

Urban Foraging: Rethinking the Human-Nature Connection in Cities

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Abstract

This article examines foraging in urban areas – more specifically in Australia and tropical North Queensland – as an alternative mode of consumption for city residents. I explore urban foraging (the practice of gathering Indigenous and introduced edible plants from streets, parks, railway reserves, etc.) within the context of a human/nature dualism which defines humans and nature as opposite. Urban foraging, which takes its roots in Indigenous Australian foraging traditions, is becoming more popular today as individuals seek connection with their food sources. Underlying this trend is a critique of industrial agriculture and the Western way of eating, as well as a need for a more sustainable system. The industrial system obscures the origins of the foods it produces by processing them so they appear as products of culture rather than nature. The urban foraging system, through gathering wild foods, is an attempt to reconnect with nature in the middle of the city. I argue that taking responsibility for the food we eat via urban foraging and cooking is a way to connect to nature through food. The paper calls on individuals to rethink human-nature disconnectedness by digging deeper into the problem's cultural roots to consider how urban foraging begins to undermine a binary human/nature philosophical imaginary.

Keywords: urban foraging; human/nature dualism; environmental sustainability; Western diet; wilderness; solastalgia

In the developed world, people talk and shop, numb to the ground that nurtures them.

(Salleh, 1997, p. 176)

We are living in an age where nature and wilderness are defined through the terms of ecology, biodiversity, environmental ethics, climate change, recycling, renewables, and global warming. Environmentalism in the 21st century is about a concept, the received wilderness idea, the notion of wilderness inherited from our forebears (Oelschlaeger, 1991; Plumwood, 2002). In 1964, wilderness was legally defined in the American Wilderness Act as follows:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. (wilderness.nps.gov)

The notion of unspoiled nature gained popularity in North America in the mid- to late 19th century (Thoreau, 1854; Muir, 1911). The 1960s were a defining decade for literature on nature and wilderness. In 1962, Murray Bookchin warned about the dangers of pesticides in *Our Synthetic Environment*. That same year, *Silent Spring*, by Rachel Carson, documented the detrimental effects of synthetic pesticides for agricultural uses. And in 1968, Paul R. Ehrlich advocated immediate action to limit population growth in *The Population Bomb*. These books mark the beginning of a contemporary environmental movement in the United States that would go on to influence a global environmental movement. In Australia, the environmental movement was the first in the world to become a political movement. Australia was home to the world's first Green party – the United Tasmanian Group (1972). The Australian environmental movement, influenced by the American environmental movement and its literature, later developed its own literature with authors such as Bob Brown with *Wild Rivers* (1983), and Tim Flannery with *The Future Eaters* (1994). Today, environmental sustainability is not merely about being a good citizen and recycling; it is ultimately about maintaining an intimate relationship with nature. Research shows (Milton, 2002) that in order to truly care about 'being green,' one must actually have meaningful exposure to nature. But just as nature can affect human emotions, it can affect human health. Indeed, in our contemporary age of science and technology, researchers study the medical aspects of nature and nature's effects on stress and mental outlook, as well as on physical health (Ulrich & Parsons, 1992; Hartig, Mang & Evans, 1991). Albrecht (2012) talks about 'solastalgia', and Louv (2005) coined the term nature-deficit disorder to express what has become a defining characteristic of urbanised societies: the fact that we do not spend enough time outside in nature. A lack of nature results in behavioural problems (stress, anxiety, depression) and can influence our physical, mental, and societal health (Kaplan, & Kaplan, 1989; Atchley, Strayer, & Atchley, 2012; Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008). Increasingly researchers try to provide various ways to help reconnect with nature – from green exercise and the experiments conducted by Japanese scientists (Miyazaki, 2018; Park, Tsunetsugu, Kasetani, Kagawa, & Miyazaki, 2010) to the values of horticultural therapy and gardening (Soga, Gaston, & Yamaura, 2017). Urban foraging can be one of the actions that can be taken to reconnect with nature in the middle of the city, and to promote environmental sustainability at an individual level. Urban foraging can then be seen as part of the answer to the ecological crisis and to the growing health concerns of the Western world.

Industrial agriculture and Western diet

Western societies in general - including city residents in North Queensland - rely for their

food mostly on industrial agriculture and the food industry.¹ Industrial agriculture is heavily based on methods characterised by technologies designed to increase yield. This system is supported by ongoing innovation in agricultural machinery, farming practices, and genetic engineering. Industrial agriculture is prevalent in the Western world. Most of the meat, dairy, eggs, fruits and vegetables available in supermarkets today are produced by such farms. Likewise processed packaged food has become predominant in our diet. Food processing includes the methods and techniques used to transform raw natural ingredients into food for human consumption. Today the supermarket is the defining retail element of the food industry. Food buying has become increasingly removed from its production as we no longer grow our own food but rely on supermarkets to obtain it. All year long, and independent from seasonal changes, in supermarkets people can find thousands of products gathered in one location. Heavily processed foods which American journalist Michael Pollan (2010) calls 'edible foodlike substances' are the basis of the Western diet.

The Western diet is generally characterised by high intakes of red and processed meat, high-fat dairy products, eggs, refined grains, white potatoes, and high-sugar drinks, with minimal intake of fruits, vegetables, fish, legumes and whole grains (Halton, Willett, Liu, Manson, Stampfer, & Hu, 2006). Acids, anticaking agents, bulking agents, food colouring, emulsifiers, thickeners, stabilizers, flavours, humectants, preservatives, and sweeteners are important components of this diet. This was brought about by fundamental lifestyle changes following the Industrial Revolution, which introduced new methods of food processing including refined sugars, refined grains and refined vegetable oils (Carrera-Bastos, Fontes-Villalba, O'Keefe, Lindeberg, & Cordain, 2011). Medical anthropologists have identified several major eras of human disease, starting with the Age of Pestilence and Famine, which largely ended with the Industrial Revolution, or the stage we are now in, the Age of Degenerative and Man-Made Diseases (Omran, 1971). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) has estimated that approximately 93 percent of Australian adults (over 18 years) do not meet the recommended daily vegetable intake of 5 serves or 375 grams. Many studies have proven that low vegetable consumption is linked to increased risks of cardiovascular disease and cancer (Deloitte, 2016). Another way to see what effects an increase in meat consumption might have on disease rates is for researchers to study lapsed vegetarians. People who once ate vegetarian diets but then started to eat meat at least once a week experienced a 146 percent increase in odds of heart disease, a 152 percent increase in stroke, a 166 percent increase in diabetes, and a 231 percent increase in odds for weight gain. And during the twelve years after the transition from vegetarian to omnivore, meat-eating was associated with a 3.6 year decrease in life expectancy (Singh et al, 2014). The Standard American Diet (SAD) - maybe the best example of the Western way of eating - relies heavily on processed food, which many researchers agree is the real cause of many health problems, much more so than meat consumption. As Michael Greger (2016) explains,

¹ Although some comments are general to the Western world, this article focuses on Australia and North Queensland. Indeed, Australia represents a unique example of Western civilization. By its geographical location, it is the largest country in Oceania and is influenced by the neighbouring Asian countries yet it has inherited Western culture and Western economy from its European origins. It also has an important Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. It is, in these respects, comparable to the United States (Cole & Symes, 2017; Huntington, 2011).

“In general, the dividing line between health-promoting and disease-promoting foods may be less plant versus animal-sourced foods, and more whole foods versus most everything else” (p. 5). Some migration studies have compared disease rates within the same ethnic groups in their current location and in their homeland. For example, the Alzheimer’s rates among Japanese men living in the United States are significantly higher than those of Japanese men living in Japan. And the balance of evidence suggests that the difference lies in the American diet (White et al, 1996). According to David Gillespie (2015), “Even when there was an abundance of food, other animals seemed to stop eating well before the point they gained 50 percent of their body weight. The only exceptions to this rule appeared to be humans and any animal unfortunate enough to be fed by humans” (p. 2). Habits, or tradition, also play an important role in why we eat what we eat. Even though Australians may be aware that they do not consume enough plant-based foods, and too much processed food, this may not be sufficient to change. A 2005 report by the World Health Organisation explores the factors influencing vegetable consumption and groups them into the following three categories:

- (1) Social factors in which personal and family habits can be a barrier to changing consumption behaviours.
- (2) Environmental factors such as limited availability and quality of vegetables in local shops, transportation and storage limitations, and misperceptions of the effort required for cooking (Anderson, Cox, McKellar, Reynolds, Lean, & Mela, 1998).
- (3) Economic factors that include costs associated with increasing vegetable consumption (Pomerleau, Lock, Knai, & McKee, 2005).

Greger (2016) confirms that the environmental context is an important influence in people’s diets: “the primary reason diseases tend to run in families may be that diets tend to run in families” (p. 12). The critique of industrial agriculture and the Western diet reveals a need for a more sustainable system. In Australia, urban foraging, which has its roots in Indigenous Australian foraging traditions, is becoming more popular today as individuals are seeking connection with their food sources.

From foraging to urban foraging

Foraging is defined as searching for wild food resources. It used to play an essential role in humans’ ability to survive and reproduce as foraged foods were the primary diet for pre-industrial, pre-agricultural societies. Aboriginal Australians have eaten native animal and plant foods gathered from the wild for an estimated 60,000 years. The Yirrganydji people – an indigenous rainforest and coastal culture belonging to the Djabugay language group of Far North Queensland – had an intimate knowledge of their lands and waters, flora and fauna, seasons and weather. They were both rainforest-dwelling and seafaring people, using resources of both environments for their food and clothing. As a gatherer-hunter society, they foraged up and down the coast following seasonal food sources (their territory

comprised the strips of land between the areas known as Cairns and Port Douglas, including Freshwater Creek and the Barron River). While the rivers and sea yielded barramundi, eels, prawns or turtles, the Yirrganydji people also hunted wallabies and cassowaries. Their fruit and vegetable intake included yams, figs, plums, lilly pilly, and various nuts and berries. The arrival of European agriculturalists disrupted the foraging practices of Aboriginal peoples. Colonial introduced farming based on non-native species was practiced in southern and eastern Australia, while tropical Australia supported ranch pastoralism (Paterson, 2017). As the landscape was slowly changing, some Aborigines remained on the fringes of the townships and tried to keep on living as hunters-gatherers, and many others were removed to mission stations. As a result, some Aboriginal hunter-gatherers became herders, domestic animal handlers, and gardeners.

Urban foraging, which is the foraging practice applied to urban areas, is a growing trend in post-industrial countries, including high density tropical cities such as Singapore and Hong Kong. Looking for edible wild plants in the city is part of a larger movement towards sustainable living, local eating, and urban homesteading. In the context of tropical North Queensland, it means gathering indigenous and introduced edible wild plants and fruits from streets, parks, railway reserves, and other urban places. Recently, the recognition of the nutritional and gourmet value of native foods by non-indigenous Australians is introducing native cuisine to the broader population. Several decades ago, authors A.B and J.W. Cribb (1975), biologist Tim Low (1988), or former army soldier and TV presenter Les Hiddins (1999) - also known as 'the Bush Tucker Man' - were among the first authors/presenters to share their knowledge of the Australian bush. Today, native Australian foods are made popular by renowned chefs like Matt Stone, who works at the Oakridge winery restaurant in Victoria's Yarra Valley, or René Redzepi, founder of the restaurant Noma, who is famed for foraging Indigenous ingredients. Redzepi opened a pop-up restaurant in Sydney in 2016. He would spend hours every morning walking through the Blue Mountains, near Bondi Beach, and into suburban neighbourhoods to gather wild edibles (Gordinier, 2016). Redzepi asserts that "Everyone should grow up as a forager. Knowing your ABCs in nature, the flora and fauna, the patterns of the landscape and the rhythm of the seasons is as important as learning how to read and write" (Tesauro, 2017). Matt Stone practices urban foraging and learnt about preparing sustainable, locally-sourced whole foods when he started as a chef at Greenhouse Perth in 2005. Today, working at the Oakridge winery restaurant, Stone organises dinners at which 85 percent of the ingredients are foraged. Likewise, Dick Copeman helped found Northey Street City Farm in Brisbane in 1994. While the farm is a successful example of urban farming which offers workshops on permaculture, Copeman also promotes urban foraging: "You can just walk through any open space land...and there's plants that grow in those green areas, including weeds, some of which are edible" (Buzacott-Speer, 2017). Greens commonly found around Brisbane include chickweed, milk thistle, plantain or dandelion. You can also find bush foods like lilly pilly, bunya nuts, macadamia nuts and warrigal greens, while native mulberries are common along creek beds. Additionally, North Queensland abounds with wild mangoes, paw paws and coconuts (Low, 1998). Angela Hirst, director of Wandering Cooks in Brisbane, promotes food communities and unites artisan food producers, chefs, buyers, suppliers, and educators. An incubator for food start-ups,

Wandering Cooks is trying “to bridge the gap between community gardens and upmarket chefs” explains the spokesperson Dick Copeman. He adds, “I don’t think there’s many restaurants actually serving chickweed spanakopita” (Buzacott-Speer, 2017). Chickweed, a nutritious and healthy vegetable, can be found in most Australian gardens (Alice, 2017). However urban foraging must be done properly as Redzepi explains: “It’s like any other foraging: it’s a good thing to encourage, as long as it’s done responsibly and respectfully, by which I mean pick only what you need, not taking whole plants” (Tesauro, 2017).

Urban foraging may be a solution to reconnect to nature in the midst of our high-tech city lives and to heal what American journalist Richard Louv calls the nature-deficit disorder. Louv (2012) argues, in *The Nature Principle*, that “the more high-tech our lives become, the more nature we need” (p. 326). Although some authors (Thomas, 2017) are trying to embrace both nature and technology and find a balance between the two, explaining that the Internet and its connectivity have benefits, just as nature has benefits, more and more scientists are proving that natural environments benefit human health while digital technology upsets human physiology (Avendano, Mata, Sanchez Sarmiento, & Doncel, 2011). As neuroscience develops, researchers are uncovering functional aspects of the anatomy and physiology of the human brain, allowing them to study how environmental factors influence cognitive, mental, and physical health (Selhub & Logan, 2012). Urban foraging is a way to strengthen our connection to nature, and by spending time outside in nature while searching for edible wild plants, to reduce stress and improve health (Williams, 2017).

Foraging is also a good way to get to know nature and extend our knowledge about plant diversity. It brings attention to provenance and seasonality, and, to some extent, it can help alleviate the increasing environmental costs of a distribution chains that transport items back and forth all over the world.² Industrial agriculture has resulted in a loss of variety in plant consumption. There are over 120,000 edible plants worldwide, however only about one thousandth of those end up in markets and supermarkets, and only about 30 of those are used most commonly. In the meantime, biodiversity is increasingly recognized as critical to human life (Bernstein & Chivian, 2008). The relationship between agriculture and biodiversity can be understood in two ways: first, as the biodiversity within farmland landscapes (i.e. the biodiversity of soil microbes, birds, insects, etc.) and also as the biodiversity of agricultural crops, called ‘agrobiodiversity’ (varieties of wheat, tomatoes, etc.). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2010) has estimated that during the last century, 75 percent of crop genetic diversity has been lost, a phenomenon called ‘genetic erosion.’ This loss is dangerous because it makes our food supply more vulnerable to outbreaks of pests and disease. Scientific research is starting to show the health benefits of indigenous foods that grow wild in native soil, free from fertilisers and genetic modification (Alice, 2017).

² It should be noted that resource-sharing is a complex issue as was pointed out by Hardin (1968). In *The Tragedy of the Commons*, he describes how a shared-resource system where individual users, acting independently according to their own self-interest, behave contrary to the common good of all users by depleting or spoiling that resource through their collective action.

Many are rich in antioxidants, enzyme regulators and anti-inflammatory substances. For instance, the Davidson plum, native to the rainforests of Queensland, is now being called a superfood. The Davidson plum has many health benefits as it contains high levels of anthocyanin and potassium, along with important antimicrobial properties, which improve cognitive function and protect against heart disease (The Australian Superfoods, 2015). On average, plant foods contain sixty-four times more antioxidants than animal foods as researchers explain: “Antioxidant rich foods originate from the plant kingdom while meat, fish, and other foods from the animal kingdom are low in antioxidants” (Carlsen, Halvorsen, Holte, et al, 2010). Foraging may provide additional health benefits by restoring emotional balance. Working with our hands and all our senses seems to alter the experience of time and helps us stay in the present moment. This is the benefit of what Pollan (2013) calls unitasking, in opposition to multitasking: “It seems to me that one of the great luxuries of life at this point is to be able to do one thing at a time, one thing to which you give yourself wholeheartedly. Unitasking” (p. 195). Taking responsibility for the food we eat via foraging and cooking is a way to reconnect with nature and to heal the imagined human/nature divide that underlies Western conceptions of the world.

Healing human/nature dualism through urban foraging and cooking

Human/nature dualism is a predominant concept in Western culture. This dualism defines nature and human as separate and distinct (Bayet, 1998; Cronon 1995; Oelschlaeger 1991). This concept also pervades our beliefs about plant foods and our relation to nature through food, which is why urban foraging can be a tool to reconcile the natural and human realms. Ecopsychology is a discipline that views the health of the individual in a context of the health of the planet itself, embracing the notion that the two are inseparable. Nutrition represents a critical component of this field – Selhub and Logan (2012) talk about ‘nutri-ecopsychology’. According to ecopsychology, positive emotions foster environmentally responsible behaviours (Milton, 2002), and nutritional patterns can influence emotions (Spencer et al., 2017). Connectivity to nature and a greater connection to the naturalness of dietary items – foods in their whole-food form – are solutions to promote healthy nutrition, healthy people and a healthy planet. When people become personally involved in the development or production of their own food (via foraging or gardening, for instance), they begin to have an appreciation of the concept of naturalness. In this respect, nutrition represents a pivot between ecology and psychology, and it helps people understand how dietary choices, fostered through contact with nature, can help us and the planet as well. Some Western ideas of nature are closely linked to that of wilderness. The American Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as a place where humans do not stay or live. Cronon (1995) writes about the complexity of this definition and its lack of practicality in our everyday lives: “If we allow ourselves to believe that nature, to be true, must also be wild, then our very presence in nature represents its fall. The place where we are is the place where nature is not” (pp. 80-81). Max Oelschlaeger (1991) also criticizes the idea of

wilderness, and ultimately that of nature, as a place where human beings cannot live. He reflects on how impossible it is for Western societies to conceive of home and nature as one and the same place. According to him, this conceptual separation results in a romanticised view of nature, which can be seen in the mythology created around hunter-gatherer communities:

The idea of 'being lost in the wilderness' logically necessitates a geographical referent conceptualized as home as distinct from all other places; but for Paleolithic people home was where they were and where they had always been. They could not become lost in the wilderness, since it did not exist. The conjecture that the conscious life of Paleolithic people was devoid of such ideas as 'being away from home' or 'in the wilderness away from the inhabited regions of earth' is thus plausible. (p.14)

Wilderness becomes a place to escape from civilization, and the wild, by definition, must be what escapes control. According to Salleh (1997), "In an aggressive and war-obsessed culture, wilderness carries the dream of gentleness and peace. To a materialistic, corrupt, and polluted society, it brings purification and spiritual transcendence" (p. 178). The conceptual split that Western culture has created between human and nature exists in our relation to food. Food - and plant food in particular - belongs by essence to nature. Plant foods are a product of nature, and when human beings feed themselves with plant foods, they connect to nature in another form (Selhub & Logan 2012). As Greger (2016) reminds us, plants get their energy from the sun through a process called photosynthesis. The chlorophyll in the leaves harnesses the sun's energy and transfers it to building blocks of matter called electrons. When we eat the plant, these electrons (in the form of carbohydrates, protein, and fat) are delivered to our cells. In the same way, Pollan (2013) says that "to forage greens is a daily reminder of nature's abundance, the everyday miracle by which photons of light are turned into delicious things to eat" (p. 21). So, food is often described as belonging to the natural side of the human/nature duality in Western culture. In this respect, nature is opposed to culture, and senses are opposed to reason. Janet A. Flammang (2009) explains that:

Food is apprehended through the senses of touch, smell and taste, which rank lower on the hierarchy of senses than sight and hearing, which are typically thought to give rise to knowledge. In most of philosophy, religion, and literature, food is associated with body, animal, female, and appetite – things civilized men [*sic*] have sought to overcome with knowledge and reason. (quoted in Pollan, 2013, p. 11)³

The human/nature binary is a core problem in our approach to the current ecological crisis and climate change issues. Natural and human systems are interconnected and

³ The gender bias according to which women are not seen as equal to men but are put in the same category as bodily senses, animals and nature, while men belong to reason, intellect and culture.

have complex relationships. If one element is affected, the cascading and often exponential effect can have a profound impact throughout the ecosystem (Harding, 2016). However, political actions, laws and social commitments will not help create a sustainable future unless we start by acknowledging the limits of a dualistic imaginary. As William Cronon (1995) argues: "To the extent that we live in an urban-industrial civilization but at the same time pretend to ourselves that our real home is in the wilderness, to just that extent we give ourselves permission to evade responsibility for the lives we actually lead" (p. 81). It is essential for city residents to reconnect to nature even in an environment of concrete buildings and tarred roads - even more so. Urban foraging may be, for city residents, one of the easiest ways to get in touch with nature. Australian professor Glenn Albrecht, director of the Institute of Sustainability and Technology at Murdoch University, talks about the way people suffer when they withdraw from nature. He coined the term 'solastalgia.' This term combines the Latin word 'solacium' (comfort, solace) and the Greek root 'algia' (pain) to form solastalgia. Albrecht (Albrecht et al., 2007) defines solastalgia as a feeling of chronic distress caused by negatively perceived changes to a home and its landscapes. Today, an increasing number of people live in urban areas, in cities. Yet scientists have demonstrated that we are linked to nature and that our nervous systems are built to resonate with referents from the natural world (Atchley, Strayer, & Atchley, 2012; Williams, 2017). Lack of nature is the cause of many psychological and physical problems (Louv, 2012). As a result, we experience this longing, this feeling that something is missing, or as Albrecht (2012) puts it, this feeling of "homesickness you have when you are still at home." Solastalgia gives expression to those gut feelings we have facing a loss of our sense of place while our built and natural environments are changing so quickly. Albrecht (2012) confirms:

Under the intertwined impacts of global development, rising population and global warming, with their accompanying changes in climate and ecosystems, there is now a mismatch between our lived experience of the world, and our ability to conceptualise and comprehend it.

Urban foraging, like any practice that takes us back to nature, is a way to soothe this feeling of alienation, this impression that we are not nature. The 'environment' suddenly begins to seem a little less out there and a lot closer to home. Bringing back nature to home can also be expressed through cooking. Our relation to food mirrors our relation to the natural world.

Our energy and well-being, physical and mental, are dependent in the main upon the composition and the quality of the diet. All of it, except fish and other food taken from the ocean and inland waters, is derived from the soil, whether in the form of grains, fruits, or vegetables, or in the form of meat and milk of animals which, in turn, live upon plant life. Man must know and respect nature. (National Education Association of the United States, quoted in Selhub & Logan, 2012, p. 199)

But the industrial system obscures the origins of the foods it produces by processing them to such an extent that they appear as products of culture rather than nature (Pollan, 2013). As we have seen earlier, the convenience of packaged meals does not promote cooking at home. On the contrary, it increases our dependency on industrial food. “We’re all looking for someone else to cook for us. The next American cook is going to be the supermarket. Take-out from the supermarket, that’s the future. All we need now is the drive-through supermarket,” Balzer says (quoted in Pollan, 2013, p. 189).⁴ Researchers agree that taking back responsibility for feeding ourselves would be a way to connect with nature (Campbell, 2014; Schatzker, 2015). Matt and Lentil Purbrick, a young couple living near Melbourne, went back to the land and left behind their city life and their jobs to live on a self-sufficient farm. They promote what they call ‘traditional living made modern’ in their book *Grown & Gathered* (2016):

This book is about our experience of returning to nature and the lessons we’ve learnt. It’s about connecting to our food and understanding the traditional village life of our ancestors. And it’s about what it really means to eat a natural, regional diet. It’s about observing, growing, gathering, nurturing, trading, seeking and eating with the seasons. And it’s about experiencing the whole process from start to finish – even if only once – and connecting with the people who do it everyday. (p. 9)

Pollan (2013) explains that cooking our own food involves us in a whole web of social and ecological relationships, with plants and animals, with the soil, with farmers, with microbes both inside and outside our bodies, and with the people we are sharing our food with. He states that:

Our growing distance from any direct, physical engagement with the processes by which the raw stuff of nature gets transformed into a cooked meal is changing our understanding of what food is. The idea that food has any connection to nature or human work is hard to credit when it arrives in a neat package fully formed. Food just becomes another commodity, an abstraction. (p. 9)

The Purbricks (2016) support this theory. They write that people are removed from what actually happens in nature and from what is actually sustainable, and this is why they need to begin to experience their food again:

We realised that we had been slowly separated from our food one meal at a time. Once upon a time, our food was either grown by us or by our neighbours. Then it was grown ten kilometres away. Then it was

⁴ If the drive-through supermarket may be the future, as Balzer explains, supermarkets have been delivering groceries to people’s homes for many years now, making it always more convenient to purchase industrial food.

available in nicely packaged parcels in small, local stores... And finally, the ultimate demise: pre-packaged meals and fast food. (2016, p. 13)

Western countries are facing opposite trends where diet and food are concerned. You can eat junk food or grow your own vegetables. But are these trends really opposite? It would be more accurate to say that they are, like culture and nature, opposite yet not opposed. Weaver (2016) writes "There is no such thing as 'junk food'. There is only 'junk' or there is 'food'" (p. 30). We are constantly opposing man-made things to nature-grown things. But when we cook, both nature and culture are transformed by the work. Inspired by Claude Levi-Strauss, Pollan (2013) writes that cooking involves transforming "the raw of nature into the cooked of culture" (p. 6). In his 1964 book *The Raw and the Cooked*, Levi-Strauss explores the nature/culture binary on the culinary level. He argues that myth describes and explains the evolution of cooking techniques, and that the transformation of cooking is also a cultural process. Indeed, cooking puts us in the world in a very special place, facing the natural world on one side, and the social world on the other. In this respect, the urban forager stands between nature and culture. Conducting a process of translation and negotiation between both nature and culture, the urban forager can be considered as working towards a reconciliation between human and nature, going from the human/nature dualism to a human-nature connection. Urban foraging, while a response to the industrial food system, can help to heal the philosophical split between human and nature so that the food we see as products of industry can feel more like products of nature again.

Conclusion

Urban foraging, through gathering wild foods, is an attempt to connect to the source of nature. To some extent, it remains a practice determined by Western culture in reaction to the industrial food system and a human/nature dualism that imagines nature and human as separate. Urban foraging, as a shadow of industrial agriculture, is both an answer to a non-sustainable food industry and an attempt to connect with nature. Urban foraging is a way to heal our human-nature disconnectedness, to soothe solastalgia (Albrecht et al., 2007) and to focus on nature in the middle of the city, a place where nature is not necessarily obvious. How we choose to live can make a difference in our happiness and our health. As Wendell Berry (1981) asked: what is the environmental crisis if not a crisis of the way we live? And if the environmental crisis is ultimately a crisis of character as Berry said, it will have to be addressed at the individual level. Our diet can be a place to start. If changing our attitudes towards nature to foster a more sustainable future implies for many researchers (Plumwood 1993; Cronon, 1995) to start with what is in our minds, changing our diet can also be a way to alter how we think (Zaalberg et al., 2010).⁵ I will finish this paper, as I started it, with a quotation

⁵ A Dutch study (Zaalberg et al., 2010) examined the effects of a daily multivitamin and fish oil combination or two placebos on the behaviour of 221 young adult prisoners. They reported a 34

from Salleh (1997) that reminds us how much we have to learn from Indigenous communities:

In practical terms, hunter-gatherers would have to be the affluent societies *par excellence*. They are self-sufficient and thus genuinely autonomous. They have a stable interchange with their habitat; they use low-impact technologies; they work only a few hours a day, and give energies to social bonds, ceremony, and art. Ecologists taking a lesson from Aboriginal cultures might discover how to devise low-demand, low-impact economies where sustainability and social equity can go together. (p. 195)

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