Journal of Interdisciplinary History, xxxix:3 (Winter, 2009), 323–348.

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The Gastrodynamics of Displacement: Place-Making and Gustatory Identity in the Immigrants' Midwest

Between 1830 and 1920, millions of Europeans arrived on the prairies and plains of the rural Midwest. Scholars tend to stress the surprising cultural continuity in the lives of these men and women, but immigrants were, in fact, forced to adapt to changing circumstances from the moment when they left their old homes. The study of immigrant food and foodways exemplifies this transition and exposes the social, economic, and environmental restraints on the transplantation of culture. Immigrants often discussed the significance of eating (and drinking) differently in their writings, and in recent years, historians have begun to take an interest in this aspect of the immigrant experience. This article provides a theoretical and historical introduction to the social, psychological, and symbolic meaning of food, with special emphasis on the issues raised by food and foodways in an immigrant context. It draws from contributions by psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists, as well as the findings of historians, devising a framework that can be used to interpret the food stories that immigrants told in their letters, diaries, and memoirs.

The act of eating joins together universal, social, and individual aspects of human existence. All humans must eat; all humans follow certain group norms for eating; and every human fulfills the needs of an individual organism by ingesting food. According to Simmel, eating is a uniquely individualistic activity: Any person can read what another has read or see what another has seen, but not eat what another has eaten. But as Simmel also pointed out, this singular aspect is precisely what makes eating all the more susceptible to social regulation. Incorporation, the act of allowing food into the body, potentially involves an anxious encounter between self and world, or the known and the unknown. The rules of a food system relieve this anxiety; they sanction behavior by

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providing nature with the imprint of culture. Biology determines that people must eat; culture regulates what and how they eat.[1]

The tension between individual needs and cultural imperatives inherent in any food event makes the study of immigrants' experiences with food particularly intriguing. A newly arrived immigrant was immediately faced with unfamiliar opportunities and restraints in the realm of food. Due to the sheer complexity of any food system—including the availability of foodstuffs, the proper equipment and skills needed to prepare food "correctly," and the accepted circumstances of eating—immigrants had to adapt or adjust in some way to new culinary realities. Since food habits have meaning only in relation to a sociocultural totality, preparing and consuming the same foods in a new context is as much an act of innovation, assertion, and transformation as it is an act of reproducing tradition. Indeed, what passed for the unconscious reproduction of tradition was often a conscious performance of identity. To examine individual immigrants' perceptions, conceptions, and emotional responses to food and food-related events that collided with prior experience and preconceived notions is therefore an integral part of analyzing immigrants' adaptive behavior.[2]

Historians have long studied the production, processing, and preparation of food from the perspectives of economic history, labor history, and women's history. In recent years, they have begun to take an interest in the consumption of food as well. Works by

1 Georg Simmel (trans. Michael Symons), "The Sociology of the Meal [1910]," *Food and Foodways,* V (1994), 345–350; Claude Fischler, "Food, Self, and Identity," *Social Science Information,* XXVII (1988), 275–292.

2 Simone Cinotto, "Leonardo Covello, the Covello Papers, and the History of Eating Habits among Italian Immigrants in New York," *Journal of American History,* XCI (2004), 497–521; Tracy Poe, "The Labour and Leisure of Food Production as a Mode of Ethnic Identity Building among Italians in Chicago, 1890–1940," *Rethinking History,* V (2001), 131–148; Euridice Charon Cordona, "Re-Encountering Cuban Tastes in Australia," *Australian Journal of Anthropology,* XV (2004), 40–53; Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); M. S. A. Rao, "Conservatism and Change in Food Habits among the Migrants in India: A Study in Gastrodynamics," in R. S. Khare and *idem* (eds.), *Food, Society, and Culture: Aspects in South Asian Food Systems* (Durham, 1986), 121–140; Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell, "Introduction," in *idem* (eds.), *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity* (Knoxville, 1984), 3–15; Susan Kalcik, "Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the Performance of Identity," in *ibid.,* 37–65; Mary Douglas, *In the Active Voice* (Boston, 1982), 100–101; Eugene N. Anderson, *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture* (New York, 2005); Krishnendu Ray, *The Migrant's Table: Meals and Memories in Bengali-American Households* (Philadelphia, 2004); Jitsuichi Masuoka, "Changing Food Habits of the Japanese in Hawaii," *American Sociological Review,* X (1945), 759–765.

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Levenstein, Gabaccia, and Diner have established American food history as a more prominent field of study. Yet, there remains a discrepancy between the significance that immigrants attributed to food and the attention that immigration historians have paid to it.[3]

Food "identifies and symbolizes who we are," is "imbued with meaning," and "mediates body and mind." Ultimately our foodways constitute "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior." Thus, beyond the mere biological notion of feeding, food and food habits occasion some of the ways in which people understand themselves, identify with others, and communicate their desires, beliefs, and claims to status. Food places individuals in time, space, and social hierarchies. But to confine the study of food to the analysis of symbols and meanings is impossible. What is needed is an "integrative" approach that recognizes both the biological and the social aspects of eating.[4]

Psychologists have taken the first step toward understanding the social implications of biology as it relates to food. Early scholars focused on physiological explanations, positing a homeostasis theory in which the body seeks to maintain a stable state based on hunger and satiety cues. Eventually, however, it became clear that the physiological responses of both animals and humans depend on the prior experiences of each individual. In other words, eating is a learned and a learning process. Experiments have demonstrated that animals learn food preferences and feeding behavior from conspecifics in a variety of ways; humans are not fundamentally different in this regard. Notwithstanding the mediating role of genetic predisposition, children learn to enjoy foods served in positive contexts and dislike foods with negative social connota-

3 Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (New York, 1988); *idem, Paradox of Plenty: The Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York, 1993); Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998); Diner, *Hungering for America.*

4 Millie Rahn, "Laying a Place at the Table: Creating Public Foodways Models from Scratch," *Journal of American Folklore,* CXIX (2006), 33; Paul Rozin, "Sociocultural Influences on Human Food Selection," in Elizabeth D. Capaldi (ed.), *Why We Eat What We Eat: The Psychology of Eating* (Washington, D. C., 1996), 235; Khare and Rao, "Introduction," in *idem* (eds.), *Food, Society, and Culture,* 6; Roland Barthes, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption [1961]," in Elborg Forster and Robert Forster (eds.), *European Diet from Pre-Industrial to Modern Times* (New York, 1975), 50; Fischler, "Food, Self, and Identity," 275–277.

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tions. Even seemingly "natural" feelings of disgust and repulsion are culturally conditioned to some extent.[5]

But the process of food learning is premised on the biological fact of what psychologists call "the omnivore's paradox." Human beings are omnivore-generalists, meaning that the number of their potential foods is high. Hence, they are likely to exhibit *neophilia,* the persistent desire to add new foods to the culinary repertoire. However, they also suffer from *neophobia,* a reluctance or skepticism toward new foods—a trait shared by rats, their fellow omnivores, who in experiments use sophisticated strategies to deal with the danger of toxicity. In the case of human beings, culturally defined questions of acceptability come into play as well. During the Korean War, some American prisoners of war died of malnutrition not because they were fed too little but because they refused to eat unfamiliar foods. Similarly, although early European colonists' benefited from American Indian foodways, they often suffered hunger and privation because they failed to identify potential aliments as food. In the case of immigrants more generally, the significance of food learning and the ambiguity toward new foods inherent in omnivore psychology reverses an old adage. So far as food is concerned, "familiarity breeds liking rather than contempt." Thus, social and spatial displacement inescapably poses a potential conflict between an altered gastronomical reality and the inertia of learned food habits.[6]

The psychological concepts of food learning and the omni-

5 Capaldi, "Introduction," in *idem* (ed.), *Why We Eat What We Eat,* 3–9; *idem,* "Conditioned Food Preferences," in *ibid.,* 53–80; L. L. Birch and J. A. Fisher, "The Role of Experience in the Development of Children's Eating Behavior," in *ibid.,* 130; Rozin, "Sociocultural Influences on Human Food Selection," 233–263; Bennett G. Galef, Jr., "Social Influences on Food Preference and Feeding Behaviors of Vertebrates," in Capaldi (ed.), *Why We Eat What We Eat,* 207–231; Bernard Lyman, *A Psychology of Food: More than a Matter of Taste* (New York, 1989); Alexandra W. Logue, *The Psychology of Eating and Drinking: An Introduction* (New York, 1991; orig. pub. 1986).

6 Lyman, *Psychology of Food,* 24; J. A. Mennella and G. K. Beauchamp, "The Early Development of Human Flavor Preferences," in Capaldi (ed.), *Why We Eat What We Eat,* 103–104; Birch and Fisher, "Role of Experience," 131, Rozin, "Sociocultural Influences," 237; Logue, *Psychology of Eating and Drinking,* 98–111; Fischler, "Food, Self, and Identity," 277–278; Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table,* vii, 4; Mark McWilliams, "Distant Tables: Food and the Novel in Early America," *Early American Literature,* XXXVIII (2003), 365–366; Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil, *Sociology on the Menu: An Invitation to the Study of Food and Society* (New York, 1997), 51–52; Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat,* 19–20. See also Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York, 1985), 1–5.

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vore's paradox can be supplemented by insights from sociology and anthropology. Simmel clearly recognized the social character of eating and the social implications of the various "rules" that structure a meal. Since eating has the potential of being a dangerously individualistic, egotistical affair, rules for appropriate timing, order, and gesture are necessary to impress the stamp of culture upon each food event. Simmel argued that conversation is necessary to lift the meal to the highest aesthetic order, because social interaction disguises the bodily need for sustenance as the foundation of eating. Similarly, the intervention of knife and fork between food and mouth creates a dignified distance between nature and civilization.[7]

The most ambitious attempt to understand how people relate to food and how ideas about food reveal truths about society is Levi-Strauss' massive *Mythology* trilogy. In the context of Levi-Strauss' structuralism, the human mind is a "thing among things," defined by "constraining structures" that unconsciously manifest themselves through all of the cultural variations observed in human societies. Levi-Strauss was greatly influenced by structural linguistics, which emphasized the unconscious over the conscious and the relationship between terms rather than the qualities of the terms as such. He argued that other social phenomena are "of the same type" as linguistic phenomena—that is, they are based on general but implicit (unconscious) laws expressed in symbolic systems.[8]

Based on his studies of native myths in the Americas, Levi-Strauss concluded that food and cooking have a special significance among all social phenomena. Cooking, "a truly universal form of human activity" (and thus similar to language), evinces structural oppositions that can be used to describe human attributes in general. Such oppositions exist, for example, in the "culinary triangle" between the raw, which is natural and "unmarked," the cooked, which is the product of a cultural transformation, and the rotted, which is the product of a natural transformation. Yet,

7 Simmel, "Sociology of the Meal."

8 Claude Levi-Strauss (trans. J. Weightman and D. Weightman), *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York, 1967; orig. pub 1964), 10; *idem* (trans. Weightman and Weightman), *From Honey to Ashes* (New York, 1973; orig. pub. 1966); *idem* (trans. Weightman and Weightman), *The Origin of Table Manners* (New York, 1978; orig. pub. 1968); *idem* (trans. C. Jacobsen and B. G. Schoepf), *Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1963; orig. pub. 1958), 34.

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as Levi-Strauss admitted, the specific interpretations of these categories vary from culture to culture, creating "concrete" triangles that somehow relate to the triangle in the abstract. Through cooking, a society "unconsciously translates its structure" or reveals its contradictions.[9]

Whereas Simmel had described the normative structuring of a meal in concrete terms and with special reference to his own time, place, and class, Levi-Strauss cast a wider net and sought to show that all people think about food in related ways (as a kind of language) and that the symbolism of food reveals the underlying structures of society (which, although variable, reflect the deep structures of the human mind). Both emphasized the imposition of culture upon natural processes through culturally defined rules. In general, people follow these rules unconsciously, with no explicit analysis of their meanings; as products of socialization, they form part of the individual's habitus.

Bourdieu's landmark work, *Distinction,* analyzed the relationship between taste and class structures in France. According to Bourdieu, the food habits of working-class people were fundamentally different from middle-class food culture. Whereas manual workers ate and drank together, consuming ample amounts of hearty foods in a convivial atmosphere, members of the bourgeoisie spent less of their money on food and more on health, beauty, and fashion. Hence, the large body, brute manners, and "temporal immanentism" of workingmen contrasted with the delicate bodies and deferred gratification of bureaucrats or school teachers. In short, workers' food habits emphasized being and doing in the here and now, whereas the bourgeoisie escaped into forms, appearances, and better futures (as they did in other aesthetic fields).[10]

Food items become cultural items through the workings of a set of rules (a language or grammar) that are unconsciously adopted by individuals within a physical and social space. Food roles and behavior, in turn, reflect the social structure of a society

9 Levi-Strauss, "The Culinary Triangle," in Carole Counihan and Panny Van Esterik (eds.), *Food and Culture: A Reader* (New York, 1997), 28; *idem, The Raw and the Cooked,* 164; *idem, Origins of Table Manners,* 478–495. For a critique of Levi-Strauss, see Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (New York, 1982), 17–29.

10 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 179–201.

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and the differences within it. The question arises, How does this process affect the gastrodynamics of migration? In other words, what is the dynamic of the change that occurs when people move from one gustatory context to another? Mankekar pointed out that food "acquires a distinctive valence . . . in diasporic and migrant communities" as food habits become markers of "cultural continuity, difference, hybridity, and/or assimilation." With the ability to express both "oneness" and "otherness," food is a particularly apt medium for the negotiation of new identities.[11]

Social scientists have used a wide variety of approaches to the study of gastrodynamics in migration contexts. Masuoka's work pointed to one central feature: Cooking and eating can be a complicated process of claiming status and identity in contradistinction to a wide variety of others. In Masuoka's case study, Japanese immigrants in Hawaii used and interpreted food to distinguish themselves from the Japanese in Japan and American haoles, as well as from members of other generations within their own community or family. Similarly, Ray found that Bengali Americans used food to distinguish themselves not only from mainstream Americans but also from Bengalis in Bengal and other Indians in India or America. The maintenance of such boundaries is often accomplished through negative definition of the other, as when Bengali immigrants expressed disgust with meat and meat products or criticized what they perceived as faulty notions of hospitality and proper meals in American culture. Bengalis thus tried to maintain particularity amid the "universalizing project of capitalist modernity" while at the same time telling tales of individually loving, hating, or accommodating to "American" food. Their food behavior was, in this sense, both "complicit" and "resistant."[12]

By situating the question of migratory gastrodynamics within the context of the encounter between tradition/particularity and modernity/cultural convergence, while also exploring the interconnections between the large-scale processes of globalization and

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11 The term *gastrodynamics* was introduced by Rao in "Conservatism and Change," more than likely influenced by the use of the term *gastropolitics* in Arjun Appadurai, "Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia," *American Ethnologist,* VIII (1981), 494–511. Purnima Mankekar, "'India Shopping': Indian Grocery Stores and Transnational Configurations of Belonging," in James L. Watson and Melissa Caldwell (eds.), *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating* (Malden, Mass., 2005), 203. Fischler, "Food, Self, and Identity," 275. See also Anna Meigs, "Food as Cultural Construction," in Counihan and Van Esterik (eds.), *Food and Culture,* 103.

12 Masuoka, "Changing Food Habits"; Ray, *Migrant's Table,* 1–2, 78–91.

local and individual experiences, Ray broke new ground in the study of immigrant food behavior. He described how each day presented many Bengali Americans with "moments of modernity and moments of tradition," and how food helped to locate them in time and place and to create a "home" in a land not their "own." Ray's work demonstrates how an almost infinitely large and complicated topic can become clear through the lens of individuals coming to terms with their own identities and creating their own narratives as they eat, cook, and garden.[13]

A number of scholars have addressed the social and cultural meanings of food for immigrants in the United States—the best-known case being that of Italian Americans. Many Italian immigrants had never eaten pizza or spaghetti with meatballs before arriving in the United States. In fact, the "codified" Italian cuisine of pasta, tomato sauce, red wine, olive oil, etc., is largely an American amalgamation, a constructed or "invented" tradition. Although immigrants from Southern Italy might have known such foods from communal feasts where the rich shared their wealth and gastronomical habits, their deep poverty often meant that the everyday diet consisted of bread and vegetable soup. Besides, Italian foodways, like the culture and identity of Italians in general, were predominantly oriented toward the local and familial rather than an overarching national pattern. But through consuming meat, pasta, and white bread in America, Italian immigrants of peasant backgrounds could claim a status that had been denied to them at home. They could celebrate their new homeland for its abundant and luxuriant meals, affirming their newly constructed identity as Italian Americans through foods considered uniquely "Italian."

This situation contributed to the creation of a "privatized" ethnicity among Italian Americans, sheltered from the stigmatization of immigrant culture in general, and food habits in particular, within the public realm. The private sphere of the Sunday meal fulfilled multiple social functions: It strengthened family feeling and power relationships while locating the family in the (expansively defined) American middle class, *and* at a distance from the American mainstream.[14]

13 Ray, *Migrant's Table,* 131–135.

14 Cinotto, "Leonardo Covello"; Poe, "Labor and Leisure of Food Production." For the

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In what has become the standard historical work on immigrants and food, Diner described in detail the Italian immigrants' transition from meals constrained by the poverty of local conditions in the homeland to those featuring the codified "Italian" food available in America. More generally, she emphasized the role that hunger and the desire for more and better food played in migration and in people's interpretation of their own lives as emigrants and immigrants. In her two other case studies in *Hungering for America,* she showed how the Irish and Jews from Eastern Europe also derived much of their migratory motivation from hunger. Yet, unlike the Italians, the Irish, who often viewed their food habits and hunger as imposed by colonial oppression, did not identify with their old country's food, and the Jews, in the tension between religious regulations and American abundance, often found themselves in conflict about food rather than united around it like the Italians. Although the three cases were different in several ways, Diner argued that each could be explained in terms of class divisions in the home country, the details and purposes of the migration itself, and the relative prosperity that many immigrants found in America.[15]

Immigrants to the rural Midwest differed from the Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants whom Diner studied, most of whom settled in the urban-industrial centers of the Northeast. The Midwestern immigrants came primarily from Germany, Scandinavia, and other parts of Northern and Central Europe, where the class divisions were less pronounced, and the economies were more developed. Although they were more likely to speak of poverty and wealth in terms of money and property rather than food, and thus of immigration in terms of economic opportunity in general rather than outright hunger, food and food habits played an important role in the negotiation of identity in the rural Midwest as well.

The experiences of the Midwestern immigrants can best be understood in relief against the European background. Historically, Europeans ate more meat than other agricultural civilizations. A high point was reached in the late Middle Ages, after the

early twentieth-century professionals' attacks on immigrant cooking, table manners, food shopping, etc., see Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table,* 103–106.

15 Diner, *Hungering for America.*

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Black Death had reduced the human population and allowed the transformation of vacant land into pasture. Throughout the early modern era, however, a period of "depecoration," or decline in meat eating, took place. Europeans also ate less butter and fewer eggs, relying heavily on grain and potatoes as the population increased and pastures were turned into fields. Swedish peasants, for example, ate less meat and vegetables and more porridge, rye bread, and herring in 1800 than in 1600. Ironically, European agriculture overcame its Malthusian limitations through the same structural changes that uprooted many rural people and drove them to emigrate. Millions of people left the continent during the second half of the nineteenth century, a time of qualitative and quantitative improvements in diet and food availability.[16]

By 1800, or even 1900, one of the most dramatic contrasts between the United States and Europe could be found in the ratio of population to arable land. The relative opportunity for land ownership was a key factor in immigration to the rural Midwest, but the ratio also influenced the availability of various foodstuffs. In America, the high status of meat was combined with easy access to it. In general, the quantity and variety of food in the United States was greater than that to which a majority of immigrants were accustomed. Most immigrants saw this abundance as a great blessing; some of those who arrived in the rural Midwest had known hunger all too well in their homelands. Peter J. Smith remembered working, at the age of eight, as a shepherd during the summer in his native Denmark from six in the morning until sunset. He had only one meal per day, consisting of two or three slices of rye bread with lard and cheese.[17]

Croatian immigrant Peter Maretich also recalled a meager existence in the old country: "[I]f we had once a week meat to eat,

16 Fernand Braudel (trans. Sian Reynolds), *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century. I. The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible* (Berkeley, 1992; orig. pub. 1979), 190–202; Hans J. Teuterberg, "General Relationship between Diet and Industrialization," in Forster and Forster (eds.), *European Diet from Pre-Industrial to Modern Times*, 64–65; *idem*, "The Diet as an Object of Historical Analysis in Germany," in *idem* (ed.), *European Food History; A Research Review* (New York, 1992), 109–128; Mats Essemyr, "Nutritional Needs and Social Esteem: Two Aspects of Diet in Sweden during the 18th and 19th Centuries," in *ibid.*, 256–277; John E. Bodnar, *The Transplanted; A History of Immigrants in America* (Bloomington, 1985), 23–30.

17 Peter J. Smith, "Memories of the Life of Peter J. Smith," unpub. ms. (Eau Claire, Wisc. n. d.).

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that was lucky. For breakfast we used to eat corn meal with milk, or corn mush . . . and for dinner, maybe it was cooked potatoes and probably some noodles . . . no meat, a little bread with it and no butter. . . . Perhaps if the men were working out in the field real hard, well, some of them probably had a chicken killed so they could get a little chicken soup and a little chicken. . . . On Sunday they might have a little meat. . . . But when we get to this country we had meat every day if we want to." When the interviewer from the *Ethnic History of Wisconsin Project* asked Maretich about political or religious persecution in Croatia, he replied, "No, they didn't force them to this country, but they forced them themselves, because they were hungry."[18]

However, even the American custom of eating "roast and cake, everyday," as Niels Hansen repeatedly put it, was subject to interpretation and reinterpretation depending on an individual's feelings about the new country. Hansen, a Danish weaver, arrived in the United States in the 1890s already in his sixties. He and his wife had come to the Chicago area to be closer to their grown-up children. Hansen first used the phrase "roast and cake" in an 1894 letter to his brother, where he noted that "the children live as the custom is here, with roast and cake, everyday." This matter-of-fact remark seemed unrelated to his own dreary and uneventful existence as an unemployed newcomer. His only amusement in the United States was visiting a Danish tavern, but even there he found the differences from home appalling, the prices for beer and schnapps being so high that "one can soon sell everything one owns."[19]

Eventually, Hansen settled in Highwood, Illinois, where he continued to struggle with homesickness and regret. Three years later, a new letter from him complained about performing hard work in the summer heat with only water and no beer to drink. As late as March 1899, the Hansens were still "owls among crows," with little knowledge of the English language. Niels grumbled that "even a salted herring costs 20 *øre*." But later that year, Hansen informed his brother that he had become used to drinking water in-

18 Interview with Peter Maretich, *Ethnic History of Wisconsin Project,* 4, 5, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison.

19 Niels Hansen, letter to Hans Hansen, November 8, 1894, Niels Hansen papers [hereinafter NHP], Danish Immigrant Archives [hereinafter DIA], Grand View College, Des Moines, Iowa.

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stead of beer and liquor, expressing satisfaction that "here no one is offered *øllebrød* and salted herring, but roast and fine cakes as much as they want for every meal." Working as a lumberjack the next year, he still noted the absence of beer and liquor during the workday, but he also reported that the food was better than in Denmark—white bread, roast, and butter.[20]

By 1904, Hansen showed outright enthusiasm for American foodways. Despite only three meals a day and no beer, the food was good, and he was thankful to have forgotten the "evil habit" of drinking liquor. "America is a good land," he wrote, "especially for workers. They need not stand and watch when the rich man lives with roast and cake, because the worker gets that everyday if he wants it." What Hansen first had seen as an odd, foreign custom eventually became a sign of the country's wealth. "Roast and cake" came to symbolize the goodness of the country itself, defined by the possibility of social equality rooted in common prosperity.[21]

Scholars have described how processes of urbanization, industrialization, and population growth disrupted traditional foodways and complicated the relationship between foods and their sociocultural meanings. Some have even claimed that modernity can create situations of "gastro-anomie," a bewildering normlessness in the realm of food caused by the "disaggregation" of old meanings. The risk of food losing its accustomed meaning is especially great in the context of migration. When he first arrived in the United States, Hansen used the phrase "roast and cake" to define the American other. The fact that this "other" included his own children deepened his feelings of isolation and hopelessness. As he became acclimated to living, working, and eating in America, however, "roast and cake" began to assume a positive meaning, representing abundance and a different standard of living. But only after more than a decade in the United States was Hansen finally able to tie American food, the American economy, and his own immigrant identity together into a coherent whole. The abundance of food symbolized how immigrants could come to America and claim equal social status with the rich. Thus "roast and

20 Letters from Niels to Hans Hansen, June 23, 1897; March 5, 1899; September 2, 1899; January 2, 1900, NHP. *Øllebrød,* beer bread, is rye bread boiled in wheat beer; like salted herring, it was typical poor man's fare in nineteenth-century Denmark.

21 *Ibid.,* December 10, 1904.

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cake" went from being an outward manifestation of one characteristic of American society to symbolizing the totality of it. The concept of "roast and cake, everyday" had become a fully articulated medium for understanding America.[22]

Europeans traveling to America sometimes encountered a new world of food as soon as they embarked on their transatlantic voyage. Simon Kjems, traveling third class in 1891, found the food decent but the coffee "undrinkable." Nils Olsen Haatvedt, who left Norway in 1879, could not bring himself to drink the coffee. It was "sweet and disgusting," filled with syrup and "other additives." The tea, apparently, was not much better. Nor was the food: "[T]he soup . . . wasn't really too poorly made. It consisted of coarse and fatty beef, whoever is not used to eating meat that fresh will not be likely to enjoy it. I don't know what we would have done if we hadn't brought along a little food ourselves. Salted veal, salty sausage, *gamalost, sureprim,* and flatbread, these mentioned things one should definitely bring aboard, or at least that is what I would prefer."[23]

Although clearly of limited education, Haatvedt (like many others) was accustomed to having coffee, meat, and dairy products available to him; being without them for a few weeks was highly undesirable. This sense of deprivation contrasts sharply with the

22 The term *gastro-anomie* was coined by Fischler. See Beardsworth and Keil, *Sociology on the Menu,* 66–67; William A. McIntosh, *Sociologies of Food and Nutrition* (New York, 1966), 29; Teuterberg, "General Relationship between Diet and Industrialization"; and Mennell, "Divergences and Convergences in the Development of Culinary Cultures," in Teuterberg (ed.), *European Food History,* 285.

The wealthy in the United States had begun to abandon the "roast and cake" paradigm by this time. After 1880, they increasingly embraced fancy French cuisine, requiring skilled chefs whom the middle and lower classes could not afford to hire, thus creating some distance between the rich and others in food habits. Niels Hansen was presumably not aware of this trend. His concept of the "rich" probably derived mostly from his experiences in Denmark. See Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table,* 10–22.

The distinction between food as medium and food in itself (as a message) is important, although this binary form conceals its complexity. If each mention of food in the sources is interpreted as a message about food, the importance of food as food will be overstated. Unfortunately, some works, including Diner's otherwise magnificent *Hungering for America,* may have gone too far in that direction. As the case of "roast and cake" shows, deciphering what people talk about when they mention food requires a great deal of attention to context.

23 Hjalmar Kjems, "Mit Liv," unpub. ms.(n.d.), DIA; Nils Olsen Haatvedt, letter to his father and siblngs, June 13, 1879, in *Amerikabrev fra Norsk Utvandrermuseum,* collection of America letters published online, http://www.nb.no/emigrasjon/brev_oversikt_forfatter.php. *Gamalost,* old cheese, is a pungent blue-mold cheese made from sour skim milk. *Sureprim* is a whey product also made from sour milk.

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well-known case of Italian immigrants, who had limited access to such foods in the old country. But of even greater interest are Haatvedt's extraordinarily specific suggestions for foods to pack on a journey to America and his admission that they constituted a preference on his part. From a structural perspective, the noteworthy connection between his five food items are that they all—besides being traditional, local (non-commodity) products of the mountain peasants—require extensive transformations (cultural or natural) from their natural forms (meat, milk, and grain) and have distinctive flavors identified with the process rather than the raw material. They are also "dry," nonperishable foods. In other words, they individually and combined form a perfect structural opposition to a soup made from fresh meat. Thus, whether he intended to do so or not, Haatvedt revealed his gustatory identity, specifying what was his food and what was foreign or "other."

In such cases, food became a component of an immigrant's social cognition. Social cognition about food behavior was not limited to food items alone. Just as most people have relatively rigid ideas about what constitutes "food," most people also have clear (even if usually unconscious) views about what constitutes a "meal." Meals are defined by a variety of factors, including proper organization, timing, and frequency as well as the types of food served and the social rules for eating with others. Due to the variability of these rules across cultures, immigrants were destined to encounter different conceptions of meals, leading to social-cognition processes situating those others relative to themselves.[24]

Niels Sorensen Rungborg emigrated from Denmark in 1903. Although he and his wife left to acquire their "own home" rather than to escape hunger, his description of the transatlantic voyage in his unpublished autobiography revolves largely around food. After a dinner of peas and bacon followed by intense seasickness, Rungborg's wife was tempted to "turn around and go back home to . . . familiar meat kettles." In time, however, they became accustomed to the sea and seem to have appreciated the shipboard diet: cereal, bread, sausage, and coffee for breakfast; soup or peas,

24 Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," in Counihan and Van Esterik (eds.), *Food and Culture,* 36–54; Simmel, "Sociology of the Meal"; Khare, "The Indian Meal: Aspects of Cultural Economy and Food Use," in *idem* and Rao (eds.), *Food, Society, and Culture,* 159–183; Douglas, *In the Active Voice,* 90–91; Ray, *Migrant's Table,* 78–81; Beardsworth and Keil, *Sociology on the Menu,* 83–84.

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meat or herring, rice pudding, apple cider, and sweet bread for the noon meal; meat, herring, preserves, cheese, and tea for the evening meal, followed later by a serving of oatmeal soup. But due either to poverty or to dietary laws imposed by religion, some passengers did not take part in these meals: "The Jews and Polacks ate and drank all day long with a greed that defied comparison. They scraped up the food and stuffed it in their mouths with both hands. They mostly ate bread and white onions, and would rub the crust of the bread with an onion. When it had been thoroughly rubbed they stuffed it down their throats with one large chunk after the other and this continued throughout the day. They have no regular mealtimes. . . . However, they did need a little time to digest their food and they used this time to fight and quarrel."[25]

Although the author may have aimed for humor in this passage, its inclusion in his autobiography long after the actual event suggests that the strange food behavior of Jews and Poles was a significant and distasteful aspect of the voyage. The offensiveness of their foodways stemmed from their lack of manners and their apparent lack of interest in structured meal times. Both of these foibles pointed to the same inevitable conclusion: By failing to frame eating within any recognizable, disciplined cultural framework, the offending parties behaved more like animals or barbarians than civilized human beings. What Rungborg perceived as constant "fighting and quarreling" only re-enforced the impression of deviation from civilized human behavior. Rather than attributing this behavior to time, place, and circumstance, Rungborg interpreted the perceived shortcomings of the Jews and Poles as inherent, as evident in the present tense that he employed when writing about them—"they have no regular mealtimes"—even though the events in question took place in a distant past, and all of the surrounding verbs are in the past tense.

It was relatively easy to dismiss and condemn the habits of strangers encountered briefly aboard ship. Regular shared meals with others was a different matter altogether. Among the Hua of Papua New Guinea, food not produced and cooked by co-residents or kin is considered dirty, not fit to be eaten. In the Indian caste system, who can eat whose foods in what form depends on highly complex rules. Eating someone's food implies an accep-

25 Niels Sorensen Rungborg, "Autobiography," unpub. ms. (n.d.), DIA, 154, 158, 159.

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tance not only of the food but also of the person who made it. It also implies a form of community with those with whom one eats.[26]

Many immigrants to the rural Midwest, especially young adults (including what we now would call teenagers), started their new lives in the employ of a farm family, as farmhands (men) or domestics (women). These newcomers would usually try to find employment with fellow nationals, though it was not always possible. Living and eating with "strangers" often became a necessity, and the cohabitation and commensality that followed resulted in adaptation and, occasionally, conflict.

Christian Hansen, who had emigrated from Denmark in 1885, described a difficult search for employment in rural Minnesota during the winter of 1887/88. Failing to find a Danish farmer who needed his help, he managed to find work with a Yankee couple. Although they were decent, respectable people, Hansen noted "a snake in paradise." To wit, the couple only ate two meals a day, one after milking in the morning and one before milking in the afternoon. Hansen was told that he could get more food each night before going to bed, but the couple did not eat at that time. Used to following the "table custom of the house," the farmhand could not bring himself to eat an extra meal alone. Instead, he went to bed hungry every night.[27]

Hansen accepted a 20 percent lower wage with another farmer (a Yankee widow) in return for assurance that he would get three proper meals a day (and be allowed to smoke). When he tendered his resignation to the couple who had originally hired him, the housewife again suggested that he simply take a third meal by himself in the evening. Hansen, however, steadfastly refused to consider this option. The woman insisted that he accept a large piece of pie before leaving—evidently feeling guilty of "food

26 Meigs, "Food as a Cultural Construction"; Khare, "Indian Meal," 176; Enrique Rodriguez-Alegria, "Eating like an Indian: Social Relations in the Spanish Colonies," *Current Anthropology,* XLVI (2005), 551–573; Rozin, "Sociocultural Influences," 235; Williams, "Why Migrant Women Feed Their Husbands Tamales: Foodways as a Basis for a Revisionist View of Tejano Family Life," in Brown and Mussell (eds.), *Ethnic and Regional Foodways,* 113–126.; Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class,* 12–13; Fischler, "Food, Self, and Identity"; Counihan and Van Esterik, "Introduction," in *idem* (eds.), *Food and Culture,* 1–7; Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," 42.

27 Christian Hansen, "Da jeg kom til Minnesota," unpub. ms. (Tyler, Minn., 1927), 10.

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failure"—as an attempt at either rebuttal or restitution. The interesting part of the story is that Hansen walked dozens of miles in the Minnesota winter, quit his job, and accepted a substantial decrease in wages, all because he could not imagine eating a meal apart from the rest of the household. To eat alone would have removed him from the proper social and cultural structuring of food events and placed him outside civilization, driven by base biological needs alone. The Yankee housewife's imposition of a new culinary order would have been profoundly degrading to him. Nonetheless, the woman's consternation about his defection also makes sense. If eating food implies acceptance of those who cook and serve it, rejecting someone's food and foodways implies the opposite.

Although most immigrants to the rural Midwest came with hopes of upward social mobility and were willing to start at the bottom of the ladder, some of them arrived with a strong sense of status, expecting others to serve and defer to them. Unlike the more modest sort, who tended to embrace social equality and democratic ideals, those accustomed to privilege often abhorred American egalitarianism and feared the social embarrassment of constant interaction with presumptuous inferiors. While others celebrated American plenty, Pastor Johan Storm Munch wrote in a letter from his "so-called parsonage" in Wiota, Wisconsin, "Food is difficult here, and help even more so. On the whole, life here is one of renunciation and rich in wants."[28]

These wants were not akin to the persistent hunger from which many Europeans had fled. Indeed, in the same letter, Munch wrote that his wife was "getting fat and chubby." More to the point was his description of a German hotel that he had visited in Milwaukee, where he had eaten "completely in European fashion" with "proper food" and "Rhine wine." This hotel contrasted with regular American hotels where "you only get water and miserable food and service." Brief reminders of the lifestyle of Europe's privileged classes were the high points in the Munches' four-year sojourn in the United States.[29]

To recreate that lifestyle in rural Wisconsin was a different

28 Johan Storm Munch, letter to Else Munch, July 16, 1857, in Helene Munch and Peter A. Munch (trans.), *The Strange American Way: Letters of Caja Munch from Wiota, Wisconsin, 1855–1859* (Carbondale, 1970), 104.
29 *Ibid.*

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matter. Caja Munch, the pastor's wife, wrote long, detailed letters about her arduous attempts to build a household reminiscent of her mother's. In her mid-twenties when they first arrived, she was a skilled and resourceful housekeeper with a high opinion of her own position in society, but in desperate need of recognition and approval. Regarding preparations for Christmas, she wrote to her mother, "I made almost all the things you prepare," and she assured her sisters-in-law that her cooking made the pastor happy ("I always have to make something extra for him to really make it as pleasant as possible"). While he complained about renunciation and want, she was making his favorite foods—meatballs, mutton and cabbage, or blood pudding.[30]

As was often the case in the rural Midwest, the pastor and his wife largely depended on the congregation for foodstuffs, especially when they first arrived in Wiota. After several months in the country, they had bought no food except a small amount of meat (along with the two ubiquitous store items, coffee and sugar). Meanwhile, parishioners had provided them with a hindquarter of a cow, some piglets, chickens, wild rabbits, quails, dried fish, flour, bread, lard, butter, cream, eggs, potatoes, carrots, onions, cucumbers, apples, nuts, and beer. The couple was eating three hot meals a day just to keep up, "living very luxuriously" on ragout of hare, creamed chicken, quail, and roasted piglets.[31]

Caja Munch's letters were filled with reports of culinary delights; the abundance and variety at the Munches' table would have impressed most Europeans arriving in the United States in the nineteenth century. Yet they frequently complained, both about their own food and about the food that others served to them. Whereas Niels Hansen made "roast and cake, everyday" the symbol of everything that was great about America, Caja Munch noted with contempt the Yankee habit of having "pork, coffee, and pie morning, noon, and evening." Even worse, because Norwegian immigrants had adopted this habit, the Munches were forced to consume these items every time they visited parishioners: "We are really tired of it, especially since these dishes are not at all our favorite ones." Hansen might have thought that universal

30 Caja Munch, letter to Thalie Falch, January 18–20, 1858; letter to Henriette and Caroline Munch, February 23–24, 1857, Munch and Munch (trans.), *Strange American Way,* 131, 78.

31 *Ibid.,* letter to Mr. and Mrs. Falch, November, 25, 1855–February 15, 1856, 15–31.

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access to rich foods helped to dissolve class distinctions, but to the Munches, those distinctions derived from birth and breeding. Thus, rich foods available to everyone were no longer appropriate markers of status. Instead, the Munches judged others by their table manners and methods of food preparation, most of which fell short of their lofty standards.[32]

Meals with others not of their class—whether Norwegian, German, Irish, or Yankee—involved uneasy interactions with dirty, rude, and impertinent people, in some cases so offensive and disgusting that they refused to eat or simply got up and left. They observed that Americans of various backgrounds did not "bother too much" about how they prepared their food. In her second letter home, Caja complained, "Americans never have soup, they don't even know what it is, meatballs arouse great curiosity; on the whole, they never use any kind of gravy or prepared food. Fruit porridge with cream they don't even know how to eat."[33]

Caja also lamented how difficult it was to procure rye and missed it "beyond measure." Even if obtainable, American rye was inferior and not ground in the same manner as in Norway. They reluctantly ate "dry wheat loaves" instead. Caja went to great lengths to brew her own beer, but admitted that the end product was a "poor substitute for the Bavarian," which was what the pastor really wanted.[34]

What makes the Munches' case significant, given that it was hardly "typical" or "representative" of immigrants to the rural Midwest? From the vantage point of cultural history, the Munches are interesting precisely because their experience deviated from the norm. Most immigrants both resisted and participated in their own displacement from old food habits, trying to find an acceptable combination of tradition, acculturation, and innovation. J. Jorgensen, who settled in Dakota Territory in 1874, cherished the rare occasions when he was able to procure a little coffee and sugar, because these commodities made what he considered

32 *Ibid.,* 22. As Paul Fussell, *Class: A Guide through the American Status System* (New York, 1983), 16, pointed out, the lower classes tend to define class in terms of wealth, the middle classes in terms of education and occupation, and the upper classes in terms of "taste, values, ideas, style, and behavior."

33 Caja Munch, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Falch, October 28, 1857; November 25, 1855–February 15, 1856, Munch and Munch (trans.), *Strange American Way,* 128, 27.

34 *Ibid.,* letter to Henriette and Caroline Munch, February 23–24, 1857, 34, 78. *Bavarian* in this context means commercially produced lager beer.

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"proper" hospitality possible. Nevertheless, when coffee was not available, he made do with "prairie tea" brewed from shoestring grass, which he described as "very tasty." To the Munches, such divergences from preferred practice would have been unthinkable.[35]

Previous studies of immigrant food behavior often found that adult males have the most traditionalist preferences in food, and that females engage in "menu negotiation" between the ideal diet (largely defined by adult males) and external constraints. Thus, in food habits, as in other aspects of life, immigrants to the rural Midwest tended to accommodate to a new identity that was neither that of the old country nor that of "Americans" culturally defined (that is, Yankees). But the Munches, in any event, did not want a new identity. Caja, who had a garden, knew something about the limitations of the natural environment, the local cooking vessels, and the available raw materials. Yet she desperately tried to emulate the "ideal diet" defined by her husband's preferences and her mother's cooking. Her husband, with little involvement in either the production or preparation of food, never managed to see departures from his accustomed habits as anything other than "renunciation and want." Although most immigrants accepted the need for flexibility, adjustment, and innovation, Johan Storm Munch was truly "transplanted," still fully Norwegian in America. After a while, he just wanted to go home. Hoping to transplant a complete set of cultural practices to a new social context could only lead to disappointment and failure. Unlike Pastor Munch, most immigrants had enough common sense and peasant pragmatism to adapt.[36]

Unsatisfying as his life was, it would have been unbearable without his wife catering to his culinary whims. Male immigrants who arrived without a female companion often had little knowledge about the preparation of even familiar, traditional foods. Indeed, single male immigrants, like Theodor van Dreveldt—a liberal intellectual from West Prussia who came to America primarily

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35 J. Jorgensen, "Danskerne i Turner County, South Dakota," unpub. ms. (n.d.), DIA, 4.

36 The previous studies of food behavior include Goode et al., "A Framework for the Analysis of Continuity and Change in Shared Sociocultural Rules for Food Use: The Italian-American Pattern," in Brown and Mussell (eds.), *Ethnic and Regional Foodways,* 67. See also Poe, "Labor and Leisure of Food Production," 142; Cordona, "Re-Encountering Cuban Tastes."

for political reasons—often survived on miserable diets. Van Dreveldt spent the winter of 1847/48 in a poorly built log cabin on the Wisconsin frontier, living on a suspect mixture of flour, water, and fat. After becoming ill, a physician told him to eat meat three times a day and to drink a glass of Rhine wine regularly. As he sat down to drink wine in his cabin for the first time, he realized that he "had purchased many privations for a great deal of money. Freedom is a good thing and worthy of a man, and yet over here it comes at a damned high price." That day, van Dreveldt decided to return to Europe.[37]

Theodore Bost, an educated Swiss man of bourgeois origins, was in a similar predicament on the Minnesota frontier: "I have two tin plates and some knives and forks. I boil six or seven potatoes and peel them; next I fry up a good big piece of bacon and brown my potatoes in the bacon grease; then I eat my whole meal using my knees as a table. Sometimes I fry the potatoes in butter, but since it costs thirty cents a pound, I use it sparingly. Sometimes, too—as I did today—I make a boiled dinner of bacon, potatoes, and rutabagas; this is for special occasions when I want a good soup."[38]

As Ray recognized in the case of contemporary Bengali immigrants, the food situation of the single male immigrant can return to relative normality with the arrival of a wife from the old country. Bost soon began a long-distance courtship, and two and a half years later, he welcomed Sophie Bonjour to Minnesota. They married the next day.[39]

Both the Munches and the Bosts wrote unusually articulate and expressive letters home, but their descriptions of life in rural America show more contrasts than similarities. Whereas Johan Storm Munch condemned the "dishwater" presented as coffee on the train from New York, the Bosts had no complaints about their ersatz coffee made from wheat or rye. Sophie made "excellent

37 Ray, *Migrant's Table,* 73. See also N. Manaan and B. J. Boucher, "The Bangladeshi Diaspora and Its Dietary Profile in East London, 1990–2000," in Anne J. Kershen (ed.), *Food in the Migrant Experience* (Burlington, Vt., 2002), 233; Theodor van Dreveldt, letter to Franz von Weise, March 1848, in Kenneth Kronenberg (ed. and trans.), *Lives and Letters of an Immigrant Family: The van Dreveldt's Experiences along the Missouri, 1844–1866* (Lincoln, 1998), 79.

38 Theodore Bost, letter to Ami and Jenny Bost, December 2, 1855, in Ralph H. Bowen (ed. and trans.), *A Frontier Family in Minnesota: Letters of Theodore and Sophie Bost, 1851–1920* (Minneapolis, 1981), 72–73.

39 Ray, *Migrant's Table,* 74; Bowen, *Frontier Family,* 130.

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wine" from fruit, syrup, and water, and was especially fond of the sweet flavors to which the farm gave her access. Her letters mention the "wonderful" and "beautiful" flavors of honey from wild bees and sugar from maple trees. Theodore found their produce as agreeable as that of their European counterparts: "Little by little, we expect to become as well off as your best farmers, with our own wine, sugar, coffee (made from wheat!), beer, fruit of all kinds."[40]

The Bosts perceived home-made replacement foods as new and exciting, not pale, inferior imitations. Although class pretensions may have hampered the Munches' appreciation of American foods, the relationship between class background and the interpretation of a new food situation is not always predictable. On the contrary, an immigrant's relationship to food can be understood only within the context of that person's own experiences and circumstances.

The Koepfli and Suppiger families who established the New Switzerland colony in Illinois during the early 1830s furnish another example of people who had been relatively well-to-do in Europe settling in a rural area on the American frontier. Their travel account contains an especially detailed list of the foods that they took on their transatlantic voyage. The 250 liters of wine and more than 20 liters of liqueur, cognac, and brandy that they packed give the distinct impression that abundance and variety were familiar to them. In addition to all of the immigrants who were literally "hungering" for America were some who were accustomed to eating and drinking well.[41]

The decision to emigrate was controversial in the Koepfli family. Bernard Koepfli doubted his father's decision, and pitied his mother's "cooking for a hungry mob before an open fire." In a house "worse than a pigpen in Switzerland," she had no oven and had to bake bread in iron pots. These objections came to naught,

40 Johan Storm Munch, "Vita Mea," in Munch and Munch (trans.), *Strange American Way,* 167; Sophie Bost, letter to Ami and Jenny Bost, April 10, 1862, in Bowen, *Frontier Family,* 204; Theodore Bost, letter to Ami and Jenny Bost, August 1862, in *ibid.,* 213; Sophie Bost, letters to Ami and Jenny Bost, December 3, 1858; April 10, 1862; April 26, 1862; to Elisee Bost, April 7, 1860, in *ibid.,* 157, 158–160, 204–205, 208; Theodore Bost, letter to Ami and Jenny Bost, August 1862, in *ibid.,* 213.

41 John C. Abbott (ed.) (trans. Raymond Spahn), *Journey to New Switzerland: Travel Account of the Koepfli and Suppiger Family to St. Louis on the Mississippi and the Founding of New Switzerland in the State of Illinois* (Carbondale, 1987), 77–84.

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however, at least in part because of the availability of good food. Salomon Koepfli, describing their acquisition of cattle, sheep, hogs, goats, and chickens, as well as the profusion of deer in the vicinity, concluded, “Our dogs consume more meat in a week than most families in Switzerland eat in an entire year.” Joseph Suppiger averred that the food was simply “better, more nourishing, and more suitable than in Europe.” Dr. Kaspar Koepfli, the group’s leader, acknowledged some shortcomings with regard to beer, wine, and cheese but described an otherwise advantageous food situation:

> “Americans eat well. The *average* farmer expects to be served two kinds of meat at every meal of the day, but soup is rarely served. Fresh bread for every meal is baked in iron pans. Corn bread, very popular with Americans, has come to be a favorite of the Swiss, who could not bear it at first. Butter and usually also honey are found at every meal, at least during the summer.”[42]

Not all immigrants were so accepting of American foodways. Some of them felt an intense longing for the flavors that they associated with home, like the German immigrant in Iowa who wrote home about missing the “good sausage . . . made in Germany” and hoped someday to visit there in early autumn to “enjoy everything that is missing here,” like “the good plum cake.” This longing tended to manifest at special times of the year. Berta Kingestad missed her mother’s “delicious Christmas porridge” and her “good pickled pork.” Anna Swanson’s American Christmas was far removed from what she had known as a child in Sweden: “It was just like any other day; no lutefisk, no limpa bread, nothing. I was . . . so hungry for a little coffee bread, or a slice of good Swedish rye bread with Swedish butter.”[43]

Yet even those immigrants to the rural Midwest who were less than thrilled about American foodways had to adapt or adjust

42 Bernard Koepfli quoted by Salomon Koepfli in a letter to Kaspar Mauris Koepfli, December 11, 1831, in Abbott, *Journey to New Switzerland,* 151, 142; Joseph Suppiger, letter to Suppiger family, September 1832, *ibid.,* 168; Kaspar Koepfli, “Advantages and Disadvantages of the Area We Chose to Settle,” *ibid.,* 196 (italics in original).

43 John Becker, letter to Johannes Seibold, January 14, 1881, 3, Becker papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Archive, Madison; Berta Kingestad, letter to Anna Bjøravåg, December 3, 1893, in Solveig Zempel (ed.), *In Their Own Words: Letters from Norwegian Immigrants* (Minneapolis, 1991), 53; Anna Svensson Swanson (ed. Marjorie Carol and Lillian Evenson), *Orphan, Immigrant, Prairie Pioneer: Memories of My Life* (publisher unknown, 1989), 17.

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in some way—farmhands to the norms of the farm family and domestics to the cooking standards of an (often Yankee) housewife. Women who once had dependable servants in Europe often had to manage by themselves or deal with less deferential maids who had tasted American freedom and social equality. According to Gertrude Braat Vandergon, all of the Dutch women with whom she arrived in Minnesota had relied on their own maids in the Netherlands to cook, if not to plan, their meals. In America, they had to learn simple tasks like baking bread or making pancakes. As Gro Svendsen put it, "Life here is very different from life in our mountain valley. One must readjust oneself and learn everything all over again, even to the preparation of food." Mathilde Küner, who in her early days in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, had no kitchen, was forced to set up her oven outside. "I would often rather not eat than stand outside cooking with an umbrella in my hand," she complained. Immigrant women who settled on the Great Plains often had to endure the even greater indignity of burning cow chips to heat their stoves.[44]

Children also had to adjust and learn. Thirteen-year-old Hjalmar Kjems, newly arrived in Ashland, Michigan, was disgusted with the taste of the "very large, red berries," that he picked from some bushes. Only later would he come to appreciate the flavor of tomatoes. Other immigrant children were more disgusted by traditional fare. Alfred Frost was appalled by his parents' Danish food—dry, hard, tasteless pumpernickel bread; awful *øllebrød;* and beef stew that made him gag. Frederikke Johansen, however, remembered it with delight, especially at Christmas when her mother "radiated Christmas joy" as she prepared *æbleskiver,* Christmas porridge, sausage, and other holiday dishes.[45]

Broad, general conclusions about the experiences that immigrants had with food in America are difficult to draw. Although the indi-

44 Gertrude Braat Vandergon, *Our Pioneer Days in Minnesota* (Holland, Mich., 1949), 24; Gro Svendsen, letter to her parents, November 20, 1862, in Theodore C. Blegen (ed.), *Land of Their Choice: The Immigrants Write Home* (Minneapolis, 1955), 393; Mathilde Küner, letter to Veronika and Regina Kerler, March 23, 1850, in Louis F. Frank (ed.), *Pionierjahre der Deutsch-Amerikanischer Familien Frank-Kerler in Wisconsin und Michigan, 1849–1864* (Milwaukee, 1911), 64; Roger Welsch and Linda Welsch, *Cather's Kitchen: Foodways in Literature and Life* (Lincoln, 1987), 3.

45 Kjems, "Mit liv," 5; Alfred Frost, "Autobiography," unpub. ms. (Withee, Wisc., 1981), 2; Frederikke Johansen, *Fredelund: Skildringer fra Nybyggertiden* (Askov, Minn., n.d.), 40–41. *Æbleskiver,* apple slices, are round pastries made in a special pan.

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vidual stories must stand alone as unique events in certain respects, the typically modern, individualist assumption that taste is simply arbitrary and idiosyncratic does not thereby hold. Learned practices and ideas derived from a sociocultural context are reflected in systematic variations in gastronomic preferences according to class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and other variables. But these effects are not completely determined; they are subject to change within the individual life cycle. Psychologists may be puzzled by the fact that members of the same family often have dissimilar food preferences, but historians who study foodways would not find it surprising.[46]

The immigrants' stories expose three strands of meaning, which can be labeled displacement, place-making, and gustatory identity. Displacement signifies the physical, social, and mental aspects of moving from one continent to another. To a certain extent, the question of whether these emigrants left Europe by force of circumstance or by choice boils down to a preference for either causal or intentional explanations. Notwithstanding the concept of "agency," underlying social circumstances clearly influenced emigrants' decisions to leave Europe. Many of those circumstances (economic upheaval, technological innovation, demographic change, military conscription, religious intolerance, political oppression, etc.) were large-scale social processes impossible for an individual to control. More importantly for the discussion at hand, displacement or migration was a similar type of disruptive process on a smaller scale. Whenever or wherever immigrants went, they found environmental and social conditions that made reproducing the cultural practices of a different place inconvenient, imprudent, or impossible. Although their grandchildren or later historians could be made to believe that such control was feasible, there is little evidence that the immigrants themselves did.

Ray has written about his three "lands": India, the United States, and the "everyday lands" of the kitchen, the desk, and the classroom. European immigrants, too, had their everyday lands: woods and prairies, pastures, fields, gardens, orchards, and the kitchens where nature was given the imprimatur of culture. What did it mean to sit, as the Vandergon family did, on a log-house floor eating from fine Dresden china? The food and food practices

46 Mennell, *All Manners of Food,* 1. See, for example, Kittler and Suchler, *Food and Culture in America,* 6–9. Mennella and Beauchamp, "Early Development of Human Flavor Preferences," 103–104; Rozin, "Sociocultural Influences," 253–254.

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of immigrants belonged to the everyday lands, fully identified with neither "the fatherland" nor "the promised land." To rely on the concepts of agency and cultural transplantation in explaining such situations would fly in the face of reality.[47]

This caveat is especially cogent with regard to immigrants in rural America. Much of what they ate came from the local environment—their own farm or someone else's. On the farm, cooking and eating also became place-making. What had once been a small square on a surveyor's map became infused with cultural meaning when, say, the Bosts tapped a maple tree and stayed up all night to keep the kettles boiling. Within the limits of the natural environment, and with due regard for the family economy, men and women turned farmsteads into homes partly by integrating some of their old foodways into a new lifestyle. To achieve a symbolic connection between the old home and the new one was more important than slavishly to follow tradition. To act always and everywhere in the same way is contrary to human nature.

As the immigrants sought to engender a sense of place through cultivating, cooking, and eating, they also sought to define their identities by contrasting their food habits with the food habits of others. Their foils were often Yankees who ate roast and cake every day, drank water instead of beer, never ate soup, knew nothing of meatballs or fruit porridge, ate only twice or three times a day, and belched loudly even in fine hotel restaurants. Although immigrants largely accepted Yankee ways as a matter of convenience, this process was rarely forced by any great desire to imitate or be like "Americans." They usually saw themselves as adapting to the environment, the economy, and local circumstances rather than conforming to a cultural norm. But as this article reveals, defining oneself and others in terms of food is a continuous process dependent on innumerable variables and contexts. What remains certain is that food was a common vehicle for efforts to understand the relationship between self and other. Through place-making and the creative negotiation of gustatory identity, immigrants took charge of their own gastronomical displacement. The culinary world that they left behind remained with them through symbolic reminders rather than a wholesale transplantation of traditional practices.

47 Ray, *Migrant's Table,* 2.

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