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**Food for Thought:
Community Supported Agriculture and Learning**

Michael Ambach

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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Abstract

Community Supported Agriculture is considered as a potential site for transformative adult learning. Over a three-year period, the author takes part in various informal activities with three CSA farms, observes the communication dynamic among members, and reflects on his own participation as a farm sharer. Sharers' perceptions of their experience, reasons for participation, and involvement are found to be highly heterogeneous and individualized, and forums for sharing perspectives are largely absent. This complicates an understanding of CSA solely in terms of current theories of transformative and social movement learning. Moreover, farm sharers' participation is characterized as a dialogue within a bioregional system that combines both conceptual and non-conceptual processes. The relation between these processes and the status ascribed to them is discussed. Implications for future research encourage a more critical and inclusive view of what educational research recognizes as learning and how it reproduces its own practice.

What do I have to learn of beans, or beans of me?

- Henry David Thoreau

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Chapter 1. Background

The fact is that farming is not a laboratory science, but a science of practice. It would be, I think, a good deal more accurate to call it an art, for it grows not only out of factual knowledge but out of cultural tradition; it is learned not only by precept but by example, by apprenticeship; and it requires not merely a competent knowledge of its facts and processes, but also a complex set of attitudes, a certain culturally evolved stance, in the face of the unexpected and the unknown. That is to say, it requires style in the highest and richest sense of that term.

Wendell Berry, 1970, p.98.

1.01 Background

Across North America people buy vegetables from around the world. The same wide variety is available independent of season or climate. This is made possible by technologies that produce, transform, transport, and preserve our food and by an economy that favours these technologies. By one estimate, the average distance a food item travels before reaching a North American's plate is as much as 2,000 km (Imhoff, 1996), a ten-fold increase from a few decades ago. A peculiar bit of trivia on its own, this nonetheless serves as a barometer for just how non-localized we have become with perhaps most basic components of life: the food we eat. That such a system be seen as the fruit of progress is debated (Shiva, 1993; Lehman and Krebs, 1996; Prakash, 1994). Yet such critiques have remained largely on the margins, rarely speaking beyond the boundaries of their own academic and activist communities. With more recent awareness of food security issues (the issue of labeling genetically-modified food in Canada and coverage of "mad cow" and "hoof-and-mouth" disease in Europe, for example), concern about how we eat seems to be slowly entering the mainstream. To understand better how these concerns get voiced and shared, we can look to groups that embody alternative

practices in how we eat. Such practices may provide fertile ground for understanding how critical theory, social change, and adult learning come together.

Community supported agriculture (CSA) appears as one such practice. CSA is a system of cooperation between small-scale organic produce farmers and people living in urban areas who share the risks and rewards of farming. Farms are typically located on the periphery of the areas where the “sharers” live¹. At the beginning of the season, sharers contribute a sum of money to be put towards the farm’s operating costs, and in return they receive a basket of fresh organic produce every week for 20-30 weeks of the year. The food is distributed through drop-off points in the city at specific times. To some extent, sharers forego the experience of shopping and choosing from an international variety of produce: what the farm produces that week, they deal with². Of course, production on an organic farm is anything but random and haphazard. Rather, it is a complex and highly interdependent system of which sharers are a part. The extent of their participation, and its potential as a site for learning and attitude change, is the subject of this research.

CSA puts the focus on sustainability rather than growth. It offers a critical view of the global marketplace where technology and competition drive one another to cater to “the consumer king”: humans cast as resource users whose needs multiply with the market’s latest offering. CSA offers an alternative set of values. Two aspects of CSA point to these differences. First, members are encouraged – in some cases, contractually obliged – to voluntarily come out to help with the harvest³. This perspective seeks to re-

1 The terms “partner”, “shareholder” and “farm member” are all used. Throughout this research, I use “sharer”.

2 Nothing is to stop people from supplementing organic farm food with trips to the supermarket. In this way, sharers participate in two kinds of consumption, whose differences are ideological as well as technical.

3 This element is not shared by all CSA farms, some of which opt for a more client-producer relationship.

introduce social responsibility into how one consumes, while providing a very hands-on learning experience for the sharer. It can also be seen as a way of affirming communitarian principles espoused by CSA. Second, the reality of seasonal rather than year long abundance and eventualities such as a poor harvest (considered drawbacks in the consumer-king market) are recast as values. That is, by accepting and respecting the realities of the environment, sharers affirm their commitment to it.

This is the theory, at any rate. Research that demonstrates if and how such change in attitude occurs is only beginning, though what has been done strongly recommends that these areas be explored, while cautioning for critical reflection in the research process.

Beyond the CSA model, the small-scale organic farm itself provides a frame for activities that consciously seek to integrate ecological philosophy⁴, localized knowledge, and sustenance work⁵. Research on using gardening as a site for learning (Mabie & Baker, 1996) suggests that science may be made relevant and authentic for learners, inviting them to *co-create* rather than *consume* a curriculum while stimulating dialogue to develop an environmental ethic. Though the idea of *environmental literacy* exists in academic writing (Orr, 1992) and in child education research (the work of Rudolph Steiner comes to mind), it is largely absent from adult education research. More broadly, literature in adult education (Lave and Wenger, 1991), environmental education (Orr, 1992; Donahue, 1994; Jorgensen, 1993), CSA and social movement theory (Imhoff, 1996; Cohen, 1985), geography (McTaggart, 1993), community development (Dorfman,

⁴ The terms "social ecology" and "ecosophy" are gaining coinage.

⁵ A term used by Hart (1993) to describe work that does not serve to underpin lifelong learning as a means to increasing productivity in a competitive global knowledge market.

1998), and literary essay (Berry, 1971) points to learning that is *localized* and *social*.

Such learning challenges the view of knowledge as a globally transposable commodity structurally separated from a knower. The presence of organic farms that combine work, social, and learning activities offer much potential to inform theory and practice in this area.

1.02 Research Problem

This research explores how participation in CSA constitutes a form of learning. What, if any, attitudes, knowledge, or skills are developed, and what acts or exchanges could such learning be traced to? More generally, how does such learning relate to current theories on transformative learning and social movement theory? Can such learning be considered a vehicle for attitude change, with special regard to the relationship between humans, food, and consumer activity? Responses to these questions could contribute to a coherent framework to conceive, plan, and carry out learning activities using organic farms and CSA as a key element.

1.03 Significance

North American society is characterized by the imperative for people to adapt to change. More than a superficial shifting of habits, one's willingness to change can be defined as a shift in attitude towards the purpose of learning and personal development. We are frequently told that we live in a knowledge-based economy; implicitly, learning becomes the accumulation of "knowledge capital". Furthermore, change is often defined with reference to a particular economic mindset: one that foregrounds competitive production and consumption of materials and knowledge as the highest of goods and most urgent of necessities:

By 1998, OECD's manifesto Learning to Be recast lifelong learning as continual education with the individual/student personally responsible for constant updating of his/her own employment skills. This marked a shift away from encouraging higher levels of education participation as a social policy goal, to encouraging work-related learning as a means of enhancing individual success and national competitiveness. This paradigm shift in the meaning of lifelong learning was linked with the obvious potential of Communication and Information Technologies... the growing importance of 'speed to market' in new technological products... and the knowledge explosion itself, which has seen exponential growth in specialized and increasingly large bodies of knowledge in established disciplines, and the emergence of new knowledge domains. (Ryan, 2000, pp.36-37, emphases in original).

The legitimacy of this orientation rests more upon the educational and economic structures that forward it than on any rational consideration of alternatives. Yet there are numerous voices that argue against the competitive global market, insisting that it impoverishes cultural and social diversity and perpetuates oppression, exploitation, and environmental degradation. Navigating these positions is about examining collectively held values – how are they formed and maintained? Seeing that values and ideologies feed into the economic and social structures that support them, we can ask what kind of learning might render this link more permeable to dialogue. Where can we see learning processes that go beyond a mere acquiescence to change, that question the values determining change, or that uncover changes linked to a different set of values? One response might be found in CSA. Given the ideals its literature espouses, this assumption is easily made. While giving the literature its due, this research nonetheless takes a more constrained approach. I seek neither to refute or confirm CSA's claims, but rather to advance its self-awareness by holding up a "research mirror", albeit a mirror limited by biases both methodological and my own. The approach is to consider CSA as an entity with self-awareness and internal dynamics.

1.04 Relevance to Education

In CSA, there are no learning objectives or curriculum. Any learning that takes place is largely informal. This distinction between informal and non-formal learning is useful here. Where the former is largely subconscious or serendipitous, the latter involves some structure and objectives; further, it is assumed that the participants recognize them (they know what they're getting into). Although CSA offers nothing so concrete, it is still a purposeful involvement in a process that seeks to cultivate a set of behaviours and attitudes. Numerous events in a CSA farm's season may be considered as sites for learning: information meetings with new members, social and harvest events, conferences and network publications, farm newsletters, farmer meetings, and the planning and implementation of the various seasonal tasks (distribution at drop-off points, for example). Some farms serve as sites for day- or even week long camps for kids, offer educational tours to members and tourists, and provide internship opportunities and/or social integration programs. Finally, it is the simplicity of CSA participation – its integration to one's lifestyle –that makes it an intriguing site for research on adult learning.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Material published within the CSA itself is largely about the practical, “how-to” aspects (Rowley, Tamsyn, and Beeman, 1994; Van En, 1992; Équiterre, 2000, Hunter, 2000). Market-based research points to CSA’s consumer benefits (Cooley and Lass, 1998). Research from a sociological perspective deals with the construction of collective identity (Rose, 2001), gender roles (Meares, 1997; DeLind and Ferguson, 1999), and other factors influencing participation (Kolodinsky and Pelch, 1997a-b; Suput, 1992). Drawing more on the CSA’s ideological claims, some writers make links to critical theory in development and globalization (Getz, 1995; Imhoff, 1993). Four areas are of particular significance to this research: *environmental education*, *bioregionalism*, *social movement theory*, and *transformative learning*. Following is a brief elaboration of each along with a summary of ideas that helped define my methodology. These areas will be returned to in chapter 5 in more detail, when their relevance to the research detailed in chapter 4 will be more clear.

2.01 *Environmental Education*

Most environmental education... does not even acknowledge the social construction of environment or invite challenges to the ideology that generates environmental problems.

Corcoran and Sievers, 1994, p.7.

Literature on environment and science education suggests that experiential learning in natural spaces has much potential (Donahue, 1994; Zelezny, 1999; Chawla, 1999). Donahue notes a dichotomy between the popular image of agriculture – that of the family farm, a rustic setting and an idyllic, wholesome lifestyle – and the reality of

agribusiness and residential development causing widespread disruption and damage to the landscape in its environmental, social, and cultural dimensions. “Although urbanites have a generally favorable attitude toward the idea of farming, their conception is sometimes disconnected from agricultural reality” (Donahue, 1994, p.4). Such an idyllic image combined with a disregard for the actual issues facing small-scale farmers does nothing to conserve small-scale farms or the ecosystems they sustain. Praising the “inherent educative nature of participation in CSA”, Donahue sees CSA as directly situated to address this ignorance: “It provides a fertile environment for critical environmental learning. CSA offers tremendous opportunities for environmental educators” (Donahue, 1994, p.7).

Orr (1992), Robertson (1994), Cairns (1995), and Corcoran and Sievers (1994) all argue that scientific-empirical knowledge alone is increasingly inadequate as a basis for environmental education. The assumption that the environment is something separate from those who study it is precisely what molds an attitude of indifference and fragmentation in our rapport with nature. A shift from empiricist to constructivist approaches in environmental education is called for. To foster knowledge that cares for the environment, we do not need abstracted factual information about the workings of ecosystems, but an understanding of *how people conceptualize their experience* of the environment.

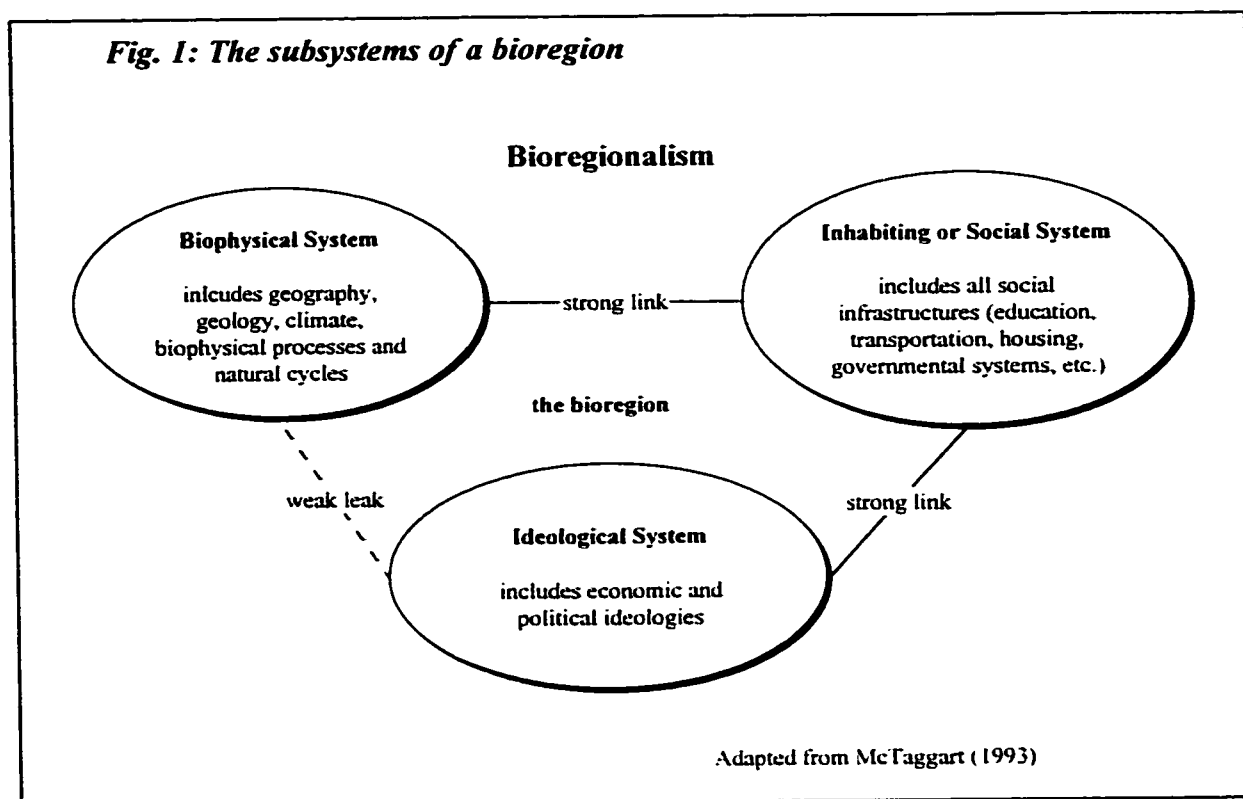
Similarly, ‘environmental problems’ are socially constructed, in terms of their conceptualized effects on human individuals, groups, and other living things and systems. There is...little research literature to inform our understanding of how others... conceptualize environment, environmental problems, and human-environment relationships. (Robertson, 1994, p.29).

Cairns (1995) links the atrophy in the biosphere's health to "qualitatively less intimate social interactions" with nature, this a result of Western social and technological development:

Individuals do not experience a direct dependence on natural systems for essential goods and services as in the past, and attitudes about the relationship between humans and nature are more dependent on various culturally transmitted beliefs about the nature of the world, particularly scientific, political, religious, or philosophical beliefs. (Cairns, 1995, p.5).

2.02 Bioregionalism

Closely related to environmental education, and of particular relevance to CSA, is *bioregionalism* (Fike and Kerr, 1995; Corcoran and Sievers, 1994; McTaggart, 1992; Sale, 1985). Bioregionalism is a model that integrates humans and all the interactions (natural, infrastructural, cultural) in a given geographical region. References to bioregionalism occur in literature on CSA, sustainable agriculture, and debates around development. Interpretations of bioregionalism range from wholehearted advocacy to doubtful critique (Sale, 1985, Fike and Kerr, 1995; Mason, et al. 1987; Frenkel, 1994). The model I have chosen here comes from McTaggart (1993). McTaggart's describes a bioregion as a complex system involving three spheres: the biophysical, inhabiting (or social), and ideological subsystems:



McTaggart suggests that our present economic ideologies control the flow of otherwise reciprocal interactions. They determine the social infrastructures, displace the knowledge of biophysical processes, and ultimately jeopardize the integrity of the bioregion. For example, the ideology of *maximizing agricultural productivity* justifies the creation of technologies of pesticides and their application, whose effects ultimately degrade the environment. What are lacking in our bioregions are ideologies responsive to the way natural spaces work (the broken line in the diagram). More technological solutions that do not address the ideologies that guide them are only bound to exacerbate this rupture. Mending it requires more than a simple iteration of environmental credos within the existing paradigm. McTaggart calls for

...a re-examination by human groups – human communities – of the way in which they have collectively structured their forms of differentiation... to dissolve the antagonistic differentiation which characterizes our common relations with the biological-physical environment. (McTaggart, 1993, p.314).

A little etymology illustrates this rupture well: ecology and economy have the same root (*eco-* meaning *home*). Ecology is the *knowledge of home*, economy, the *management of home*. Does the way we manage our home (that is, our dominant economic activities) respect our knowledge of its processes, particularly when the latter is, to say the least, sketchy? My own response, and that of environmental education, is an emphatic “No”.

2.03 Social Movement Theory and Adult Learning

The moment social movements are included as objects of analysis within [adult education's] boundary the old paradigm collapses... it bursts apart, unable to offer any explanation for intersubjective learning processes in all of the domains within society.

Michael Welton, 1995, p.132.

Research in social movement theory considers how collective identity is created, affirmed, and transformed (Cohen, 1985; Arato and Cohen, 1984; Offe, 1985). Explicitly concerned with issues of power, democracy, and exposing hegemonic structures, social movements contest “what knowledge is considered important, how it is generated, organized, legitimated, and distributed” (Kastner, 1993).

Much of adult education has its roots in social movements. Yet many educators concerned with social change identify a critical division in the field, between adult education for vocational training and adult education for social justice. In Canada, these goals were once seen to be compatible: the Antigonish movement, the farm forum, and various workers movements sought to “learn their way out of” situations of oppression

through work-related learning. But in the last decade there has been a growing recognition of adult education's hijacking by proponents of unfettered global capitalism (Welton, 1993, 1995a; Collins, 1995, Shied and Zacharakis-Jutz, 1993). The demands of economic growth, it is argued, have all but supplanted humanistic notions of adult education and reduced the field to the instrumental application of andragogy in the service of the dollar. It is further argued that learning of the kind evidenced in social movements has been purposefully omitted from the rubric of adult education so as to "deligitimize oppositional learning". This has resulted in feelings of deception and frustration within the field. To move beyond the deadlock, adult education is urged to look towards critical social theory, a move that can be unsettling.

We drift uneasily into relatively unknown waters. The new, or emergent social learning paradigm, would construct the boundary of the field as wide as society itself, and would include everything that forms the outlook, character, and actions of communicative agents in space and time (Welton, 1995b, p.134).

Central to this "emergent social learning paradigm" is the work of Jürgen Habermas and in particular the concept of the *lifeworld* (Habermas, 1984a,b). The lifeworld is a background of societal consensus: the "interactions woven into the fabric of everyday communicative practice [that] constitute the medium through which culture, society, and person get reproduced" (Habermas 1984b, p.137-38). These practices lend coherence and direction to everyday life. They are inherent to human learning; they need not be prescribed by any state or system apparatus. In fact, such an intrusion Habermas describes as a "pathological" violation of an otherwise adequate process of cultural reproduction. Habermas juxtaposes the lifeworld to "the system" that colonizes the lifeworld through "the monetary redefinition of goals, relations and services, life-spaces

lifeworld through “the monetary redefinition of goals, relations and services, life-spaces and life-times, and through the bureaucratization of decisions, duties and rights, responsibilities and dependencies” (p. 322).

Collins (1995) relates lifeworld to Ivan Illich’s (1983) concept of “the commons” – the “constantly threatened, yet still non-commodified customs, practical activities, and generative locations in our everyday lives which are so essential to our well-being” (Collins, 1995, p.79-80). He recommends that adult educators learn from environmentalist groups that oppose encroachment into the lifeworld through “reclamation of valuable community-oriented aspects of everyday life” (p. 79).

The marginalization of emancipatory learning in adult education can also be seen to parallel the rise of human capital theory as a guiding principle in economic development. Briefly, human capital theory is a kind of social engineering in which people are seen as possessing productive capacity that can and ought to be augmented by constant productivity-oriented learning – thus the oft-heralded “knowledge-based economy”⁶. A similar argument, one of particular relevance to this research, is offered in Zacharakis-Jutz’s (1996) case critique of how adult education’s purblind focus on human capital does nothing to stymie the death of Iowa’s rural farming communities. He expands the human capital paradigm to include *physical capital*, *environmental capital*, and *social capital*, the latter being such values as voice in community decisions and openness to participation. Rather than occupying themselves with “technical functional adult education”, adult educators, he suggests, ought to enhance *social capital* by facilitating dialogue.

⁶ Human capital theory, and its peculiar relation to both agriculture and adult education, will be revisited in Chapter 5.

From a perspective of social psychology, Chavis and Wandersman (1990) examine how *sense of community* (an explicit goal of CSA) acts as a catalyst for collective action. They recommend the appreciation of “human ecologies” to enhance democratic participation in decision-making processes. As with environmental education, they call for social psychology to get beyond issues of methodology and research and partake in the knowledge its research attempts to create: “Our greatest challenge lies not in how to effectively research empowerment but how to participate in it and encourage it...” (p.77).

So just as adult education is looking toward (or back toward) the insights of social movement learning, many researchers in sociology concerned with change are looking at participatory adult learning. The lifeworld provides a common conceptual ground, a field composed of “customs, practical activities, and generative locations in our everyday lives which are so essential to our well-being”. Community Supported Agriculture, foregrounding the everyday, practical, and localized activity of how we nourish ourselves, appeals precisely to this dynamic.

Yet despite the abundance of literature in environmental education, social movement theory, and CSA itself that points towards CSA’s potential to foster critical collective identity, there is a paucity of research that actually demonstrates that it does! Rose’s (2001) study of the Montreal CSA network is particularly relevant. Rose gives a much more nuanced portrait of how sharers value their participation⁷. Based on open-ended interviews with farm sharers, Rose notes that sharers have a host of *commonly held* concerns and values (physical health, information on food and how it is produced, the

integral-ness of food to domestic and work sphere). Nonetheless, Rose concludes that these values are *individually*, rather than *collectively* construed.

A sharing of perspectives among CSA sharers is absent, while this social framework seems to exist among farmers... [Sharers'] alimentary practices are continually reinvented... [Their] critiques of health and nourishment do not seem to take the form of a collective organization, but rather, an individual social appropriation. (Rose, 2001, p.154, my translation).

In other words, sharers do not, as a rule, engage in dialogue with one another to affirm values relating to CSA participation, despite the expressed presence of these values in CSA literature! After three years of being a farm sharer myself, I'd have to agree: although my own farm has over 200 sharers, I only know about half a dozen by name. Nonetheless, a more low-key dialogue does go on. DeLind and Ferguson's focus group interviews with farm members in Michigan illustrate this:

On deeper reflection, many participants... saw their involvement as something more than resistance... One woman labeled this effort 'a quiet form of activism.' While she, unlike others, saw it as having political implications, such activism had no formal or public agenda. It was not like a boycott, a rally, or a lawsuit... It was not intent on exposing, deconstructing, or reforming the existing system... Rather the idea was to build something new, in particular new relationships to food and the environment. They were following no prepared blueprint. The organization they were creating was an outgrowth of many individuals, each pursuing alternatives in a quiet, personal manner. (DeLind and Ferguson, 1999b, pp.196-7)⁸.

So a fascinating picture emerges when we look at CSA through the lenses of learning in social movements. On the one hand, social learning that builds collective identity through dialogue is heralded as a way of seeing through a dogma fixed on economic productivity. On the other hand, research suggests that participation in CSA is

⁷ Rose's research was also carried out, quite by chance, parallel to my own. Having met at a conference on CSA, we were thus able to exchange at length throughout the research period.

⁸ It is worth noting that the focus group environment is itself a space for the expression of collective identity. Both Rose's and DeLind and Ferguson's studies use qualitative and in-depth methods with relatively small samples; their respective conclusions should not be taken as generalizable, but rather, generative of new lines of inquiry.

best characterized as soft, quiet, and personal. The element of overt political critique in the form of dialogue between farm sharers is not really evident! And yet, CSA appears regularly in overtly counter-hegemonic literature (Mander and Goldsmith, 1996; Mongeau, 1998; Esteva and Prakash, 1997). It makes me think of a T-shirt I saw at a CSA meeting: the iconic image of Ché Guevera with the motto: “Join the Revolution! Community Supported Agriculture Now!” Yet CSA sharers are not *unified by one model*: on the contrary, they pride the diversity of methods used by different CSA farms!

2.04 Transformative Learning

Learning is a process of constructing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience as a guide to awareness, feeling, and action.

Jack Mezirow, 1991, p.35.

When it comes to learning that leads to attitude change, Jack Mezirow’s theory of *transformative learning* comes immediately to the fore. This section briefly summarizes the theory and its relation to the lifeworld.

Transformative learning sees learning as a process of making sense of our lives. When we encounter events we subject them to a process of scanning and association with known categories. In this way we develop a set of expectations that guide our actions. We gradually render a kind of interior landscape that sets out what we recognize as meaningful. Just as importantly, this landscape delimits what we *do not* recognize as meaningful. What is meaningful is *that which lends coherence to our experiences*. An encounter with something unknown will be acknowledged to the extent that it fits with our expectations. Something quite incompatible – something we experience as *incoherent* – may pass unnoticed, be instinctively ignored or consciously rejected, or if its

presence is strong enough, it may eventually force a shift in the way we make sense, what Mezirow calls a “transformation of a meaning structure”.

Mezirow identifies two components to the processes of construing meaning: presentational and propositional. Where the former involves sensory perception and is pre-conceptual, the latter involves attaching a concept or symbol to the phenomenon experienced. “Both forms of construal become modified through experience and, obviously, are highly interactive” (p. 24). They can be summarized thus:

Presentational Construal	Propositional Construal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-linguistic. • Associated with perception of space, time, form, movement, dimension, direction, sequence, etc. • Tends to tacit meanings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of language. • Associated with cognition and involves things in terms of concepts and categories. • Tends to explicitly understood meanings.

(adapted from Mezirow, 1991, pp. 24-25).

It is across these two fields of meaning making that transformative learning occurs. What is absolutely essential in Mezirow’s theory, however, is *critical reflection* and *rational discourse* on meaning structures. Mezirow outlines the following ideal conditions for rational discourse and critical reflection to take place. The individual must:

- have accurate and complete information
- be free from coercion and distorting self-deception
- be able to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively
- be open to alternative perspectives
- be able to become critically reflective upon presuppositions and their consequences
- have equal opportunity to participate (including the chance to challenge, question, refute, and reflect and to hear others do the same), and

- be able to accept an informed, objective, and rational consensus as a legitimate test of validity.

(Mezirow, 1991, p.77-78)

2.05 Summary

From environmental education research, we get a strong rejection of empirical approaches to environmental knowledge and calls for an understanding of how people conceive their environment. From bioregionalism, we have a framework that presents three interrelated components of one's environment: ideological, social, and biophysical. We are encouraged to examine the destructive imbalance among these components. Social movement theory draws a portrait of social learning that involves reciprocity between diverse life activities, a kind of learning that eludes categorization under cognitive functioning. Finally, transformative learning provides a model whereby the underlying assumptions about diverse life activities come into question.

In terms of research, the direction is clear. CSA is poorly understood as a static phenomenon or as a unidirectional movement. Meares (1997) recommends that CSA not just "plow ahead simply on the basis of mobilizing more and more resources" (p. 45), but pause to consider how it is constructed from within. Similarly, DeLind and Ferguson suggest that most research is limited by a focus on CSA's "radical tenets" and "operational pragmatics" and misses the opportunity to get into the skin of CSA to understand how "involvement in CSA cuts across, confounds, and articulates with other aspects (and definitions) of people's lives" (p. 195). In a less academic vein, Wendell Berry (1970) suggests that

The discipline proper to agriculture, which survives not just by production but also by the return of wastes to the ground, is not economics but ecology. And ecology may well find its proper disciplines in the arts, whose function is to refine

and enliven perception, for ecological principle, however publicly approved, can be enacted only upon the basis of each man's perception of his relation to the world (Berry, 1970, p.100).

There emerges an overwhelming set of ideas about what orientation research should take. A reliance on a positivist-empiricist framework has limitations (and detrimental effects, it is suggested). Instead, more constructivist and phenomenological approaches are called for. Furthermore, research is advised to question how, where, and for what purposes knowledge is created and validated.

This points to the potential of critically reflective research to inform learning processes that defy knowledge as an empirically measurable and commodifiable pursuit, suggesting instead knowledge – at once environmental, cultural, social, and economic – as a locally-rooted acting on values, as critically informed *living*.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The way a question is asked limits and disposes the ways in which any answer to it – right or wrong – may be given.

Susanne Langer, 1942, p.3.

3.01 Methodology and Theory

This research draws on phenomenology (Cohen, Louis and Manion 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Sherman and Webb, 1988) and reflective practice (Usher, Bryant, and Johnston, 1997). The rationale for this approach should by now be clear.

Phenomenology deals with how meaning and value are construed through interaction in society. Reflective research practice demands a constant inquiry into how the researcher's own participation filters and influences the meanings generated. The literature reviewed concurs that the researcher-as-participant is a suitable methodology. McTaggart (1993), for example, sees bioregionalism as "an active way of understanding and participating in self-organizing systems rather than as a form of knowledge about something" (p. 308). As I would quickly become aware, however, participation in CSA extremely heterogeneous: some sharers desire no involvement other than to pick up their weekly basket while others regularly participate in farm activities. This heterogeneity immediately disrupts the notion that CSA members have a shared understanding of what participation is about.

This poses an interesting challenge: to combine reflective, participatory research with phenomenological methodology to better understand how people learn through a highly informal and integrated practice.

3.02 Study Group

As this research is aimed at understanding learning processes within a fairly complex system, some elaboration is necessary about the different participants and the Montreal CSA network.

There are currently 50 farms in the Montreal CSA network, serving a total of approximately 5,000 sharers. The network is coordinated by a non-profit organization, *Équiterre*, whose mandate is to promote socially just and ecologically sustainable choices. *Équiterre* establishes connections with new sharers, advocates for CSA awareness, develops the network internationally, and coordinates farmer and sharer reunions. In fact, CSA farms had been operating in Québec prior to 1996, but in a much-limited capacity. As one farmer put it, *Équiterre* allows farmers to make contact with a much greater membership. Once farmers establish a link with members, most communication occurs directly between them, with *Équiterre* playing a background, facilitating role. The farms themselves have between 50 and 300 members each, and place varying emphasis on member participation in each farm's social, communication, and work activities. The network has grown rapidly in the last five years. In November, 2000, a three-day conference in Lac Superieur, Québec⁹ served as an opportunity to pause and take stock of its progress.

The research subjects here are as much the learning sites (the farms, the drop-off points where people come to get their vegetables, and other meeting points) as the people involved. In terms of people, this research involves contact with farm sharers, farmers, farm employees and student interns, CSA network organizers (*Équiterre*), and other

people interested in, but not directly participating in, CSA. Significantly, I consider myself as an integral part of the study group, as my own participation constitutes part of the dynamic that takes place.

3.03 Data Collection and Presentation

This research project involves a large and varied study group active in numerous informal and non-formal educational exchanges that are integrated with their daily lives. To best address this complexity, I've used a wide range of data collection techniques: interviews, observations, document surveys, participant reflection, and personal narrative. This has all taken place over two years at a number of sites: farms, conferences, drop-off points, at home and on the road. Appendix I provides an overview of these elements. This thesis is a narrative of these events, layered in a context of current and evolving theory and personal reflection. Accordingly, the layout invites some permeability among these layers, while still following a fairly conventional sequence: literature review, research description, analysis.

Chapter 4. Research

In all the sciences - social and natural - the gaze is one-way. The knower's ratio is the stable centre from which everything and everyone is observed and known. The world to be known is separated from the world to be lived; knower and known are divided as are self and Other, cognition and emotion. Knowledge is pursued for knowledge's sake so that regenerative (or procreative) concerns have no place. The non-human world is not an interlocutor, not a sentience with whom one converses, not a being (or beings) whose integrity must be respected, not a sentience to nurture and be nurtured by. Knowledge is not an activity, not a living, not a mutual interaction.

Frédérique Apfell-Marglin, 1997, p.42

4.01 Introduction: How this Research Came About

My original interest in CSA was as a farm sharer. It was only after a year that I began to think of CSA as a framework for learning. At that point I began to pay more attention to my own observations, to look back on the previous year with more curiosity, and to structure my participation as research. A journal entry from this period reflects this questioning:

Of course, it would be easy (easier!) to just come up with a standard research problem and question – something about getting one's hands dirty. Or sharing responsibility. Then set up a before and after, a questionnaire, find the "study group" that would correspond to what I would like to "discover", and away I go. Altogether, that would make things tidy... but being in the university nourishes a particular kind of knowledge (even limited)... what kind of knowledge would I like to make space for? (January, 2001).

The idea to make CSA the focus of my research evolved quite quickly. From the literature, there was an abundant field of theory that had only skirted CSA enough to realize its relevance: what Donahue (1994) describes as the "inherent educative nature" of participation in CSA.

At the same time, I had a certain deal of resistance to "doing research" as an autonomous, privileged academic pursuit. This was partly due to the readings

themselves. For example, I became interested in *participatory action research* (Hall, 1981), which combines the role of researcher and participant in collaboration with other participants to advance a transformative or creative process in a community. The co-option of the socially embedded knowledge under the rubric of academic research serves only to disempower communities and bottle up what is otherwise a fecund, living process. Instead, research ought to flourish within communities:

The primary product of this kind of research [bioregional learning, or praxis] is not an academic bioregional monograph (though such is not excluded either). Rather it is a capability in the community to consider, evaluate, and determine. While a community may either conduct its own research or 'employ' a specialist to carry it out, it has to retain ownership of the findings and perspectives generated, and not have them appropriated by a distant research entity, remote from the concerns of the local populace. (McTaggart, 1993, p.317).

However, the community in the case of CSA, as I gradually found out, was far from cohesive or unitary, with each CSA member appropriating her participation in a rather individualistic fashion. Further, *relating to one's food system* does not strike everyone as a process of *learning*. The educational nature of participation in CSA that Donahue sees as inherent was scarcely recognized by CSA members themselves: time and again, my explanation – “I’m looking at the educational aspect of being a CSA sharer” – was met with blank stares. Of course, subsequent elaboration most always led to some recognition and even enthusiasm. Moreover, the point is that “education ~ CSA” was not an association immediately or consciously held by a group of people sharing a clearly defined set of values. This made it difficult to visualize a research process that would satisfy the criteria for “participatory action research” the literature seemed to be calling for.

This difficulty in settling on a research approach is evident in my early notes.

For example, I decided to omit the following paragraph, written two years ago, from the original paper that led to this research:

Originally, I had posed myself the question: to what extent does participation in CSA constitute a form of transformative learning? Or is CSA just a kind of 'niche market', a convenient vehicle for people whose values dispose them to take part? My intention was then to test this question against the study group through some conventional means: questionnaires, surveys, before-and-after interviews, etc. However, the more I became involved with CSA and researched pertinent literature, the less appealing this approach seemed. If the research process is to have any value to transformative learning (which is my intention), then it should do more than either refute or confirm pre-determined possibilities. The literature suggested much the same thing.

An entry from my journal at this time is more candid:

But even as the thrill of these academic gymnastics was in full swing, part of me is thinking – is this all that research can be? A gratuitous referencing of theories and case studies, to be ultimately preserved in professional journals, ensconced in libraries, read by relatively few, probably for the purpose of their own academic gymnastics? Is this the best I could hope for – the addition of my own, committee-approved (methodologically sound, of course!) case study to this indifferent, massive, and supposedly benevolent pool of “knowledge”? I was still learning about, writing around, reflecting on. Could I relate with any certainty the essence of my interest? What did I really understand? I was still standing apart from my own experience, in a way, and the “growing body of literature” was becoming a weight. If this research is to be thought of as “taking the plunge”, it certainly won't consist of splashing around in the same comfortable waters that surround, but never quite permeate, what I wish to know.

More significant than these passages themselves is the fact that I decided to omit them from early drafts. This omission is indicative of a dual dialogue: on the one hand, a “clean” research process (wherein, so I thought, the research is situated among established methodologies, data is subjected to rigorous analysis, and any partiality of the researcher and results is tidily accounted for in a section called “limitations”); and on the other hand, a “dirty” dialogue between myself, the CSA network, and my researcher ego (i.e., what I *really* thought of the whole process). I call this a “dirty” dialogue because it

has the quality of being uncontrolled, venturing into ground that felt academically suspect, and exposing my apprehensions about the process.

I thus proceeded as a researcher/participant with a certain ambiguity as to what that meant. While participating as a farm sharer, I also had one foot firmly in the autonomous, academic domain of educational research; or rather, I had *stable footing* in this world. At the same time, my CSA participation was adequate in its own right: personally enriching and occasionally presenting opportunities for exchange with other members. Rather than setting out to resolve this ambiguity by conforming my participation/research to a model of qualitative or participatory action research, I decided to maintain the dual dialogue of “clean” and “dirty” research, keep a parallel journal of notes for myself, to blend them together and see what would emerge. I drew on a model of self-reflective research presented by Usher, et al. (1997). By admitting to the reciprocal influences of situational and dispositional factors, this approach favours a regenerative rather than linear model that resembles what I thought of as a “dirty” as opposed to “clean” research practice. As this model also suits the multi-faceted character of CSA, I adopted it to the research.

Accordingly, the research shifts from a perspective of an intentional research activity (an interview, document survey, or participant observation) to the more narrative and spontaneous point of view of a participant, or more specifically, of *my* participation. It is my intention to illustrate my bias as something that cut across the research throughout its course rather than an add-on that I sought to isolate or minimize. The following chapter sub-sections deal with my observations as a participant/researcher for a

period of 3 years (1999-2001) in the Montreal CSA network. The final sub-section will revisit the idea of this dual dialogue.

4.02 My first year as a member

In 1999 I became a sharer with a farm. A roommate was at the time a member and asked me if I would be interested in splitting the cost of a weekly basket. I knew what CSA was from some reading (Imhoff, 1996) and I agreed immediately. Usually it was my roommate who went to pick up our vegetables, though I went a couple times. The drop-off point was just in front of another sharer's apartment on a residential street in Montreal. I recall feeling a bit suspicious about this ad-hoc market that materialized once a week for a few hours and then disappeared. I also recall remarking on the social atmosphere at the drop-off point. Some people milled about and chatted while picking up the vegetables, others like me just came by, had their name ticked off, and moved on. Once, my roommate came back with the vegetables and said that the farm was planning a volunteer day and that we were not obliged but *encouraged* to lend a hand with the harvest. I felt an instinctive resistance, along with a tinge of guilt. Although I supported CSA's principles and was not a stranger to volunteering for other things, there was something about giving up my Saturday that transgressed my idea of what my participation was to be. My conditioning as a food consumer did not have space for a "non-value" activity such as volunteering at a farm!

4.03 A personal narrative

Several months later I undertook a narrative-writing exercise as part of a research methods course wherein we were to write very spontaneously, without self-editing, about a critical incident relating to our current research interest in education. I chose an

incident about a family reunion around a dinner table. In writing it I realized that the food we ate played a significant role, a kind of constant that bridged generations, language, culture, and change (see appendix 2: The Soup).

The narrative's references to societal change and a vague sense of unease are counterbalanced by references to the family meal and the soup as a constant, a value perhaps taken too much for granted. The narrative has no direct relation to education or learning. Rather, it calls attention to a particular incident that I use, quite consciously, as a touchstone to reflect on my research practice, which also happens to concern food and critical reflection on societal change. In the subsequent interviews and observations that constituted much of the research, I kept an ear open for narratives that superficially had little to do with CSA or food, but which may serve as contexts for other members' participation.

4.04 Observations from a CSA Conference

In November, 2000, the Montreal CSA network held a conference on CSA. Organized by Équiterre, this three-day event brought together about 250 farmers, sharers, and organic agriculture enthusiasts from Quebec, other parts of Canada, and the United States. Twenty-seven workshops were carried out to address a variety of subjects, from genetically-modified organisms to basket pricing strategies to increasing farm sharers' involvement. Logistically, I was limited to participate in just seven workshops, including one that I co-animated on the subject of the educational role of CSA. I kept notes on each and have grouped the main themes that emerged thematically as follows:

(i) *Building a Loyal Partnership*

A study of membership in the Québec CSA network (Équiterre, 2001) found that the sharer retention rate varied between 23% and 86%. The subsequent analysis was unable to find any viable link between the number of years of farm experience and the sharer retention rate: the variation was spread equally among CSA farms with 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8 years of experience. A questionnaire (96 respondents from 12 different farms) provided more anecdotal reasons as to why sharers discontinue: dissatisfaction with the quantity, quality, diversity of baskets, lack of communication with the farmer, or inconvenience of the drop-off time or locale. Reasons for sharers discontinuing cited by farmers include sharers moving and incongruence between what sharers expected and the how the farms actually functioned (the constraints of fixed drop off points, for example). This study addresses a very real concern for farmers. A high retention rate expresses sharers' satisfaction, permits the development of a loyalty and personal acquaintances, contributes to farm's financial security, and saves much energy otherwise spent in finding new members. Not surprisingly, the issue of sharer loyalty was a recurring theme in the conference: how can a farm ensure the return of a dependable base of sharers from year to year willing to accept the risks and rewards of the organic farm, who will continue supporting their farm despite the possibility of meager harvests certain years?

Some suggestions to this question focused on farmers' responsibilities towards sharers:

- **Keep sharers well informed.** Farmers do this through a variety of means, ranging from the more social (harvest meals, making personal contact at the drop-off point) to the more formal (price lists detailing the contents of each week's basket and the

comparative price of the same organic produce bought in the market).

- Provide high-quality produce. I came to see this as a point of honour among the farmers, one that often took on the tones of a client-producer relationship. Sharers were referred to more often as “clients” whose desires and consumer tastes must be respected: “*providing a quality product for the client*”, as one farmer put it.
- Adhere to the standards of certification for organic food¹⁰. Farmers who follow organic practices to the letter but who are not officially certified run a great risk if they advertise themselves as organic. Organic certification in North America has only recently (in 1999) been harmonized to an internationally-recognized standard; advertising one’s produce as “organic”, “biological”, “all-natural”, or a host of other terms without certification is illegal. Moreover, it was felt that organic authenticity was the basis of a farm’s credibility in the eyes of the sharers. Indeed, my subsequent observations of interactions between potential sharers and farmers at start-up meetings almost invariably confirmed this.

These points all relate to a fairly conventional market paradigm, wherein the sharer is seen as a consumer whose needs or desires (for authentic information as well as well-priced, quality food) must be met by the producer. Unfortunately, there were no farm sharers at this workshop to voice their ideas on what factors would make them more loyal sharers - an absence that is itself significant. From market research that asks sharers what makes them loyal, we get the same predictable answers: quality, quantity, and communication with their farmer (Block, 1998a,b; Harrington, 1998). As significant as these points may be, returning to them to answer the question of sharer loyalty doesn’t do

much to advance an understanding of how sharers *come to value their participation* as distinct from that in the conventional market. In other words, all this can be said to measure are particular consumers' attitudes at the time of surveying; little is learned about how peoples' attitudes evolve or change as a function of their participation in CSA.

More divergent suggestions for enhancing sharer participation came out of a workshop on *core groups* (definition follows).

- Give sharers responsibility. The quantity and diversity of work that goes into operating a CSA farm is enormous. Beyond the work at the farm itself, there is the entire dimension of communication with members, publicity, information start-up meetings at the beginning of the season, keeping membership records, writing up weekly recipes and newsletters to put in the baskets, organizing volunteer days and social events with all the logistics this entails, transportation and drop-off of food, etc. Much of this work is based in the city or may be done anywhere (web-site maintenance, for example) and so, is easily delegated to members. One farmer advocated a very direct approach: get the members together, give the list of everything to be done, bluntly explain that help is needed, and divide up the work. She actually recommends brainstorming as many tasks as possible so as to emphasize, rather than obviate, sharers' potential responsibilities. One way to do this is through "core groups": groups composed of a few sharers and perhaps the farmer who take on much of the organizing/communication aspect of CSA. Only a few farms in the Montreal CSA network have core groups, though most farms have members who are more involved, usually who offer their porches or garages as drop-

¹⁰ Theoretically, there is no reason why CSA farms must be organic; it just so happens to have evolved that way. Many farms across

off points and may help with the distribution (“drop-off point coordinators”). One such coordinator, present at the workshop, expressed frustration at not knowing where to start to get people more involved.

- **Involve food.** A farmer from the U.S. described the variety of farm-based activities that he used to insure member participation: workshops in food transformation and conservation in the autumn, food fairs open to the community at large, taste tests to guess at the different varieties of tomatoes, thematic pot-lucks, etc. What was essential, he stressed, was that everything had to do with food: *“Food is always at the centre”*. Exceptionally involved, his farm's sharers actually come out weekly to pick most of the vegetables themselves!

Stories of sharer loyalty were offered by one farmer who recounted a particularly horrible year (horrible for a variety of reasons ranging from bad weather to machinery trouble) in which she considered returning all of the members' money rather than providing a pitiful harvest. To her surprise, members insisted on sticking out the bad year and shouldering the loss together, in some cases even offering more for their baskets to help offset the next year's start-up costs! Such anecdotal accounts serve an important role in reflecting the spirit envisioned for CSA, and provide a look into sharers' commitment rarely afforded by questionnaires that take the form of market or satisfaction surveys.

(ii) *Plurality of approaches to insure openness*

Repeatedly encountered in CSA literature is an *emphasis on diversity*: each farm has its own mode of functioning; what works for one may not work for another. This

valuing of diversity was reconfirmed in the context of farms' strategies for insuring member loyalty. For example, one farmer had very little direct contact with the sharers, preferring instead to have a very responsive contact through telephone, Internet, and leaflets inserted into weekly baskets. In contrast, another sought to have frequent visits to the farm from members. What is interesting is that each voiced respect for the other's method. When in the course of workshops a general awareness emerged that certain farms have a much more distanced relationship with their members, this was invariably accepted as a good thing, a diversity that opens the door for a wider participation and ultimately makes the movement richer.

Keeping participation widespread was a concern that repeatedly emerged in the course of workshops. Several participants expressed their apprehension that CSA become an exclusive practice. "*Who all is really being served?*" asked one participant. "*I don't want to only reach people who already go for organic!*" explained a farmer just starting up. Making CSA a viable option for families of varying incomes were also voiced as concerns¹¹. This reflects a concern that CSA risks to "*stagnate*", functioning solely within groups of people who happen to have the means and values that dispose them to participate. The concern becomes more acute when CSA is treated as a social movement with objectives of popular education.

The dialogue on member loyalty – indeed, most of the conference dialogue – was dominated by established CSA farmers or those making the transition to CSA. Relatively few regular farm sharers turned out to the conference, despite publicizing it by way of

¹¹ Variably-priced baskets is one method: sharers who are willing to pay more than the regular cost of a basket, the collective extras are pooled to offset the cost for members who cannot afford the regular cost. "Working shares" are another strategy: basket prices are lower for members who pledge a certain number of hours work at the farm across the season.

flyers in all farm baskets and despite efforts made to design the workshops according to feedback from a survey. This illustrates how CSA as a movement is largely driven by farmers. The concern for increased sharer participation, or at least for a clearer idea of how sharers feel about their participation, is for pragmatic reasons quite apart from the interests outlined by environmental educators.

(iii) *Learning in CSA*

During the conference I co-animating a workshop on the educational role of CSA with a farmer, Madelaine Roussel, and a social work professor, Jean Panet-Raymond. Attended by a dozen participants, this workshop consisted of a round of brief introductions, followed by a description of some of the educational activities at the Cadet-Roussel farm and my own observations (based on readings and personal experience) on how experience of the farm atmosphere might affect one's attitude towards the environment, consumption, and the value of food. The rest of the workshop took the form of brainstorming in small groups what the participants felt was to be learned in CSA, finally sharing our key observations with the entire group. The following points were raised:

- The learning that is required of the would-be CSA farmer came up as a subject. One participant spoke of his plan to develop a "farm incubator", essentially a program to facilitate the transition to and development of CSA and organic farming. Very enthusiastic, he envisioned fostering local partnerships to create alternatives to conventional market farming and recognized andragogy as inherent to his vision "*Andragogy, that's it, exactly what I mean!*" He cautioned against a dependence on "expert" agricultural knowledge (too attached, he felt, to the imperatives of market

capitalism), emphasizing instead a reliance on local know-how to address local issues.

- The value of food was redefined for some. One participant (a farm sharer) explained the value of learning about food through a narrative: He had always balked at the price of a cord of firewood until one day he helped a friend cut several cords and he learned (physically) just how much work was involved. Since that time, he felt a renewed respect for the products of manual work. This, he felt, is exactly the case with his attitude towards food in CSA: participating allowed him to recognize and appreciate the tremendous amount of work that goes into producing vegetables.
- Two participants were involved in farms that had an educational/therapeutic function¹². Both felt that the farm had great potential as a site for developing cooperation, responsibility, and technical skills that could benefit individuals from economically or socially marginalized backgrounds. They were enthused by the prospect of academic research that could legitimize these potentials.
- Visiting an organic farm was felt to be most educational for children. Many participants admitted to having to grapple with their kids' food preferences and being increasingly concerned that they learn to eat well. Participants readily related stories of kids who believed that milk came from cartons and the plastic wrapping was "*part of the pepper*". Several people felt that when children eat nothing but prefabricated, and industrially produced food they never develop an appreciation for the value of growing food. They wondered how activities in CSA might influence attitudes at an early age. The intent was not, they felt, to unilaterally eliminate non-organic food

from kids' worlds out of an irrational mistrust, but rather to play an active role in mediating the quality of their children's nourishment and their understanding of the ecology and work that underlies producing what we eat. I related to the participants how one study on "lifepaths into environmental action" found that childhood experience of natural areas plays a significant role in orienting people's commitment to environmental causes later in life. (Chawla, 1999)¹³. This comment was received with general head-nodding.

At this point it is worth exploring a tangent: Waldorf education. Briefly, Waldorf education is a holistic approach to child education developed by Rudolph Steiner that emphasizes creative expression and experience of natural spaces. It is a response to a perceived imbalance in conventional children's education that over-emphasizes purely academic skills. Steiner is also credited with developing *biodynamic farming*, a method that seeks to harmonize agricultural practice with natural, cosmological, and spiritual forces at play in the environment. The biodynamic farm can be seen as an ecosystem where care is taken to respect all energy flows within the system; it's function is to *heal* rather than *exploit* the vitality of the soil. CSA is occasionally mentioned in the context of biodynamic farming.

One of the farms in the CSA network is certified biodynamic (the Cadet-Roussel farm, represented by Madelaine Roussel in the workshop) and regularly serves as a site for school visits from a Waldorf-style school initiated by the local community. By and large, however, the other farms in the CSA network are not biodynamic or explicitly

¹² One of these farms (The Cap St. Jacques ecological farm) would later serve as a site where I volunteered and carried out informal interviews with participants.

¹³ Footnote: among a group of (56) respondents chosen as environmentally active, 70% recognize childhood experience of natural areas as key to their subsequent commitment to environmental causes.

educational in nature. The angle is still worth mentioning because the philosophy of Rudolph Steiner (who also wrote on society, philosophy, medicine, knowledge, spirituality, and just about all other fields) frequently appears on the periphery of CSA events, at information kiosques.

In retrospect, the workshop I helped facilitate could itself be seen a means of education: providing a semi-structured forum for dialogue on the value of participation in CSA. The relevance of having such spaces for exchange would become increasingly evident as the research drew on.

4.05 Start-up Meetings

Start-up meetings are held in early spring. Organized by the farms, these meetings are attended by past and potential farm members. The idea of CSA is explained, either by the farmer or by a representative of Équiterre. The farmer then explains the details of the upcoming season: history of the farm, its products, basket prices, drop-off points, contingencies for missed pick-ups, the members' contract, and the possibility of farm visits and volunteer days. Past members are occasionally present to share a word on their experience. Questions are asked and answered, and registration and payment for the season is then taken care of. Depending on the turnout the whole process can take up to two hours or more (one meeting was attended by over 150 potential sharers!) For many farm sharers, the start-up meeting is their only participation apart from picking up their weekly basket. Start-up meetings generally represent the largest single gathering of farm sharers throughout the season. More than any other event, these meetings deal directly with members' concerns about how CSA works. The dialogue between farmers and

sharers and among sharers is observable, providing some insights into the concerns that various participants share.

I attended 4 start-up meetings and kept notes on each. I have grouped my observations under four categories:

- i) **Content:** What concerns do sharers have? What information do they want to get out of the meeting? What information do sharers bring to the meeting to share with others?
- ii) **Dynamic:** What patterns of interaction occur? How could the dialogue be described? What is the mood of the exchange?
- iii) **Values:** What emphasis is put on the principles of CSA, particularly as they relate to a conventional market system?
- iv) **My own reflections:** How was my understanding of CSA enhanced?

(i) *Content*

By far, the greatest proportion of time at start-up meetings is taken up in the clarifying the technical aspects of CSA functioning: drop-off points and times, size of baskets, variety of vegetables, the changing cycle of basket contents depending on the time of the season, the possibility of special orders, etc. The dialogue through which these technical aspects are clarified reveals two major bases of reference. Consistently, the sharers' questions relate to their *desire* for convenience, flexibility, and variety of produce, while the farmer's explanations deal with the *reality* of organic farming that instead demands a tolerance for uncertainty. The two groups' understandings of CSA are different. A few examples serve to illustrate this:

- A sharer asks how big the baskets are. The answer, invariably, is "*it depends on the season*". Farmers take pains to explain that in CSA, the contents and quantity of the

summer basket varies significantly from June to October. A similar question frequently comes up: “*How many people does a basket feed?*” The answer: “*It depends on the people*” illustrates again how the sharer’s interests are dominated by a concern for security. But from the perspective of the farmer, accepting a certain ambiguity with regards to the quantity, diversity, and availability of certain vegetables is simply part of organic farming.

- A farmer explains what veggies are produced and circulates a seed buyers' catalogue full of colorful pictures. I notice that farmers do not give a comprehensive list of their farm's products. Instead, they name about a dozen from memory, are reminded of others, and generalize the rest (“*We'll have the basic fine herbs, maybe two or three varieties of squash later in the year...*”). With my own two years of participation as a sharer, I understand that this casualness is not forgetfulness on the part of the farmer, but rather, a realistic perspective that counts on certain vegetables and varieties not faring so well. I note that when farmers do name their produce, sharers are particularly attentive and frequently pose questions of the nature “*Will we have X [vegetable]?*” I suppose this is because this information is the most concrete and recognizable reference new sharers have.
- A new sharer asks “*If we go to the farm, what exactly will we do for work?*” The response, once again, is “*It depends - we have a rough schedule but if it rains on a particular day, then we'll find something else to do. There's always something to do.*” At this point, I began to notice how so many of the farmers' responses took the form of “*it depends...*” determined by the weather or other environmental concerns.

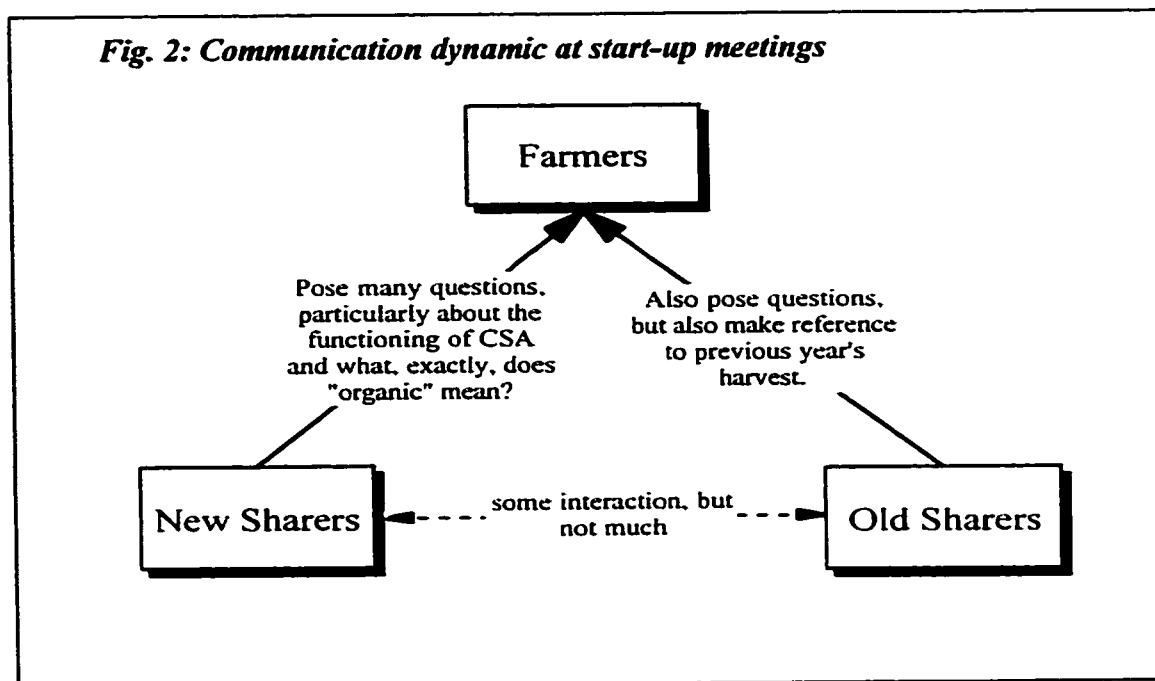
- A sharer asks: “*Can I change some vegetables for other ones?*” This question stimulates a discussion on sharer’s preferences. Often, past sharers offer comments: “*We had so many potatoes last year, I didn’t know what to do with all of them*”; “*Will we get any ground cherries like we did last year?*”; “*Will we get a lot of lettuce?*”; “*Is it possible to get my basket without X (vegetable)*”; The question of diversity is responded to in a variety of ways: Drop-off points have exchange baskets where sharers replace what they would rather not have with something else; someone suggests ways of conserving or transforming food items that start to accumulate in the fridge; or the farmer explains that the diversity depends on how the season goes (good conditions, good diversity). Once again, questions seeking an assurance of diversity in the baskets are rarely answered with an absolute “yes” or “no”.

(ii) *Communication Dynamic*

In as much as the *content* of the interactions at the start-up meetings speaks to the technical aspect of CSA’s functioning, the *dynamic* of the communication reveals something of the social dimension of CSA. This aspect is heavily stressed in literature on CSA’s theoretical principles (Imhoff, 1996; Harington, 1998; Kittredge, 1996).

Observing the communication dynamic at start up meetings proved to be more insightful than I had anticipated. Half expecting participants to hold a fairly homogenous set of ideals and motivations - a collective identity that might reflect in peoples’ communication - I was instead surprised to note a more heterogeneous exchange. Broadly speaking, the people at start-up meetings belong to one of three groups: old sharers, new sharers, and farmers. Quite often there is also present a member of Équiterre to answer questions

about CSA or give a brief presentation on related topics. The dynamic between these groups can be visualized thus:



In the course of the start-up meetings, observing the interaction between these groups revealed differences in the level of *trust* and *openness to uncertainty*. The following observations serve as examples of this:

- Waiting for the farmer to arrive, I ask another person if this is her first year with the farm. She says no, and asks me the same question. I notice that when I identify myself as an old member, the people waiting adjacent to me pay attention to my answers to her questions on how I found the experience.
- F explains that last year's harvest wasn't so good, but most years are okay. An old sharer speaks up, commenting that it was really just the first few baskets that were a little low, but after that it was fine. This comment is directed both at the farmer and the new sharers present. I notice that the people present focus on the sharer, and it seems to me that perhaps his reckoning of the experience lends more credibility to

CSA for them. Having a past sharer attest at a start-up meeting is one strategy recommended (Hunter, 2000) to create a sense of community among new sharers.

- New sharers tend to pose more factual questions and even express some reserve or suspicion, particularly with regards to what is “organic”. Old sharers seem to “chat” with the farmer, occasionally speaking more anecdotally and personally.

It seems that at these meetings, old sharers tend to express their appreciation, offer more anecdotal feedback (for the benefit of both the farmer and new members), ask specific questions to refine their understanding (typically of what vegetables were or were not in last year’s harvest), and otherwise have a friendly or familiar rapport with the farmer. I also noticed a tendency to use the first person plural “we” to refer to the sharers, as in “*I really liked the squash - the little ones we started getting in October - what were they?*” (It is only in going over my notes that I noticed this; I did not at the time make any effort to analyze participants’ speech at that level).

New sharers tend to have more cautious attitudes; research strongly suggests that they are very informed and critical consumers (Rose, 2001; Block, 1998; DeLind and Ferguson, 1999; Kittredge, 1996; Lamb, 1994). They pose factual questions relating to how CSA functions and pay particular attention to issues of quantity, diversity, and the authenticity of the organic label.

With farmers, the issue of trust is not really relevant: the trust that gets developed is from the new sharers towards the farmers, not the other way around. From what I observed, farmers’ communication tends to be very straightforward and pragmatic. Farmers seem very comfortable with the uncertainty that is the focus of many new

sharers' concerns: "*It depends...*" is a perfectly reasonable response to countless questions that seek confirmation on the details of how CSA functions.

(iii) *Values*

Underlying the dynamic of communication are peoples' values. Are the values touted in CSA's literature evidenced in the communication at these start-up meetings? A definitive "yes" or "no" is not possible. A few observations illustrate that values underlying participation are multiple and not necessarily shared.

- A sharer asks if it would be possible to get organic fruit? Generally, the response is negative, providing an opportunity to remind sharers that CSA is more about eating according to what is locally grown: "*I don't do importation*" said one farmer. Even so, several CSA farms associate with organic fruit producers/importers to offer "special orders" at certain times of the year. This is particularly the case with organic fowl and meat. At least one farm in the CSA network specializes in meat products and works in association with a number of vegetable CSA farms to provide special orders for their members. Other farms offer free-range or organic chicken (and often eggs) at an extra cost when such items are available through acquaintances. One start-up meeting I attended included presentations by individuals offering optional shares for both fruit and a variety of fowl. These arrangements can be seen as a kind of hybrid market system, combining consumer choice with the pay-in-advance system of CSA. At this point, however, the aspect of having a *commitment* with one's farmer becomes overshadowed by having the *convenience* of choosing among a variety of products bearing the organic seal, or otherwise associated with values attractive to the environmentally conscious consumer. It is

imaginable that sharers shop for a CSA farm, their final selection based on convenience of drop-off times and locales, specialty products, price, and the farms' reputations.

- At three start-up meetings, conversation occasionally strayed into parallel issues in environmental or social justice. These links show how CSA fits into social movement. Participants at various start-up meetings circulated a petition to investigate the environmental effects of municipal pesticide use on green spaces in the city, spoke about the treatment of fowl at industrial poultry farms, voiced their skepticism about the credibility of conventional market system, and brought up questions about the protests at the 2001 Summit of the Americas. In listing these issues, I do not mean to imply that these concerns are collectively held by participants, only to suggest the range of overlapping concerns.
- A new sharer asks the farmer “*Why did you get involved in organic farming?*” The farmer responds by explaining how their farm’s soil humus level was very low after years of farming with chemical fertilizers. He relates how the level has improved considerably after 7 years of organic practice. This seemed a sufficient response for the farmer, as nothing more was added. I found this response interesting, as it was not something that I (or the new sharer) would think of. It seems that good, healthy soil is to the farmer reason enough to go organic. This exchange illustrates how farmers’ knowledge of the health of the farm ecosystem is very tactile and concrete, whereas sharers tend to talk more in generalities about CSA being “good for the environment”, and often positing this assertion against their *mistrust* for industrialized chemical farming being harmful to the environment. Farmers, on the other hand,

have tacit knowledge (and quite often, extensive experience) in both organic and non-organic farming.

(iv) *Personal Observations*

A few comments I jotted down speak more to my own interests in the technical aspects of CSA, the communication dynamic at the meetings, and the values that motivate my being there:

- In my own experience as a sharer I have become more open, curious, and active, and this change has been mirrored in my communication with other farm members. At one point I reflect that this openness exposes me to a wider range of values expressed by other participants.
- In overhearing a discussion between sharers on the relative size of baskets from two different farms, I reflect that for me, this criteria is really tertiary to the sense of familiarity I have with “my farm”; I am willing to accept more inconvenience if it allows me the value of having some continuity with the farm. I note that this was not always so.
- I reflect that my own interest in what, specifically, will be in my basket, has waned considerably in the past two years; the value for me derives only partly from the actual food items I get.

(v) *Summary*

Start-up meetings are largely informational and concern the technical aspects of CSA. The farmer’s point of view frequently emphasizes how the reliance on the climate necessitates a certain ambiguity, while many new sharers’ concerns reveal expectations for convenience. Further, the start-up meeting is a site whereat the farmer’s credibility

(with particular regard to the aspect of organic-ness) is subject to inquiry. Old sharers seem to be more at ease with the uncertainty that is part of CSA participation, and more apt to communicate anecdotally and off topic with the farmer and other sharers. Multiple values relating to consumer identity, motivations for participation in CSA, and social/environmental justice are evident. These values are voiced in an ad-hoc fashion, suggesting a greater complexity than the literature expounding CSA might suggest. Reflecting on my own participation, I note a growing sense of belonging to a farm, which disposes me towards a more open, enquiring stance at the start-up meeting.

4.06 *Farm Visits*

I visited 3 farms in the course of the research: Tessa's Garden, the Cadet-Roussel farm, and the Cap St. Jacques Ecological Farm. The objective with each was to experience the participation at a farm and observe the exchange between other members. By keeping my eyes and ears (all my sense, as it would turn out) open to opportunities for learning, I sought to look for patterns in the ways such learning takes place: how are skills, knowledge, and attitudes communicated, integrated, and validated by participants on a CSA farm? Of course, visiting farms also provided occasions to discuss with farm sharers about their experience. I felt that more formal interviews, such as the workshop I had helped facilitate at the conference, create a context that reflects *on* participation rather than reflecting *in* participation¹⁴. This is not at all a bad thing, but it draws away from a research question that had become more refined since attending the start-up meetings: how does learning occur *through participation* in CSA?

¹⁴ Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) make this point with regards to reflective practice in adult education. Reflecting *on* experience immediately creates a level of abstraction that draws away from the intended dynamic of critical reflection.

Following is a brief description of each farm, an account of my participation, and a summary of the points that came out of my observations.

(i) *Tessa's Garden*

At the time of writing, *Tessa's Garden* is in its 5th year operating with CSA as one dimension of its production. The farm is in the Estrie region of Québec, near Frelighsburg. The farm comprises 8 fields totaling around 9 hectares. It has 3 drop-off points in Montreal and delivers over 200 baskets during the summer season. For the past two years, the farm has begun doing winter baskets as well. Volunteering at the farm is not obligatory, but it is something the farm has tried to make more available to sharers in this last year, offering every second Sunday as a volunteer / visit day, and organizing the occasional social event for sharers at the farm.

I have been a sharer with this farm for 2 years. I first went out to help in a cabbage harvest in November 2000. The following year, I attended three volunteer days where I helped in the seeding, transplanting, and/or harvesting of broccoli, cabbage, zucchini, squash, garlic, potatoes and tomatoes. I otherwise helped out in the promotion of the farm, at drop-off points, and in organizing car-pooling for sharers to get out to the farm on volunteer days. At each volunteer day, there were between 5 - 15 members who came out. Some of those who came out did so regularly, for others it was their first time. Often, people would stop by the farm on a Sunday for a visit or just to help out for a couple hours. We worked alongside the group of employees and interns at the farm. My observations can be roughly grouped as follows:

⇒ *Complexity*

After most people arrived, Frederic started off giving a brief tour of the farm: the greenhouses, the fields, and the cold-storage room. Informally, he elaborated on the rotation of crops, the reasons for doing so, and the adaptations this meant for work. With some fields in a 5-year rotation, others in a 7-year rotation, some fields fallow, and 25 varieties of vegetable, each requiring particular treatment and labor at different times of the year, the complexity involved in the planning of the each season is, for a novice like me, mind-boggling. Other visitors were equally impressed, commenting on the tremendous work involved and posing questions to get a better understanding of specific vegetables and how they grow. It struck me that these questions and observations may not occur to sharers who never visit the farm. Visiting the farm is being immersed in an incredibly complex organism, providing endless opportunities for exploration.

⇒ *Interdependence*

One lesson impressed upon volunteers prior to commencing the harvest of certain crops is that *every step* in the cultivation process is responsible for *all the steps following*. For example, I learned that when harvesting zucchini (or any member of its family), it is crucially important not to cut the stem too short or too long. Why? Because if the stems are too short, the flesh of the zucchini fruit is exposed to the air and this invites rotting. Cut too long, and the stems tend to jostle about in transport, poking into other plants, scarring them up, and again accelerating the rotting process. Rotting spreads, so that an entire bin of zucchini, kept in storage for a several weeks, may go bad due to sloppy handling of a few. As zucchini is a winter vegetable – harvested in mass in the fall and conserved for months to be distributed in the winter baskets – it is vitally important that

volunteers work carefully. The tilling, seeding, transplanting, hoeing, and all the care that went into the zucchini fields since spring may all be undone by a lazy harvest! If there is a larger lesson to be learned by this example, it is that *a great deal of labour and care goes into the food we eat*. Interdependence between all the steps in cultivation ultimately leads to high quality, healthy food. I can only say from experience that this lesson is made vividly real by a few hours work in the sun – much more real than if I had simply read it somewhere.

Lest this anecdote be considered trivial, my point is that through working at the farm, something previously taken for granted becomes a *value*. We might recall the participant in the CSA conference for whom a cord of wood took on new value after he had helped cut a few! We can also consider the testimony of one CSA sharer, interviewed in Rose's (2001) research, who remarked that she was much less willing to throw away uneaten bits of vegetables since realizing how much work had gone into growing them. To what extent sharers who visit the farm consciously value aspects of food that were previously taken for granted, and what importance they accord to this change, are questions quite relevant to further CSA research. In my own case, I actually do pay more attention to such seemingly innocuous details about food: how was this zucchini's stem cut?

⇒ *Waste Isn't Waste*

In contrast to the concern for not wasting the vegetables that were so laboriously grown, there is a surprising amount of "waste" at the farm itself: overripe tomatoes, scarred zucchini, bruised squash, green potatoes, leaf-eaten kale – all get "chucked back into the field". Of course, it's not actually waste, because it all gets churned under the

tractor wheels and tilled up to further enrich the soil. And it was surprising only to visitors like me. The level of loss varies from vegetable to vegetable; this is part of organic farming. These lessons are learned by the farmer through toil, experience, and collaboration with other organic farmers, and they play a significant role in the decision of what to plant each year.

(ii) *The Cadet Roussel farm*

The Cadet-Roussel farm, also in the Estrie region of Quebec, is one of the longest-running CSA farms in the Montreal CSA network. It was, in fact, the pilot farm that started as a project initiated through Équiterre, cultivating food for 20 families in its first year in 1995. Seven years later, the farm is producing close to 150 baskets with three drop-off points in Montreal and a pick-up point for sharers living close to the farm. The farm has stayed with this number of sharers for the last two years¹⁵. The Cadet-Roussel farm also requires that sharers contract to each do 12 hours of volunteering across the season (8 at the farm, 4 in the city). This element has been more recently added. On any given day, there are likely to be members at the farm helping in the fields. One woman told me that she went out more often than was required. In many ways, the Cadet-Roussel farm is closer to the model described in some CSA literature: sharers whose participation goes beyond *consuming* to include *sharing the workload*; a core group consisting of sharers and the farmers who take care of coordinating drop-off points; ongoing projects wherein youth spend time at the farm (up to two weeks) participating in work and educational activities; well-organized events for members combining work and farm

¹⁵ CSA farms often “level off” their membership between 100-250 members, the CSA system lending itself to a small-is-beautiful strategy. It seems that with a larger membership, it becomes difficult to maintain the personal contact that certain CSA practitioners seek to have.

tours with social, educational, and seasonal feasts. Indeed, the participation of members is remarkable: up to 80 sharers have come out to the farm for some harvest days, and on one event that I attended in June (prior to receiving any baskets), there must have been about 150 people present! The Cadet-Roussel farm is certified *biodynamic* and is also in partnership with a non-profit organization, *ProtecTerre*, formed for the purpose of putting the farm under a land trust so as to remove it from market speculation while supporting organic and associative agriculture.

I went out to the farm twice; once to get to know the farm and to meet a few members who were there to sign up for the season, and again for a “Buckwheat Festival” in June, where around 150 people (including many children) participated in a hay-ride, pancake feast and, significantly, a presentation entitled “Agriculture and Human Being”. This presentation was given by Luc Bergeron, a biodynamic farmer (not CSA) and co-founder of a therapeutic farm in the Laurentides region of Québec that uses the farm as an atmosphere for healing, creativity, and growth for people with mental handicaps. Key points that came out of this presentation, and other observations I found noteworthy, were as follows:

⇒ *Diversity Among Sharers*

Although the Cadet-Roussel farm actively engages its sharers in the CSA philosophy, the sharers’ commitment and understanding to the principles of CSA was quite varied. One new member told me how she had also considered subscribing to an organization that delivers baskets of vegetables to the client’s door. The food itself is organic, but comes from any number of producers, local or not. In any case, the origin of the food is not the client’s concern, and nor is any kind of social exchange with other

members. The client remains the consumer king, secure from any reciprocal responsibility. Such participation is, in principle, very different from CSA involvement. What was curious for me was that the woman who told me about it did not seem to recognize much of a difference; she'd chosen CSA because she was "curious" about the farm.

Another sharer told me that he doesn't usually buy organic food, but CSA makes it affordable enough. He was curious what my experience was with my own farm, how was the quantity and quality? And curiously, he was interested to know if they had the same "old equipment" – a reference to the farm's machinery. It is safe to say that small-scale organic farms do not boast the latest farm technology¹⁶. That a sharer would recognize and attach some value to the character of a farm's equipment (only possible by visiting the farm) is itself interesting. I myself began to notice the difference in the machinery between the organic farms I visited and the large-scale industrial farms that surround them. I wondered to what extent such visual information affects farm visitor's perceptions of agriculture.

Concerning participation, one sharer expressed her doubt that anyone comes to appreciate organic food simply by participating in CSA. *"As far as motivation goes, I think you pretty much have to already be interested in it to get involved. Those who aren't interested don't get involved."*

Conversations I had and overheard during a hayride tour of the farm were quite varied. Two people recount stories of other visits to farms (particularly if farming had

¹⁶ An interesting anecdote related to this came up at the 2000 conference: A woman in the process of starting up a farm explained how Québec's Ministry of Agriculture makes it near impossible to acquire equipment appropriate to small-scale farming by favouring loans only for the purchase of high-end machinery intended for large-scale agribusiness use. A new tractor costing well over

been in their family); a trio of university students are engaged in talk about pesticide use, lax environmental standards in indebted countries, and economic agendas; parents are struggling with the endless “*what’s that...?*” questions of their kids; many people are chatting about subjects not at all related to their reasons for visiting.

⇒ *The Sensory Element and the Inter-connectedness of Farm Processes*

As with *Tessa’s Garden*, the *Cadet-Roussel* farm is a sensory experience. The hayride featured many impromptu stops to point out different features of the ecosystem. These ranged from the matter-of-fact (“*the cows there are eating turnips – they make enough manure for our fertilizing needs*”, “*this field will get carrots this year*”, “*this is garlic*”, “*these two species grow well together*” etc.) to the more critical, as when we stopped by a dead tree. The tree had been planted by the farm a few years earlier as part of a windrow, to prevent wind erosion, hold the soil, and provide a habitat for insect-eating birds. It had been killed by the pesticide spraying of a neighbour, whose fields would be growing beans (“*for export to Mexico*”) in denatured soil (“*Earthworms don’t live there*”). This led to a brief explanation of the regulations imposed by organic certification regarding the distance in meters that must be left un-cultivated between organic fields and those of non-organic neighbouring fields. Industrial farms, on the other hand, are obliged by the imperatives they operate under to maximize their productive land, eliminating windrows to do so. This critical aspect was mentioned more in passing than as a central element of the tour, yet illustrates quite well the inter-relatedness of the biophysical, structural, and ideological processes that play upon food production. Questions posed by visitors throughout the tour were often responded to by

such crossing of categories. For example, the question “*Does the farm produce milk?*” was answered with an explanation of the licensing procedures that made it unfeasible.

⇒ *Thought for Food*

After the hayride, the farm had arranged a presentation. About 150 people gathered in the barn where two large concentric circles of hay ~~bales~~^{bales} had been set up. Luc Bergeron’s talk on “Agriculture and Human Being” attempted to put into lay-terms some fairly abstract ideas. By tracing the evolution of the agriculture through different sources, Luc sought to render explicit how it has become fragmented from human experience. Food in all its dimensions has been reduced to an anonymous fuel in the service of the supposedly higher functions of rationality. It is displaced from its central role in social interaction. It is deprived of its nutritive, ecological, and spiritual values, as *sustenance*. Agricultural production has all but lost its familial character and has come under the control of large agribusiness. The family can never own the land, and farmers are human resources used by agribusiness to make it produce¹⁷.

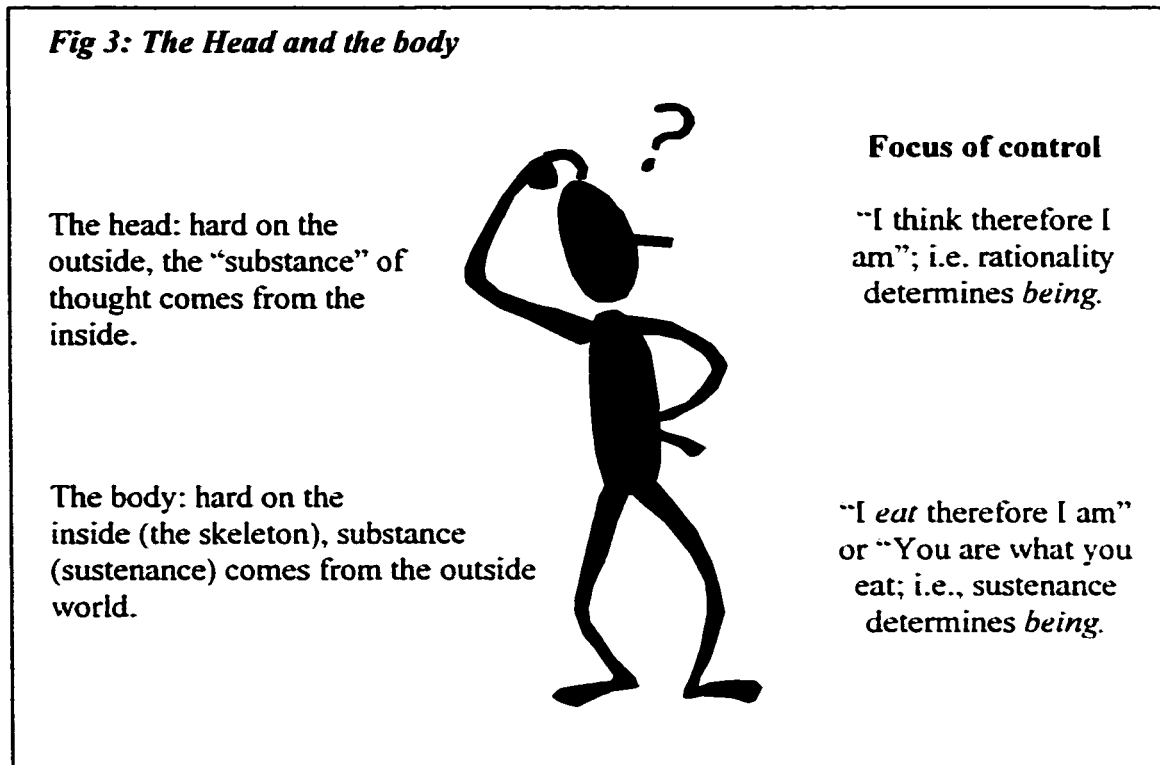
Given this progression, what happens to our perception of the human being and agriculture? Luc suggests that we’ve unknowingly fragmented “human being” into the head and the body and that we think of each quite differently. We think of the head as analytic, rational, functioning on command, accumulating knowledge, and *producing* thoughts; the body is festive, expressive, follows rhythms, uses only what it needs to function, and *takes in* experience through the senses. What’s more, we’ve come to

explanation took the form of a direct confrontation with Québec’s minister of Agriculture.

17 A subsequent presentation given by ProtecTerre drove home this point with a comparison of farm prices in the last 30 years. A farm, equipment and buildings included, in 1970 cost about \$20,000; the same farm (without equipment) in 2000 would average around \$450,000!

assume the primacy of the head, and we're unaware of the paradox. We've come to think of "*the head as hard on the outside and soft inside, the body as the opposite*"¹⁸.

The following graphic illustrates the paradox Luc suggests we are largely unaware of:



Luc humorously suggested that we turn humans up side down, to put their head closer to the soil that sustains them. Metaphorically, this is what CSA tries to do. Perhaps most interesting in relation to this research is the idea that too much rationality fragments our sense of being from our sources of sustenance, disturbing the integrity of mind/body health.

The presenters at this event have clearly given some thought to what agriculture can mean, and to the value of being at a farm "*At the farm there are all sorts of*

perceptions that lead you to a new way of knowing... when the consumer comes to help at the farm, his way of thinking changes.” Clearly, this kind of discourse is pure gold for this research. Still, I couldn't help wondering if others around me felt in the same way. How are such abstract ideas (though engagingly presented, for me at least) assimilated into one's worldview? One participant said afterwards that she found it too abstract and theoretic, that she was too sleepy to really follow it. Another person had expected to learn more about biodynamic farming. Immediately after the event, I made the following note to myself:

I guess that the difficulty comes back to this: how to know, share, research, and share the knowing of those physical-perceptive experiences that (so we suspect) transcend the dichotomy between mind/body (+ spirit?) created by the rational-scientific homo economus? Could it be that the “tools” of research are lacking, rooted as they are in this same rational scientific mold? I feel as though my methodology is becoming more permeable, refined, open, reflective. It's good that it continue along this way?

⇒ *Invitation to Dialogue*

Regardless of whether or not those present found the presentation too abstract, the essential point was that the *context for dialogue on humans and food was created*. The farm had taken pains to put up a few affirmations around the barn where we met. One stood out for me: *“If I knew the world would end tomorrow, I would still plant a tree today. – Martin Luther King”*. I was at the time reading Wendell Berry's *Essays Cultural and Agricultural*, in which he suggests that the human who *dwells*, not just *inhabits*, in a land, is best exemplified by the image of an old man planting a tree – he will never live to see it grow, but this does not matter: it is the right thing to do. Whether or not sharers

18 Luc extended the metaphor to North-South relations, suggesting that we in the “developed” countries (a term he rejects) think of ourselves as more analytic, rational, and thought-producing, whereas our image of “the South” is festive, sensual, “living from the land”.

have the intention to learn or change their way of perceiving, the environment does provide stimulus for it.

(iii) *The Cap St. Jacques Ecological Farm*

The Cap St. Jacques ecological farm is not foremost a CSA farm. Situated in a municipal park, its main function is as a popular education site for tourists, receiving thousands of visitors each year. Secondly, a non-profit group incorporated in the farm – *the D3Pierres Corporation* – offers remunerated internships to young adults. The program is part of an umbrella organization (*le Collectif des entreprises d'insertion du Quebec*) that promotes initiatives for young adults to better integrate into society and the job market. In addition to the actual farm work, the participants design and facilitate educational tours for groups of children. The farm began functioning in 1999 as a CSA farm and at the time of writing had just over 100 sharers. The farm produces three sizes of basket and has made connections with an organic poultry farm to offer their sharers special orders. The farm invites sharers who are willing to come out and volunteer whenever they would like to, but does not require it. A members' potluck is held later in the season, combined with a tour of the farm.

The farm being on the island of Montreal and having regular bus service, it was more accessible for visits. I worked in the fields with the participants for a total of 8 days at two different points in the season: in July and later in September. This permitted me to see the farm work at different stages, to catch a glimpse of what program participants were learning, and to discuss about their participation. Although this portion of the field research deviates somewhat from my original focus on CSA *sharers'* experience, it

nonetheless helped me to better situate the potential of learning through CSA in several ways:

- It provided a more intensive experience and structured framework to learn about organic agriculture;
- The actual work experience, as I would find out, led to insights about the *aesthetic* and *sensory* nature of the work;
- In conversing with the group of (6) participants, I sought to understand if and how their experience working at the organic farm influences their knowledge, values, and attitudes about food, environment, and consuming. I conjectured that this would reflect, to some extent, how farm sharers are influenced by time spent volunteering at a farm.

⇒ *Framing Observations: Perceiving and Reflecting*

The informal contact I had with the farm participants was exploratory. That is, I started by getting to know a bit about them, why they participated at the farm, how they liked it, what they hoped to get out of it, etc. At the same time, I closely observed my own learning through the physical work. Very quickly, my observations began falling into various divisions. At a personal level, I was repeatedly struck by the *perceptive* demands of the work, as the following journal entries show:

...the morning came and we started weeding carrots that had just begun to sprout. This is a time-consuming, meticulous task that requires you use your fingertips. It also gives a great opportunity to speak with the people you work with, as we all progressed very slowly three abreast down our rows...

...different tasks require various levels of skill, timing, attention (weeding in areas with 2-3 different plants growing together requires keen observation, doing triage in a tomato crop is much quicker, pruning is another matter...

Anyone who has done repetitive manual work and can well remember the particular knack that is developed, the muscles used, the motions repeated, the patience and concentration demanded. Such acquired manual skills are nothing extraordinary in themselves, but what was interesting was the fact that I began to attribute some significance to them, to see the knack as something of value, a small source of pride that was validated at the moment where I would straighten up and look back on a row well done. This observation – “the well hoed/weeded/tilled/planted line” – was voiced spontaneously by farmers, participants, and volunteering sharers at just about every work-related event I attended. At this point I began to notice the *aesthetic* quality to farm work. Words like “beautiful”, “nice”, “pretty” came up to describe things one might not otherwise appreciate: lines of sprouting carrots or well-spaced transplants. For one participant, the aesthetic quality came out in the transformation of farm products that takes place in the early Spring and late Fall at the farm: the canning of sauces, oils, vinegars; the making of craft items for sale in the farm’s shop – these were her favorite activities precisely because they involved “beautiful things” that she felt proud to sell (she otherwise didn’t like sales at all!).

Though I was becoming more attuned to the sensorial and aesthetic aspects of the work, I found that these did not come up in conversations with participants:

I notice that my own observations are pointed more towards the perceptive, while theirs (in our conversations, at least) seem to be more to the cognitive. How can I re-direct the research to get at those perceptive aspects and the rapport between the two? (Journal entry)

Though *cognitive* was the word I used at the time of writing, *reflective* would be more appropriate. Participants reflected on why they were there, what their values were,

what they liked or disliked about the work. Most of the participants in the program defined themselves as being outside the norms of society, particularly norms of consumer participation and education. The following are excerpts from my field notes:

E. strongly affirmed that she found the conventional schooling system not just bad, but “sick, dysfunctional” – I forget the exact word she used.

Four have expressed critiques of “the system”, referring to its consumer nature, “make money” attitude, hierarchical education system, unjust distribution of the wealth. The context of the conversation points to these critiques developing throughout their lives.

L., also, dropped out of university (after 1 year, studied in Education). He made very explicit his distaste for formal education (and formal education training!) in relation to “the real world”. Said that being on the farm, learning about how vegetables grow are things “you need to know”, laments having grown up always in the city and not having that contact, asked me if I grew up on a farm [...] He also said that he worked on a learning farm in Kaslo, B.C., excellent experience, “the future is in home schooling, not in the schools!” ardent about that...

Talked with E. a bit more – motivations, what does she value in the experience... live good and simply, detests the “make money” culture – J., too, feels this way [...] A common theme was to live simply and well – how did this motivation/direction take form?

Beyond participants’ values and positions towards societal norms, a recurring theme had to do with the social aspect of the experience. In fact, this was immediately brought to my attention when I first explained the research idea to the group and one of them asked, “...learning on the farm? You mean... in the social sense or the technical sense?” In subsequent conversations, all of the participants would recognize the social dimension of their participation:

G. said that she liked working in a team when you have a big job to do, that things go fast and fun then...

K. says she likes working in the shop for the contact with the people...

D. said there’s always someone there to have a conversation with, but you can work totally alone at the same time...

Once at the farm, you're around people who share the same (kinds of) ideas.

You realize that you're not alone.

If you do it alone, you lose motivation, if you're not around others, it's discouraging.

During an informal group discussion, I asked participants what words they associated with “alimentation”¹⁹, and how these definitions had been influenced by experiences on and off the farm. Their responses spoke equally to the technical and social dimensions of their participation:

Culture.

Respect the rhythms of nature.

Not just organic [rhythms], but nature in general.

Life, in all its senses.

All alone you feel small.

At first you think it goes nowhere.

...to learn about the plants, not just the name, but how they grow, how to cultivate them.

Being at the farm allows you to consider things, integrate them, be open to how to define nourishment.

Somewhat by chance – the luck of falling in with others in an environment where that understanding can grow.

We all start from the same base (of interest in ecology).

The experience makes it concrete: I am capable of living it, of understanding it, of integrating it. That's it! Becoming aware of it!

It reinforces your perception, gives you the taste of advancing.

It's enriching, too, the non-commercial aspect of it... as opposed to, for example, working in a specialized shop that sells organic food.

It's more palpable, more concrete.

You respect yourself more.

When you put your heart into it, you see it and you know where it comes from.

¹⁹ The research was carried out in French. “Alimentation” has the combined connotations of the English nourishment, food, as mentioned earlier.

Regularly throughout the program, participants would gather indoors for a more structured lesson in some aspect of organic farming. The session I sat in on dealt with pests: what were the various types of pests and how can they be treated without the use of chemicals. This topic immediately revealed, once again, the interdependence of organisms in the organic farm ecosystem. For example, certain species of birds are helpful in keeping insects down for certain species of plants, and these birds tend to prefer to nest in certain kinds of trees, and these trees grow in certain climates in balance with other forms of vegetation. In brief, when one gets into the technical details of organic farming, the necessity of biodiversity is explicitly demonstrated. Likewise, it becomes clear how the principles of managing an organic farm generally appose those of industrial agriculture. Critiques of the latter become less vague and more informed.

⇒ *A Sharers' Potluck*

Aside from volunteering at the farm, I also attended the members' potluck later in the season (in September). There were about eight families present, a total of around 30 people, including many children. I believe that everybody present had previously been to the farm, either for the start-up meeting or just to visit it with their children. It was a nice day, warm and sunny, and the event was quite informal: no presentations or introductions, just a buffet table laid out for peoples' dishes and picnic tables. People chatted and kept an eye on their kids. Present were both first-year and second-year sharers.

The sharers seemed to be a more heterogeneous group than the participants. One spoke of the "poisons" of the dominant food system, elaborating how the consumer society in general makes people anxious and greedy: "*We have so much around us and*

*we're so rich if we would just slow down and appreciate it, stop trying to get more*²⁰.

Another explained her participation entirely in cost-benefit terms: *"It's the cheapest, most convenient way to get good organic food"*. I asked the latter if she would continue as a CSA sharer even if organic food were available at a lower cost and in greater diversity at the corner store. After a pause, she responded that she doubted that store-bought organic could ever be cheaper than CSA, as CSA eliminates the "middle-man" and should therefore always be less expensive. This ignores the possibility that industrial methods of production, distribution, and marketing *may be applied* to organic agriculture to cut production costs and undercut markets. Gradually, someone remarked that different values were at play: *"In the end, we're all so capitalist... at a certain point the pocket-book sets the limit"*.

Despite differences in values with regards to consumerism, there was a general concordance in peoples' doubting of the conventional food system and the information it mediates.

I noticed that several people talked about recipes, so I made a point of asking if people felt they'd had to adjust to a different diet with CSA. Everybody said that there was really no problem and they didn't feel much of an adjustment. Even so, sharers did trade ideas on what else to do with spaghetti squash and Swiss chard. A couple people were very enthusiastic about exchanging recipes and expressed much appreciation for the farm's newsletter with its recipes and tips on what to do with basket contents.

²⁰ Incidentally, this sharer and her husband both worked as artisans (a violinmaker and a goldsmith, respectively). I later wondered if their vocations disposed them towards valuing food produced with greater personal attention rather than through more impersonal, mechanized methods.

In summary, all of the now-familiar themes among CSA sharers (distrust of the conventional food system; knowing where one's food comes from; concern for a healthy, affordable diet; a desire that their children know what a farm is) were evident. These dimensions were not, however, collectively made explicit or shared and validated among one another, except on an ad-hoc and individual basis. Sharers' knowledge of organic farming was more general; knowing in greater detail the ecological processes at the organic farm, or how these differ from the processes and ideology of industrial agriculture, did not figure prominently into their interaction, as was the case with the farm's working participants.

4.07 Drop-off points

Drop-off points are the one potential learning site that everyone passes through. Each drop-off point is different. Although CSA guides recommend arranging for drop-off points that permit some socializing between members, this is not always possible. My own farm's nearest drop-off point in 2000 was in a busy alley next to a public market; mingling was not much of an option. The next year, we were in the parking lot behind a community center with much more space. Some drop-off points are inside community centers or in sharers' garages or on their porches. In one case, the food is delivered in the morning to a sharer's porch and simply left there, each basket marked with the sharer's name. Sharers come by whenever they want in the day. I spent some time at this drop-off point distributing questionnaires for the 2000 conference and was surprised to see it worked completely on a system of trust: absolutely no one was present to oversee the distribution of baskets.

At the beginning of the season, it is common for farmers themselves to be present at the first few drop-off points to establish a personal contact. Some may prefer to do so every week, while others delegate this responsibility to employees, farm interns, or sharers. The loading, delivery, distribution of baskets at several drop-off points, return to the farm, and de-loading of the truck is itself a days' work. In some cases, the farm's drop-off points are on different days, necessitating two deliveries a week.

Aside from my own weekly basket-fetching for 2 years now, I started lending a hand in the distribution at a drop-off point at the end of the last season, and made a few observations on these sites that I felt were relevant to adult learning, though in rather a subtle way:

- Many sharers assumed that I was "from the farm". They asked me questions about different vegetables, *will we have any such and such a vegetable next week*, etc. This empowered me as a kind of information link with the farm. Having visited the farm a few times and having some contact with the farmer, I was able to provide slightly more information than otherwise.
- Sharers were genuinely interested to open their baskets and discover the contents. I should note that I volunteered in late August/September, when the baskets were literally overflowing. 2001 was an excellent year for the farm.
- Many sharers took the time to look over the weekly newsletter and take note of the week's recipe. A few were as enthusiastic about the newsletter as they were for the basket itself.
- Recipe banter dominated talk between sharers. This was particularly the case when someone would express not knowing what to do with a particular vegetable.

- The exchange baskets were greatly appreciated. Most sharers would ask permission before trading an item against another (“*Is an eggplant good for a bunch of radishes?*”) to which the response was usually a shrug, *sure, why not?* By the end of any drop-off, exchange baskets were overflowing with one or two “surplus” vegetables.
- Non-sharers would occasionally happen by and pull out their wallets. For them, the impromptu presence of a mini-market had a certain allure. This provided the occasion to do a little promotion and sign up new members, if production allowed. A drop-off point in full swing illustrates what CSA means for a sharer more immediately and concretely than a description of the process.
- There is a sensory element to the experience: the scent of fine herbs fills the air when they're in season (sharers joked of following their nose to the drop-off point). I noticed that people often smell their basket when opening it, or nibble at an unfamiliar vegetable. I noted this because I had been reading on Rudolf Steiner-inspired education where sensory learning is a key element (Sardello and Sanders, 1999). Sharers' frequent comments that “you can taste the difference” and the recommendation offered by one farmer at the 2000 conference – that all sharer activities be centered around food – suggests that the gustatory senses play a significant (perhaps undervalued) role in sharers' appropriation of CSA values.
- When I put up some photos of the farm, people were curious to get to know more. I later received the same feedback from another drop-off point volunteer, a farm employee, and a couple sharers who were in the photos.

Aside from recipe banter and inquiries about the farm and its products, there was

very little exchange about sharers' reasons for participating, the value they derived from participating, or anything explicitly about learning through the process. Stating this, however, I recognize that it is a peculiar comment: why *should* there be? I cannot really imagine a sharer turning to another and broaching such an abstract subject. At the same time, participants express curiosity about the process they are involved in, and this curiosity seems to be a function of the information exchange that takes place at the drop-off point.

Returning to the theme of this research, what can we understand about adult learning from this mingling curiosity evidenced at drop-off points? Is the "inherent educational nature of participation in CSA" really just a haphazard collection of recipe tips and farm trivia? Clearly, such a question is limited by its underlying assumption that learning need be evidenced in explicitly set and obtained goals; we would rather see something more concrete, more substantial. Such is our frame of reference for recognizing learning. What can be done to see beyond this frame?

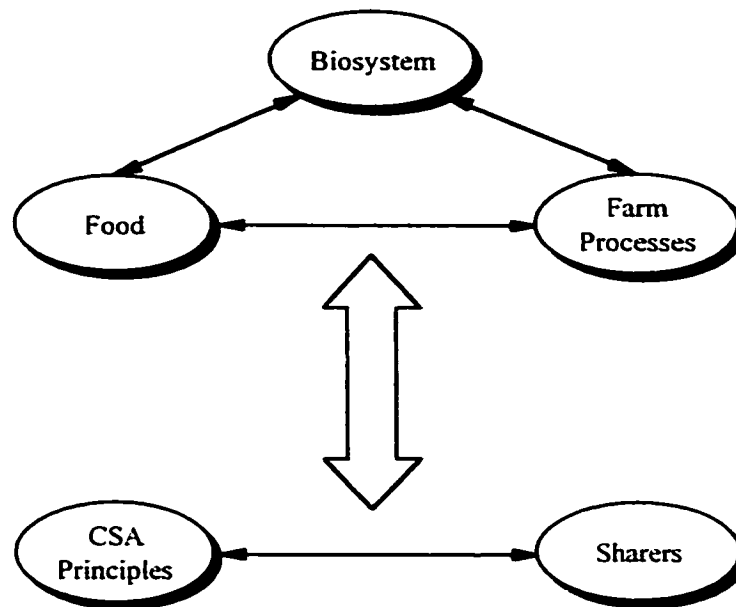
DeLind and Harman Fackler (1999) use the term "slow food" to describe the value-use aspect of CSA products. Just as the value of fast food is the "fast" (foregrounding the product and the immediate gratification of one's desires), slow food offers the neglected value of "slowness" (denoting process and patience in tune with nature's rhythms). Shifting the metaphor to education, I would suggest that "slow learning" merits some consideration. In this sense, the medium of slow learning is the commonplace or tacit: recipes, sensory perception, directionless curiosity, and social chat.

4.08 *Basket Newsletters*

Most CSA farms include in each week's basket a brief newsletter with information for the sharer. Newsletters typically contain information about vegetables to be found in the basket (particularly as they come into season), recipes, tips for conservation, invitations to come out to the farm, explanations of how organic agriculture works, reminders to sharers to renew their subscriptions, and explanations of how the weather is affecting the work on the farm, the production, and consequently, what arrives in sharers' baskets. Some newsletters appeal directly to sharers' consumer sensibility by listing an equivalent market price. Others may contain poems or stories relating to food, particular vegetables, or the seasons. After the start-up meetings and drop-off points, the newsletter serves as the primary means of communication from the farm to the sharer.

I kept all (21) newsletters from the 2001 summer season of my own farm, Tessa's Garden. Certain themes emerge: moreover, links between these themes illustrate a potential for sharers to see themselves as part of a larger complex that includes the ecosystem of the farm:

Fig. 4: Links between farm processes and the sharer



The biosystem: the climate, season, flora, and fauna.

Food: facts about vegetables, how to prepare, clean, transform, or conserve them, recipes, information on their quality or quantity.

The farm: how organic agriculture works.

CSA: its underlying principles as they relate to any of the above.

The sharers: their implication, obligatory or voluntary.

A few excerpts from the newsletter illustrate the links between these elements:

Finally the summer! A dry and hot springtime followed by fifteen odd rainy days has given us crispy radishes full of water, juicy rhubarb and beaming lettuce!

The squash are really adding up! Every farmer or gardener having already witnessed the abundant explosion of zucchinis in August will tell you! But don't worry: this squash can be part of any meal: spaghetti sauce, sandwich, pastry, grated, soups and more. Allowing them to mature, they can become quite impressive, up to 90 cm. But the good thing is that despite they're being huge, they don't make you huge because they're full of water (94%!) In fact, the effect is quite the opposite, as this food acts as a mild diuretic and laxative.

Conserving your vegetables: At the farm, most vegetables are chilled as quickly as possible after harvest, which makes an enormous difference for the length of their conservation. But once arrived home in your basket, it is still necessary to assure that they keep fresh until you're ready to put them on the table...

The management of "weeds" in organic: a question of diligence, equipment, patience, and climate! Misplaced sentimentality aside: in a broccoli field, what we want to see grow is broccoli, organic or not! Though they have beautiful names, plants that insidiously get into crops and benefit from the detriment of the planted crop are, in the eyes of the farmer, weeds. In organic agriculture, however, the tenacious farmer develops an approach to the management of weeds based above all on prevention. No free miracle solution (dearly paid for by the planet!) eliminating the problem the moment it jumps up... The key to success: the assiduousness to weed week after week with specialized equipment, enduring and patient workers to remove by hand the undesirables for hours (and thus, significant cost in salaries), and the complicity of providence, that is, the climate. Good news: our fields are in good form, and we're keeping up.

The passage refers to compromise, industrial agriculture ("*miracle solutions... dearly paid for by the planet*"), the very considerable physical labour involved (having weeded for a few hours myself as part of various volunteer work, I can attest to the "assiduousness" of the task!), the financial aspect ("*significant cost in salaries*"), and the climate. Here we have an example that ties together dimensions of a food supply system that CSA, quite unlike a conventional market system, renders accessible to the participant. Values are included in these dimensions. We may think of this paper's opening quotation from Wendell Berry (1970): "*...and [farming] requires not merely a competent knowledge of its facts and processes, but also a complex set of attitudes.....*".

The sharers come up in the newsletters in various ways. Obviously, every week's newsletter is itself a link between the sharer and the farm, allowing the former access to the complex processes going on at the latter, and occasionally inviting her to come visit. The recipes serve as the most immediate link between the sharers and the vegetables (assuming the former take the time to try them out!). Another way in which sharers are

linked to the food is in its preparation, conservation, cleaning, etc. Here the sharers are invited to take on a responsibility that the farm cannot:

It is necessary to blanch the garlic flowers a few minutes in steam before dicing them and dipping them in olive oil to conserve them for several weeks.

The denizens of broccoli: what to do to get rid of them: Yeah, maybe you'll find caterpillars in your broccoli! We've done pretty well until now, but they've seemed to get the upper hand! This doesn't stop the broccoli from being delicious (once rid of these superfluous proteins...). Here's how to eat your broccoli with a light heart and peaceful spirit: it's enough just to dip the broccoli in cold, salted water for about 15 minutes and shake vigorously before rinsing in running water.

The sharer is invited to take on a role (a final touch, but a role nonetheless) in the overall food system. We may imagine how the conventional market, focused on the consumer king, would do just the opposite and seek to relieve the client of all responsibility. Aside from linking sharers to the food, the newsletters occasionally appeal to sharers to lend a hand at the farm. The following example, appearing in the season's first newsletter, illustrates how the sharer is linked to the farm and its processes:

Involvement of sharers: a major plus: Since the harvest festival last autumn, when a handful of enthusiastic members lent a hand to close the fields, we've made an observation. The farm needs the participation of its members to be able to survive economically. Long gone are the days of families of 14 children who all put their energy into the service of the farm, with no thought of receiving a salary! To sustain a farm today while keeping the costs of production at a reasonable level takes some real financial gymnastics. Last year, which was particularly difficult for market farmers, gave us the proof! This is why this year we propose an activity at the farm every two weeks for those who wish to take part in the work. It's a great occasion to get some fresh air, meet other good folk like you, and get to know the farm... let us know your ideas about activities so that they can become memorable encounters between the city and the country!

Though such direct appeals to sharers' participation appear much less frequently than do other elements, they embody a very concrete expression of the social ideals of CSA participation, putting the emphasis on reciprocal support not just in word but in action. The sharer is invited to enter into dialogue with an organic farm's processes, with

the rhythms of the biosystem, with the multiple dimensions of food, and with the values underlying CSA.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The challenge for a community that seeks to reproduce itself would be to regiment the interactions in which learning is likely to occur, as well as the outcomes to which it may lead.

Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.19.

Do people learn through participation in CSA? In as much as we all learn on a daily level without really thinking about it – the haphazard accumulation of experience – the answer is yes, but such a response reveals little. Rather, is there anything particular about participation in CSA that makes it a privileged site for learning, as the literature around it suggests? If so, what, and how does this take place? To address this, I will return to the models of social movement, transformative, and bioregional learning introduced in chapter 2.

While sharing an understanding of lifeworld, divisions exist within theories of social movement learning. A few key distinctions will be looked at to better situate CSA.

Transformative learning seems on the surface to offer a suitable framework for the learning processes of CSA. Although certain narrative accounts of CSA participation resound with this link, I argue that transformative learning, at least in its present form, is not a suitable theory to frame the learning of CSA participation. The theory's emphasis on transformation as a highly individualized and cognitive process does not quite speak to the subtler dialogues present in CSA. Nonetheless, much of transformative learning's conceptual basis, in particular the distinction between presentational and propositional construal (tacit and explicit knowledge) is very helpful.

A more adequate theoretical framework is Lave and Wenger's (1991) *Situated Learning*, which locates learning in communities of practice rather than in individuals. I

have chosen not to introduce this theoretical framework until now because this reflects the order in which its relevance emerged in doing this research.

Drawing together what seems to work from the above sources, I will present a synthesis that attempts to incorporate CSA's explicit and tacit dimensions together with its individual and collective aspects.

Having explored the process of CSA learning, I will then focus on the content. Here bioregionalism provides the framework to situate CSA's lessons. This model is also amenable to numerous aspects of transformative, social movement, and situated learning, and brings us full circle to suggest how research practice might get more in tune with CSA's internal dynamics.

Finally, I will introduce a number of more radical discourses around CSA, research, and the nature of the knowledge generated. A certain amount of theoretic conjecturing will be introduced so as to suggest directions for future research.

5.01 Learning in Social Movements Revisited

Is CSA a social movement? Rather than arguing yes or no, my aim is to ask *how* it might be considered as such, and what, then, do related theories of social movement learning have to offer an understanding of CSA. My hesitation is that the term social movement is already so loaded that grafting CSA onto it may bias an otherwise fresh understanding. Secondly, research on CSA (including my own) indicates that participants do not see themselves principally as participants in a social movement and may in fact resent being co-opted into this discourse. If a label is at all necessary, I prefer *community of practice*, a term which “implies participation in an activity system about

which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities” (Lave and Wegner, 1991, p.98).

Two pairs terms will be looked at: 1) *new social movements* and *old social movements*; and 2) *personal transformation* and *collective action*.

Finger (1989) characterizes the “modernist crisis” by a failure of the modernist vision to create a society that is just and free from oppression of various sorts. He categorizes social movements that have sought to work against this as one of two types: old and new. The former seeks to attain social ideals through existing institutions: educational, economic, and political systems. The latter, he contends, have given up on this approach, seeing it as a hegemonic pursuit using intrinsically flawed institutions. Even while critiquing political regimes, old movements act as political players themselves. Using societal institutions as their missionaries, they seek to proselytize “the right way” through imposed collective action. In the camp of “old social movements” Finger places Dewey’s progressive education, “the labour movement, the feminist movement, the human rights movement, various movements for peace and justice, as well as all kinds of Third World movements” (p. 16). New social movements, he contends, hold to a “perspective of the blocked horizon” – one that rejects the imposition of universal ideals and instead favours personal transformation. The horizon is blocked because it is not the horizon (what could or should be) that matters; it is the here-and-now, the transformation process of the individual. Examples of new social movements include the green movement, the new peace movement, and various religious and spiritual or “New Age” movements. Finger clearly sides with what he calls the “truly educational” new social movements. He eschews adult education for adult

transformation, which he sees as “informal, local, and communitarian, based on concern, commitment, and experience, rooted in and contributing to the development of a local culture” (p. 18). Finger concludes that a reinvention of adult education focusing on holistic learning, experience, and personal transformation is essential.

Welton (1993) takes issue with Finger. Though he also uses the old-new distinction, he opposes the polarization of the two along a collective-personal spectrum. He rejects the association of the old movements with a kind of zealous universalism, and more passionately, he opposes the highly individualistic vision of transformation that he sees in Finger’s conclusion. He argues that rather than atomizing society, new social movements radicalize modernist values, evince personal and collective action, and reinvent political structures. Like Finger, he sees much potential in new social movements to inform a post-modern adult education: but his vision differs considerably in what constitutes a new social movement. To make the point that new social movements are at once individual and collective in nature, Welton identifies a “sensitivity of threat” common to members of these movements. In response to these and other threats, new social movements have come up with strategies for action. Drawing on Capra and Spretnak (1984), Welton identifies four basic principles of new social movements: ecology, social responsibility, grassroots democracy, and nonviolence.

Of these, ecology is the obvious link to CSA. The principle of ecology holds that humans exist in dynamic relationship with their natural environments and living fully in this dynamic means rejecting the view of nature as an object to be analyzed, exploited, and used for the betterment of human life, as if the two were separate. Instead, a reciprocal engagement with the environment is envisioned, the natural world as a subject

to be respected, allied, and met with willingness to compromise. This in turn requires a radical shift in what we value as knowledge, culture, and learning. Social responsibility – the collective dimension – is intrinsic to this principle of ecology, and here Welton challenges the highly individualized transformation espoused by Finger.

Now, turning to CSA, we see very clearly a concrete practice wherein people act in a way that respects, allies, and compromises with the natural world. Without invoking theoretical paradigms, this is the central tenet of CSA. The “shared threat” is strongly voiced by CSA sharers (and non-sharers!). For this reason I tend towards Welton’s interpretation of new social movements to frame CSA.

Cohen (1985) expresses some doubt as to what makes new social movements “new”, or for that matter, “social” (as distinct from the movement of a political party). Preferring instead “contemporary social movements”, he outlines a historical context in which two interpretations of social movements have arisen: the “resource-mobilization paradigm” and the “identity-oriented paradigm”. The resource-mobilization paradigm treats social movements as strategic maneuvers made by groups to advance their interests. These groups work within established norms and structures of negotiation (unions, advocacy groups, and other political units). The emphasis is on power relations negotiated among groups. The identity-oriented paradigm sees social movements as processes of collective identity-building, wherein emerging social actors seek greater solidarity, autonomy, and responsiveness to the environment. The analysis here is on how people in collectives come to know themselves and affirm – not negotiate – their values and struggles. “Using an expanded identity paradigm, one might say that

collective actors strive to create a group identity within a general social identity whose interpretation they contest” (p. 694).

Cohen suggests that the two readings of contemporary social movements are complementary: movements may be simultaneously engaged in both paradigms, shifting weight from identity-building to strategic negotiation and back again as they evolve within the societal norms that are themselves also changing²¹. Neither strategy nor identity alone provides a comprehensive view of social movements’ role in affecting the lifeworld. Rather, it is their diverse combinations that filter what emerges:

Although [social movements] signify the continued capacity of the life world to resist reification, and thus take on a positive meaning for Habermas, they are not viewed as carriers of a new collective identity, as capable of institutionalizing the positive potentials of modernity or of transcending particularistic and expressive politics. Habermas situates contemporary struggles around dimensions of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization... he places them at the ‘seam between system and life world’ – as resistances to the expansion of steering mechanisms. (Cohen, 1985, pp.710-11, emphasis in original).

Whether we describe the learning processes of social movements as identity building or resource mobilization, as personal transformation or collective action, or even whether we make the distinction between old and new movements, they all involve transformation at some level.

5.02 Transformative Learning Revisited

Some elaboration of transformative learning will help clarify its relation to CSA. Transformation is about changing meaning structures, the frameworks through which we make sense of experience. Mezirow defines two kinds of meaning structures: meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. Meaning schemes are specific dimensions within an

²¹ In the strict Kuhnian sense, two paradigms are mutually incompatible. Although Cohen does not take up this argument, his analysis seems to challenge these defining boundaries.

overall frame of reference. This could be, for example, an attitude, value, or opinion regarding a particular subject: the best way to educate one's children, the healthiest lifestyle to lead, an admirable work ethic, the efficiency of today's government. Meaning perspectives are the broader assumptions that encompass and determine the range of one's meaning schemes. When meaning perspectives are challenged, one questions the premises that define "best", "healthiest", "admirable", and "efficient" in the above examples.

Mezirow delimits four kinds of learning: elaboration or refinement of existing meaning schemes, acquisition of new meaning schemes, transforming meaning schemes, and transforming meaning perspectives. Although all four kinds constitute learning, it is only with the latter two, when the lens of inquiry turns inward towards people's own assumptions, that transformation can be said to take place. Excerpts from an interview with CSA farm organizer Dan Wiens (Samson, 1994) illustrates superbly a shift in meaning perspective:

Q. How did you come up with the idea of CSA?

A. I would have to go back to 1986 when my wife and I arrived in Africa. We had gone to Africa with these grand illusions of somehow helping these people growing their food. Somehow saving them from their misery... That first night that I had arrived, I finally felt that I had found a place that needs development, that needs me, and was quite excited. But over the course of just a few weeks the tables were turned and I realized that I was the one that needed saving, not them. They had their ideas in place and it was my life that needed developing... Through my western eyes over the past 25 years I had come to believe if I didn't have a certain amount of amenities, food, comfort and standard of living that somehow I was underdeveloped. But I learned that the reality of the substance of what we are as humans can be summed up in one word and that is relationships [...]

We did come back with the idea that it is North America that needs a lot of development in our attitudes and also in the way we acquire our food... So when we got back we got into organic farming or environmentally happy farming. You can see this whole CSA thing evolved over time it just didn't happen overnight. The turning point came for me two years after we had gotten back to Canada. We

had been growing vegetables and fruit in what we had perceived as a sustainable manner. But economically and socially we weren't very close to where we wanted to be. I went to a farm rally in Winnipeg with 7000 other farmers who were protesting that food prices were so low that farmers couldn't make a living any more. I didn't go for the same reasons most of the other fellows and ladies went. Most were protesting for the government to give more assistance or handouts. My understanding of our system and what was wrong with it, wasn't going to be solved by another government handout. It was systemic problem and it needs a systemic solution, it needs a change of thought and a total change in the way we do things...

...One of our sharers summed things really well after the first year when he said this really isn't about an economic arrangement. This shared farming is really about friendship. It's putting the culture back into agriculture²²...

Q. What do you think are some weaknesses of CSA?

A. I don't consider the limited season a problem. It is a weakness in our own attitude. We think we can have whatever we want whenever we want. That is the problem...

...When I tell people about CSA I don't mean to be prescriptive. I am descriptive. I tell people about what we have done and they can use that information for their own situation. But naturally no CSA farm is going to be identical to another, because humans and communities are so diverse.

In this testimony, a critical turning point (exposure to an entirely different culture) presented Dan Wiens with phenomena that were incompatible with his worldview, leading to critical reflection on the premises of that worldview. The dilemma could not be resolved through existing meaning structures (“*My understanding of our system... wasn't going to be solved by another government handout*”), but by a redefinition of the problem (“*It was systemic problem and it needs a systemic solution, it needs a change of thought and a total change in the way we do things...*”) leading to a worldview wherein new meaning schemes become evident (“*It's really about friendship. Putting the culture back into agriculture*”).

²² I appropriated this catchy phrase in my own CSA involvement, including it in a flyer I made to encourage people to come out to Tessa's Garden.

At the same time, Dan Wiens recognizes that not all participants or farmers see things as he does and he categorically rejects prescribing his vision as a solution. By instead offering his experience as an insight to be shared, he encourages the ideal conditions for rational discourse on meaning structures: freedom from coercion and distorting self-deception, openness to alternative perspectives, opportunity to participate (Mezirow, 1991, p.77-78). In the transformed meaning perspective, differences (the diversity of communities) are welcomed as equal participants in a discourse. In validating the worth of CSA, Wiens depends not on scientific proof or prescriptive information but on relationally defined consensus. That is, it is the shared values among his farm's members that legitimizes CSA.

So, very well, we have an example that resonates with transformative learning. Then why reject transformative learning as a model to understand CSA participation? The reason is that such examples are few and far between and almost exclusively from the perspective of farmers rather than sharers. The more qualitative, in-depth portraits of CSA membership (Rose, 2001; DeLind, 1999; DeLind and Ferguson, 1999) note how CSA farmers shoulder by far the larger share of the responsibility in defining CSA as a movement. As an example, over 250 people attended the conference on CSA in 2000, yet less than 50 of them were sharers (of a possible 5000 who received information on the event). The highly variable sharer retention rate suggests that sharers' commitment to the CSA model is less than steadfast. In contrast, farmers know each other and regularly meet to discuss the direction of the movement. The majority of sharers are in the same room at the start-up meeting, cross paths every week at the drop-off point, and that's about it. In short, farmers show a collective identity, sharers do not.

In a way, this makes sense: while an organic farmers' livelihood hinges on a practice whose principles counter the dominant norm of industrial agriculture, a sharer's decision to buy a season's baskets may be made on a whim. **In the farmer's case, an ideological stance is *inherent and collective*; in the sharer's, it is *optional and individualized*.** Finally, the key events leading to transformation in this testimony did not take place in CSA, but rather, in Africa and then at a farm rally in Edmonton!

Rather than saying that transformative learning can occur within CSA, it would be more appropriate to say that CSA can occur as part of transformative learning. Recalling Mezirow's four types of learning, we can see the more superficial levels of learning frequently enough in sharers' comments. People learn through their meaning schemes and acquire new dimensions. Reflection is directed towards the content and processes (what and how one eats), but the assumptions that determine sharers' meaning perspectives are rarely themselves challenged. Where it does occur, critical reflection is outward (towards the conventional market), not inwards (towards one's presuppositions about a healthy food system). Certainly, there may be exceptions to this observation, but it remains that no sharers within this research (those I've spoken with) define events that take place *within* their CSA participation as key to perspective transformation. In fact, qualitative studies on environmental attitudes and CSA (Chawla, 1999; Rose, 2001) suggest that such reflection takes place outside and often prior to CSA participation²³.

As well, sharers' perspectives ***are not necessarily subject to any rational discourse or "relationally-defined consensus"***, the essential components of transformative learning! Dialogue among sharers not being strongly evidenced, it is

unlikely that validity testing through communicative action is taking place within a farm's membership. This is not to say that sharers do not test their value-meanings with other people they know. Instead of looking at dialogue within the CSA network, it may be more revealing to look at dialogue outside of it! That is, maybe a CSA farm's membership and the activities they do are not the ideal sites wherein to find transformative learning at all.

They are, however, the focus of this research. This being so, there is a further aspect of Mezirow's theory that is somewhat limiting: it presents learning through reflection as a highly individualized, cognitive, and humanocentric process. Where there is dialogue, it is between people. I would suggest that in CSA participation, the principle dialogue is between people and the ecosystem. Such a dialogue lends itself to very gradual rather than revolutionary transformation, and may not even be definable by human standards of rationality that seek to delimit changes in knowledge through rigorous and categorical way. Consider Mezirow's elaboration:

Transformation theory is not a stage theory, but it emphasizes the importance of the movement toward reflectivity in adulthood as a function of intentionality and sees it advanced through increased ability and experience, which may be significantly influenced by educational interventions. Transformative learning involves an enhanced level of awareness of the context of one's beliefs and feelings, a critique of their assumptions and particular premises, an assessment of alternative perspectives, a decision to negate an old perspective in favor of a new one or to make a synthesis of old and new, an ability to take action based upon the new perspective, and a desire to fit the new perspective into a broader context of one's life. (Mezirow, 1993, p.160).

The entire process described here is conceptual and internal; rooted in developmental psychology, only its subsequent applications are outward, vaguely

²³ This was my own case (considering my narrative, "The Soup").

defined as “the broader context of one’s life”. The learner is obviated from seriously considering any non-human communicative interaction. Elsewhere Mezirow defines the emancipatory quality of intentional learning as “...freedom from libidinal, linguistic, epistemic, institutional, and *environmental* forces that limit our options and our control over our lives” (pp. 97-98, emphasis added). Thus freedom is foregrounded to the point that dialogue with the environment – requiring compromise, respect of limits, frugality, and humility – is cast in a negative light. Yet these are precisely the values that are cultivated – intentionally – through CSA participation!

By immediately extrapolating CSA participation to the level of reflection and inter-human dialogue, we miss the obvious: what about the everyday, sensory, non-reflected acts of collecting one’s food, preparing it, eating it, and in the occasional case, helping to cultivate it? These are the *actual* stuff of CSA participation. What transformative learning calls “perceptual construal” leading to tacit meaning.

We can summarize the drawbacks of framing CSA within transformative learning as follows: Sharer participation in CSA...

- Does not necessarily involve a perspective shift, intentional learning, or a shift in perspective (but may have been precipitated by any of the above);
- Does not necessarily relate to key moments of discordance or life crises (but is generally accompanied by an accumulation of doubts and suspicions regarding the validity of information available in the conventional market system);
- Does not necessarily lead to changes in meaning schemes or perspectives (but may serve as a practice in which new meaning schemes, acquired otherwise in sharers’ lives, are validated and/or take form);

- Does provide a context in which a routine (getting one's food) continually presents itself as alternative to the dominant means of achieving the same ends (shopping as a "consumer king"). That is, the discipline required as a CSA consumer invites a solidify of one's meaning scheme;
- Does involve sensorial experimentation – perceptual construal or tacit learning – and dialogue with one's ecosystem;

My intention is not to reject transformative learning as a way of framing CSA, but to illustrate how the two are only partially amenable. A passage from my last summer's journal illustrates this uncertainty:

I find it increasingly elusive to pinpoint "learning" through interviews with people. It's all observation, things popping up at odd moments, like the comment on the signs by the genetically modified corn fields, or the eavesdropping on the hayride. It's bits and pieces that together make up the whole spectrum of "meaning perspectives under transformation". But this is rarely contained within one person – and even if it were, so what?

5.03 Situated Learning

The dilemma between individual and collective processes on the one hand, and between tacit and explicit processes on the other, is cleverly addressed through Lave and Wenger (1991) theory of situated learning. Stemming principally from observations of apprenticeship relations, their research shifts the focus away from learning as an individual cognitive process of acquiring new understandings to a social process of increasing participation in a community of practice. Learning always occurs in a social context where the practice of a skill or attitude is validated contextually (by other practitioners and non-practitioners). Learning is thus a process of associating with a

shared identity: “Learning is a way of being in the social world, not a way of coming to know about it.” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.24).

Learning is not situated in the sense that there is something being learnt that happens to be located somewhere; learning is situated on all occasions. Further, all positions within a learning community contribute to the identity of the whole. Their particular combinations say something about the power relations that they play within. A position may be empowering or disempowering for the individual. What makes them legitimate is that they all constitute learning as a process of making, affirming, or transforming identities – even if the individual isn’t intentionally aware of it!

As an aspect of social practice, learning involves the whole person; it implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities – it implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person... These systems of relations arise out of and are reproduced and developed within social communities, which are in part systems of relations among persons. The person is defined by as well as defines these relations. Learning thus implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.53).

In extracting the learning from the individual, Lave and Wegner invite us to consider the community of practice as the site for learning. “Its constituents [the defining aspects of learning] contribute inseparable aspects whose combinations create a landscape... of community membership” (p. 35). This landscape is not an interior frame of reference (as transformative learning has it) but a field that encompasses inter-subjective practices among participants in the learning community.

Situated learning is distributed among the community, the members of which act as the teachers in an ad-hoc and often unintentional manner. “A decentered view... moves the focus of analysis away from teaching and onto the intricate structuring of a

community's learning resources" (Lave and Wenger, p.93-94). In instrumental/cognitive learning theories that place learning entirely within the individual, the social context (and, I hasten to add, the ecological context) is partitioned off from our view, even though it is the social context that imposes rewards, ascribes worth, stigmatizes non-participation, and legitimizes knowledge²⁴.

An emancipatory dimension is revealed: the locus of authority (who determines what is worthy as knowledge) is de-centered away from an individual expert's prescription and distributed among participants' diverse learning resources, these being the interactions they have with their environment: social, ideological, and too-often ignored, ecological. Putting the focus of research on the structures of a community's learning resources provides a highly workable framework for considering learning in CSA. Rather than asking, "how do farm sharers learn?" we ask "how does the farm membership learn?"

This interpretation – that situated learning provides a framework to look at emancipatory learning in social movements – assumes that the individual becomes critically aware of the community of practice in which she is participating and the meanings it reproduces. Rather than making or contesting this assumption, Lave and Wenger pay special attention to the issue of *access*: opportunities for involvement can favour or limit participation in the constitution of shared understandings.

The issue of labeling of genetically modified organisms in Canada provides a good example. Currently under debate, agribusiness argues against obligatory labeling while various environmental and consumer awareness groups argue for it. Here the

²⁴ And it is the ecological context that mediates the physical well-being essential to *all cognitive and social interactions*.

conventional market system advocates against access to information that would enable people to participate in the shaping of the meanings the food system reproduces. In terms of learning resources, the individual remains limited, and his participation serves only to reproduce power relationships that keep him so. Lave and Wenger recognize “hegemony over resources in learning and alienation from full participation” as possible elements of communities of practice.

This leads to a refinement of research question. **How does CSA mediate access to experiences that reproduce its meanings?** It is my hope that the preceding chapter informs this question. The following section attempts to synthesize CSA’s diverse learning resources such that the sharer can be seen as a co-participant in a community of practice.

5.04 A Synthesis: Don’t Eat the Menu

CSA involves by both conceptual and non-conceptual processes. By conceptual, I mean processes that negotiate meanings represented in symbols. Supporting the local economy, adapting one’s lifestyle to one’s ecosystem, and getting to know where one’s food comes from: these are the concepts bantered around in the literature on CSA. By non-conceptual processes, I mean the actual sensory actions of relating to one’s environment. Cultivating, preparing, and tasting food, for example, are imbedded in the individual’s experience. To use a metaphor, we know what the restaurant serves by what’s written on the menu, but until we taste the meal, we don’t really know what the food’s like. There are different kinds of knowledge.

Mezirow uses the term “pre-reflective” to characterize non-conceptual activities, but I find the prefix “pre-” sets up a hierarchy wherein perceptual construal of meaning is

relegated to a kind of inferior, formative stage of development²⁵. Such a hierarchy conveniently paves the way for cognitive learning and its institutions, but it is ultimately inadequate for learning in the lifeworld. Like riding a bicycle, it is the action itself and not its description that constitutes knowledge.

Within CSA, the emphasis put on conceptual processes varies from farm to farm. Non-conceptual processes tend to be more standard and inherent, though some farms create more space (volunteer days, for example) for these activities to take place. These two types of processes are here summarized:

Fig. 5: Conceptual versus non-conceptual processes

Conceptual Processes	Non-Conceptual Processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Start-up meanings whereat the principles of CSA are explained ● Events at the farms that are explicitly educational (such as the one I attended at the Cadet-Roussel farm) ● Farm newsletters (when they emphasize or remind sharers of the principles of CSA) ● Conversations that sharers <i>may</i> be having with other people they know. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Picking up one's vegetables (the physical act of collecting a set basket of vegetables rather than shopping) ● Preparing them (this includes washing, preserving, possibly making preserves, and of course, eating) ● Visiting the farm (the sensorial experiences: sights, sounds, smells) ● In certain cases, the physical work of helping out at the farm

These two sets of activities can be further characterized in terms of how they construe meaning, how these meanings might be validated, and the nature of the resulting knowledge.

²⁵ My resistance to this hierarchization stems in part from a personal interest in Eastern philosophies such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism, in which non-conceptual knowledge, silence, and wisdom are valued over conceptual knowledge, rhetorical discourse, and intelligence (Evans-Wentz, 1954; Kalamaras, 1994; Smith, 1991). From a global perspective, such traditions of learning have a history and breadth as long (longer, some may argue) as those of the West.

Fig. 6: Characteristics of conceptual and non-conceptual processes

	Conceptual Processes	Non-conceptual Processes
How meaning is construed...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Propositionally (by negotiating, affirming, or discussing ideas, values, attitudes) • Through dialogue with information or with other individuals • Intermittently and in discrete, identifiable units of meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptually (through the senses) and through the establishment of a routine • Through dialogue with biophysical processes • Continuously, evolving over time, and holistically with other dimensions of life
How meaning is validated...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through relationally-defined consensus, or having one's ideas, values and attitudes acknowledged within communities of practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experientially, through the senses (when the fresh organic tomato tastes better than store bought, that's the proof!)
The resulting knowledge is...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbolic, representative • Ideological (it exists in peoples' heads and may be invoked to represent shared or differing views of lifeworld) • Explicit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct, tactile • Place- and time- specific (knowledge 'happens' contextually embedded in the lifeworld) • Tacit

It would seem that formal education recognizes the conceptual column as valid learning and largely ignores the non-conceptual column. Sardello and Sanders (1999) draw on C.G. Jung, Rudolph Steiner, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to elaborate not five, but twelve senses which serve to link the external world of phenomena to the internal

world of soul and mind-body health²⁶. After all, they argue, shouldn't education concern itself ultimately with leading a balanced and harmonious life? Technological advances that distance us from sensory experience disrupt our healthy development as humans.

Balance in and of the senses, and the subsequent freedom of thought and actions, can be consciously sought and taught, but it cannot occur naturally. As more people live in areas of high population and as technical devices of every sort intervene in our sensory contact with the world, we will need to become trained in the art of living in our senses, whereas information of knowing about the senses will serve us poorly. (Sardello and Sanders, 1999, pp.227, emphasis in original).

The authors' emphasis on the crucial need to educate for the senses strikes me as a bit overblown; the argument is rather conveniently underpinned by an assumption that they don't back up, namely, *it can't happen naturally*. Even so, their perspective invites a fresh way to look at how we create the tacit knowledge of our environment through interaction with it. Similarly, environmental education recognizes the detrimental consequences of scientific knowledge separated from the knower and instead asks the question: how do we *conceptualize* environment? The question is a very good one, but the answer suggested here is that an exclusive focus on conceptual understandings masks the non-conceptual processes that accompany or substantiate them.

Non-conceptual knowledge also resists being commoditized, and so, doesn't merit much recognition in the knowledge-based global market. Stiglitz (1999) defines knowledge as having tacit and codified dimensions, as well as general and local spheres. Juxtaposing these two pairings on a bi-polar schema, he identifies the local and tacit

²⁶ The twelve senses, first elaborated by Steiner, are divided into 3 groups: the corporeal senses of touch, balance, movement, and life; the world senses of smell, taste, vision, and warmth; and the community senses of hearing, speech, thought, and "I" or individuality.

knowledge as “the hard stuff”: that which traditional development strategies have repeatedly failed to respect²⁷. He advocates “horizontal” and social learning processes as alternatives that respect cultural and place specificity.

Finally, non-conceptual and sensory experiences can only be represented symbolically (packaged into thought-forms that point to them), but they cannot be *understood*, not *known*, except by experience. They are not *knowledge of*, but *knowledge in* a phenomenon. For academic communities of practice whose status and identity rests on abstracted knowledge, *knowledge in* can be a confounding challenge. To recall Luc Bergeron’s presentation on agriculture and human being, we live in a society whose deep philosophical roots assume the primacy of mental processes over all others (“I think therefore I am”). Relinquishing this primacy, or making room for non-conceptual awareness as equally legitimate knowledge (“we are what we eat”), is bound to meet with some resistance.

A final refinement of the research question that respects both tacit and explicit knowledge might read thus: ***How does CSA mediate or promote activities that render its explicit and tacit dimensions permeable to one another? In other words, how does the tacit knowledge acquired through the actual nuts and bolts of membership participation converge with the explicit knowledge of CSA’s principles?***

My suspicion is that no structurally linear answer (“Well, X happens, then Y then Z”) exists to this question. In any case such a framework would immediately draw us back into the individual learner and away from the interplay between learning resources.

²⁷ Stiglitz’s article draws on the work of Polanyi (1962), Schon (1971), and Dewey (1957) to outline a more permeable framework for learning in development. He does not speak of “non-conceptual” knowledge, but of knowledge that doesn’t lend itself to being “codified”.

Instead, we can draw back a step and consider the various communities of practice to which a sharer belongs. The farm's membership is one, the CSA movement, a second, and finally, there are all the individual communities of practice to which every sharer belongs: their circles of friends, family, colleagues. Of these, the farm membership would seem to be the most appropriate for tacit lessons to be shared and joined to the explicit. And it is, but not to such an extent as is suggested by the literature. Rather, it is the sharers' interactions outside CSA that may provide a better understanding of how sharers validate their participation. This makes sense, really: it has repeatedly been my own pleasure to explain CSA to friends, family, and colleagues over the past two years, usually over dinner (that sensory aspect!). Certainly, some interaction must be occurring: how else would sharers validate their practice, and how would one explain the phenomenal growth in membership (from 25 to over 5,000 sharers in just 5 years)? Recalling the comment of a participant in the Cap St. Jacques program: *"If you do it alone, you lose motivation, if you're not around others, it's discouraging"*.

5.05 Bioregionalism Revisited

The assumed primacy of individual and conceptual processes is disrupted when we step back from to look at the social and sensory dimensions as learning resources. Drawing further back still, we may also consider the bioregion as a mediator of the interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge.

The bioregion can be visualized in three dimensions: the biophysical, the local, and the network system (see figure 1). The biophysical system includes the geography, climate, geology, flora and fauna, and ecological processes. Within it, energy and matter is exchanged in the form of heat, water, energy, minerals, etc. The local system includes

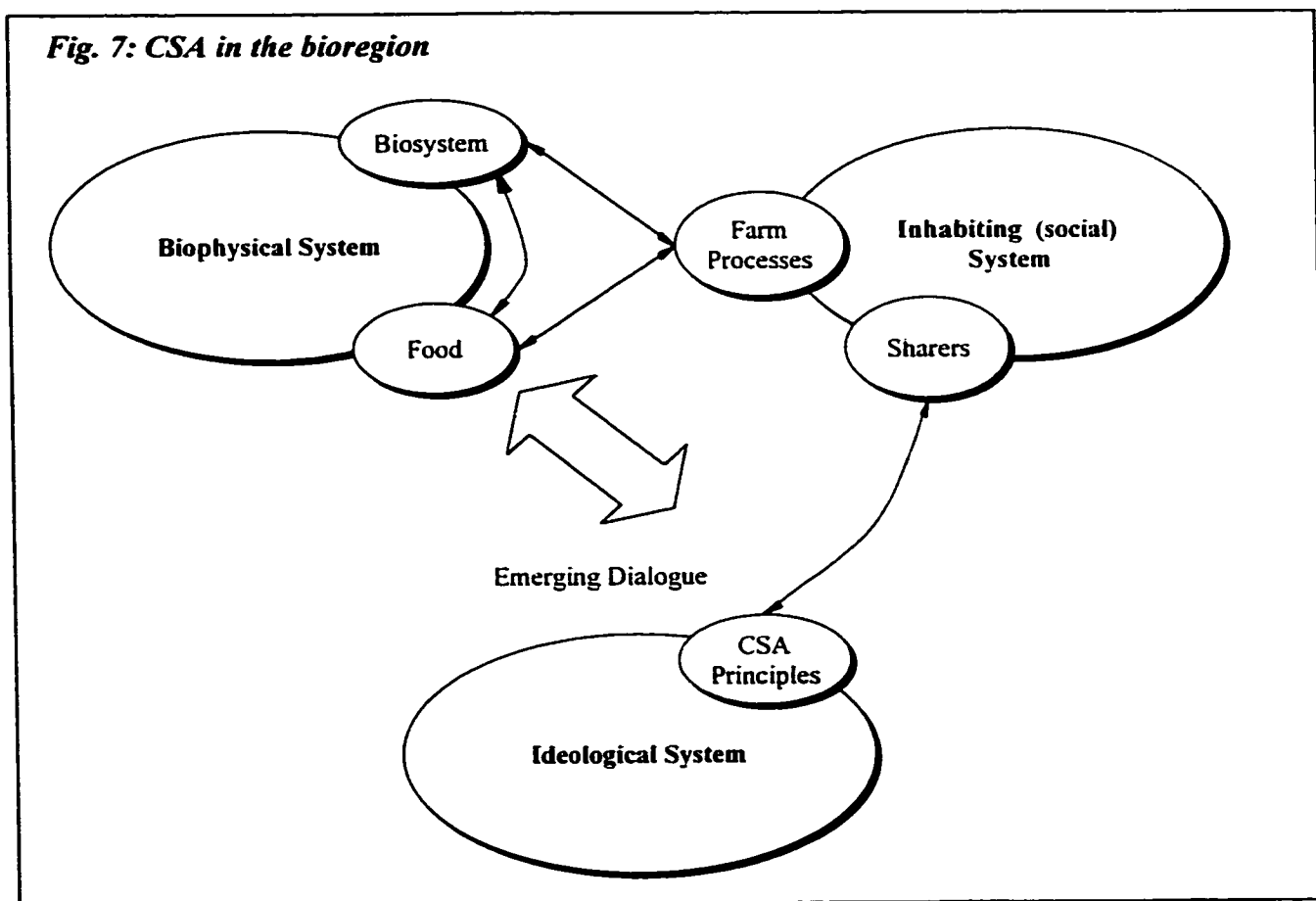
the people and their ways of living, including the infrastructures for agriculture, transport, communications, cities and towns, education, industrial technology, and all social organization. Information, values, material goods and services interact at this level. The network system includes economic and political agendas. Ideology, power, and influence are its essence. The bioregion constantly regenerates itself through the interactions among these levels; it cannot be understood by the functions of its individual parts. For McTaggart and many others, the network sub-system favouring growth-oriented ideologies is downright dangerous:

In terms of relationship to the local region these network sub-systems are disembodied and deterritorialized entities, lacking any kind of place-loyalty or responsibility. They operate to prioritize their own systemic ends – economic profits, political stability, and cultural-scientific homogenization of society. (McTaggart, 1993, p.316).

Aside from being non-localized, the network system is non-human (but inoperative without the acquiescence of humans) and exempted from having a social conscience for the problems its decisions may engender in the other two systems. This is because “social conscience” is not in its domain; the onus of dealing with social problems rests in the local system. This makes sense: “While there is no guarantee that a local community will always behave ‘responsibly’ in respect to the region it inhabits, the rationale for doing so is certainly more apparent than for the network system” (p. 316). McTaggart recommends that people must break the network system’s monopoly on intervening in their bioregion. Ironically but quite logically, this cannot be done by another ideological policy (i.e., another network system directive). Critiquing the dominant ideologies is indeed helpful, but for viable alternatives to arise, a willful

strengthening of other dimensions within the bioregion, and particularly the biophysical subsystem, are called for.

This may be thought of as a *dialogue with one's ecosystem*, essentially what I suggest as the dominant phenomena present in CSA participation. Overlaying the schematics of McTaggart's bioregionalism and what I've termed CSA's links (fig. 4), we have the following picture:



The emphasis here (most of the interactions) is between the biophysical system and the inhabiting system. In fact, it is imaginable that interactions between these two systems could modify the third (CSA principles). CSA farmers' refusal to accept to a single prescribed, idealized CSA model helps keep the ideological system in check,

reinforcing instead the vitality of interactions between the inhabiting system and the biophysical system. Sharers, in this model, are gradually given access to participation in this dynamic (the emerging dialogue).

What is most striking about bioregionalism is that learning is distributed among dimensions in a bioregion. The bioregion may be seen to exhibit characteristics of “mind” attributed elsewhere to complex systems:

Bioregionalism would, however, go further [than systems theory]. Regional systems exhibit a quality which we may refer to as 'co-evolution' in terms of their informational content...the informational component grows within the system and emerges or evolves along with it. In other words, the future behaviour of the system as a whole is conditioned by the manner in which its information component evolves [...] Gregory Bateson... had suggested many years ago that nature and natural (ecological?) systems had a capacity to conduct some form of 'learning' (McTaggart, 1993, p.309).

Situated learning, we recall, also models learning across a community of practice. Bioregionalism strikes essentially the same chord, with the added dimension that the community's learning resources include biophysical components – the actual ecological processes which all the time surround and interpenetrate us. We are invited to tune into a wider understanding of what can make up human learning communities, allowing us to pose questions not only about the content of learning, but about the access to resources and experiences through which we create meaning.

5.06 Radical Angles

CSA also appears in the writings that radicalize modern education. Though hinting at this a bit, I have not delved into these perspectives apart from the opening quotations to various chapters. For the most part, such writing invokes CSA to exemplify the authors' arguments rather than to convey an understanding about CSA from direct

experiences. As my intention with this research is to generate interesting questions based on the experience and not the promise of CSA, I have resisted co-opting my reflections into a more abstracted discourse. But I admit that it has been tempting to do so! Even so, it would be remiss to omit certain perspectives, both to enhance the theoretical potential of CSA and to suggest ideas and cautions for future research.

Foremost among these voices is that of Wendell Berry, a Kentucky farmer and writer from whom I drew the opening quotation to this research. Berry advocates sufficiency rather than growth, stewardship of the land, and local knowledge to sustain communities: positions for which, it is argued, he has been exiled from the dominant discourse in education:

[Wendell Berry's] prolific outpouring of books, essays, poems, plays, novels, and short stories of two decades is ignored by most professors and students of education. This is not an accident: his exclusion is the price Berry has to pay for the radical challenge he poses to the central "certainties" of modern mainstream institutions, including education. Berry's challenge goes far beyond that of the educational system's well-known "radical insiders". (Prakash. 1994, pp.135-6).

Berry's work appears in publications on sustainable agriculture, bioregionalism, and in grass-roots social movements. His writings resonate with those of another academic black sheep: Ivan Illich. Illich recasts the "liberation" promised by modern education as a corruptive socialization of people to see themselves as "nomadic professionals" in constant need of the latest educational fix. He responds by calling for an education based on conviviality or communion with the "Others" of the culture, society, and nature. His work is central to an emerging educational philosophy of environmental postmodernism. Gabbard (1994) uses Illich to deconstruct the

monopolistic hold over knowledge and learning currently enjoyed by institutional education, itself conceptually underpinned by human capital theory:

The human capital movement views individuals almost solely as “human resources” to be engineered through schooling, a process also aimed at compelling persons to view themselves as competitive economic units who should be primarily concerned with achieving ever greater levels of personal wealth and affluence. The model for understanding the individual advanced here and in Illich’s thought offers some important guideposts for renegotiating the view of the individual. Positing “individuals plus the communities to which they belong” (past, present, future, and natural communities) as the fundamental unit of the educational enterprise, environmental postmodernism holds promise as the basis of a radical new pedagogy that promotes sustainability across social and ecological relationships rather than personal affluence as the worthiest of human pursuits. (Gabbard, 1994, p.187).

Environmental post-modernism is further explored by David Orr (1992). Orr argues that the environment of institutionalized education – particularly the university – insulates learners from all understanding of the resource flows that nourish them. For example, he points out that at most of these institutes of higher learning, one can study for four years or more and be accredited as a professional in the field of resource management without ever knowing or participating in the management of the resources of the university itself (beyond unthinkingly consuming them). Our ideal campus is something of a climate-controlled theme park: level fields of weed-free grass kept ever-green by a landscaping infrastructure, food that somehow arrives from somewhere, wastes that are taken away to somewhere, all kinds of material resources whose acquisition is relegated to specialists, and learners who are obviated from having any concern over how this all happens! With learning entirely framed in an artificially

maintained environment, learners naturally come to think in fragmented and place-less ways about the nature of knowledge. What's more, this is presented as "progress"²⁸.

On balance, modern education has certainly better equipped us to dominate nature rather than dwell in harmony with it and to understand things in fragments rather than think broadly about systems and ecosystems. More of this kind of education will only compound our problems [...] The challenge before educators is that of developing in themselves and their students mindsets and habits that enable people to live sustainably on a planet with a biosphere. (Orr, 1992, p.4).

More profoundly, Orr sees this challenge as a reorientation towards truth. Higher education has always sought a truth of mastery - truth that may be externally validated and used as leverage for the advancement of knowledge. Against this, Orr offers "humbling truth" - truth that "has to do with wisdom and restraint, not technical fixes... aimed toward health, justice, fairness, peace, and all of those things that tie us together in community - including the biotic community" (p.7).

Orr's and Illich's work is joined by a large variety of post-development critics who turn the development paradigm completely on its head by suggesting that what the western world governments advance as the highest of human goods in terms of economic and social development is more accurately described as cultural and ecological genocide. "Education for development" is re-phrased as "cultural defoliation", "economic growth" as "cancer", "progress" as "needs manufacturing", "humanitarian NGOs" as "Trojan horses of economicide" (all elaborated in various chapters in Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997). These writers do not limit their critiques to the economic models advanced by global superpowers; they extend their analysis to the rational-scientific paradigm that underlies knowledge production itself, in other words, to the taken-for granted "social

²⁸ Orr's critique can be seen to parallel the "consumer king" environment offered as "progress" by the conventional market: in the case of education, the consumers are the students.

organization of the production of knowledge in the value-neutral, autonomous university” (Apfell-Marglin, 1997, p.42). Alternatives are to be found in communities and practices not sold on the paradigm of knowledge-as-commodity: Gandhi's *swadeshi* (or local self-sufficiency), *vernacular or soil cultures* (Esteva and Prakash, 1997), the *public commons* (Illich, 1983), and *home economics* (Berry, 1970).

It is in the context of these writings that CSA occasionally comes up as an example of a counter-hegemonic practice linking human values through localized knowledge to social well being. The emphasis in this writing on culturally regenerated learning, dialogue with nature, and the central role of food are striking in their relevance to CSA.

Finally, one other conjecture – more pertinent to adult education – merits some mention. The dominant discourse in adult education, I would argue along with Gabbard (1994), is one underpinned by human capital theory. Human capital theory sees adults as bearers of knowledge capital; progress is made by enhancing the quality of people's knowledge. Knowledge is necessarily a commodity to be bartered, accumulated and leveraged for competitive economic growth. The knowledge market being international and largely dependent upon an infrastructure of information technology, the commodity of knowledge must furthermore be non-place-specific and transposable from one culture and region to another (digitally, preferably)²⁹.

In CSA, we see a different kind of knowledge: knowledge that does not claim to be universal; that resists individual ownership; that embraces each local ecosystem as

²⁹ A parallel can be made here to the codification of “vegetable” knowledge through the science of genetic engineering. Just as the new knowledge-based economy constructs knowledge as an autonomous and transposable commodity, so too, does the knowledge of vegetables exist in the “autonomous text” of a plant's DNA. The business of biotechnology is, quite simply, to encode and decode that information. It does this in laboratories and controlled environments, well beyond the cultural or biophysical spaces of the farm.

intrinsically worthy of care; that combines tacit and explicit processes in the most common, as yet non-professionalized of human activities (getting one's food, preparing and eating it). Such knowledge is not acquired so much as it is cultivated. As I have already suggested, it does not lend itself to being commoditized. From the perspective of human capital theory, such knowledge is of little value. It is interesting to note that Theodore Shultz, credited as the founder of human capital theory, was himself an agronomist³⁰! To define wealth, Shultz measured the distance people are able to put between themselves and traditional (non-industrialized) agriculture, which he characterizes as the "economy of being poor" (Shultz, 1981, p.3). His description of the human-nature relationship reveals much about his theory's ideological base. "Nature," he writes, "is host to thousands of species that are hostile to the endeavors of farmers. Nature, however, can be *subdued* by knowledge and human abilities" (Shultz, 1981, p.17, emphasis definitely added).

Although it is not to be denied that farming is hard physical work, Schultz's rather harsh rendering of it leads one to question just to what extent the "man dominates nature" value underlies the elaboration of human capital theory, and thus, the education system that it weighs so heavily upon.

5.07 Conclusion

Community Supported Agriculture is above all a practice integrated into one's daily life that presents opportunities for creating meaning. Though some of this meaning making may involve critical reflection, much of it is embedded in everyday and commonplace actions and does not necessarily involve explicit reflection. CSA

participation does not seem in itself to be a vehicle for transformative learning, but it does involve encountering alternative frames of reference, wherein the values of choice, freedom and independence are eschewed for responsiveness, responsibility and interdependence. In fact, these frames of reference co-exist to some extent or another within each individual. Very significantly, no ideal balance of values or mechanisms for achieving them is mandated, and this openness to diversity is consciously voiced as an inherent principle of CSA.

At the same time, different farms are in the position to mediate access to activities through which sharers reproduce meanings. This reproduction of meanings takes place through conceptual processes and through non-conceptual processes. It is the permeability between these dimensions – the way they play into each other – that is likely to determine the evolution of a CSA identity as a whole.

Among the learning resources that participants may access, the least obvious and most important is the bioregion itself, more precisely, the farm's ecosystem. Participating in CSA can be thought of as a dialogue within this ecosystem. The exchanges of this dialogue are measured in seasons, punctuated by harvests, and flavored by the weather. It is a dialogue that invites use of all the senses. To lift a phrase from Wendell Berry, it involves "enlivening and enhancing one's perception" of the environment. This is not an aesthetic frill, but a constituent part of learning within CSA. Sharers' comments suggest that the work on the farm takes on a certain aesthetic quality from which emerges a sense of satisfaction.

³⁰ Shultz won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work, particularly in its significance for the 'Green Revolution'.

Social exchange within a farm's membership does provide some space for sharers to validate their experiences. However, sharers tend to create their relation with the food system through individually appropriated relations, possibly within other spheres of their lives. In terms of situated learning, each sharer belongs to multiple communities of practice, any of which may serve to demarcate their CSA participation as meaningful. This is not just about being accepted within a community of practice, but also about critiquing another: that of the conventional market system of industrially produced food. The latter constitutes a perceived threat to the individual's agency in determining what values, actions, and relations are to make up her lifeworld.

In short, the learning processes in CSA membership are explicit and tacit, conceptual and sensorial. These processes play themselves out across individual, social, and more often neglected, ecological spheres.

5.08 Suggestions for Further Research

Subsequent research in CSA could take many forms. What strikes me as most interesting is the way in which tacit and explicit meanings interrelate. Although a qualitative research framework could be developed to explore this, I suspect that a more experiential approach would yield a deeper understanding. I recall the activities one farmer recommended doing with sharers: sampling different food items, potlucks, recipe exchanges, everything centered around food. Essentially, this places the sensory experience as the central phenomena for learning and change. Such membership activities are themselves examples of participatory research, and could be readily combined with more formal phenomenological studies. Similarly, how could CSA be informed by research that deals with aesthetics, refinement of sensory perception, poetics,

or other less cognitive human endeavors? Such research might seek to legitimize sensory learning as knowledge, an area of study marginally included in child education, yet barely existent in adult education.

On the more conceptual side, it would make sense to widen the research lens to look not just at how individuals learn, but also at how communities of practice learn, and wider still to include bioregions as learners. The key academic term here is *praxis*, for which a growing body of research literature exists. McTaggart (1996) also notes how systems theory provides a viable footing to consider the mindedness of complex systems.

Just to throw a wrench into much of what is so far elaborated as alternative to consumer practice, we can also ask if CSA participation is not itself a highly consumer activity? That is, do people consume the “green ideology” of CSA with the same avidity its principles claim to counter? Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) argue forcibly that “postmodernity and contemporary capitalism encourage and require consumption and people who develop their identities through consumption” (p. 16). Individualized identity-creation, they suggest, takes place in all spheres of life: lifestyle, confessional, vocational, *and* critical practices such as adherence to social movements. This is not intended as a cynical leapfrogging of so-called emancipatory adult learning; rather, it is an honest invitation to consider adult learning within its larger social field.

Another possible line of enquiry comes from social movement theory. Offe (1985) suggests that to predict where social movements might go, we ought to consider how the various players within them resolve their “internal cleavages and inconsistencies”. That is, what alignments might occur through new middle class, old

middle class, unionized working class, non-unionized class, and peripheral groups³¹?

Such an enquiry would be informed more by demographics than by learning processes: large-scale changes in the presence and function of unions, personal service industry, student population, aging of the population, etc.

More theoretical research may be pursued in relation to CSA: how credibility of information relates to perceived threat to the lifeworld; how a sense of community relates to social movement participation; how human capital theory has shaped education and agricultural policies and attitudes.

Finally, a caution: we may situate each of these possible lines of enquiry within the bioregion. Some favour an exploration of ideological systems (mapping human capital theory), some of inhabiting systems (a demographic analysis of social movement stakeholders), and some of biophysical systems (sensory learning), all in their relations to adult learning. As such, research constructs its own problematization, sharpens the focus on certain areas, and inadvertently or not, draws our attention away from others. Research would do well to question how its presence weights understandings in its community of practice and more broadly, its bioregion. In other words, don't eat the menu.

³¹ These are the groups Offe identifies as constituting old and new social movements.

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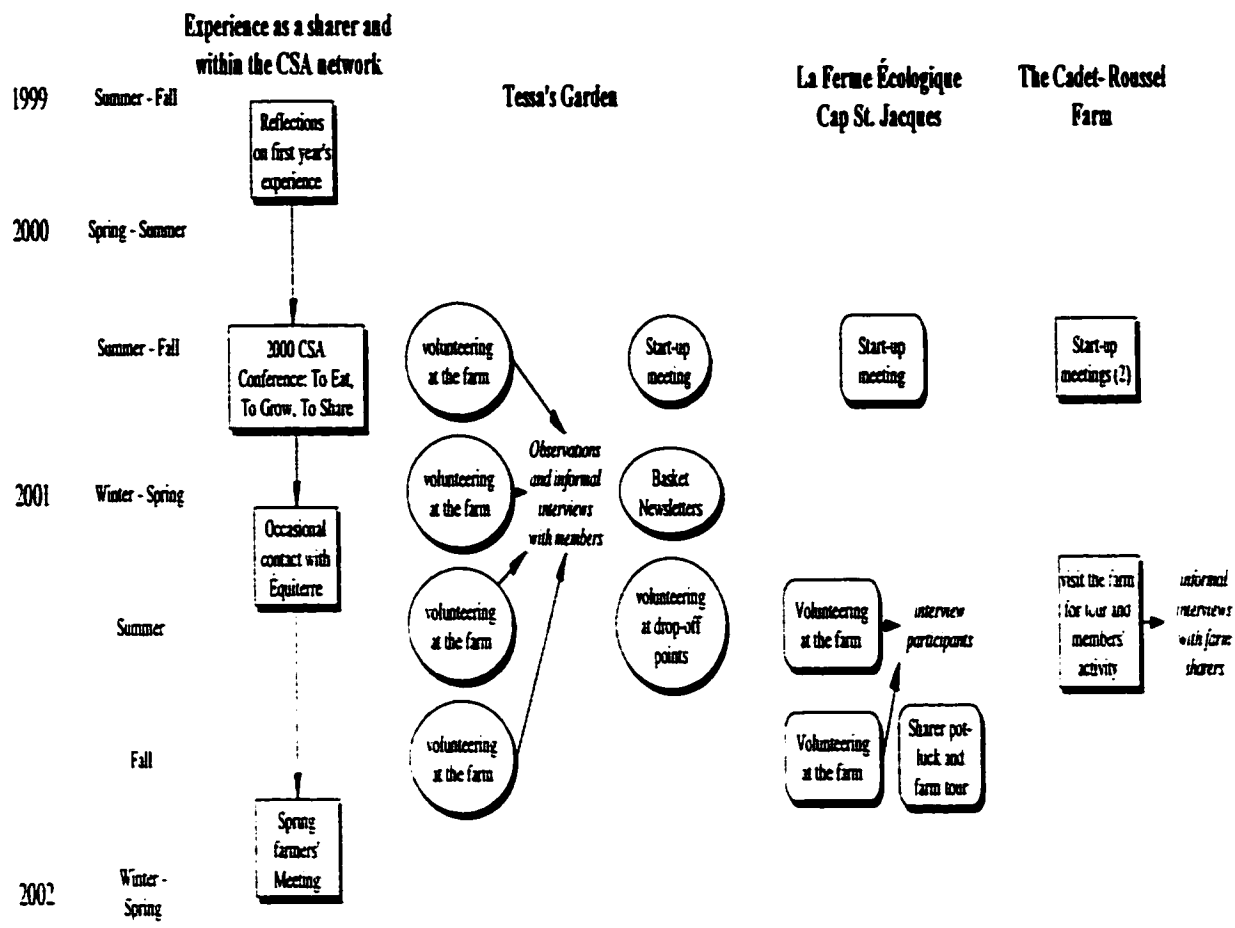
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Appendix I: Schema of Research Sites



Appendix 2 : The Soup

I am sitting around the table with my family and even though it has been sixteen years since I was last in this room, I remember it pretty well. From where I am sitting I can see a painting of my grandmother. In the painting, she is a young woman of maybe 30-odd years, with a broad frame and strong arms. Her arms are holding a basket filled with apples, I think. She is wearing a blue dress and the light is falling on her brow. She seems to be squinting. It is a painting that was painted by a friend of hers, who is now dead. My cousin Ede, who was a student of this painter, took me to the tiny old museum, now closed, which the town hall keeps the keys to. We looked at the dusty paintings – the electricity had been cut so we couldn't see clearly – and Ede explained to me that the painter and our grandmother had been good friends. So sometimes I think of my grandmother that way, when I picture her. In the painting you can see that she is looking at you.

My grandmother was there at the table, too. She is 88 years old, and according to my uncle who says according to the doctor, she hasn't long to live. It was largely for this reason that my family and I went to Hungary to visit our family there in the summer of 1999. My father, the oldest of three brothers, moved from Hungary when he was 18. He has since returned several times to help with the family business. Or businesses, because they have had to adapt to the changing times. So Ede explained to me, as we cycled on bicycles with constantly flattening tires, through the country roads of the village – Némétker – roads that still smell like cows. Ede seemed sad, somewhat. He explained that there weren't many options for young people, now. A lot of pressure to change and move.

There were about twelve of us in the dining room. It has dark red wallpaper with a repeating motif and there is a cabinet by one wall with china in it. It is small, so the great grandchildren eat together watching TV in the adjacent room, just as my sister and I had sixteen years before, when we last visited. In the middle of the table is a bowl of soup. This soup – and I realize that I don't know what its real name is, that is, the Hungarian name – the soup is yellow and salty with many long, delicate noodles, and pieces of chicken. The noodles you can buy, but you can also make them like they used

to, and still do, with a kind of noodle-maker where you put the pasta in one side, turn the handle, and out comes the thin, stringy noodles. It fascinated me, this noodle maker, because it was so heavy, solid iron. Also, it makes me laugh, because I remember the customs people once x-rayed our luggage and thought the noodle-maker was a gun, so they confiscated our luggage for several days; this is the joke in our family. Anyway, the soup with its noodles is tasty; and the taste is in my memory with all of the other memories of Hungary. It is a soup that is served before just about every meal at my aunt's home, so perhaps it's not so special for them. It is very clear and thin, so when you eat it there is much slurping and dapping of napkins.

My grandmother is very shaky; she was shaky 16 years ago, I remember, and she often needs help eating. She doesn't hear very well, and has an intelligence and wit in her eyes. Around the table, my father and cousin translating from Hungarian to English, they tell stories to tease her, how she pretends to be very ill to get attention, they say. My grandmother smacks her lips and sits upright and grins and looks into the corner of her eyes, all exaggerated coyness.

The conversation changes from topic to topic; not everything is translated so I don't follow everything. They talk about changes in the village, and about the neighboring boomtown of Pacs, where Hungary's aging nuclear power plant turns out about 50% of the country's energy needs and employs most everyone. I had visited the plant with Ede a few days before. On the trails behind the plant, walking between artificial lakes fed by the Danube, Ede talked to me about certain misgivings. He had been to Germany for several years to make money, working in a tire shop. The wages were incomparably higher in Germany, and many Hungarians have gone there as transient workers, ever since their country embraced the free market. Ede recognizes that it was important, but he tells me that he would rather have stayed in Hungary and become a musician. Ede is a musician, in fact. He's very good and many young kids in the village ask him to give them guitar lessons; he still plays with a quartet of singers and some other musicians, at weddings and festivals. But when he married he decided, not without much urging from his father, to put his energy into something more stable and safe. He works part-time as a fireman now in Pacs and he has a small business with tires

which he operates from his house, which was built on the property right next to his father's. It's too late, now, he says, but I'm not exactly sure what he's referring to. Ede seems rueful and I get the impression that he really wants to say something, but maybe he's not sure what it is. His eyes are very friendly and a little worried. He explains how it is so good to spend time with us, his cousins, how it's important for him. He wanted to sell the family car and come visit us in Canada with his family last year, but he was talked out of it.

I heard also that many people of my father's generation are finding it difficult in Hungary. Many heart attacks and stress-related illnesses. All of the changes in the system, redefining everything they had lived.

In the dining room, my grandmother is nodding steadily, her eyes moving from face to face, all engaged in discussion. Three generations younger than her are with her around the soup. Later, she would show my sister and me the hundreds of photos she keeps in her room in plastic bags and old albums. We look through the photos saying nothing other than the names of the people in them. It's the only language we have in common, and it seems to suffice; my grandmother lays a thick hand on an image of a fat-cheeked child and says the child's name and smacks her lips for punctuation, and my sister and I nod and repeat the name as a question, as a confirmation.

I catch myself thinking about that soup often. Around the table, the different generations, every generation with its own concerns: the grand-children watching the cartoon network; my cousins and my sister and I wondering about where we might be in the future; our parents, about where they'd been and what to do now, maybe how to make sense of it.

I look at my grandmother and I think, maybe, what is important to her is *this moment* – this time with the family around the table, whatever they are talking about. That, maybe, and the soup in the bowl, in the middle of the table with the white, embroidered tablecloth.