

Cooking Toward a Transformation of Glocal Foodways

Huey-li Li
University of Akron

One does not need to experience insomnia in order to recognize the value of and need for sleep. Likewise, hunger is not a prerequisite for appreciating food. While the metaphysical, economic, political, and cultural ramifications of food have been evidenced throughout human history, contemporary philosophers of education, to a large extent, have overlooked the significance of food and the complexity of foodways in the global age. I applaud Susan Laird's efforts to reclaim foodways as objects of philosophical and educational study. Her presidential address stands as scrumptious whole-food cuisine that disallows drive-thru or take-out. Due to limited space, I am not able to reciprocate her labor-intensive cookery. Instead, I hope to first reaffirm a nonbinary conceptual framework for exploring coeducational foodways, as proposed and articulated by Laird. Next, I wish to identify some key ingredients in preparing a philosophical and pedagogical recipe for transforming the "glocal"¹ foodways as a collective response to Laird's call for coeducational reform.

It is noted that binary thinking pervades contemporary discourse on food and foodways: production versus consumption, the global versus the local, hunger versus obesity, embedded food versus disembedded food, fair trade versus free trade, organic food versus nonorganic food, fast food versus slow food, and so forth. Confined within the binary system, it is tempting to settle for simplistic solutions to problems prompted by complex etiological factors contributing to the construction and maintenance of unhealthy foodways. In recognition of the limitations of binary thinking, Laird's coeducational thoughts on food provision, somaesthetic practice, and hunger not only unveil the hidden gender ideology sustaining the fast food industry but also shed significant light on the exploration of pedagogical construction of healthy foodways.

At first glance, Laird's critical examination of the feminization of food provision seems to reflect reactionary feminist politics. After all, the modern fast food industry, to a large extent, has fundamentally transformed the age-old patriarchal cultural practice, "men eat and women prepare." Thus, the feminization of food provision appears to be a bygone or vanishing cultural practice. Similarly, as it is not uncommon for today's youth to confound traditional sex/gender role differentiation via somaesthetic practices, one may question the need to examine the gendering of foodways, body images, and hunger.

However, Marilyn Frye points out that "women's experiences is a background against which phallogocratic reality is a foreground... It is essential to the maintenance of the foreground reality that nothing within it refer in any way to anything in the background, and yet it depends absolutely upon the existence of the background."² The modern fast food industry, as an integral part of what French historian J.L. Flandrin terms the "never-ending Industrial Revolution," stands for a rational pursuit of progress.³ To sustain the "never-ending Industrial Revolution," the

instinctual human need for food has been converted into incessant “craving” or “hunger” for packaged “fast food.” At the same time, it has become clear that the fast food industry continues to devalue the feminine, the home, tradition, and ecological sustainability. Hence, to redress the miseducative effects of the modern fast food industry, one must appreciate Laird’s efforts to unveil the gender ideology embedded within the “multiple educational agency” that propels the development of the fast food industry.

Laird’s vision of “coeducational agency” for transforming unhealthy foodways, however, goes beyond critiquing the binary conceptual tradition. Just like Hannah Arendt’s advocating for refugees to have “a right to have rights,”⁷⁴ Laird’s essay calls for the recognition of an ethical right to have the right to an integrated bodily and emotional health through transforming coeducation and foodways ecologically. The recognition of such a right to the right of human and planetary health demands arduous and creative educational cookery.

Artistic cookery is a process of mixing and integrating various ingredients. In what follows I answer Laird’s call and identify organic philosophers, time, and mixing or integration as the key ingredients that could facilitate collective philosophical and pedagogical cooking aiming at a transformation of glocal foodways.

ORGANIC PHILOSOPHERS

Ivan Illich notes that modern educational systems in both developed and developing nations are inclined to guide individuals “away from their natural environment and pass them through a social womb in which they are formed sufficiently to fit into everyday life.”⁷⁵ The training of philosophers of education or other professionals has been more or less confined to a specialized “social womb.” Metaphorically speaking, well-schooled educational philosophers can be compared to well-fed caged chicken. Just as the caged chickens never get to explore the living world outside the cages, it is not surprising that most “professional” philosophers of education have lost their organic connections with the increasingly globalized worlds of food. Instead of debating whether Morgan Spurlock’s film *Super Size Me* counts as “philosophical text,” Laird’s presidential address is a timely call for philosophers of education to go beyond the canonical literature by John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Michel Foucault. Above all, her address stands as an invitation for philosophers to study Tyson, Pepsi, Kellogg — the companies and products that constitute our food landscape and shape our somaesthetic practice. If philosophers of education are responsible for shaping socially reflective and responsive educational enterprises, then they must make time commitments to re-establishing their organic connections with all producers and consumers of food in order to reconstruct healthy foodways for all.

TIME

While it is a known fact that cooking requires time, time was often overlooked as an imperceptible ingredient of food preparation until the emergence of the *fast* food industry. The spatial expansion of the global fast food market corresponds to the social acceleration of time. William E. Scheuerman notes that contemporary

capitalism has used fast-track legislation without involving the public in the deliberation process. He states “as high-speed social action ‘compresses’ distance, the separation between domestic and foreign affairs erodes, and the traditional vision of the executive as best suited to the dictates of rapid-fire foreign policy making undermines basic standards of legality in the domestic sphere as well.”⁶ By eliminating deliberative collective decision making, fast-tracking legislation, to a certain degree, enables global capitalism to create its own form of “global law without a state.”⁷ In view of problematic ramifications of the fast food industry, philosophical cooking toward transforming the global and local foodways must reclaim the public’s right to participate in educational, political, and legislative deliberation during the pursuit of public goods. Corresponding to the slow food movement, it is especially crucial for philosophers of education to address and redress the current accountability movement’s continuing protraction of the cult of efficiency that endorses simple quantitative measures while failing to reflect on complex qualitative outcomes. Just as it takes time to prepare healthy food, it is also imperative to take time to deliberate on the aims and means of the accountability movement. In due course, more careful and thoughtful deliberation on educational accountability is likely to reaffirm civic engagement as both the ends and means of equitable educational practices, thus laying the groundwork for transforming unhealthy foodways.

MIXING OR INTEGRATION

The essence of cooking is about mixing and integrating the seemingly distinct ingredients. Recently, the salad bowl has emerged as a popular metaphor for mixing diverse cultures without losing each culture’s distinctive taste and texture. In response to the global fast food industry, place-based food production and consumption has also gained substantial support from ecologically minded consumers. Also, there has been a widespread recognition that “food is a cultural heritage and should be consumed as such.”⁸ However, the metaphor of salad bowl misleads us to reify the distinctive essence of each culture while overlooking the interactive nature of cultural formation. It follows that seeing food as cultural heritage more or less essentializes our sense of that heritage. In the same vein, the bifurcation of global food vs. local produce appears to dismiss the porous boundaries between the global and the local. Just as we cannot “localize” the hunger in the Third World, transforming foodways must involve attentive investigation of the complex intersections between the global and the local. For instance, the global may not necessarily subsume the local. The World Health Organization in 1998 recognized the need to rectify “the global epidemic of obesity.” However, there is no “global” remedy to the global epidemic of obesity. More specifically, while obesity appears to be an epidemic in lower socioeconomic classes in developed nations, obesity is more prevalent in higher socioeconomic classes in developing nations. Clearly, any remedy to the global epidemic of obesity must attend to the intersections between classes at both global and local levels. In light of Laird’s affirming Mary Wollstonecraft’s advocacy of mutuality as a coeducational remedy for social inequity, I believe that reclaiming our ethical rights to human and planetary health

must be based on collaborative and integrated efforts to transform both the global and local foodways.

In conclusion, transforming the glocal foodways as a pedagogical project calls for ethical activism within diverse cultural, political, and economic contexts. A genuine appreciation of Laird's "Food for Coeducational Thought" commands our making collective educational efforts to explore the possibilities of establishing new ethical norms for food production and consumption in the glocal community.

-
1. "Glocal" refers to a space where the global intersects with the local.
 2. Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality* (New York: Crossing Press, 1983), 167.
 3. J.L. Flandrin, "From Dietetics to Gastronomy: The Liberation of the Gourmet," in *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to the Present*, eds. Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari (New York: Columbia University Press), 435.
 4. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1986), 295.
 5. Ivan Illich, *Toward a History of Needs* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1978), 76.
 6. William E. Scheuerman, *Liberal Democracy and the Social Acceleration of Time* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 145
 7. Gunther Teubner, ed., *Global Law Without a State* (Brookfield: Dartmouth, 1997).
 8. Alberto Capatti, "The Traces Left by Time," *Slow* 17 (1999), 4.