaced across a wide cross-section of contemporary society. Issues once associated with alternative food movements are now taken up (at least nominally) by major food industrialists (Neilson, 2010: 214-215); and, across academic disciplines, there is more regular and robust engagement with a plethora of food-related discourses. At the very least, we see the extent to which food has been analysed and interrogated in academic fields paralleled in wider non-academic areas, a symmetry that bodes well for *Locale's* aims and interests.

Locale adds to growing academic literature and activity dedicated to the study of food, but is distinguished by two important emphases: a geographical focus on Australasia and the broader Pacific region; and the interdisciplinary exploration of food-related phenomena within this region in ways that extend and even challenge conventional associations between food and place. As such, some definitional clarity

Locale: The Australasian-Pacific Journal of Regional Food Studies

Number 1, 2011

is required here. In the broadest sense, 'locale' refers simply to the scene or locality (the locus) of an event; it makes no claim to tradition, history, or longevity. 'Regional', on the other hand, is more complex, even problematic. A region implies a geographical area with discernible and definable characteristics and/or boundaries. In turn, a region typically implies a suite of expectations – of traits that belong to or emanate from this specific, bounded area. A locale bears no such connotative responsibility; it points to place, but is not so symbolically laden. This distinction is raised here to flag at least one of the ways this journal addresses the diversity and eclecticism of food studies today: *Locale* welcomes discussions that frame or contextualise food-related phenomena in regional terms, but is equally amenable to research that looks at sites that are not necessarily delineated along regional lines, or are born of processes of regionalisation.

By scaling discussions of food to local or regional levels, *Locale* privileges the role food plays in both demarcating and differentiating specific precincts from national borders and global flows. Moreover, the linking of particular foods and food practices with particular places is now one of the most widely deployed means by which various interests (commercial, cultural and political) articulate a variety of agendas. In popular entertainment media, for instance, high-profile chefs regularly endorse provenance as a prime indicator and guarantee of ingredients' quality, which invariably invokes a discourse of regional specialty (Heuzenroeder, 2006: 46.1). Also important is the marketing of travel to 'foodie' destinations, with its obvious emphasis on regional cuisine. Lucy M. Long called this "culinary tourism", or the "intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways of an other – participation including the consumption, preparation, and presentation of a food item, cuisine, meal system or eating style not one's own" (Long, 2003: 21). From Tuscany to Tasmania, Dubai to Dunedin, there are now scores of regions around the world (and within Australasia and the Pacific) that package and promote their food-based travel experiences. This, in turn, enables local food industries to add lucrative brand value through product affiliation (Khamis, 2007) by sustaining an identifiably regional or local character (Moran, 1993: 266).

Food can thus be linked to a particular locale or region due to practices and features that can be observed over time; or due to concerted efforts to create this association in response to certain developments. For Barbara Santich, this difference separates regionalism from regionalisation: the former is descriptive and “refers to a particular set of characteristics at a particular time”, while the latter, which she sees within the context of (and as a response to) globalisation, entails “the purposeful development or enhancement of foods... which differentiate the region and help define its identity” (Santich, 2002: 6). For many though and now more than ever, the relationship between food and place is not just a sensual matter; it is a major ethical and environmental concern. For a growing corps of eco-literate consumers, the globalised food system appears increasingly untenable. The carbon cost incurred when foods wastefully crisscross the planet, the nutritional cost of lengthening supply-chains, and the humanitarian cost of unethical farming practices (especially within developing societies) have inspired a range of initiatives that collectively signpost a more localised approach to food, whereby the gap between food production and food consumption is narrowed – and is thereby more within consumers’ control (Norberg-Hodge, 2006). Such initiatives, which include local farmers’ markets and communal gardens, often occur within urban and suburban areas (on rooftops, in basements, at schools) and deliberately redirect conventional food flows away from the major industrialists towards more localised sites (Sullivan, 2010).

Food thus figures as both (and often simultaneously) deeply personal and highly social. How, where, and what we consume, and with whom, is shot through with myriad ideals, assumptions, pleasures, fears and concerns – and these variables have as much (if not more) to do with extrinsic factors as the food itself. Since the political-economic (re-)structuring of our food choices intersects the nuanced dynamics of diverse food cultures, a basic necessity (consumption) becomes a discursive minefield. As Stewart Lockie argues, “it is hard to escape constant reminders of the complex and fluid relationships between the livelihoods of food producers, the health of agricultural environments, the economic performance of exporting nations, the activities of transnational corporations and the ways in which we satiate our own hunger” (Lockie, 2001: 240). Yet within this context of advanced globalisation, in

these “hypermodern times” (Lipovetsky, 2005: 37), a critical tension persists. On the one hand, the most personal decision (what/how/where to eat) weaves through a web of externally controlled factors: the ‘free market’ is anything but. Ironically though, around the world, we see how the multinational giants of globalised industries must not only negotiate the resilience of local communities and movements but also, often enough, attempt to harness and exploit their points of difference, with varying degrees of success. In any event, and as Appadurai argues, as global flows multiply, accelerate and intensify—across financial, mediated, technological, ethnographic, and ideological lines—“the relationship of these various flows to one another, as they constellate into particular events and social forms, will be radically context-dependent” (Appadurai, 1990: 21). *Locale* considers how food phenomena feature in these flows, in both contemporary contexts and historically.

No matter how entwined contemporary consumption practices are with global forces, or how multicultural/cosmopolitan/fusion a meal can be (the ‘world on a plate’), there is no escaping the extent to which local conditions affect, influence and sometimes define any food experience. *Locale* pivots on this point, and recognises what John Tomlinson calls “the enduring pull of locality as a focus of cultural, moral and political solidarities in the face of the complex structural connectivity of globalization” (Tomlinson, 2002: 243). This “enduring pull” has two aspects. First, there is the resilience of local habits, values and preferences—the results of numerous variables, not the least of which are tradition, custom, convenience and economic protection. Second, there are the cultural and infrastructural differences that shape how national and/or global forces manifest in local contexts. For this reason, and as Bell and Valentine note, the globalisation of food media, transport, processing and marketing has tended to “glocalise” food consumption at the regional level (Bell and Valentine, 1997: 17–19). That is, local phenomena (such as food consumption) are reframed as interactions with global forces. It is argued here that it is not just food consumption that has been glocalised (Robertson, 1995: 25–44) at local and regional levels, but the gamut of food-related activity and knowledge. Herein lays the critical heart of *Locale*: to spotlight research that uncovers and interrogates food-related phenomena at these local or regional levels, within Australasia and the Pacific. This emphasis encompasses the spectrum of food-related

behaviour, knowledge and symbolism (activated by political, economic, social and/or cultural forces), both historical and contemporary, with a view to animate dialogue across disciplines, industries, consumers and advocates.

Locale's platform is wide and inclusive. Indeed, this openness reflects the breadth of vision embodied in the Regional Food Research Network Australasia (RFRNA), with which *Locale* is directly affiliated. Established in 2010 with the support of Southern Cross University's School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, the RFRNA encourages researchers, industry practitioners, policy makers and consumers to discuss and debate issues of regional food culture. *Locale* welcomes contributions from RFRNA members, and acknowledges its role in broadening food-related research. Like the RFRNA, *Locale* considers food from 'paddock to plate': across histories, sectors, and interest groups, in ways that speak to a general readership. As such, *Locale* heralds a much-needed addition to food-related literature. Despite the scale and scope of food writing over the last few years, there is a need for an academic journal dedicated to this thematic diversity. There is no shortage of print and electronic media devoted to celebrity chefs, genetic modification debates, 'food miles', ethical consumption, culinary tourism and so on. Such topics command a burgeoning proportion of popular and academic interest. *Locale's* imperative is to canvass such topics with the scholarly depth and analytical precision that readers expect from a peer-reviewed journal, but without the exclusivist underpinnings and presumptions of more narrowly focused journals.

Insofar as *Locale* places food studies in an accessible and inclusive forum, the seminal role played by two long-running English-language journals must be acknowledged here. Since 1985, *Food and Foodways* has been a key to furthering food studies within the humanities and social sciences, and fostering an interdisciplinary food studies environment. *Locale* is inspired by the precedent it has set in encouraging "analysis of the fundamental logic and mental structures at work in the elaboration of dietary, culinary and gastronomic models", and also seeks to "confront them with medical and religious beliefs, aesthetic values, as well as the economic, social and political organization of different societies" (Editorial, 1985: i). Similarly, since 1996, *Food, Culture & Society* (formerly the *Journal of the Association for the Study of Food and*

Locale: The Australasian-Pacific Journal of Regional Food Studies

Number 1, 2011

Society) has been an important meeting place for interdisciplinary food research. *Locale* acknowledges the role it too has played in broadening discussion and research of “food policy, food programs, nutritional epidemiology, agricultural issues, the social significance of food, implications and applications of dietary change” (Newman, 1996: 4).

With its focus on Australasia and the Pacific, *Locale* signals a necessary expansion of this research. Over the last two decades, the study of food has become a major interdisciplinary field in this region, particularly in Australia and New Zealand. Since 1992, for instance, the Australasian Agri-Food Research Network (AFRN) has brought together researchers in food, agriculture and the rural sector. Its annual conferences and papers generate important research output from academics across the social sciences, as well as research practitioners, policymakers and advocates, from public and community sectors. Also, and more recently (2010), the Australasian Food Studies Network (AFSN) was formed to share and promote the research of food and culture in Australia and New Zealand. As befits a food-focused collective, central to the AFSN’s activities is a critically engaged conviviality. Knowledge is pooled not only from members’ own personal and professional trajectories, but also from group events that showcase food’s prominence in contemporary popular culture: retreats, excursions, workshops and cooking-classes. *Locale* looks to both the AFRN and the AFSN as effective guides to the diversity of food studies in this region. Like the AFRN, *Locale* welcomes contributions from those working within food-related areas outside of academia: dialogue is encouraged with those who integrate and/or respond to our concerns and interests within corporate, governmental, advocacy or artistic contexts. Like the AFSN, *Locale* is as engaged with the ‘paddock’ end of food studies (agri-business, government policy, industry practice, sustainability) as the ‘plate’ side; this includes the sensorial pleasures of food consumption, and the role it plays in sustaining and celebrating cultural identities.

Of course, *Locale* will accommodate perspectives from fields that have, over the last few decades, made the study of how human societies source, prepare, share and represent food a significant disciplinary concern: anthropology, agriculture,

geography, political science, nutrition, sociology, cultural studies and so on. However, and as several recent initiatives suggest, the space for these conversations needs to be extended further still. As Donna-Lee Brien (2007) has shown: not only does food writing (and I would add most food media) exceed the parameters of traditional academic publishing, in terms of genre, purpose, and reach; but such writing speaks to and about the richness of food studies 'proper'. That is, these interventions, often popularly oriented, underscore food's status as a unifying and highly salient reference point for all cultures. With this in mind, *Locale* is primed to promote important research and inspire lively debate about food's role in this region, and its many locales.

Bibliography

Appadurai, Arjun (1990) 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', *Public Culture* v2 n2: 1-24

Bell, David and Valentine, Gill (1997) *Consuming Geographies: We are where we eat*, New York: Routledge

Brien, Donna Lee (2007) 'Writing about Food: Significance, opportunities and professional identities' in Webb, Jen and Williams, Jordan (eds) *the and is papers: proceedings of the 12th conference of the AAWP*, Canberra: The Australasian Association of Writing Programs

Editorial (1985) 'English Editorial', *Food and Foodways* v1 n1-2: i-ii

Heuzenroeder, Angela (2006) 'A region, its recipes and their meaning: the birth of the Barossa Cookery Book', *History Australia* v3 n2: 46.1-46.13

Khamis, Susie (2007) 'Gourmet and Green: the branding of King Island', *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* v1 n2: 14-29

Lipovetsky, Gilles (2005) *Hypermodern Times*, Cambridge: Polity

Lockie, Stewart (2001) 'Food, place and identity: consuming Australia's "Beef Capital"', *Journal of Sociology* v37 n3: 239-255

Locale: The Australasian-Pacific Journal of Regional Food Studies

Number 1, 2011

Long, Lucy M (ed.) (2003) *Culinary Tourism*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky

Moran, Warren (1993) 'Rural space as intellectual property', *Political Geography* v12 n3: 263-277

Neilson, Lisa A (2010) 'Boycott or buycott? Understanding political consumerism', *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* v9 n3: 214-227

Newman, Jacqueline M (1996) 'Welcome!', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Food and Society* v1 n1: 4

Norberg-Hodge, Helena (2006) 'Local food, global benefit', *Arena Magazine* (October-November) n85: 38-40

Robertson, Roland (1995) 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity' in Featherstone, Mike, Lash, Scott and Robertson, Roland (eds) *Global Modernities*, London: Sage: 25-44

Santich, Barbara (2002) 'Regionalism and Regionalisation in Food in Australia', *Rural Society* v12 n1: 5-16

Sullivan, Rachel (2010) 'Local food for sustainable communities', *ECOS Magazine*, online at: <http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?paper=EC152p18> (accessed November 2011)

Tomlinson, John (2002) 'Interests and Identities in Cosmopolitan Politics' in Verovec, Steven and Cohen, Robin (eds) *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press