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Connecting Communities Through Food: The theoretical foundations of community supported agriculture in the UK

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Abstract

This paper seeks to make a contribution to debates about the continuing performance and significance of community within contemporary society. The subject of the paper is Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), a relatively new form of co-operative venture between farmers and their neighbours in which the community shoulders some of the risk of farming (usually by pre-paying agreed prices for the produce) and shares in the resulting harvest. This approach to farming is increasingly popular in Western societies, where it is commonly seen as a means of ‘re-establishing’ localised relationships between community members, farmers and the environment. While recognising the transformative potential of CSA, this paper suggests that the theoretical foundations of such co-operation are well-established and can be understood as gift-based, fostering deep connections between people as a means of resisting external pressures. As such, this paper posits that the significance of the emergence of CSA lies in the refusal to accept a market-based notion of food communities and the durability of certain forms of community as a means of understanding the ways in which people actively engage in making multiple connections, in this case with other people, with land and with food.

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Introduction

The call for stronger communities is pervasive. Politicians and people in every walk of life seem convinced that communities can solve social ills and build a happier, more fulfilled, society

(Rowson, et al, 2010: p1).

In this paper we seek to address this observation by reference to the emergent community supported agriculture (CSA) movement in the UK. In many Western countries, CSA is conceptualised as an innovative structure and process by which people make community over the ways in which food is grown, prepared and consumed (Groh and McFadden, 1990, 1997; DeLind, 1998; Soil Association, 2001; Lang, 2005; Ostrom, 2007; Henderson, 2010; Carolan, 2011; Saltmarsh, et al, 2011). Understood broadly as mutual support between farmers (or growers) and consumers in which people invest in a neighbouring farm or garden in return for a share in the harvest (Soil Association, 2001; Saltmarsh, et al, 2011), CSA is overwhelmingly a phenomenon of the Western, industrialised world, and reflects a desire – understood to be on the part of both farmers/growers and consumers – to ‘re-establish’ what they believe to be a traditional localised community-based relationship between food production and its distribution and consumption (Ostrom, 2007; Ravenscroft and Taylor, 2009).

While ‘CSA’ suggests a formal agricultural link between community and farmers (Saltmarsh, et al, 2011), there are multiple and varied forms of community-producer relationship that go far beyond official definitions. These range from small groups of people working together in allotments and other growing spaces (Crouch, 1992; Wiltshire, 2005; Burchardt, 2010), to city farms and gardens (Quayle, 2007), to large numbers of people owning in common substantial farming enterprises and blocks of farm land (Large, 2004; Soil Association 2005a, 2005b; Hollins and Hollins, 2007; Large and Pilley, 2007; Cox, et al, 2008). What CSAs are perceived to have in common is resilience to social and environmental change, understood here as ‘... the ability of a system to sustain itself through change via adaptation and occasional transformation’ (Magis, 2010: p. 410). In the case of CSA, resilience is driven primarily by resistance to global consumerism based on the mutuality of sharing both the risks and the rewards of growing food (Cone and Kakaliouras, 1995; Bjune and Torjusen, 2005; Henderson, 2010; Turner, et al., 2011). This has led some authors to claim that CSA reflects a new food citizenship, or ‘alternative food network’ (AFN), characterised by dense community networks that shorten or even remove the supply chains found in convention food systems (Stephenson, 1998; McGlone, et al, 1999; Pretty, 2007; Cox, et al, 2008; Jarosz, 2008; Kramer, 2010).

While we share the sentiments underlying these claims, particularly in offering resistance to the hegemony of global capitalism, we are less convinced that contemporary forms of CSA are either new, necessarily ‘good’, nor always local (see Hoggart, 1995; Carolan, 2011). Indeed, we agree with the cautions offered by Born and Purcell (2006), Desmarais (2008) and Coley, et al (2009), that ‘local’ is both a relative and a contested term and that the social movements reflecting CSA are not necessarily any less global or inclusive than other forms of farming (DeLind and Bingen, 2008). We also suggest that the antecedents of CSA are to be found many places, even if they are assuming diverse forms. We seek to argue in this paper, therefore, that the emergent CSA movement is significant not so much for identifying *new*

forms of community connection (Lyson and Guphill, 2004) but, rather, for demonstrating the active reworking of community as a means of forging particular connections, in this case between people, land and food. Informed by Sennett's (2012) argument about the significance of informal ties, we thus concur with Warde's (1997) observation that people actively seek social attachment, whether through adversity (as in the early allotment movement described by Burchardt, 2010), through neighbourliness (as observed by Goldthorpe, et al, 1969), or through choosing membership of a specific community as a balance to the individualisation of everyday life (DeLind, 1998; Crow, et al, 2002; Henderson, 2010; Jarosz, 2011).

In framing our arguments, we seek to move away from accounts of community which focus on the *what* of community, or on the use of descriptors such as stronger, weaker, more local, more traditional, in favour of an account which addresses the *how* of community, focusing on which connections are being made or not, and the work involved in sustaining particular connections, especially over other kinds of connections. By this we mean to examine the extent to which claims about the web of formal and informal connections between land and people in CSA schemes serve to '... continuously regenerate and realise the network of processes ... that produced them' (Maturana and Varela, 1980: p.78). We commence the paper with a brief review of the 'problem' of community in contemporary Western society, as understood through the changing relationships between what Warde (1997) has characterised as individualisation and communification. In so doing, we want to examine the extent to which communities that come together to grow and consume food are a response to emerging (global and local) issues. The paper will then seek to position a number of different forms of CSA, relating them to relevant forms of community development, before concluding by suggesting a research agenda suitable for examining more fully the extent to which CSA, in its different forms, offers potential for developing self-reproducing communities around food and farming.

The 'problem' of community

In his work on the shift from solid to liquid modernity, Bauman (2000) suggested that one of the key processes has involved decentring the solidity of space and place in favour of greater fluidity in social relations. This suggests that local places and neighbourly connections now play a lesser part in shaping individual lives (Crow, et al, 2002). For Bauman (2006a, 2006b), liquid modernity is characterised by the decline of social and cultural systems such as local community and ideas of neighbourliness. This notion of the redundancy of community in the face of increasing individualisation is equally prominent in the work of Beck (1992) and Sennett (1998, 2012), with the 'existential condition of alienation' (Lee, 2005: p. 65) that has resulted from the shift towards liquid modernity underpinning Beck's (1992) work on the risk society.

Yet, as Crow, et al (2002: p.128) have argued, 'claims about the decline of community and the increasingly privatized character of social life are not new ...,' even in the classic *affluent worker* research of the 1960s (Goldthorpe, et al, 1969). In Goldthorpe, et al's (1969) case, the decline of community was linked to growing affluence reducing people's reliance on their neighbours - rhetorically there may have been a residual wish to 'belong' to a community, but this was tempered by a sense of being subsumed that was incompatible with the essential individuality of the Modern age. As Warde (1997) has observed, however, the danger of the decline of community in liquid modernity is that it leaves people without social attachment. In response to this, some people have actively sought community membership, although their choices have been necessarily restricted by their attempts to balance their individuality with their responsibility to others in their chosen communities. Bennett, et al (2009) further argue that cultural practice of this type is increasingly restricted to certain social classes, suggesting that the shift from communities of necessity to communities of choice may not involve the same people - ie that there is a more fundamental shift occurring in the identity and social

composition of communities, involving dimensions such as class, gender, age and ethnicity (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

It is increasingly clear, therefore, that both the form and the function of community continue to change, and it is exploring the nature of these changes, rather than reproducing narratives of the presence or absence of, stronger or weaker, community, which remain interesting to pursue. Nonetheless, versions of progress and decline narratives persist in some accounts of food communities, such as recent work on the history of allotment gardens (Leivers, 2009; Burchardt, 2010; Farley and Symmons Roberts, 2011). While Burchardt (2010; p.37) allows for the pleasureability of gardening in common, these histories risk reiterating a version of allotments which produces a shift over time from economic necessity to lifestyle choice, and which denies both early allotmenters any pleasure in their work, and ignores any critique of capitalism and its actual or potential apocalyptic environmental impacts as a factor in the current take up of allotmenting. Indeed, the dominant contemporary rhetoric has it that allotments have become ‘... embourgeoised and ... socially diverse ...’ (Buckingham, 2005: p. 171), although here Farley and Symmons Roberts do recognise an attendant search for an alternative economic practice:

The huge growth in interest and participation in public gardens and community orchards, together with the way that of food ethics and a concern for sustainability and responsibly sourced product have entered the cultural mainstream in recent years, means that allotments have become popular again, even cool, their promise of self-sufficiency, thrift and health coinciding with a broadsheet emphasis on environmentalism ... they offer an alternative to a life of getting and spending

(Farley and Symmons Roberts, 2011: p.108)

As this illustrates, community still has meaning, but those involved in food growing are actively engaging in the (re)working of community. This suggests that the character of community has changed, particularly over how the boundaries of involvement are established. Crow rejects the ‘stark opposition between the presence or absence of community’, stressing the extent to which the neighbouring styles he and his colleagues were researching, ‘are actively constructed and chosen by individuals, rather than being a given feature of the local social structure to which community members are compelled to conform’ (Crow et al 2002, p.128). In Steepleton, where once community was dominated by close neighbourly relations, it is now characterised by what Crow, et al (2002) describe as ‘friendly distance’ – associating with others, but across recognised boundaries (the back door and the allotment edge, for example). It is this situated approach to community that we bring to understanding CSA: people coming together out of choice to achieve collectively what they could not have achieved individually, through forging particular connections between people, land and food which are not supported by mainstream approaches to agriculture. For some, there remain elements of necessity in response to financial pressures (Firth, et al., 2011); the community gardens of Cuba are one example (Henn and Henning, 2003; Premat, 2009), as are some healthy eating schemes in the UK and elsewhere (McGlone, et al, 1999; Turner, et al., 2011). For others, joining communities in land and food is articulated primarily as about making particular life choices that involve sharing with others the risks and rewards of farming and gardening (Groh and McFadden, 1990, 1997; DeLind, 1998; McFadden, 2003a, 2003b; Buckingham, 2005; Henderson and Van En, 2007; Ravenscroft and Taylor, 2009; Henderson, 2010; Evers and Hodgson, 2011). However these different motivations and tendencies cannot necessarily be separated out from each other as easily as some accounts might suggest; in Cuba the economic motivations are also intensely social and political; sharing risks and rewards includes financial, as well as social and cultural, risks and rewards. We explore this more fully in the following sections of the paper.

Community Supported Agriculture as a response to the ‘problem’ of community

The contemporary concept of CSA has a relatively short history from its emergence in the 1970s (Klett, et al, 1990; Cox, et al, 2008) although, as Fairlie (2009) and Henderson (2010) have observed, there is a much longer history, stretching back to the medieval manor, of groups of non-farmers being connected with specific land or farms. For Lyson and Guptill (2004), the growth of CSA is associated with a broader trend towards what they term ‘civic agriculture,’ which they characterise as being concerned with the broader social, economic, environmental and cultural implications of caring for land, producing food and engaging with local communities. This association has since been questioned by DeLind and Bingen (2008: p.128), who argue that it suggests a producer-consumer relationship that remains economically rational and, hence, market-driven.

In offering a creative response to the problems contemporary agribusiness poses for some communities, there appear to be a number of specific drivers behind the recent development of CSA, related to people’s concerns about the long term health and welfare implications of industrialised food production and distribution as well as the economic challenges facing small scale farming and associated enterprises (see Groh and MacFadden, 1990; Large, 2004; Henderson, 2010; Carolan, 2011). The Teikei system of CSA in Japan, for example, is widely reported to have been initiated by parents worried about the health implications for their children of conventional food (Parker, 2005; Henderson and Van En, 2007). In contrast, much work in the USA suggests that health benefits have been a by-product of CSA marketing schemes. For example, Ostrom (2007) found that many CSA members report high levels of social and economic benefit from their membership and, as a consequence, have changed their diet to include a greater variety of fresh vegetables and fruit, as part of a new approach to healthy eating. Brown and Miller (2008), Smithers, et al (2008) and Carolan (2011) report on a number of other studies in North America that have similar findings.

In contrast to this individualised approach to addressing perceived problems with global food distribution, Jarosz (2011) offers an alternative reading, informed by a feminist ethic of care. Following Foucault’s (1988) care of self, Jarosz suggests that many women, in particular, involve themselves in CSA as a way of refiguring notions of care of the self, from an individualised notion of self, to a self, or a life, which is inextricably bound up with the life of being connected with community and land:

Based upon my interviews, I claim that women’s motivations to farm are not based upon livelihood considerations, as much as they are about supporting a particular way of life. These ways of living emerge from individual biographies and choices informed by class, age, marital status, educational level and urban context. Farmers identify nourishing themselves and others as an important motivation for farming. By highlighting an ethics of care in food provisioning, these farmers privilege social relations and ‘making a life’ rather than making a living through their farming practices.

(Jarosz, 2011: p.308)

These claims are consistent with the findings of research in the UK (Cox, et al, 2008), France (Bougherara, et al, 2009) and the USA (Wells and Gradwell, 2001), that key motivations for joining CSAs are, predominantly, about ethics of care – often related to the environment as much as to other people. It is also apparent that more women involve themselves in CSA than in conventional agriculture, leading Jarosz (2011: p.311) to observe that CSAs offer a challenge to the dominant ideology that agriculture is exclusively men’s work – in contrast to gardening, which often involves particular gendered practices (Bhatti and Church, 2001).

Notwithstanding the overarching ethics of care, Burkham (2010) has identified some economic drivers behind CSA, particularly for farmers who do not have the capital to buy land or improve farms that they already own. Nevertheless, while the need for new sources of capital and income may motivate farmers to consider CSA, Burkham also argues that many people see CSA as a means of securing local food, particularly if it is organic, biodynamic or otherwise difficult to obtain from conventional sources (see also O'Hara and Stagal, 2001; Lang, 2005; Pearson, et al, 2011). This is associated with the strong commitment that many people feel towards supporting local communities (Fieldhouse, 1996; Lea et al, 2006), increasingly in the belief that a strong local economy is fundamental to addressing climate change and food security (McFadden, 2003b; Bjune and Torjusen, 2005; Parker, 2005; Alkon, 2008). Indeed, it is interesting to note that initial consultation over the future direction of European agricultural policy post 2013 has recognised that sustainable farming is dependent on strong local communities and economies (ARC2020, 2010; European Commission, 2010).

In their work on new productivism, Ravenscroft and Taylor (2009) observe that these types of motivations reflect an impulse to establish new forms of citizenship (see Parker, 2002), sometimes referred to as 'food citizenship' (Stevenson, 1998; Parker, 2005). They further observe that the significance of this trend is less its connection to food per se, and more its role in expressing new forms of identity that make explicit connections with community and land. For Parker (2005) and Winch (2005), this is essentially about shortening the food chain (*combating distance*), so that citizens gain better knowledges of both the production processes and the actual producer of the food. Thus, *combating distance* is essentially an amalgam of geographic and cultural motivations, in recognising that distance separates rights from responsibilities (Connell, et al, 2008). And, of course, such rights and responsibilities flow in both directions: the right of the citizen to eat wholesome food that has been grown responsibly by the farmer; and the responsibility of the citizen to uphold the farmer's right to a fair price for the food. This is captured in Lockridge's (2005) epithet that the impulse is about 'putting the farmer's face on the food', recognising of course that the farmer, farm and land are intimately connected to the consumers of the food.

As this suggests, the term 'CSA' encompasses many forms of food-related community connection. By analysing the social organisation of relevant texts (Silverman, 1993), four identifiable themes emerge, each informed by the broad motivations of those involved. The first of these is the *co-operative community*, where individuals work together to do jointly what they could not do so effectively on their own. The second theme relates to '*therapeutic communities*', which are grounded in ideas of social justice. In this case the justice can be positive, in using community food projects to promote health and well-being, or it can be punitive, in the sense of wrong-doers 'giving back' to society. The third theme relates, broadly, to market-driven *enterprise communities*, where consumers make financial contracts with farmers and growers to secure particular quantities and qualities of produce. This can be at arm's length, as in the Teikei model, or it can involve some direct consumer input to the financial and operation of the farms. The fourth theme revolves around the connections generated through *gift communities*. While some of these retain elements of market exchange, they are characterised more by the interconnectedness that is established between producers, consumers and the environment. Each of these forms is explored in more depth below.

The co-operative community

Co-operative communities related to food and farming first emerged in the UK as part of the allotment movement, which came about as a response to enclosure and the need for land for farm labourers to feed themselves (Burchardt, 2010). The first rural allotments were provided, broadly, on the grounds of social welfare, certainly to the extent that 17th century poor relief could be understood in these terms. Burchardt (2010) writes about how the moral obligations experienced by landowners post enclosure led to the provision of allotment gardens for their workers, and how the rental of allotments spread broadly across rural communities. A rural

allotment could be worth up to half the annual agricultural wage (Greener, 2010), with local markets providing a space for selling excess produce. In some cases, workers and their families worked co-operatively to secure and tend several allotments from which they could grow vegetables for sale; these arrangements sometimes included succession, much as if the land were owned, leading Farley and Symmons Roberts to reflect that many 19th century allotments were the "... engines of a hidden economy of exchange and reciprocity, a crucial if largely unacknowledged means of getting by" (2011: pp. 107-8). This approach remains redolent of many contemporary allotment and community gardens projects (Evers and Hodgson, 2011), where co-operative communities are considered central to promoting social benefits such as health and well-being (Armstrong, 2000; Brown and Jameton, 2000).

The therapeutic community

There is a broader literature on social justice that informs the development of what might be termed therapeutic communities, including those connected with farming (Pretty, 2002; Sempik and Aldridge, 2006; Hassink and van Dijk, 2007; Mind, 2007; Hine, et al, 2008). In this form, farming and gardening are used to achieve non-food or farming outcomes, often in circumstances where the process may be more significant than the physical output. 'Care Farming' has become well established in Holland and Belgium, and is becoming popular in the UK. The city farm movement is a well known example of this form (Quayle, 2007), as are many other types of farm used for education, health, social care and the re-integration of prisoners into society (Sneed, 1996; Hassink, et al, 2007; Hine, et al, 2008). Although not always associated with formal CSA structures, Barnes (2008) suggests that such farms fit within the social justice movement, as part of a more general approach to physical and mental health care characterised by a claim, that lacks irrefutable evidence, that most people's mental and physical health improves with exposure to healthy activities undertaken in the natural environment (Hine, et al, 2008). It should be noted, however, that not all literature supports this approach, with some work on therapeutic care in North America tending towards a more libertarian 'corrective' view, particularly with respect to 'penal farms' (see Bauer, 1997; Furst, 2006; Oshinsky, 1996).

The enterprise community

This form of CSA is found either where a group of people contract with one or more farmers to buy all their produce if it is grown in a particular way (usually organically), where farmers sell seasonal boxes of produce, usually vegetables, through subscription schemes (see Bougherara, et al, 2009), or where there is a formal risk and reward relationship between consumers and producers (Saltmarsh, et al, 2011). The best known consumer procurement scheme is the Teikei system in Japan (Parker, 2005; Henderson and Van En, 2007), while Brown and Miller (2008) offer a review of box schemes in the USA, noting that some schemes have begun to replicate the social and physical distance characteristic of conventional food distribution systems (see also Clark, et al, 2008, for a case study of Riverford Organics in the UK, Feagan, 2008, on box schemes in Canada and Torjusen, et al, 2008, on box schemes in Denmark and Norway). Unlike the co-operative and therapeutic communities, this form has a mercantile foundation, with the exchange of money for goods (often a share of the output). In many cases, such as Stroud Community Farm and EarthShare in the UK, the 'share' will be a function of what is produced, with members getting a larger share in good years and a smaller share when the harvest is less bountiful (see Soil Association, 2001, 2005a; Cox, et al, 2008). While rhetorically being about shortening the distance between producer and consumer, Carolan (2011: p.48) recently concluded, from a study in Iowa, that this may not be the case, socially at least.

An alternative form of enterprise involves the establishment of community-owned farms or farming companies that can offer opportunities to farmers to run community-oriented farm businesses where the majority of the produce is bought by those who raised the capital to start

the businesses (Soil Association, 2005b; Hollins, and Hollins, 2007; Large and Pilley, 2007; Ravenscroft and Taylor, 2009). This is largely a contemporary form, informed by earlier approaches to CSA but driven by a ‘third-way’ agenda of reflexive community self-help (see Etzioni, 1993; Giddens, 1998; Hopkins, 2008) and organised through new legal forms such as Industrial and Provident Societies and Community Interest Companies (Brown, 2004; 2008). In his review of Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farms in East Sussex UK, Burkham (2010) notes how well these legal forms are suited to community enterprises, since they offer a low-cost democratic route to community ownership while maintaining the core relationship between the farmers and the land.

The gift community

This version of CSA, derived from the teachings of Rudolf Steiner (1958) and later work by Michel Foucault (1988) and others (van En, 1988; Groh and McFadden, 1990, 1997; Klett, et al, 1990; Jarosz, 2011), involves farmers, community and land working intensely together. It is characterised by a strong ethic of care and is often experienced through multiple gifts be given and received: the community ‘gifting’ the annual budget for running the farm; farmers ‘gifting’ their skills to use the land to its best sustainable ability to produce food; and the land ‘gifting’ this food to the farmers and community. ‘Gift’ is used in this sense – following Hyde (2006) – as a gesture that is freely made as a way of maintaining the flow of resources to and from the land. Unlike other versions of CSA, therefore, there tends to be a clearer separation of roles between farmers and community, with an understanding that all members of the farm organism should give to the farm/farmer what they can afford and take from the farm what they need to eat (Groh and McFadden, 1990, 1997). This form of CSA is typically motivated by people ‘making a life’ around farming (Jarosz, 2011), and is characterised by community connections that insist on linking health, food and community security.

While Hyde chooses to focus on the power and value of gifting, against what he understands as ‘negative’ gifts (Hyde, 2006: p. xix), literature on the *ambivalence* of gifting (Diprose, 2002; Clark, 2005; Hird, 2010) offers some further insight into transformative potentials of CSA, in that their versions of gifting mean that the gift cannot be determined in advance, and thus ‘... cannot be anticipated or controlled’ (Hird, 2010: p.2). Similarly, Moore (2011) recognises that whilst gift exchanges will often be unrecognisable and subject to power and property relations they can also involve an economic exchange and thus can disrupt hegemonic structures linked to economic exchange and the market. Ravenscroft et.al. (2013) also link these discussions of gifting to the existence of gift relationships between humans and non-humans and observe that property laws and rights which seek to make the nature-human gift relationship increasingly exclusive are increasingly questioned by those who propose different interpretations’ of the human-nature gift relations that emphasise common rights. These discussions of gift exchange is is provide a useful context for way in to understanding the notion of the risks and rewards of CSA, for it involves a commitment to working with the ambivalent gifts of naturethe land, which may withhold harvests one year, only to produce bountiful crops the next. We might even conceive of endless bountiful harvests of one crop as an ambivalent gift, when we tire of endless courgettes or zucchini for example. Diprose’s (2002) term ‘corporeal generosity’ points to the overlooked debt of embodied generosity. For Diprose, life is dependent on the opening out to other lives. Clark’s (2005) work extends this notion of embodied gifting to non-human, or other-than human, others: ‘to enter into a close relationship with another species is not to enter a circle of calculable effects of equivalent exchanges, but to open to a network of unknowable and immeasurable outcomes’ (Hird, 2010: p.3). This is an asymmetrical gifting, an account of gifting that holds open the possibilities of the risks as well as the rewards of gifting, and thus of the possibility, and even necessity of violence and conflict, as against community as never-ending harmony, where conflicts are necessarily excluded and expelled.

Synthesis: transitional and transformative relationships between communities and land

In organisational terms, each of the themes has a distinct theoretical foundation. The co-operative community is founded on a liberal welfare philosophy in which the poorer members of society are provided with the means to grow their food. The therapeutic community is based on a similarly liberal tradition, but rooted more in justice than in welfare, while the enterprise community retains a liberal connection to conventional market structures, although with an attempt to reduce the physical and social distance between producers and consumers. All of these are essentially partial approaches to reconnecting communities with each other and with land, in the sense that support for food growing is provided in order to achieve defined outcomes related to improving welfare, justice and well-being. None of these positions, in isolation, reflects a new role for community in fostering a step-change for society. Rather, they reflect attempts to use food growing as a means of promoting certain pro-social goals that contribute, eventually, to social change. This is very much the ‘new productivism’ agenda envisaged by Ravenscroft and Taylor (2009), in which people seek meaningful engagement with the land that is understood as formal, long-term and ‘serious.’ A market continues to operate, of course; but this market is informed – rhetorically at least – by a neighbourly respect for the needs of both producers and consumers.

The transition envisioned by these constructions of CSA is very much about moving from a society dominated by momentary transactions to one that is characterised by sustained relationships between people (see Sennett, 2012). At the heart of these constructions is an emphasis on deploying neighbourliness as a core value in social relations, such that the physical and social distance between people is reduced and new community-related competences are learned. The market remains the medium of exchange, and liberal paternalism remains prominent, but both seek to operate within a network of informal personal relationships that generate increasingly durable social, economic and environmental institutions.

At the core of this, for many of those involved, is an espousal of ‘localism’ that extends beyond conventional market analysis. As Delind and Bingen (2008) have remarked, the shift towards what Lyson and Guptill (2004) have termed ‘civic agriculture’ has done much to promote resistance to the inequalities and isolation of global markets in food while at the same time ‘... tend[ing] to direct our attention away from the culture of place and toward a functionally discrete and largely rational and market based sense of civic engagement and political activity’ (Delind and Bingen, 2008: p.128). And this is where we begin to see significant difference emerging between, on the one hand, city farms and allotment gardens and, on the other, CSA. For whereas city farms and allotment gardens have largely retained their cultural connections between people and place, civic agriculture has, in DeLind and Bingen’s (2008: p.129) terms, become identified as local commercial enterprise, with the consequent reduction of ‘local’ to little more than a marketable commodity (see Guthman, 2002; Hinrichs, 2003). While this marketisation of local may suit ideas around reducing distance in the food supply chain, it does little to address broader social and environmental inequalities; it is about a partial response which reifies localism rather than connections between people, and between people and land; and it is about reifying production over the *bodies* and *bodily practices* that produce the food (Carolan, 2011).

While starting as a form of resistance to global food, therefore, many CSAs have developed into more conventional, if localised, food distribution models (DeLind, 2006) in which the market remains the primary referent, even if the actual mode of exchange has been modified. This suggests that, as Bauman (2000, 2001) has argued, community as a concept has equally been appropriated by conventional marketing practice, such that claims around new food citizenships reflect an increasingly empty rhetoric that seeks to substitute deep civic and bodily relationships between people and their local environments for the superficial

commodity form that many CSAs now embrace. This has led DeLind and Bingen (2008: p.145) to suggest that we require a renewed understanding of CSA which identifies that ‘... the power of a local culture of place ... lies in finding ways to move beyond the economic and the transactional.’ This intersects well with Jarosz’ (2011) invocation of the feminist ethics of care at the core of many CSAs in which women hold key roles. As Jarosz has observed, location and locality remain both important in themselves and also constituent of individual and community identity in ways that are not articulated through any form of market or commodified exchange, but are understood in relation to the bodily practices of the spaces themselves. In this sense, CSA has the capacity to move beyond the individual human towards a more interconnected or distributed notion of self that does not stop at the skin, but encompasses a caring human and non-human food community. As Carolan (2011: p.56) has noted, ‘... when bodies become tuned to a grip on food through alternative sources, Global Food ceases to be [so] attractive’ echoing Diprose’s account of gifting as corporeal generosity.

We suggest that the potentiality for CSA to be transformative can be found in gift relationships, which arise from a different empirical and philosophical frame to conventional CSAs. Rather than the normative liberal constructs of co-operation, care and enterprise, gift communities have developed from the operation of pre-mercantile societies in which power and authority were measured by the size and value of gifts given and received (Mauss, 1967). The gift community is thus a cultural observation about the interdependencies experienced by stable archaic societies that did not rely on markets as the only medium of exchange. As such, gift communities typically relied on a three-fold social order that bound communities, land and gods together in heterogeneous sustainable societies that were characterised by locality, co-operation and care. This interconnectivity remains at the core of gift communities, with the gifts between people exhibiting a dynamism that is quite at odds with the individualised sale and purchase of goods and services in conventional market exchange:

... unlike the sale of a commodity, the giving of a gift tends to establish a relationship between the parties involved. Furthermore, when gifts circulate within a group, their commerce leaves a series of interconnected relationships in its wake

(Hyde, 2006: pp xvi-xvii)

As Moore (2011: p.5) has argued, gift exchange involves ‘... a complex network of obligations, commitments and blurred identities from which there no more emerges a concept of the individual than does an isolable market place.’ As this suggests, the gift generates and perpetuates human and spiritual inter-relationships. Hyde (2006: p.8) suggests that it is about recognising (and honouring) connectedness, particularly with nature (what he calls the circles of nature), explaining these circles by reference to the gift as a constantly flowing river that has to be kept in this condition if it is to continue yielding fresh clean water. So it is with land, which has to be nourished if it is to continue producing crops. Thus, in gift-based CSA, the farmers assume responsibility for nourishing the land, by improving its residual fertility; the community assumes responsibility for the farmers, by paying the annual budget for the farm; and the land assumes responsibility for both farmers and community, by producing food. For Jarosz (2011: p.308), this is emblematic of Gibson-Graham’s (2006) post-capitalist politics, which ‘... emphasises care for people and the environment as part of an ethical positioning that challenges the processes of privatisation and unfettered capital accumulation.’

Gift communities are, therefore, examples of transformed societies that combine elements of other (transitional) CSA forms (co-operation, care and market exchange) to provide a strong foundation for connected and sustainable community relationships (see Hyde, 2006). Gift communities use a dense network of formal and information relationships to foster a stable and sustainable approach to social dynamics. What lies at the heart of this approach to the relationships between communities, farmers and land is the generation of a ethical way of

living *with* (as opposed to *from*) the land, in which people – the community – take explicit steps to become more responsible for the food that they eat and the care that is shown to the land and those who cultivate it.

‘Local’ is one element of the gift relationship, in minimising the spatial and cultural distance between the production and consumption of food. Co-operative and sustainable approaches to production are equally part of gifting. But these are not necessarily enough on their own: the catalyst that links localization and sustainability into a new relationship between the public and the land is an ethic of care that fosters active community connections and engagement. This is reflected in a paradigm shift from consumer to (quasi) producer through which groups of people commit to sharing the risk and responsibility for producing local food from local land for consumption by local people. This is the basis of what McFadden (2003b) has referred to as ‘regenerative agriculture’, a form that seamlessly incorporates a community of people engaged in ‘civil labour’ (Rojek, 2001) to produce and consume the food (and land, landscape and amenity) that they, collectively, decide to grow. For Carolan (2011: p.58) this is about being *present* on the land, to experience what he terms ‘reflexive ethical reasoning’ about the production of food.

Mature gift-based CSAs therefore have the potential to achieve autopoiesis, understood by Maturana and Varela (1980) as the capacity to self-maintain and reproduce their organisation and unity, even in the face of inevitable disturbances and challenges. For Jarosz (2011), this is axiomatic: the care of self and others at the core of her argument demands no less. Similarly, Henfrey (2010) observes that the very autopoietic nature of farming and gardening (growing food and eating it as a means of gaining the nourishment to grow more food, and so on) lends itself to the intensity and density of connections at the core of CSA. He argues that this approach to farming can be read as ‘... a metaphor for an applied anthropology of social activism’ (Henfrey, 2010: part 2), but pushing this further would suggest not so much a metaphor but rather a situated knowledge, a material –semiotic (Haraway, 2003) which must extend to all realms including any ethical activism or anthropology. Social activism, in this context, is about rejecting the nature of market transactions in favour of a new emphasis on building and sustaining communities that are connected to land and the people who farm that land. Both Jarosz (2011) and Groh and McFadden (1990, 1997) put farmers at the centre of the farm organism; in Carolan’s (2011) terms, they are the *somebody* who promotes autopoiesis by cultivating the land to produce what the land and community require in nourishment.

Discussion and conclusions

At the start of this paper we questioned whether there is evidence of the capacity of community supported agriculture (CSA) to address the ‘problem’ of community through fostering ties between people that promote individual health and wellbeing and offer resistance to the ills of global food distribution. In identifying a number of distinct CSA forms we encountered some arguments in support of this proposition. Working predominantly from within a liberal welfare paradigm, these CSA forms offer the potential to promote therapeutic approaches to co-operation and neighbourliness, with an emphasis on resisting global food through local connections and commitments. This is certainly emblematic of the informal ties that Sennett (2012) sees as important to fostering flexible and responsive communities that are resilient to external threats. However, while the philosophical tenets of such approaches to community do not suggest radical transformation, and in the main they stay close to market models of exchange, in many cases reifying little more than a modified approach to conventional food distribution (see Hinrichs, 2003; Kramer, 2010), there is in fact little evidence by way of empirical research, of how people engage with these forms of CSA in the context of their everyday lives.

Many of these CSAs have close empirical ties with city farming, allotment gardening and numerous other forms of small scale localised food-related spatial practices. These ties encompass, on the one hand, ideas of poor relief and food security and, on the other, ethics of care, often played out through lifestyle choices. Indeed, the history of allotment gardening is similar to the history of CSA, both temporally and spatially. In temporal terms allotment gardening has shifted, over the last three centuries, from a response to rural poverty to a middle class leisure pursuit to, recently, a localised response to threats of global food scarcity and environmental change. Interest in CSA has followed a similar, if attenuated, path, from being a response to the scarcity of good (safe) food (particularly in Japan), to being a middle class lifestyle choice, to being a response to food scarcity (often in cases where no suitable allotments are available to rent) and climate change (see Cox, et al, 2008).

This combined history has been reflected in the spaces that allotments and CSAs have occupied: mainly what Shoard (2002) and Farley and Symmons Roberts (2011) have termed 'edgelands' – the 'complex landscapes' that occupy the boundaries between legitimate land uses (Farley and Symmons Roberts, 2011: p. 6). Just as the original allotments were located on land that was of marginal significance to the economic and social interests of the landowner, and the nineteenth century guinea gardens were located on land awaiting urban development, more recent allotments and many CSAs have tended to remain at the margins, still occupying land that is derelict, uneconomic, or waiting for new permanent uses (see Jarosz, 2008). For Farley and Symmons Roberts this means that such land uses 'hark back towards feudal, swineherd England, subsistence strips for the poor outside the pasture land and deer parks' (2011: p.107).

This is not to dismiss CSA as a contribution to community connectedness and alternative food networks, but to acknowledge that the initial challenge transition that it offers, from the supermarket to the farm or farmers' market (Seyfang, 2008; Pearson, et al, 2011), may do little *per se* to challenge wider social, cultural or economic issues (see Coley, et al, 2009). Yet, as Ostrom (2007) has argued, CSA can be an agent of change, particularly in enlivening people to the possibility of building strong community relationships around food and farming. As Brown and Jameton (2000) and others have observed, this can have a positive impact on people's physical and mental health, while also fostering a longer term ethic of care for land and people.

It is this potential for a more radical practice of connectedness that interests and excites us. With reference to the dynamics of change in archaic societies (Hyde, 2006), the gift-based form of CSA offers transformative possibilities, for communities and for the distribution of food. The concept of mobilising gift relationships as a basis for engaging with community is a strong motive for many people wishing to share the risks and rewards of growing food in favour of the deadening certainties of conventional agribusiness. In this sense the power of a local culture of place allows the possibility of moving beyond simple mercantile exchange to create new forms of human, extra-human and environmental justice. At the core of gift-based CSA is a systemic understanding that place, people and the multiple interrelationships between them matter; that in contradistinction to Bauman's (2000) arguments about the fluidity of social relations, communities of care and interest remain important (Crow, et al, 2002). And this cannot be dismissed as not about class: while the transitional CSAs may retain strong class connections, particularly to those consumers who feel that they can exercise choice (Clark, et al, 2008), gift-based CSAs offer an alternative that demands more than money. Indeed, as Gibson-Graham (2006) has suggested, social formations such as these may well reflect a reconnection to former understandings of community as a function of proximity and need – with the fundamental need still being related to food.

To conclude this paper, therefore, we suggest that, far from being a peripheral middle class simulacrum of a form of community that never existed, CSA – certainly in its (re)emergent gift form – offers a means of reconnecting communities with the places that they inhabit and

the food that they can produce from them. This is not simply the shift of the market place from the supermarket to the farmers' market, and a concomitant juggling of communities but a deeper ontological shift in the ways in which community is understood and practiced. Following a few decades in which some in the West began to feel that community was optional, gift-based CSA offers a return – with a difference – to, on the one hand, a more conventional construction that places community at the core of people's need to co-operate around food production and distribution, and, at the same time, offers an openness to the ambivalent risks and rewards of sharing the gift of life.

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