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**Fields, Restaurants, Grocers, Abattoir:
Food Spaces in Austin, Texas**

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Food Spaces in Austin, Texas**

by

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Dedication

To my parents, Bob & Jen.

And may all beings be happy.

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Abstract

Fields, Restaurants, Grocers, Abattoir: Food Spaces in Austin, Texas

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This dissertation examines five different sites in Austin, Texas, from the past and the present, related in some way to food production or consumption. They are: spinach fields from the first decades of the twentieth century when the Austin-area was one of the leading spinach-producing regions in the U.S.; a public abattoir (slaughterhouse) operated from 1931 to 1969; three different restaurants that marked different times of Austin's history; the home-grown organic-luxury grocer, Whole Foods Market; and four urban farms whose controversial presence provoked a conflict over the neighborhood they are embedded in. This dissertation takes on board two notions of food geographies: food as connecting and impacting distant and disparate places *and* food as playing a major role in defining the contours of place. By looking at these five episodes of Austin's history enacted through different food spaces, I ask two questions that thread through the dissertation: how do different foodways gain, maintain, and lose access to space and what does that say about the dynamics of place formation?

And, what can we learn about the potential opportunities, pitfalls, and challenges wrought by the intersection of place and food? To do so, I take on board theorizations of assemblage and place with the variegated characteristics of food serving as a thread. The dissertation traverses a wide expanse of conceptual and empirical territory, but they are linked by two findings. I find that food spaces can become both emblematic and forgotten within the spaces of ideology and discourse on one hand, and everyday practice on another. I also find that the examination of foodspaces can help both clarify and trouble the processes by which places are made.

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Chapter One: Introduction

WHY WRITE ABOUT FOOD & PLACE?

A compost pile along the edge of a 2-acre urban farm. A counter top with a plate of enchiladas in a downtown diner. A three-story slaughterhouse on the outskirts of town. The aisle of packaged rice from Thailand in that foodie temple of Whole Foods Market, and its embedded geographies. The loamy, sandy fields of spinach that stretched along the banks of the Colorado River. For some readers, there may be an evocative quality to such images, something that links to sensations or thoughts of wistful agrarianism; to feelings of warmth and hominess, to convenience, to senses of doing good. Perhaps the slaughterhouse provokes a sense of aversion. This dissertation suggests that by unpacking these sensations and thoughts that resonate in relation to different food spaces, and coupling this with a material reconstruction of how those foodspaces formed, what happened while they graced the earth, how and why they ceased to be (in some cases), and what was the extent of their legacy when they left, we add some nuance to place-making.

This dissertation examines five different sites in Austin, Texas, from the past and the present, related in some way to food production or consumption. They are: spinach fields from the first decades of the twentieth century when the Austin-area was one of the leading spinach-producing regions in the U.S.; a public abattoir (slaughterhouse) operated from 1931 to 1969; three different restaurants that marked

different times of Austin's history; the home-grown organic-luxury grocer, Whole Foods Market founded by University of Texas dropout John Mackey; and four urban farms whose controversial presence provoked a conflict over the neighborhood they are embedded in.

Food products such as spinach leaves, locally slaughtered meat, a package of rice from Thailand; and the spaces they are embedded in—fields, diners, abattoirs, grocery aisles—are compact coils of stories, ideas, processes, and anxieties. They are perhaps what Donna Haraway (1994) refers to as knots in a game of cat's cradle. Food is a materiality that forms a knot, or a node of the technical, the organic, the mythic, the economic, the political, and the textual. The promise of food studies is that each material of food is something that can be unspooled and unwound and serve as a guide, a kind Greek chorus to the various political, economic, social, cultural, material, and mythic affairs of the world.

When writing about food, one often starts out by pointing out both how monumentally trivial and distinctly profound food is. How it is both taken for granted and what much of our economic, political, social, and cultural lives is shaped from. The thing about studying about food is that the line between superficiality and profundity is a thin and unstable one. To take food as an object of analysis means to traverse many other categories of analysis- politics, economics, urban affairs, dietary concerns, media. Food thereby occupies a paradoxical position. It is so ubiquitous that it is easily rendered trivial and forgotten, and yet food consumption is among the

most, perhaps *the most*, consequential acts people make on a routine basis. Not just for the sake of their own personal health, but as an expression of their values and lifestyles, and the communities they are embedded within, the identities that coalesce around the two. There are also the impacts on the biophysical world, and the folks embedded within the various systems of labor to bring that food from fields, feedlots, and labs to our tables, fridges, and stomachs. As such, food studies is a sprawling “post-discipline” (Goodman, 2016) with an endless supply of material. Just as social gatherings generally require the presence of food, food studies is an increasingly welcome guest at a variety of academic parties- from environmental history and cultural studies, to several sub-disciplines of geography, such as cultural, social, political, economic, and development geographies (Goodman, 2016). To paraphrase Michael Pollan (2006), the question of “what’s for dinner” is both a simple daily question and a complicated one that is depthless and fascinating and troubling.

Going back to Brillat-Savarin’s famous aphorism “tell me what you eat, and I’ll tell you who you are” (W. Belasco, 2008), food scholars like to speak in terms of how studying food provides a valuable lens into the world. Bell & Valentine (1997) state: “every mouthful, every meal can tell us something about ourselves, and about our place in the world” (p. 3). As Del Casino (2015) has it, food is “an entry point, both theoretically and methodologically, for thinking through broader body-environment-place relationships” (p. 805). As food is something mobile, traversing across space and time, research is a matter of finding a way to hitch a ride, so to

speaking. Goodman (2016) argues that food is “imbued” with notions of culture, space, economy, politics, and materiality and Appadurai calls food a “highly condensed social fact” (Appadurai, 1981, cited in Belasco 2008). Both of which suggest that food is a kind of knot made up of many threads. Food is a way of stitching together human meanings and environment (Slocum & Saldanha, 2013) and “food is the nexus of the ‘sensing’ self and the ‘sensible’ society” (Forrest & Murphy, 2013, p. 353). Mary Douglas says, “eating is the medium through which a system of relationships...is expressed...both a social matter and part of the provision for the care of the body”(cited in(Probyn, 2000). These ideas suggest a way in which food makes the world coherent. As Alkon & Agyeman (2011) put it "food is not only linked to ecological sustainability, community, and health but also to racial, economic, and environmental justice" (p. 4); which speaks to a sense that food is an entry point for thinking through our ethical commitments and relationships with the world.

The study of food is inherently one that demands an interdisciplinary perspective. Food is liminal and boundary crossing (Bryant & Goodman, 2004) and does not lend itself easily to straightforward analysis. If food is a material object that is a concentration, nexus, or meeting point of energy, matter, information, and symbolic meaning, it is also as a way of making connections and relationships that extend out into bodies, social world, biophysical landscapes; it troubles the various categories that make up a variety of understandings of the world. Haber posits that food, like gender, could serve as its own category of analysis (Haber, 1997). But this

perhaps is challenging because you cannot write about just food; ‘following food’ (Cook, 2005; Haber, 1997) usually requires a kind of engagement with several other phenomena. Or as Cook, states it, “there’s a core argument...that food can tell us about anything and everything. It’s simultaneously molecular, bodily, social, economic, cultural, global, political, environmental, physical and human geography” (Cook, 2005, p. 656).

Food is good for telling stories (or good to think with as Levi-Strauss has it), that is to say, mundane food products can reveal a ‘much bigger story’ (Friedberg, 2003, p. 4). The food related plant and animal exchange between the Old World and the colonized Americas, known as the Columbian Exchange, tells the story of colonization and nascent globalization (Crosby, 1972). Similarly, Sidney Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power* for instance argues that it was in the name of the quest for sugar that much of our colonial system was created, and also set a kind of standard for food-as-narrator. Of the three commodities that Cronon traces in his book *Nature’s Metropolis*—grain, lumber, and meat—two of them are food related. The astonishing transformation of late 19th century landscapes, while enacted in part via technological shifts, were the remaking of economic relations, an economy that was faster, a loom stitching together distance relations. Along with landscapes and political economic relations, food can reveal psyches. Egan (2016) argues that the dominant trends in American food consumption, tells the story of an American psyche in which food expresses convenience and individualism. But what, Cook (2005) questions, are the

borders and limits of such story? There is risk and peril, along with promise and excitement in such an “undisciplined” field.

The excitement and promise have won out over the last couple of decades, witnessed by the proliferation of food studies across various academic disciplines, as well as the popular media. But there was a time when studying and writing about food was not as vital an occupation. An environmental historian recounts how he was once dissuaded from studying food (Mink, Chester, Dusselier, & Shoemaker, 2009).

The editors of a food and culture anthology write that they had to work hard to impress upon their publishers how important the book was in 1997, were then begged to organize a third edition by 2012 (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013).

Belasco (2008) posits out a few reasons for the academic neglect. One is that studying food does not fit neatly into the Cartesian rationality of body-mind separation, in which matters of the mind are more important and worthy inquiry, with food being more associated with the body, the material, and the ‘feminine’. Also, in two intertwined ways, food is something that is related to drudgery—both in the fields and in the kitchen—and should remain hidden. Such a notion, that goes back several centuries, sees its extension and deepening throughout the twentieth century with the distancing of food processes and relations. Food was thought too mundane a topic to examine.

However, there is likely another reason, one that points back towards the profundity of food studies. Eating, according to Yi-Fu Tuan (1993), “forcefully

reminds us of our animal nature” (p. 46). Thereby, it requires the masks of culture to conceal it. Tuan goes on to say that what is concealed are a variety of phenomena and activities conjoined in an unsettling manner: “biological imperatives are worryingly joined to sensual delight, the killing and evisceration of living things to art, animality to claims of culture, taste (a process in the mouth’s cavern) to that refined achievement known as ‘good taste’” (Tuan, 1993, p. 46-47). If we take a food as a starting point into understanding the world and ourselves, we may not like what we find, and we especially might not like the various ways in which we ourselves are implicated in the world. Food is, to paraphrase Nigel Thrift, loaded with ethical content (Thrift, 2005), and that content is mostly made up of relationships. For those who study commodity chains that is often the central mission, with the purpose of uncovering such relationships in part with the aim of bringing to bear a sense of ethical obligation and understanding towards those involved in the various components of producing, distributing, delivering, and preparing food (cf. Cook, 2004). A geographical understanding of food in this case helps illuminate our connections to distant lands and peoples as well as to our bodies and their “biological imperatives.”

Another way of using a dual lens of food and geography is through a more bounded approach. Regional cuisine, which binds together the available ingredients (matter) and cultural practices (knowledge/discourse) into one of the preeminent markers for a place. For example, Amy Trubek’s (2008) examination of the French

concept of *terroir*. Originally devised as a way to understand the impact of soil, climate, and the practice of sensorial refinement on wine varietals, Trubek expands the concept to think about the relationship between cuisine, taste, place, and culture. Many connect to the work of Wendell Berry (1977) and his exhortations to develop a greater appreciation between the connections between land and ourselves. It is has become a common truism that places that have cultivated a relationship with food are somehow *better*. This can mean that they are more adept at attracting tourists and/or capital investment or it can mean instilling a sense of local pride. Or it can mean that the place has more just and ethical relations with its soil and other resources and among the people that are involved in the stages of making food.

This dissertation promises to take on board both notions of food geographies: food as connecting and impacting distant and disparate places *and* food as playing a major role in defining the contours of place. By looking at five episodes of Austin's history enacted through different food spaces, I ask two questions that thread through the dissertation: how do different foodways gain, maintain, and lose access to space and what does that say about the dynamics of place formation? And, what can we learn about the potential opportunities, pitfalls, and challenges wrought by the intersection of place and food? To do so, I take on board theorizations of assemblage and place with the variegated characteristics serving as a thread.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PLACE & ASSEMBLAGE

Food is an ideal way of talking about geographic assemblages, which Robbins and Marks (2010) define as "dynamic structure applied to semi-stable socio-natural configurations and geographies that emerge over space and time." (p. 181). Specific food products like a potato can be thought of as assemblages, echoing Appadurai's comment that foodstuffs are condensed social facts, meaning that they are a constituted within an array of ideas, institutions, processes in economies. As Mink (2009) put it, food is "narrated, legislated, prepared, sold, advertised, processed, trucked, and packaged into existence" (p. 314). But also, food products can be constituent parts of assemblages. A site dedicated in some way to food, such as a restaurant or a slaughterhouse, can also be theorized as an assemblage in that the food product can play a role as both upholding and undermining its stability. Jane Bennett (2005), in her delineation of assemblage thinking highlights that assemblages are historical (read circumstantial) are made up of vital, non-human matter and energy (read: not just malleable clay to be molded by the wills and minds of humankind) and exist within a web in which power both decentralized and also unevenly distributed. Bear (2013) in writing about scallop fisheries calls assemblages: "heterogeneous actants gathering and dispersing entangling multiple timespaces through practices of territorialization and deterritorialization." (p. 23).

While the use of terms like “assemblage” and “actor networks” may be used in sprawling, imprecise ways, and perhaps may be best thought of as a “set of sensibilities” (Müller, 2015); there are some key components that have emerged over the roughly two decades worth of research. One includes the tensions and questions of emergence and stability. As referenced above, they are semi-stable and emerge over time. Such emergence is contingent on a whole host of factors and ultimately their constitution is precarious. As Müller (2015) puts it, “action is a precarious accomplishment rather than a *fait accompli*” (p. 63).

The specific vocabulary often used here is *territorialization* and *deterritorialization*. Outlined by Manuel DeLanda (2006) in his *New Philosophy of Society*, anything that is territorializing is a stabilizing, synthesizing force, something that erects and preserves boundaries and identities; while anything that is deterritorialization breaks down, erodes, or decomposes. There is an underlying assumption here that all assemblages are subject to deterritorialization, all are more unstable than may superficially appear. This is because there is no real fixed outcome, but only a continual process. Each moment of space and time serves as raw material for the next moment.

By breathing new life into the seeking and delineation of explanation, assemblage theory operates on a promise to bring different perspectives into our understandings of the biophysical and socio-cultural worlds. It can broaden us beyond the anthropocentric myopias that plague not just social theory, but much of our relationships with the biophysical world. Robbins & Marks (2010) delineate four

different approaches to utilizing assemblage theory in geography, which speak to the way in which assemblage explanation can draw on a disparate, and sometimes even antagonistic, theoretical traditions. There is the symmetrical mode exemplified by Bruno Latour (2005), which holds that symmetry between human and non-human objects that act on each other in such a way that undermines many of Western thought's rigid boundaries such as that between nature and society. The intimate mode of appeal is interested in the mutuality of relationships that exists between the human and the non-human. The domestication of plants and animals for instance is not a unidirectional flow of power of human domination but a mutually constitutive set of relations in which humans and non-humans are made subjects of each other. The metabolic assemblage is based on Marxist thought and traces the ways in which uneven flows of capital, resources, and ideas create uneven and unequal spaces. Such a mode of appeal is rooted in exposing such relations as exploitative. A genealogical approach, rooted in the work of Michel Foucault, is interested in the full account of how things and ideas come to be.

<i>Assemblage</i>	<i>Exemplary theorist</i>	<i>Mobilizing metaphors</i>	<i>Stresses</i>	<i>Explanatory principle</i>	<i>Narrative style</i>
Symmetrical	Latour	Quasi-objects	Purification/ Translation	Nothing just sits there ¹	Paradoxical Description
Intimate	Haraway	Companion species	Everyday practices of co-constitution	'Beings do not preexist their relations' ²	Reflexive connection
Metabolic	Marx	Circulation and Metabolism	Uneven geographic processes and results; capitalism and justice	By acting on the world and changing it, people at the same time change their own nature ³	Tragic unmasking
Genealogical	Mitchell	Epistemic things	Concentration and reorganization of expert power	'Ideas and technology ... emerged from the mixture and were manufactured in the processes themselves' ⁴	Ironic revelation

Notes:

1 Paraphrased from Latour (2005: 129); see below.

2 Haraway (2003: 6).

3 Paraphrased from Marx (1967); see below.

4 Mitchell (2002: 52).

Figure 1: Styles and Strategies of Assemblage Explanation.

Source: Robbins & Marks, 2010

While perhaps there is a lot of promise in the conceptual vocabulary of assemblage & relational geographies, some scholars, even sympathetic ones, find there to be a lot of flash and little heat. Some claim that ANT analysis is “just telling stories with weak explanations” (Laurier & Philo, 1999). Fine (2005) argues that scholars under the sway of ANT can become so enamored with ‘heterogeneity’ that they neglect (or outright refuse) to account for the homogenizing forces, logics, and tendencies that define global capitalism. Walker (1997) finds the analytic starting point of “social life is messy” as not particularly enlightening (as it often devolves into methodological individualism) nor politically helpful (as it does not provide the conceptual tools towards

class liberation).

Robbins and Marks (2010) acknowledge these concerns but also articulate the ways in which assemblage thinking does actually provoke new insights into our world(s) and offers something of value to a variety of political conversations. For one, by staking a claim for non-human/more-than-human entities to be actors, assemblage thinking can work to expose hidden ideologies, i.e. ones that claim humans exercise control, that progress is teleological, etc. But more than revealing ideology, or “piercing the veil,” the empirical methods of assemblage geographies can demonstrate the vulnerability and precarity of those ideologies, thereby opening space for new political possibilities. They also detect a different shade of assemblage thinking, inspired by Donna Haraway (2003), that opens of a space of reflection into the socio-natural world and draws both author and audience closer into an examination of how *they* are co-constituted within an array of relations- which potentially has the byproduct of showing us, to paraphrase Haraway, how to live less violently.

To say a farm (or a restaurant, a grocery store, or an abattoir) is an “assemblage”, which Bear (2013) puts as a way in “a descriptive sense in which things come together” (p. 23), is fairly modest proposal, bordering on the banal (Robbins & Marks, 2010). It does not necessarily provoke any new levels of understanding. However, taking as a base assumption that every outcome is the product of relations,

that there is no essence that is untouched, unshaped by relations is also a rather radical proposal that when adopted can radically shift our understandings of history (as being non-teleological) and our relationships with humans and non-humans as being non-instrumental.

Crucially, the conclusions that assemblage theorization can lead to carry us towards mutual constitution. That is to say, humans and their social arrangements get constructed through the relationships with an array of their ideas and discourses but also their practices co-enacted with others. One example of this is agriculture, particularly the domestication of plants and animals. Gardens and fields are not just instances of human enacting their ability to control and manipulate landscapes, soils, water, and biological material. Rather, one has to least account for the plants *themselves* as making evolutionary adaptations that in turn refashion humans and their relations. William Doolittle (2004) observes that it was the ways in which humans disposed of their waste, what Edgar Anderson referred to as “dump heaps” (Anderson, 1967), provided new niches that certain plants took advantage of. Humans then exploited this new source of food but then became dependent upon it, resulting in a state of mutual constitution, dependence, and exploitation. Paul Robbins (2006) makes a similar argument in regards to turfgrass in U.S. cities: lawns to a certain extent are manifestations of human wills and desires on the biophysical environment, but in turn lawns enact and condition human responses. This is in part what Bruno Latour (1993) refers to as needing to account for “symmetry” between the human and non- human.

Another food related example is the “fast food assemblage”. Fast food restaurants become situated in an urban fabric and highway-dominated transportation infrastructure in which many folks depend on a car to get around and the overworked, time-poor families across class spectrums rely on them to feed their families. Their rise mirrors the rise of Fordist factory efficiency, suburbanization, highways. Perhaps we can say that it is due to fast food that the overall structure of suburbs is able to sustain itself (both literally in terms of the everyday) but also perhaps ideologically. The function that fast food can play is in the familiarization and normalization of a particular suite of socio-spatial practices. It then can sustain itself as a practice. But engaging in the practice of going to McDonalds or whatever it may be may also have the effect of cementing the person ideologically to the practice; and not just to the practice of eating, but the whole lifestyle that it is attached to. It becomes an object of attachment through the daily rhythms but also the through sights, sounds, tastes, and the way it looks on a landscape.

In some ways then, looking at geographical phenomena as assemblages can take on a timbre of path dependency. Any kind of assemblage has to in some way refer to the assemblages that pre-existed it. Acknowledging such does not mean ascribing any kind of ahistorical essence to them, but it does mean to take into account the durability of certain assemblages of ideologies and materialities. This is

why for many, colonialism for example, is a powerful starting point, a powerful coming together of creative-destructive logics that have left a long-standing legacy. While its possible for such categories of analysis to become stale or reified, efforts should still be taken to bring to bear their durability. Injecting a historical perspective into assemblage thinking can be a powerful way of connecting both the horizontal and depth relations of time and space. Rather than starting from scratch and calling it evading *a priori* categories and binary thinking, comes from a place of understanding assemblages as emerging from previously existing categories, actors, and desires (Müller, 2015).

Accounting for such continuities dovetails well with contemporary theorizations of place (Cresswell, 2011; Hoelscher, 2011). As will be discussed below, theories of place have undergone an evolution from humanist geographies' perspective from the 1970s through today. This dissertation takes on board theorizations of assemblage to bring to bear an understanding place as something neither static, essentialized, nor totalizing. Places in this mode are unique because of their combinations, in terms of their materialities, and representations. Studying different food sites in Austin throughout time sheds insight on these processes of combination and decoupling.

To start, place is an elusive concept that is difficult to pin down. Used in everyday speech in a variety of contexts from the relatively benign (*where is this place?*) to the more sinister (*you need to be put in your place*), it is also one of the foundational concepts

of geography Tim Cresswell (2004) argues the most straightforward way of conceptualizing place is as a “meaningful location”. This conceptualization itself is rooted in James Agnew’s (1987) of place as *location, locale, and sense of place*. Location refers to the place as a set of geographic coordinates fixed in space. Locale refers to the conditions that provide the context and resources for social and material life. Sense of place refers to the ways in which place accrues subjective and intersubjective meaning over time. Robert Sack (1988) theorizes place as that which is interwoven between society, nature, and meaning. Place is in this instance is a constructed lifeworld. Place is something that is lived in, and therein literally supports life. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) posits place as space that has become humanized and meaning laden through activity. In a similar vein, Hoelscher (2011) calls attention to place as something that has “moral, aesthetic, and affective qualities” (p. 250).

While “place” is both a foundational concept in geography as well as a commonplace word, efforts towards theorization are rooted in 1970s humanistic geography of Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph, Anne Buttner and David Seamon. Their project on place, and sense of place, had two main interlocking objectives (Cresswell, 2004). One was to argue for a thinking about place through subjective human experience. Place was something that should be thought of in terms of subjective and intersubjective meaning. Through human practice and perception, place is made. The second was to pushback against the cold calculation of geography’s quantitative revolution of geography.

The focus on the stable and essential kinds of place led humanistic geography to take on associations with an erosion of “sense of place”. Ed Relph (1976) perhaps stands out as the geographer most interested in what he calls “placelessness”.

Important for Relph is the idea that place is made and experienced for the benefit of “insiders”, or those that stake claims to a space. Placelessness then is when spaces take on characteristics that are not of the “insiders”, but directly outwardly towards “outsiders” like tourists or perhaps absentee landowners. Homogenization of the landscape—restaurants like Howard Johnson’s and McDonald’s for instance—in which one could not tell which particular establishment one was in, either from inside or by looking at it on the roadside, gives rise to a kind of formlessness and disorientation.

The erosion of the notion of place, or sense of place, carries with it an implicit sense that place formation is a process that can be reversed, and therefore needs to be defended. It is not just that space is the abstract and raw material turned into place through human action and perception, but place as such can revert back into being space. This homes in on a particular aspect of thinking about place in terms of its capacity as a receptacle for collective meaning making. There is nothing about an individual chain store that keeps it from being a “place” in an individual sense of term, and the framework of Tuan’s thinking. Rather it is the replicability of the chain store, the expressway, and all that, which creates a sense of an homogenized landscape and what that says about the destruction of unique cultures around the world.

Joshua Long's *Weird City* (Long, 2010), specifically about Austin, offers a case study of sense of place that serves as a well for cultural resistance in the face of homogenization pressures. The study was framed around the now-famous "keep Austin weird" campaign that started as a campaign to promote locally owned, independent businesses and became a rallying cry for Austinites concerned with the loss of local culture. "Weird" became a polyvalent term that could be connected to the city's reputation for openness towards creativity and eccentricity, its reputation to be distinctive from rural red-state Texas, its laidback, non-corporately ambitious nature. Threats to such a reputation were met with organized resistance. A Borders development that may have been the death knell to nearby locally-owned book and record stores was stopped and a Whole Foods was put in its place (see Chapter Six). A Wal-Mart development met with protests as well which led to the project scaling back significantly. A beloved restaurant in downtown, Las Manitas Café, found itself under threat of its building being demolished for a hotel construction (see Chapter Five) and similar dynamics came into play, though ultimately the restaurant closed.

The utility of thinking of place as stable has been called into question from several different angles. Feminist geographers have critiqued the association of place with "home" and as something stable and nurturing as myopic in its relations to gender (Rose, 1993). David Harvey too is troubled by some of what he calls "militant particularism" which has the markings of exclusivity. What these scholars point to is that the roiling dynamics of place must take into account the varying and divergent

perspectives embedded within a place. Place is often contestable and conflict ridden, or as Harvey (1996) puts it, places are “contested terrains of competing definitions” (p. 309).

Finally, Doreen Massey (1993) argues for an understanding of place in terms of relationships and process, which dovetails most appropriately with assemblage thinking. Using the example of her Kilburn neighborhood, she observes that her community is a nexus point with a singular “constellation of social relations”. That is to say, it is defined by entities and relationships external to it, and whatever uniqueness it has is not due to some internal essence, but is the product of a myriad of interactions, both from the past and carrying into the future.

Maria Elisa Christie (2004) provides a helpful example about how to think through spaces or places of food as both bounded and permeable, both stable and dynamic assemblages. Working in small towns in central Mexico, she explicates what she calls “kitchenspace” which incorporates both the kitchen and the outdoor house- lot garden. There is no clear boundary between the two, and, especially during times of collective food preparation, there is no clear boundary between the private space of the household and semipublic communal space. It is the production, preparation, and consumption of food that dissolves these boundaries at the intersection of inside and outside and public and private. Christie outlines another scale in operation as

well. With the small towns increasingly being swallowed by urbanization, and younger generations are finding these traditional foodways and spaces less relevant to their lives, the house-lot gardens are going fallow and the fiestas less well attended. Christie points to processes that operate outside the kitchenspace—urbanization and mechanization of agriculture, to name two—that impinge and ultimately threaten the durability of the kitchenspace assemblage. This impingement of large-scale processes on local place-making is a theme that I find throughout this research as well.

Similarly, the work of Carolyn Steel (2008) and Susan Parham (2015) look at the intersection of food and urbanism, using food as a lens to understand place-making processes in specifically urban environments. This can include the very morphology of a city, arguing that grain helped create the morphology of the ancient city and meat the industrial city. Medieval London's street grid for instance reflected the fact that wagons and barges were the main foodstuff delivery options and reflected an urban environment in which food was a very visible part of urban life. Contrasted to today's supermarket which is enrolled, that is to say sustains and is sustained by, the suburban morphology. Steel argues that food helps us understand cities holistically by showing how power relations between city and hinterland get thrown into relief, how social life can be facilitated and broken down through different kinds of food space.

AUSTIN, TEXAS: ITS HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY IN BRIEF

The city of Austin will be re-encountered here in terms of both its well-known and forgotten food geographies, and hopefully add some shades of nuance to its ever-growing collection of epithets and its standing place on a variety of listicles. One of the fastest growing cities in the U.S., having doubled in population approximately every twenty years since WWII, Austin has regularly shown up on top ten lists for having one of the more robust job markets and a high overall quality of life among U.S. cities. Known as a progressive bastion in otherwise conservative Texas, the city prides itself on its troika of values: weirdness, environmentalism, and economic growth (Busch, 2017; Long, 2010; Swearingen, 2010; Tretter, 2013a, 2013b). The site of both the state's capital and the flagship public university, Austin has long possessed a competitive economic advantage that allowed itself to develop an economic engine based on technology, while simultaneously cultivating a set of countercultural values. It is this dominant image and narrative of Austin that has been crafted over the course of the twentieth century, with Austin's civic leaders and boosters promoting the city as a kind of bucolic, pastoral paradise, set in a pristine Hill Country environment with an ample supply of water and highly educated workforce (Busch, 2017). In the most recent election, candidates heralded this 'special character of Austin,' while simultaneously tapping into anxieties that this was all under the threat of change from traffic congestion, an increasingly unaffordable housing market, and rampant development.

While some have argued that the greatest divides in Austin are between the

environmentalists and countercultural types on one side and the pro-growth and development forces on the other (Swearingen, 2010), others would argue that greatest divides are along lines of race and class. This divide in Austin, colloquially understood and spatially demarcated by I-35, is rooted in the implementation of the 1928 Master Plan which relegated all people of color to the eastern side of town. It is on display through health, criminal justice, and education disparities (Herrick, 2008; Tang & Ren, 2014). It is present in the way mainstream environmentalists have ignored the work of environmental justice organizations such as PODER (Tretter, 2013a). It manifests in the way ecological planning initiatives adversely affect low-income Latino communities (Dooling, 2012). Perhaps it is most visible in the gentrification of those long-segregated neighborhoods in East Austin, and the startling out-migration of the African-American population of Austin (Tang & Ren, 2014; Tretter & Sounny-Slitine, 2012).

The socio-spatial divisions of the city have a geologic division as well. The city straddles the Balcones Faultline, with the scenic woods and hills lying westward and the Blackland prairie lying to the east. Indeed, the geologic divisions underpin, in part, the socio-spatial ones. For it was the hills that were safe from the occasional raging floods of the Colorado river, and the rich who were able to afford homes there. The poor, disproportionately nonwhite, had to contend with the floods taking lives and damaging property (Tretter & Adams, 2012).

Going back into the nether regions of the Austin past, what now is called

Austin, was originally settled by Anglos in the 1820s, with outposts such as Jacob Harrell at the mouth of Shoal Creek, and Reuben Hornsby set up shop at swooping bend of the river just north of where the airport sits today, known as Hornsby Bend. But though it may have been far removed from the large and glitzy cities of New Orleans or Mexico City, it was not some uninhabited frontier. It was part of the often overlapping, often contested territories of tribes such as Tonkawa and Kiowa. These tribes were largely nomadic and relied on game hunting, but some tribes grew corn in the area (Austin History Center, 2013).

According to legend, then-President of Texas Mirabeau Lamar on a visit to the settlement declared that he foresaw the site becoming the “seat of a great empire” (Kerr, 2013). Perhaps it is here that we can trace the ambition and boosterism that has shot through the city’s development. And while civic and business elites have managed to successfully mold the city in their images to some extent, there have also been some massive failures. An ill-fated trading expedition to link Austin with Santa Fe, New Mexico, coupled with the failures of steam boats to navigate the Colorado River left the settlement rather isolated through much of the 19th century. With the establishment of the flagship university in 1888, which was preceded by the HBCU Tillotson (later Huston-Tillotson) and the private Catholic university, and the entrenchment of the state capital, the economy was set to run on the twinned power of state government and university.

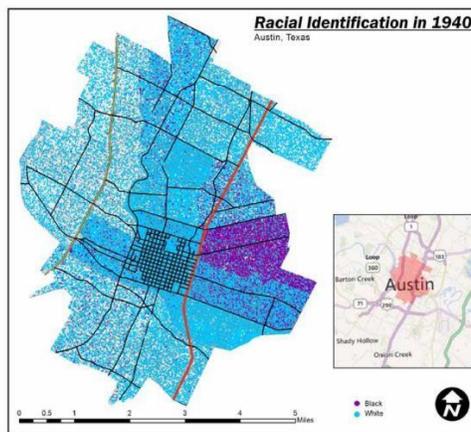
Yet, there was a strong contingent of folks who still envisioned Austin as a

potentially great industrial power. In 1888, A.P. Wooldridge was elected mayor on a platform that involved public bond funds for a great dam to be built west of the city. The dam was promised to be an integral part of the city's future: it would provide power and light to its citizens, irrigation and stability to its farmers, protection from the floods, and the reservoir tucked behind the dam would be a source of recreation. Completed in 1894, the dam was an unqualified success in terms of recreation, but something of a disappointment in terms of irrigation and power supply.

As for the flood-prevention, that seemed to be to the dam's credit as well, but structural weaknesses were eating away at the dam's base, and in April of 1900, the dam gave way. With the water previously held back in the reservoir joining with the cascading floodwaters channeled from across the Hill Country to be even more devastating. There were several casualties, a wide swath of damage across the city and what was likely the death blow to the visions of those captains of industry (Tate, 2015). Instead, the civic leaders pursued a growth strategy around leisure and the knowledge economy that still dominates today (Busch, 2017; Tretter, 2016).

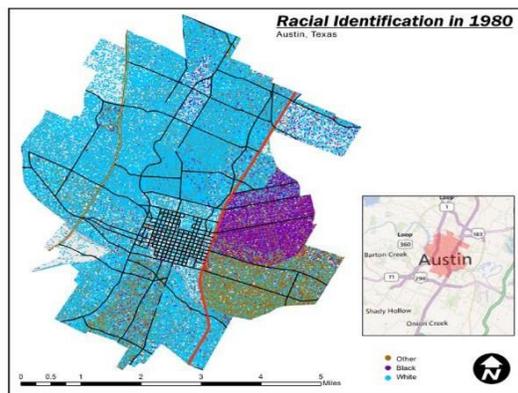
Segregation took on the force of the state with the introduction of Jim Crow laws, perhaps most prominently with the segregation of the public transit system in 1905 (Humphrey, 1985). Restrictive covenants kept nonwhites out of several prominent neighborhoods throughout the city (Tretter & Sounny-Slitine, 2012). The private practice of segregation was cemented in 1928 with the enactment of the 1928 Master Plan. The plan was the first planning document of the city, it not only

contained visions for the street and transportation systems, schools, parks and cemeteries, and the like, but it also sowed the seeds for one of the clearest examples of institutional racism to be found in U.S. cities. Specifically, what it did was dictate to nonwhite residents of the city who wished to have access to city services and utilities, and wished to attend their neighborhood parks and schools, they would need to live within the demarcated “Negro District”.



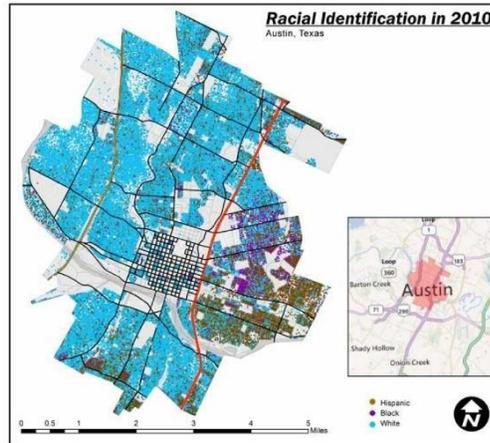
Map 1 - Racial Identification in 1940

Dot density map of racial identification in Austin, Texas based on 1940 United States Census: Population & Housing Data. Data is derived from census tracts, this leads to dots density representation within some blocks. Census tracts were highest resolution of data available. Two racial identifications are mapped based on the census: White and Black (Negro).



Map 5 - Racial Identification in 1980

Dot density map of racial identification in Austin, Texas based on 1980 United States Census: Summary Tape File. Data is derived from census tracts, this lead to dots density representations within some blocks. Census tracts were highest resolution of data available. Three racial identifications are mapped based on the census: White, Black, and Other. There were four major racial groups in the 1980 census leading to the following categories: White, Black, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Other. Hispanic was not considered a racial category. Analysis on 1990 Census revealed that 98% of respondents who checked other also marked themselves as Hispanic. (Gibbels, Tolson, Warner, & Guarnaccia, 2000). For this reason this dot density map included 'other' as a category to help in identifying Hispanic distribution in Austin.



Map 8 - Racial Identification in 2010

Dot density map of racial identification in Austin, Texas based on 2010 United States Census: Redistricting Summary File. Data is derived from census blocks, this lead to some block having no populations and appearing uninhabited in the map. Census blocks were highest resolution of data available. Three racial identifications are mapped based on the census: White, Black, and Hispanic.

Figure 2: Maps showing the patterns of segregation and the racial make-up of Austin.

Source: (Tretter & Sounny-Slitine, 2013)

It was in the 1970s that the reputation of Austin as hip and alternative can trace its origins. The environmentalist and co-operative movements, for instance, along with the music scene created a milieu of progressive activism and creative life. Austin remained deeply segregated throughout this time, and the various social movements did little to assuage that. The 1990s saw a kind of détente between the environmentalists and the developers as mayor Kirk Watson brokered a kind of truce via “smart growth” in which the areas deemed environmentally sensitive in West Austin and west of Austin would be protected while the downtown area and neighborhoods in the central city, including those east Austin neighborhoods that had seen decades of financial disinvestment, would see increased densification. Such policies, done in the name of sustainable development, has had the consequence of rampant gentrification and displacement in

those neighborhoods (Busch, 2017; Tang & Ren, 2014; Tretter, 2016).

In sum, Austin is a profoundly complex place in ways that often get elided in the promotional literature. The spiraling affordability crisis has left up to a quarter of residents food insecure (“Food for All: Inclusive Food Planning in North Austin,” 2016). There has been a profound loss of cultural, social and material resources due to community fragmentation in the wake of development-led displacement (N. Jones, 2016). It is in the spirit of wanting to continue the work, much of which is cited above, that this study wishes to trouble standard narratives of Austin. Austin’s food culture has a base of Tex-Mex and barbeque, with an increasingly diversifying restaurant scene. However, this dissertation seeks to uncover some of the subtler ways in which food and place intersect in Austin, Texas.

RESEARCH METHODS & BACKGROUND

Those engaged in historical geographies use maps, city directories, newspapers, property deed records, and oral histories in order to reconstruct historical landscapes and places (Holdsworth, 2004; McGeachan, 2014; Naylor, 2006; Offen, 2012). It is an eclectic and experimental sub-discipline (Mills, 2013). Historical geography is a troubling enterprise for a couple of reasons. One is that the materials that are used to construct the past themselves are not outside of the historical process such that they too are marked with the same kind of power dynamics as the object of

study. This means that the archives, or the broadly defined as the source material, are gap-ridden and incomplete sources. While a truly comprehensive archive is surely impossible, the ways in which they are incomplete is not entirely random. Researchers must be sure to be attentive to what is said and not said, distinguishing between what is left out because “it goes without saying” or because it cannot be articulated (Van Sant et al., 2018). What is kept and what is not has a politics to it (Mills, 2013). Many critical geographers are interested in what is called the “historical present” (Van Sant et al., 2018), that is, to use historical geography to make critiques about the present.

Karl Offen (2012) argues that one of the vital traditions of historical geography is delineating the effects of colonialism and other wide-scale, durable, processes on landscapes and epistemologies. For example, Katherine McKittrick (2013) writes about “plantation logics” in which the plantation is seen as “an ongoing locus”; that is a continuation of logic from the plantation to the prison and the ‘ghetto’.

Plantation logic can also be understood in terms of creating ecologically homogenous landscapes, the brutal instrumentality over land and labor in the name of export-driven extraction. Levi Van Sant calls this ‘glacial history’ in which history is not something which recedes like a shoreline from a moving vessel, but rather accumulates like a glacier. Both notions take cues from Walter Benjamin’s “theses of history”.

Holdsworth (2004) speaks of understanding place-making as a historical process.

Therefore this dissertation will attempt to be sensitive to gaps in the historical record and ways the past can help critique the present, while searching for

power relations accumulated over time through various phases of Austin's food geography.

The germination of this project began in November of 2013 when I attended a neighborhood community meeting on the issues and concerns surrounding a collection of urban farms that existed in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood in East Austin. What I remember most from that meeting were the pitched emotions. As I go into detail in Chapter Two, the farms provoked a lot of passion. Farm advocates spoke of the fertile soil in that part of town, and the benefits of having farms so integrated into the fabric of the city.

I was both struck and dismayed at the frayed emotions and tensions that were present at the meeting. I was also struck by the depth of the issues at stake: the question of creating sustainable cities and food systems (for whom? what does it look like?); the historical and systemic racism present in Austin and the affects it continues to have on both community and communication; and the ways in which gentrification was playing out on the ground as not only an economic process but a cultural one as well. I left the meeting with a germ of an idea for my research project. I wanted to understand more robustly what impact urban farms had on the communities in which they were situated, what the sources of tension surrounding them were, and to work for more just outcomes.

Before arriving in Austin, Texas for graduate school, I traveled with two friends around the country as a trio of songwriters. For seven weeks we played

wherever we could: coffee shops, bars, living rooms, and farms. We all had several friends living and working on small organic farms all around the country, people our age who graduated from top universities eschewing careers in finance or law to become farmers. While some were likely in it for the short-term to find direction for their lives, others were clearly thinking vocationally. From California to Michigan to Vermont, it seemed a movement to remake the food system was afoot.

A few years before that, I was living in Athens, Georgia where I was working two jobs. One was at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia where I first started learning about gardening and landscaping. Around that time, I consumed some of the seminal texts of the then-burgeoning food movement: Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Raj Patel's *Stuffed and Starved*, Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* and the documentary, *Food, Inc.* I got plugged into the alternative food movement: shopping at the food co-op, volunteering at community gardens, and growing my own tomatoes.

My other job was at a library in a mobile home community servicing mostly Mexican and Mexican-descent immigrants, many of them with a background in farm labor. Many of them worked in the chicken factory within sight (and smell) of my house, coming to the U.S. after the collapse of the local agriculture in the 1990s. It was in this environment that I learned firsthand of immigrant struggles and of Mexican pride. So, when long-time neighborhood residents began to complain about urban farms started by newcomers as not serving the interests of their community, I

was torn. It hurt to see these two communities, both of which have been instrumental in the development of my social and political consciousness, at odds with each other. It challenged my assumption that anything involving local food was nearly universally accepted. I began to question who and what urban farming served and began to see that farms were perhaps too narrow in their scope.

In the early stages of the project, I thought it would revolve largely around the urban farms, with a few chapters discussing a close reading of the controversy; a couple of chapters tracing some of the historical roots of the controversy, meaning that I wanted to bring to light some of the reasons why longtime residents of East Austin might be resentful towards urban farmers. I also had ideas of understanding some of the local food policy making spaces in Austin as well as tracing some of the networks the urban farms were connected to—namely the restaurants that sourced their produce from these farms. In sum, I saw the urban farm controversy as way into understanding some of the depths of Austin’s socio-spatial conflicts, as well as thinking topologically about the networks it was associated with.

The final version of this dissertation does maintain some of those roots, though it did evolve in ways that took me far afield. Though I continue to lead with the urban farms study to start this dissertation, it did not maintain itself as the centerpiece that I anticipated. One reason for that was that Kate Vickery’s (2014) master’s thesis covered much of the ground that I had intended, with in-depth interviews with many of those involved in the controversy. I did not want to reproduce the same work. At

the same time, I became doubtful that the case of the urban farms had the depth needed to anchor the dissertation. I was also hesitant to wade into something that had so many people upset. I was unsure how to navigate such a space.

What did prove more fruitful was to explore more of the history that was referenced by many people on both sides of the debate. In particular, the spinach farms and abattoir. Boggy Creek Farm, which was generally left out of the criticism levelled at some of the other urban farms, often makes reference to the spinach growing past of the district of the city. A handful of residents too, brought up the municipal abattoir that existed in their neighborhood over time. I followed those leads where they followed and tried to understand how those spaces existed in the past and how they were being re-mobilized in contemporary settings.

The interest in restaurants morphed as well to think less in terms of their direct relationship with urban farms, but how some of them fit into the milieu of Austin's culture over time. I was noticing a trend of restaurants closing down and became curious as to what that could possibly be saying about the rapid changes Austin is undergoing. A similar train of thought brought me to think more deeply about Whole Foods Market. As the reader can probably tell, my process grew unwieldy. Certain lines of questioning and data gathering, such as interviews with food policy key informants, and some 19th century archival work had to be abandoned (at least for now).

This explains the order in which the chapters are arranged. Staying true to the original inspiration of the dissertation, urban farms and the controversies they sparked comes first, followed going into the early twentieth century and through the 1960s. The Restaurants and Whole Foods chapters also overlap historically but bring us to the present.

Methodology

This dissertation is almost exclusively based on publicly available documents and other archival material. The list of sources includes the press archives of the local daily paper, the *Austin American-Statesman* and its weekly, *The Austin Chronicle*; biographical and subject files from Austin History Center; Government reports; Extension agency reports; City Directory; Agricultural Census; City Council Meeting Minutes and Backup Material; Chamber of Commerce Minutes and Reports; Sanborn Maps; and Works Progress Administration reports. While there was some overlap between the chapters, for the most part each one had its own collection of materials.

For urban farms I relied on the extensive coverage in the two main papers, the *Chronicle* and the *Statesman*, including the news coverage, the opinion editorials and the letters to the editor. Another valuable source of data was the public testimony at the City Council to decide the fate of the urban farm ordinance. I relied heavily on both the video of the testimonials and the transcribed minutes, as well as all the backup

material. I also made use of the textual material and notes that came out of public workshops designed to craft the urban farm ordinance.

For spinach, I also used the digital historical archives of the *Austin American-Statesman* (henceforth *Statesman*). This included not just the news articles but the classified ads as well. Through the website hathitrust.org I did a keyword search around spinach and turned up a great deal of material from the USDA. The digitized documents from the Interstate Commerce Commission also proved invaluable for understanding the conflict the spinach growers had with railroad companies. From the Austin History Center, I found the biographical files of spinach growers, particularly Moton Crockett, enlightening, as well as Chamber of Commerce annual reports. I also relied on the agricultural census from 1900 through 1935.

The *Statesman* archive was again a major linchpin for the chapter about the municipal abattoir. Another invaluable document was the annual report filed every year from 1936 to 1939 (at least that have survived) which detailed the monthly and year profits and losses of the plant, the extensive maintenance requirements of the plant. Two years also had a list of employees, which I then used the city directory to find their corresponding addresses, which led me to think about the geographies of labor at the plant. I was unable to uncover similar information regarding the spinach laborers. Finally, through the City of Austin's website, I was able to find the early ordinances which limited the presence of livestock in the city leading up to the construction of the abattoir.

My starting point for the restaurant chapter was the vertical files on Austin restaurants kept at the Austin History Center. This included press snippets and other paraphernalia for dozens of restaurants. I wound up selecting the three restaurants that I did based on the amount of material found in these files, and the way in which they had overlapping timelines that stretched for much of twentieth century Austin. This material was augmented through the digital archives of the *Statesman* and the *Chronicle*.

For my Whole Foods chapter, I also relied on the material found in vertical files at the Austin History Center. They also had a collection of print newspapers, which included some of the newsletters produced by Whole Foods from the early 1980s through the mid-1990s. The vertical files were also instrumental in reconstructing the 1970s cooperative scene in Austin. I also took dozens of photographs in the flagship Whole Foods Market in downtown Austin of both food labels as well as displays on the walls and columns of the store.

All the data was collected in ATLAS.ti, which is a qualitative data analysis software. Each chapter's documents were collected together and I relied on Cope's (2010) method of coding documents. I started with some generalized categories that would be refined with further readings. These were: conditions, interactions among actors, strategies and tactics, and consequences. I also found it helpful to use a general code of "spatiality" whenever that popped up. After that, I would then go through those coded and refine them to the specific themes, concepts, and conflicts

that arose within each story. Also, I found that I could construct the narrative and analyze motivations and themes for each space and story of the dissertation.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

I start in Chapter Two with an examination of the contemporary urban farms in East Austin. It traces the eruption of controversies in 2013 that emerged around them due to practices of both farming activities such as composting and animal slaughter as well as using the farms for non-farming activities such as events that were also considered nuisances. Underlying the conflict though were different imaginaries held by proponents and detractors. Urban farmers and were operating within a household lot scale and their advocates conceptualized urban agriculture within a global and city imaginary rooted in concerns around climate change, urban sustainability, and creating a locally viable food system. Urban farm detractors were enacting a different conception of place rooted mostly in a neighborhood scale. Rather than thinking in terms of Austin as a whole city, they were working primarily with an East Austin imaginary. Detractors were concerned with urban farms as both disamenities that harkened back to the neighborhood's industrial past as well as the threat of gentrification and displacement. In sum, two very different place images were enacted through the food space of urban farms.

For a brief period of about fifteen years, the Austin area was one of the leading spinach producing and shipping regions in the country. Chapter Three delineates how this came about and why it was ultimately unstable. It looks at the ways in which market opportunity, consumer tastes, technology, exploitative labor relations, bacteria came together to make Austin one of the leading spinach-producing regions, then it examines the underlying precarity of the assemblage that kept it from becoming a durable one. It points to the ways in which sites are vulnerable to outside forces and processes.

Chapter Four, examines an abattoir also built in east Austin and operated from 1931 to 1969. Its discursive development in the decades leading up to its construction were wrapped up in anxieties around the sanitary conditions of the local meat supply and arguments about the role of local government to both fund such infrastructural projects and intervene in market processes. Upon its construction, the abattoir symbolized a modern and progressive Austin. It then quickly faded into the background as a useful part of the local infrastructure until being rendered obsolete through the national rescaling of the meat industry. This chapter also delineates the but played a role in the stigmatization of Austin's East Side.



Figure 3: Map of Food Sites in Austin

Chapter Five examines three restaurants at various stages of Austin’s history. It highlights how restaurants can operate as sites of both contestation and reconciliation. The first part examines how the Night Hawk Diner played a role as a space of open sociality and how its owner framed restaurant space in favor of public integration of the city. I explore the struggles around the loss of restaurants such as Les Amis and Las Manitas from the urban landscape and social scene, which can also be partially understood by homogenizing (large-scale) forces working against the preservation of local places.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I consider how consumption at Whole Foods Market means interacting with a variety of different scales as a consumer while also exploring

how the company of Whole Foods intersects with the trajectory of Austin's development as a whole. It takes as a jumping off point its name, looking at how the concepts of "Whole", "Food", and "Market" construct an ethos in which there can be no bad choices made in the store. Parallel to this, I trace the trajectory of the company from its roots in countercultural Austin and its remarkable rise that tracks uncannily alongside the rise of the city itself. Whole Foods too may ultimately be unstable itself as it has recently been bought out by Amazon and faces an uncertain future.

Chapter Two: A sustainable city and a contested neighborhood: conflict, history and threat around the urban farms of Austin, Texas

INTRODUCTION

When Dorsey Barger started HausBar Farms in 2009, it was a calling, stating in the *Statesman*, “it's a moral obligation to decrease the problem of global warming” (Gándara, 2012, p. A01). Inspired by Michael Pollan’s critique of industrial agriculture (Vickery, 2014), she left her famed restaurant, the Eastside Café, and bought two acres of property on Govalle Avenue. It had been abandoned property for several years, with dilapidated shacks purportedly used for crack dens and illicit sex rendezvouses. A real estate consortium had aims to buy it and develop condominiums on it, but in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, that fell through, allowing Barger and her life partner, Susan Haussmann, to buy the property (Gándara, 2012). Within a couple of years, they had transformed the property, with hundreds of chickens and goats running around, rows of carrots and kale. All for sale at the weekly farm stand. Whenever it was referred to in the press, it was as a model for sustainable agriculture, and even Michael Pollan himself came to an event to give a talk.

Perhaps most indicative of its sustainability, and the trigger for the conflict that followed, was its compost pile. It was what is known as a black soldier fly compost pile. What makes it special is its ability to compost animal byproducts after their slaughter. The heads, lungs, intestines, and other scraps of flesh are places in a

container which attracts black soldier flies to lay eggs in the flesh. When the grubs hatch, they use chicken parts as a food source. The grubs then crawl out of the composter through a tube where they become a food source for the living chickens. In a lovely and innovative, though somewhat macabre, closed-loop system, chickens and soldier flies then become food sources for each other, leaving no waste products that need to be disposed of offsite. Indeed, this was the goal of the farm—to be as self-sufficient, and self-contained as possible. However, the space of the farm could never truly be so bounded and contained as it would like. The farm is located in the zip code 78702, one of the most rapidly gentrifying zip codes in the nation at the time. The farm also existed within a city that prided itself on its progressive image and policies, making “sustainability” the guiding frame of reference for its most recent master plan (City of Austin, 2012), yet also is a city deeply segregated racially and economically. The farm is also within a nation in which small scale agriculture has been eroded for decades. In sum, the compost pile and the farm are embedded within a variety of scales and swirl of discourses and urban processes.

Dorsey Barger’s compost pile found itself enmired in controversy when in November of 2012, its smell got a little too intense, and wafted its way down the block and onto the property of Louis Polanco (Gándara, 2012). Polanco had lived in the neighborhood for five-plus decades, which was five decades longer than HausBar farms and its compost pile, and he had experienced all the changes the neighborhood had gone through. He was quoted in the *Statesman* a few weeks later saying, "It's just

not right to have chickens and donkeys in the middle of the city, and the noise, smell and traffic that comes along with it" (ibid). On that day he decided that the smell coming from his neighbor was unpleasant enough to call the city's complaint department, touching off a year-long controversy, culminating in an emotional public hearing and city council vote on a new urban farm ordinance (UFO) that dealt with in what zoning designations commercial urban farming would be allowed to operate in, what kinds of farming activities would be allowed on them (i.e. slaughtering of animals), and what non-farm activities (such as weddings and events) would be allowed. As a public process, the debates around urban agriculture in Austin brought to surface some of the deep socio-spatial fault lines in the city that show that urban agriculture is inherently political (McClintock, Miewald, & McCann, 2017).

This chapter explores how the public controversies and conversations around the practices, meanings, and discourses of urban agriculture were mobilized in framing different spatial imaginaries of the city. It shows how urban agriculture can be grounds for public discourse on a whole host of questions. What does it mean to be a good neighbor? To not want something in your backyard? To be sustainable? To protect the neighborhoods characteristics? To be congruent with a city's supposed ethos? I find that urban agriculture advocates positioned the farms as keeping within a socio-spatial framework of sustainability, emancipation, and community building, while critics and skeptics positioned the farms within a socio-spatial framework of neighborhood sovereignty and fears of dispossession and revanchism. What emerges

is the ways in which urban agriculture can trigger the affective capacities of different communities.

THEORIZING URBAN AGRICULTURE

In the most basic terms, urban agriculture is a set of practices revolving around the producing of food for consumption through the tending of plants and animals for the purposes of communal and/or household wellbeing that is done in an urban or peri-urban area (Hanson & Marty, 2012; Hodgson, Campbell, & Bailkey, 2011; Pearson, Pearson, & Pearson, 2010; Tornaghi, 2014). Such a definition can include anything from small-lot, household gardens to large parcels grown for profit. Urban agriculture has been celebrated for its ability to tackle a range of urban problems, from urban food insecurity and childhood obesity, to community and economic development, to reducing urban pollution and providing green space.

What makes urban agriculture difficult to theorize is not the practices in and of themselves, but the contexts in which they are embedded, and the economic, social, political, and ethical objectives the projects seek to carry out. This is partly alleviated by the devising of different typologies to understand urban agriculture. Nathan McClintock (2014) for example positions different projects along lines of different scales of production, functions, management and labor arrangements, as well as market engagement. In terms of scale and market engagement, for example, UA can mean anything from backyard gardens grown for household consumption to high-

tech vertical indoor farms grown for the market. Projects like community gardens and school gardens often have a social mission such as community building or child education in which the gardens serve as the physical spaces to enact that mission. Indeed, the question “why farm the city” is a fundamental one for scholars interested in urban agriculture. Motivations can be as divergent as addressing acute food insecurity to providing a leisure activity. In his seminal paper, Nathan McClintock (2010) argues that practitioners in both the global north and global south are interested in the healing of various kinds of rifts, both collective and individual, ecological and political.

Often it is this difference of mission and context that reveal the tensions in urban agriculture as a set of practices. Take for example, two of the most well-known projects in the United States: the Hantz Farm in Detroit and South Central Farm in Los Angeles. The latter, which shut down in 2006, was a kind of urban commons project in which largely Latinx immigrants took over an abandoned plot of land and intensively cultivated ten acres of land at a volume to truly alleviate food insecurity among the low-income population creating the farm (Mares & Peña, 2010). The former is a project initiated by Detroit billionaire John Hantz in which he bought up about 200 acres of land in Detroit to grow vegetables and timber (Safransky, 2014). The project’s intentions, coming from Hantz himself, was to induce scarcity in the real estate market by taking land out of circulation, creating the conditions of making other land more valuable. Several food justice organizations objected to this and

argued for the land to be put for uses more directly beneficial for the residents of Detroit. These two examples make for a stark illustration of how understanding urban agriculture across the whole spectrum of its instances is difficult.

It is often pointed out that as long as there have been cities, people have grown food in them (Hanson & Marty, 2012; McClintock, 2017). For instance, the rapid urbanization starting from the 20th century and continuing today has meant a large influx of rural people bringing their agricultural practices with them as they move into the city. The sheep that grazed in Central Park until the 1930s when Robert Moses kicked them off, the victory gardens that cropped up in the World Wars; all demonstrate a kind of fluidity between urban and agricultural landscapes. The field and the city have always been entwined and mutually constitutive. The sedentism of agriculture and its capacity to produce surplus frame the possibilities for urbanization and social differentiation (Mazoyer & Roudart, 2006). Different types of agriculture systems shape urban development. Urban centers rooted in tobacco growth in the Piedmont South saw their growth stunted relative to grains because of the different urban market structures they enacted (Earle, 1992). Cronon's (1991) central insight in *Nature's Metropolis* is that the development of Chicago is entwined with the transformation of its hinterlands into vast agricultural landscapes.

Yet, despite the fact that the city and country are mutually constituted materially, and that growing food has generally had its place in city life, there lie deep tensions between urban and agricultural processes. One major factor is the economic. In Von

Thunen's land-use model as well as Alonso's (1964) urban model that extended Von Thunen's insights of a political economy made spatial, there is little place for agriculture in the city. In a bid-rent system, agriculture cannot be a profitable use in the expensive urban land market and is developed into residential or commercial enterprises. The "octopus in the garden", that is to say, the inexorable spread of urban development at the expense farmland has been well documented (Holdsworth, 2004). The removal of animals from urban environs, while also couched in terms of public health, was often about making the city more profitable (McNeur, 2011). In a crude sense, then, the city is predicated precisely on what is *not* agriculture. This accounts for much of the contingent, precarious and temporary status of most urban agricultural projects.

Laura Lawson's (2005) history of U.S. community gardens lays out how cities turned to small plots tended by urban dwellers in times of war and economic downturn. For example, the mayor of Detroit in the 1890s, Hazen Pingree, pioneered a vacant lot cultivation-as-philanthropy model in which the municipal government partnered with owners of vacant land held for future speculation to allow unemployed and poor workers to cultivate the land to meet their food needs. "Pingree's Potato Patches", a Detroit program to grow on vacant urban land in the 1890s set a template for using urban growing as a means to alleviate food insecurity during the ebbs of capital flows and real estate development. Indeed, when the overall economy, and with it the real estate market, picked up in the early 20th

century, the program folded when the private owners took back the land for the purposes of pouring more concrete and brick. The much-lauded victory gardens of the world wars met similar fates. Such echoes are also found in the South Central Farm in Los Angeles. As a general principle, urban farming is much more widespread in conditions of economic precarity, which makes the projects themselves tenuous in the face of development pressures.

The development of the New York City community gardens over the latter third of the twentieth century both re-enforced and transformed this narrative (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004; Schmelzkopf, 1995; C. M. Smith & Kurtz, 2003). Re-enforced because many gardens were established via squatting on vacant or abandoned lots and many fell to development pressure. That narrative has shifted though due in part to a more valiant and organized resistance that led to the establishment of a community garden program run by the city. Urban growing became more viable in the city due to citizen demand.

New York was not alone in its establishment of a community garden program. The 1970s saw yet another resurgence of interest in urban growing, and again is partially explained by economic recession (Lawson, 2005). But, instead of getting paved over, a lot more gardens have stuck around. Municipal programs developed in Boston, Seattle, Washington D.C., San Francisco, and Philadelphia have their roots in this period. This relative permanence and valorization of community gardens is often explained as coming from a couple of different, and countervailing, forces. One is the

aforementioned community organizing and activism that has led to both the establishment and sustaining of spaces for urban growing.

The other reason for the relative durability of urban growing over the last few decades, though, is that it fits better into how cities operate politically and economically, as well as socially and environmentally. As cities seek to become more sustainable, more entrepreneurial, more geared towards attracting workers in the so-called creative class, urban agriculture can play a pivotal role in the pursuit of such goals. UA can provide an easy-to-maintain green space that adds to the green infrastructure of a city. As part of the green infrastructure it is part of a suite of amenities that create a more livable city that attracts the workers. Spaces of urban growing become ways for cities to advertise how green and sustainable they are. Rather than a hindrance to development, urban growing can be enrolled in its facilitation. Community gardens have demonstrated a positive effect on real estate values (Voicu & Been, 2008). McClintock finds that a different spatial pattern in front yard and back yard gardening indicative of different flows of capital development (McClintock, Mahmoudi, Simpson, & Santos, 2016).

Nathan McClintock is among the most nuanced theorists of urban agriculture to grasp these dynamics. There are two basic directions that urban plots can go. A vacant or undervalued parcel that becomes a garden plot. The area surrounding the plot and/or the plot itself becomes coveted for reasons outside of the plot itself and then it gets displaced. Or, the plot can become a symbol of a combination of livability

and sustainability and gets marketed as adding value to the surrounding real estate and thereby is enrolled in the process of neighborhood transformation in a different way. This second narrative puts urban agriculture as a part of the sustainability fix (While, Jonas, & Gibbs, 2004).

Sustainability is increasingly enacted at the urban scale (Braun, 2005; Gibbs & Krueger, 2007; Tretter, 2013; While, Jonas, & Gibbs, 2004). Cities were once regarded as impediments to sustainability due to their enormous ecological footprint (Wackernagel & Rees, 1998) and the fact that their energy and material needs outstrip available ecosystem services (Young, 2009). However, cities are increasingly seen as solutions to ecological problems (Glaeser, 2011), with dense urban areas yielding lower carbon footprints per capita compared to suburbs (Tretter, 2013). At the urban scale, sustainability translated into practice typically looks like a collection of policy implementations such as installing bike lanes, investing in renewable energy, cleaning up polluted rivers, and preserving green space (Braun, 2005; Desfor & Keil, 2004; Krueger & Gibbs, 2007; Quastel, 2009). While such initiatives likely do have a positive impact towards reducing the ecological imprint of cities and improving their livability, they also are entangled in the new ways in which cities need to be entrepreneurial and compete for skilled labor and capital (Hall & Hubbard, 1996). These strategies have been referred as 'ecological modernization' (Desfor & Keil, 2004) or the 'sustainability fix' (While et al., 2004). The key notion of the sustainability fix is that it is a response to pressures from various fronts, such as

stronger imperatives for environmental protections at the national and international scales, shifting economies, and demands from citizen groups. As such, the result is a “selective incorporation of environmental goals determined by the balance of pressures for and against environmental policy within and across the city” (While et al., 2004, p. 552). In practice though, the effort among policy-makers to find balance is usually a re-enforcing of the status quo and creates a divided city (Long, 2014; Quastel, 2009; Tretter, 2013). As such, urban farming relates to the discourses and anxieties of gentrification.

Uncomfortably similar to climate change, gentrification seems like an intractable problem, seemingly something that is inevitable, something menacing. Like climate change deniers, gentrification also has its skeptics, those that proclaim it to be a piddling problem barely worth addressing, and those that claim it’s a good thing (Duany, 2001). To be clear, the analogy can only take us so far, as the consensus in academic world for the depth of climate change is stronger than that for gentrification. Researchers, for example, have still struggled to find/quantify Neil Smith’s famed “rent gap” hypothesis and the extent of displacement is still unclear (Freeman, 2005; Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008). More importantly, while climate change is operating in temporal and spatial scales that render it distant and invisible, gentrification is often experienced through the hypervisibility of changed landscapes and demographics. For many, gentrification has come to be a combination of visible transformation of the landscape (condos, boutiques, bars, bike lanes) and the

concomitant practices that come with it (yoga, bicycling, brunch, etc.) with dramatic rises in rents. Gentrification gets to one of the great paradoxes of the city as being emancipatory and revanchist.

Neil Smith is responsible for the coining of the term “revanchism”, which he identifies as occurring in the “restructured urban geography of the late capitalist city” (Smith, 1996, p. 46). He took inspiration from the bringing down of the 1870 Paris Commune, in which the monied classes re-took the city from anarchists and agitators. “Revanche” comes from the French word for ‘revenge’, connotes a violent reclaiming of the city. Smith’s first extensions of his theory referred mostly to the criminalization of the homeless and the forced removal of squatters in Tompkins Square Park, it has come to mean a generalized sense of class war in which the middle classes and elites reclaim and retake urban neighborhoods for their purposes. A concept further developed by Rowan Atkinson in which he delineates four strands of revanchism: 1) Governmentality focused on the regulation of people and behavior in public space 2) Specific policies such as anti-begging laws that “secure” public space. 3) A dystopian trope of downward social relations 4) a set of policies geared towards beautifying segments of the city for the purposes of capital accumulation. Revanchism is one of the of many ways in which the narratives and processes of gentrification take on undertones of violence. From the perspective of many long-time POC residents, there is a sense of gentrification being part of a “plan” (Freeman, 2006). From such a position, gentrification is put as a continuation of 20th century urban processes that saw segregation, disinvestment,

white flight, suburbanization, and urban renewal, in which the city is subject to the flows of capital and the whims of those who hold it. In this perception, urban agriculture appears like a trojan horse for gentrification.

FROM TANK FARMS TO URBAN FARMS

Though there is a brief sketch of Austin's history and geography in the introduction, I will reiterate a few points here. Born from a vision of several generations of its civic and business leaders, Austin has parlayed its location as the state capital and university and a relatively unspoiled natural environment to become a model for other cities (Florida, 2005). Austin has won plaudits as a "clean tech hub" (Walsh, 2012), as one of the fifteen "greenest" cities in the world ("Austin, a Green City", 2015). Yet, beneath the plaudits it is one of the more economically and racially segregated cities in Texas and the country (Florida and Mellander, 2015). The question that gets at the heart of why urban farms in Govalle caused such a stir across the city is, in the words of historian Andrew Busch (2017), why has the "concept of urban sustainability . . . developed in a way that seems to exclude so many people from its benefits and why Austin is a city so tied to its natural environment yet so bifurcated by race" (p. 2). The linkages between Austin's political economy, urban development and culture have been covered elsewhere (Busch, 2015, 2017; Long, 2014; Tretter, 2013b). What I provide here is a brief sketch of that story as it relates to the context around the urban farm conflicts. It is a story of neglect and abandonment of a space, colloquially known as the East Side, turned into a space of desire.

Today, the 1928 Master Plan is pointed to as a kind of original sin of segregation and discrimination. This is a bit simplistic, as this was presaged by private residential discrimination in the decades previous (Tretter & Sounny-Slitine, 2013), not to mention the installation of Jim Crow laws in the early 1900s (Humphrey, 1985). But, the impact of the plan was nonetheless massive. The neighborhoods of the eastside were systematically disinvested from and it became a kind of sacrifice zone (Reinert, 2018) of industrial dumping. Particularly egregious was what became known as the ‘tank farm’ sited in the Govalle neighborhood, less than a mile from the collection of urban farms cropped up some decades later. It was a large storage tank facility in which several of the major oil and gas companies were able to store their used byproducts within sight of the residential neighborhood that was largely Latino. Over the nearly four decades that it was operational, there were dozens of leaks that polluted soil and ground water, as well as the steady stream of noxious fumes that would give residents a litany of health issues (Busch, 2017). At the time, Austin had cumulative zoning, meaning that areas zoned residential could not have industry, but areas zoned industrial could have residences built on them.

By the late 1980s, residents of Govalle and East Austin began to take action, with PODER coming to the forefront. While PODER later came to play a major role in the urban farm controversy, it began as an environmental justice organization that

fought the city government in the 1990s to get rid of the ‘tank farm’, an industrial facility operated by six major energy corporations that housed toxic waste. The name PODER functions as both an acronym (People in Defense of Earth and her Resources) and means “power” in Spanish, and the organization rose to prominence for its pressuring city government to close the facilities, as well later on the Holly Power Plant. Its leader, Susana Almanza, became nationally-known environmental justice organizer.

It is partly through the efforts of PODER that east Austin came to be attractive to newcomers and investment. By working to rid their neighborhoods of hazards, they opened them up to the possibility of rapid development, a point not lost on them at the time (Almanza, 2016). PODER’s efforts also coincided with another coalition of environmental activists working to protect the Edwards Plateau watershed that lay underground (Swearingen, 2010). The Save Our Springs coalition as it was known eventually cut a compromise measure with the development class of the city to restrict urban growth in the western side of the city and promote a denser growth model in downtown Austin and eastward (the so-called desired development zone). It was these two forces that account for much of the change seen in East Austin over the last two decades, and it is crucial part of understanding the position of neighborhood activists around the urban farm ordinance debate.

It was a hard fight to get the tank farms out of east Austin and to get the district re-zoned as single family residential. While urban farms would seem to have

little in common with such toxic land uses, their small-scale animal processing brought up painful memories of its industrial past. The complaints around crowds, events, parking, and so forth were also rooted in memories of “Aquafest” a festival that took place in the 1960s and 1970s that east Austin residents disdained for the way their neighborhood was treated. In sum, decades of oppression and struggle were called up in ways urban farm advocates had little frame of reference for.

TIMELINE OF A CONTROVERSY

In the months following the neighbors’ initial complaints about HausBar farm, the local press followed the story closely and various actors made their voices known through social media and op-eds. Both sides of the debate felt attacked and vilified. A collective of urban farms in the Govalle neighborhood created a website¹ to make the case that their farms deserved public support. That case centered on using only organic methods and being good ‘stewards of the land’ by collecting rainwater and reusing materials. At the heart of this appeal is the production methods used as what is of value to the community. In one editorial, the urban farmers appeal to the sustainability-based prerogatives of Austin’s recent master plan to argue for the positive contributions to the community (Sayle, 2013). Also, 60 local chefs penned a letter to the city council in support of urban farms. One was quoted in the weekly alternative paper

¹ www.austinurbanfarms.org

“I definitely support urban farms 100% percent. The produce and product they provide the city of Austin and from the education aspect, as well. If people approach it with an open mind, they will support urban farms” (Toon, 2013a). Neighborhood advocates countered that “The objection is not to urban farming but to commercialization of the single-family zoning in general and to the slaughtering of animals in particular, which presents health hazards to the neighborhood and is inappropriate to the area” (Austin American-Statesman Editorial Board, 2013).

The public debate led to the SFPB being appointed to draft a clearer and elaborate urban farm ordinance (Vickery, 2014). SFPB hosted four public engagement meetings on various topics surrounding the urban farm ordinance, with sessions dedicated to issues of animal raising, site requirements, and issues of sustainable waste management. It culminated with a town hall meeting in which the recommendations were presented and open for public comment. Dozens of people showed up to these meetings, a mixture of direct stakeholders, city staffers, and those who were interested in local food issues. Conversations mostly revolved around what the best practices should be for an urban farm, such water and soil management, as well as the policies that would best enable urban farms to be economically viable. For example, the working group defined sustainable waste management as "a close circle requiring as little waste disposal away from the site as possible and the reuse of

as much material as possible already on the site" (Sustainable Food Policy Board, 2013).

While members of the SFPB proclaimed the process to be one of robust public engagement, others disagreed. One community organizer was quoted as saying "The fact that persons of color proclaimed that they felt uncomfortable or unsafe speaking about race, privilege, or gentrification in a white-dominated space, the UFO [urban farm ordinance] public meetings, should serve as a loud horn with glaring and flashing red lights that something was wrong" (Toon, 2013b). Neighborhood activists complained that none of their recommendations, including outlawing slaughtering animals for commercial use and banning commercial agriculture on single family zoning, to the board made it into the document that was to be presented to city council (Gándara, 2013).

The public process reached a head when the issue made it to city council in November of 2014. Neighborhood advocates reiterated that they were not opposed to urban farms in theory but were concerned with having commercial and undesirable land uses imposed in their neighborhoods. They criticized the process of pursuing the ordinance by having the SFPB stacked with farming advocates, for not providing an inclusive space to talk about issues of gentrification, food justice, and white privilege. Some expressed outrage that none of their recommendations made it into the document. The farms were taken to task for not accepting food benefits for low-

income consumers. Several speakers brought up the history of east Austin's segregation.

By contrast, the advocates made an appeal to the idea of 'community,' by providing locally grown food and green space to their surrounding neighbors. Urban farmers, they claimed, are facing an up-hill battle against an industrial food system, that what they were doing was a labor of love, no one was getting rich off of farming. After showing a video of some local residents speaking in Spanish and stating they did not have any problems with farms and after two African-American children, with adopted white parents, testified to loving HausBar farms in their neighborhood, some people in the gallery got visibly and vocally upset. "The tokenization here is just really outrageous," a woman called out from the gallery, eventually getting removed from chambers.

The final ordinance that the city council passed maintained that urban farms could be established across all zoning types but prohibited slaughtering animals for commercial use. Urban farm advocates decried the decision as a move "away from sustainability" (Toon, 2013b) Barger was quoted in the local paper stating: "I truly hate to see Austin moving backwards when it claims to want to set the bar for sustainability for the whole country" (ibid) and felt it was unfair to frame the practice as one that subjected poor residents of East Austin to industrial/commercial uses. Following the council's decision, there was cautious optimism on both sides. One community organizer who spoke against the ordinance stated, "with both sides

claiming victory in the decisions voted on by Council, we can pivot back to creating dialogue about race, gentrification, climate change, and food justice, and identify other points of unity" (ibid), while one of the prominent members of the SFPB expressed hope that the community could come together.

SUSTAINABLE CITY, CONTESTED NEIGHBORHOOD

During the spring of 2013, as city staff officials and the sustainable food policy board were organizing the sessions to discuss the urban farm ordinance, a map of the city's urban farms was circulated (see Figure 4). It purported to show all the community gardens and entrepreneurial farms in the city. Both gardens and farms were mostly in the desired development zone, east of the MoPac Expressway. Community gardens had a somewhat wider distribution, the urban farms were clearly concentrated in East Austin. However, the map did show a smattering of other farms throughout the city.

Some of the members of PODER did some "ground truthing" to see what was actually going on at each farm. They reported back that none of them were entrepreneurial farms. One was a school garden at a Montessori school, and the rest were part of a program called Urban Patchwork that partnered with residences to use their yard space to grow vegetables. PODER cast claims that was an attempt to soften the case that urban farming was concentrated in east Austin. It is not clear whether it was a bizarre but accidental discrepancy or a deliberate attempt to show urban farming as a more geographically dispersed phenomenon than it was. The contestation of the map was also relatively minor compared to future events. However, it does speak to the

question of where urban agriculture is, where it should be, and what it means to be or not be in a particular place. Its location could evoke old traumas, spur idealism, or conjure up feelings of threat.

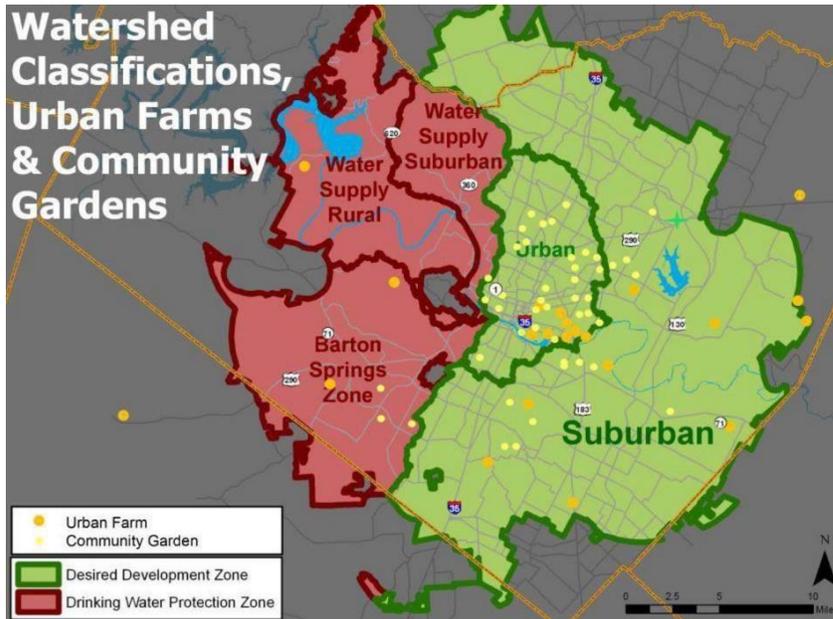


Figure 4: Map showing purported distribution of urban farms in Austin

PODER and its allies made a case that urban farms were one more phenomenon that fell along the well-established socio-spatial fault lines of the city. As such, urban agriculture became a kind of proxy war for issues such as neighborhood rights, urban imaginations, and discussions over how to tackle issues such as gentrification and climate change. Urban agriculture became the grounds at which various claims could be made about what the nature of Austin was really about.

After all the public testimony was finished, and the council members took turns discussing the various issues and possible amendments. Council Member Mike Martinez prefaced his remarks by stating “we don’t want to be like Washington D.C., we don’t want to be like Dallas, we want to be Austin” (City of Austin, 2013). By this he meant that the ideal of Austin does not devolve into political gridlock, that is neighborly and conscientious, and is creative in finding solutions to the major socio-political issues facing its communities. The reference to Dallas is an oft-cited refrain to those concerned that Austin is losing its character. The connotation, especially since Martinez offered generic support for them, is that urban farms are part of, or should be part of, Austin’s character, while they would not be in a place like Dallas.

For many, the fit of urban farms into their image of Austin was almost beyond reproach. Paula Foore of Springdale Farm proclaimed that “our thriving food scene is very much a part of our thriving city” (City of Austin, 2013). In letters of testimony to city hall, the farms were described as “gems,” “oases,” and part of the “fun, thoughtful, and creative culture” that is Austin (ibid). The farms had that special “Austin-y vibe” of being slower paced, creative, environmentally conscious, sustainable. This is an oft-cited refrain of needing to defend that which is special about Austin.

While in some respects, urban farm critics felt threatened by a return to the past, in other respects it was about the encroaching future. One testifier put it this way:

The reason the neighborhoods are so passionate about this is because we're trying to stay here... these communities, particularly the communities of color, who were relegated to this side of town when it was terrible, when conditions were much worse, are trying to stay in the city that they love. Trying not to get priced out to Del Valle where so many of our family members have gone... That's what's happening, Austin is changing. (City of Austin, 2014)

Another community member testified: “East Austin is going to continue to be targeted for land acquisition for individuals concerned more about profit, not people” (ibid).

Susana Almanza expressed fears that easing the restrictions on urban farms would become a “land grab” and folks would start flooding into East Austin to setup commercial farming operations (Austin American Statesman, 2013). While such a claim is almost certainly hyperbolic, it speaks to the general anxiety that longtime residents are continuing to face.

The sense of threat though was not just confined to neighborhood advocates and urban farm critics. The co-owner of Springdale Farm was quoted in the paper stating that “I just get the feeling that the city would rather have condos here.

Sometimes I get the feeling they want to quash us” (Gándara, 2013). Dorsey Barger of HausBar Farms pointed to the fact that before they bought the property, it was almost sold to a real estate consortium that had designs of a multi-unit condo for it.

The point being, if the farms were not protected, there would be condos instead. A supporter of Springdale Farm in particular and urban farms in general proclaimed that the farm was “Austin’s Alamo”, the last hold out from the way Austin used to be (specifically the natural beauty of giant oak trees). Judith McGeery of the Farm and

Ranch Freedom Alliance contextualized her appeal to the city in terms of the loss of farmland, the inability of farmers around the country to make a living solely through farming and the overall precarity of farm operations, and urged Council not to make life more difficult through burdensome recommendations.

What is somewhat startling about the urban farm debate was how it centered on urban farms in Govalle as both disamenities and amenities. For critics, the farms created nuisances of smells, noise, and traffic—things making their neighborhoods *less livable*—while simultaneously accused of playing a role in the ongoing gentrification of East Austin, i.e. driving up the cost of living through its amenities. Advocates, for their part, rarely addressed the claims of being disamenities directly but instead highlighted the positive contributions they were making to the neighborhood. What holds the two criticisms together though is a sense of threat.

Threat that in one sense is rooted in the past and in another rooted in the future. Just about every person who testified before city council wanted to make clear that what they were defending was the right of the neighborhood to maintain its single-family zoning, “this is about defending single family neighborhoods from commercialization” said one person at the hearing (City of Austin, 2013), echoing the concerns of others. They got a boost from the Austin American-Statesman, which argued in an editorial leading up to the final vote, that “the urban farms ordinance has as much to do with single family residence as it does with farming (Austin American Statesman, 10/19/13, a14). While single family has had a destructive role

in American cities, both socially and environmentally, the neighborhood associations saw it as an integral piece to maintaining their neighborhood's sovereignty and character. Single family zoning needed to be respected by upholding the expectations that come with it. One testifier put it this way:

They should appreciate the desire to increase urban farms but balance that against aspirations of homeowners. They make the sacrifice to buy homes in residential areas zoned for single family residence with the expectation of living in dignity, in communities protected from certain kinds of businesses, eyesores and industry. (City of Austin, 2013).

There was a sense that by allowing certain land uses, the farms were contra the expectations of existing in a residential neighborhood. On one hand for being too rural with their foul smells and animal killing, on the other hand being too urban with their loud events and their concomitant traffic and congestion. No one was publicly against the idea of growing vegetables or raising chickens for the purposes of egg production. Those were non-controversial and fit comfortably into what an urban farm ought to look like. It was the “slaughterhouse” that was the point of contention. This sense of encroachment and erosion in single family zoning is better understood by appealing to the history of East Austin, which several testifiers did. One brought up the old municipal abattoir (see Chapter Four) that was sited on 7th and Pleasant Valley Dr, less than a mile away from the farms (City of Austin, 2013). An environmental disamenity that fit well into the established imaginary of East Austin as being the site of the unwanted land uses. It was part of the widespread industrial zoning and

warehousing of the districts as well as the severely diminished political voice those communities had to oppose such conditions. It was not until the 1990s that communities successfully organized to not only remove the tank farms as mentioned earlier, but get the whole area rezoned single family residential. So, though slaughtering a few chickens for purposes of selling may not compare to the old municipal slaughterhouse, it would still bring up feelings of the bad old days. The neighborhood as it stands now was in large part the result of hard-fought political victories and any whiff of returning to that would be met with resistance. As Jane Rivera stated at the end of her testimony: We don't want to see that happen again. We don't want to have slaughterhouses in our communities. We don't want to have people who are having huge commercial things going on but saying that it's part of their farming... This is history, please don't repeat it" (ibid). Neighborhood advocate Paul Saldana also wanted to root the issue in a local, historical perspective. He referenced the 1928 Master Plan and the years of neglect and disinvestment that followed. It took eight decades for the city to reverse course and give East Austin residents a greater voice in the planning process and it would amount as a betrayal to go back now. The neighborhood planning process was supposed to be the "mechanism and tool to address neighborhood and community concerns regarding intrusive encroachment of unwanted limited industrial and commercial uses in proximity to single family and neighborhoods in east Austin" (ibid). It is also possible, though never explicitly connected, that the concerns around parking, crowds, and the like, is rooted in experiences around the AquaFest held in the 1960s and 1970s.

Plants & Animals

When it came to discussing urban farms in East Austin, the points of agreement seemed to point towards vegetables being okay, particularly if they were not being sold, or at least not being sold to high end restaurants. Animals, as they often have been, were the problem, particularly if they were being killed and/or decomposing on the property. Urban farm critics wanted to separate the growing of plants from the killing of animals as what an *urban* farm should be, while advocates wanted to keep them conjoined. However, it was rare that advocates would give a full-throated endorsement of animal processing, or slaughtering.

Much of the debate hinged on the words used. The Austin American Statesman concluded a “slaughterhouse goes too far” in terms of being sited in a single-family neighborhood (Austin American-Statesman Editorial Board, 2013). In the press, Food Policy Member Katherine Nicely was quoted in the press as saying, “Slaughterhouse does not accurately depict the changes we are recommending based on community input” (Toon, 2017). Indeed, the language of the food policy board documents typically used words such as “processing” and “raising” to describe the activities, which critics found euphemistic. After the city council ultimately decided that slaughtering for sale would be prohibited in property zoned residential, Dorsey Barger complained that council had been bamboozled into thinking that animal processing was detrimental to neighborhoods: “the *Statesman* made the issue into one of subjecting the poor residents of East Austin to the 'horrors' of animal processing,

which they claimed would never be allowed in any other neighborhood (even though it was in fact allowed in any neighborhood in Austin and had been for around 13 years)” (Toon, 2013).

However, in front of the council, Barger, who was the only one of the four farms that did slaughter animals, declined to testify. And while nearly every opponent of the ordinance had brought up animal slaughter as a major part of their reasoning, the proponents of the ordinance barely mentioned it one way or another. Their final speaker, Judith McGeery of Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance, argued for including animal “processing” as she called it. She claimed the farm had been following all state regulations and that ought to be sufficient. Julian Limon, a musician, long time resident of the neighborhood, and vocal supporter of the farms injected some humor into the proceedings by claiming “We grew up slaughtering our chickens . . . We do it inhumanly because we just twist their neck and start plucking it right there, but that's the way it's done in east Austin” (City of Austin, 2013).

All the other speakers did not reference the issue at all. Instead they leaned on the natural-cum-agrarian beauty of the farms, the sense of community they fostered, the delight of seeing the *live* animals behind the fences. One testifier referred to the hands of the farmers that are “calloused and strong and often dirty from mother earth's dirt.” Another was quoted as saying “It brings enjoyment for the kids to go by the people, it's like walking into an area of beautiful flowers and the animal” (City of Austin, 2013).

What is curious about this approach is how it elides the messier elements of sustainable farming, which are elements that are integral to sustainable farming practices. It is difficult to have a farm that does not rely on outside inputs without animals (Pollan, 2006). Their waste products, habitat shaping activities, and even their remains are important parts of their ecological health. However, their place is also more easily contested, marks landscapes as dirty, smelly. The appeal to the beauty, the pristineness of the urban farms is actually perhaps secondary to sustainability in terms of resource consumption and circulation.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I began with a description of a compost pile as a demonstration of both the embedded and topological nature of scale and place. While most obviously part of a household, it too was embedded within a neighborhood, Govalle, and within a collection of neighborhoods loosely known as East Austin, that influenced the way in which the compost pile could exist, the way it could be understood, debated in public, championed and rejected. As a material entity, the compost pile could not be contained within property bounds; its unpleasant odors wafting through its neighborhood, acting as a trigger point to a controversy that surfaced tensions around race, gentrification, and sustainability. For proponents of urban agriculture, the compost pile was emblematic of a true sustainable city, by keeping its out of the city's landfills, by providing a food source for its on-site chickens, it was a modest-yet-radical praxis of re-imagining what was

possible around land use in the city. But for others it was a nuisance; and in particular one that harkened back to the previous decades of the “anything goes” treatment of East Austin and exposure of its minority residents to noxious land uses. Even the most minute of spaces can be enrolled in the complex dynamics of neighborhood politics, race, and sustainability.

As the controversy around urban farms in Austin intensified, the compost pile itself faded into the background, and points of contention emerged that revolved around animal slaughter and ways in which the farm spaces were being used as event spaces that were not directly related to agriculture. These practices too triggered negative memories of the past; ones that a nostalgic throwback to quaint agrarianism would not offset.

As a result, the public process of outlining and enacting new urban farming policies, which was sparked by the controversy, revealed two very different senses of place and two different imaginaries operating on different scales. Urban agriculture proponents framed the issue around threats of climate change and wanting to pursue the goals outlined by sustainable city discourse, while also adopting a *laissez-faire* or libertarian philosophy regarding uses of urban space. Detractors of the farms saw threat not globally, but locally in terms of the gentrification processes that made urban farms seem like threats to their neighborhood but also in relation to longstanding treatment of the neighborhood as a place where residential interests are subordinated to economic productivity.

Chapter Three: Spinach Assemblages

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes place and crops fuse together, entwine, come to mutually define each other. The oranges in Indian River Florida are one example; Vidalia onions in southern Georgia, is another. Spinach and the Austin-area is not one of those stories. From roughly 1910 to the late 1920s, Austin was one of the preeminent points for both the growing and shipping of spinach in the country. The development of spinach growing in Austin found itself right at the cusp of the transportation infrastructure—namely railroads—and the market demand necessary—driven by new nutrition consciousness—to make spinach growing viable. However, rather quickly, it moved from being backyard hobby to being a large business concern, and just as quickly it reverted back.

In its long history of cultivation and consumption, spinach has been understood in a variety of ways. Arab agronomists once dubbed spinach the “prince of the vegetables” (Hallavant & Ruas, 2014), and throughout, at least from its introduction into Europe, has played a role in both the diets of the elite as well as the commoner. Spinach cultivation did not begin in Europe until around the 12th century. There are two competing theories in tracing its emergence into European gardens and dishes. One is that crusaders carried it westward across Europe, and another is that they came through the Moorish Spain and first cultivated in France, with the most recent archaeological evidence pointing towards the latter (Hallavant & Ruas,

2014). As a crop that is eaten before going to seed, its presence in the archaeological record is rather sparse, but it's known that herbs and greens were generally considered to be foods of the commoners, and spinach appears in simple soup dishes and austere Lenten recipes (Harvey, 1981, cited in Hallavant & Ruas, 2014). However, spinach also appears in the 14th century garden handbook of the Archbishop of Canterbury and soon thereafter in the cookbooks of upper-class Parisians. It was served in pie to the King of France in the 14th century and from the 16th century onward, spinach, along with other greens, played a prominent role in the diet of the elite.

John Winthrop Jr., governor of the 17th century Massachusetts Bay colony, was in possession of “spynadge” seeds as early as 1631 and spinach is said to have flourished in the gardens of colonial Williamsburg (Mower, 2012). It maintained an association with upper-class consumption through the 18th and 19th centuries, though its appeal broadened in the decades around the turn of the 20th century. Seed companies in Philadelphia and New York would advertise their selection of imported seeds from Holland. Classified ads directed at gardeners showed that spinach seed from Landreth & Son was available from at least 1890 onwards (Weaver, 2011). In Austin, the first reference to growing spinach was in 1872, in an article making suggestions to sow spinach along with parsley, leeks, carrots, and other winter crops (“Winter Gardening,” 1872).

This chapter looks to examine the formation and disintegration of the “spinach assemblage” that came together for about two decades. It looks at the ways in which market opportunity, consumer tastes, technology, exploitative labor relations, bacteria came together to make Austin one of the leading spinach- producing regions, then it examines the underlying precarity of the assemblage that kept it from becoming a durable one.

THEORIZING SPINACH ASSEMBLAGES

Holloway offers that farms “act as mechanisms for holding together, or apart, streams of things that are fluid, that flow into, circulate around and move away from the farm” (Holloway, 2004, pp. 203–204). Planting seeds into soil, channeling water from the surface or underground, attaining capital investments, moving harvests to market are all flows that converge and disperse from the node that is the farm. The relative success and durability of that set of flows, though, depends on relatively rigid fixities: the fence or property line that demarcates the human(s) who have legitimated claims to grow their crops, the straight rows that make sowing and harvesting more efficient, the buildings that contain the tools and harvests. Farms, then, are also “damming mechanisms... attempting to stabilize and regulate flows by imposing order in space” (Holloway, 2004, p. 204). Such efforts are also subject to tremendous precarity: weeds, diseases, and pests wend their way into the farm-space and disrupt the growth and subsequent circulation of crops to sell or subsist from; the weather

does not bring the correct proportion of water, sunshine, wind, temperature that is needed; the sale price on the market ends up too low to bother harvesting and shipping at all. Sometimes the uneven flow of capital makes the land too valuable to farm at all. Farms, then, facilitate movement but also connote fixity, rootedness, conjure images of tranquil stasis, but they are not purely discreet entities, even the ones that mostly self-sufficient.

This chapter attempts to understand the spinach farms of Austin as a non-durable assemblage. The forces and agents that brought it together: green vegetables and discourses of health and wellness, railroads and ice, abundant and racialized labor supply, financial markets and knowledge were met with countervailing forces such as weather, bacterial soft rot, information control, and real estate pressures, that undid the spinach farm assemblages of Austin. But tracing these associations that remain faint on the physical and cultural landscape of Austin work to bring to bear the food system and cultural logics that have remained durable today. Addressing why spinach production rose sharply in the Austin area, and why it declined just as sharply means to bring together notions of nutrition, land rents, and transportation networks.

Spinach has never been given the “how *x* explains the world: a social history”, it has barely featured in any of the food- & agriculture-focused academic literature. Both are a bit perplexing, given its global history, its prominence in French cuisine, and its dual signifier role in North America as an uber-healthy, prototypical “superfood” as well as (along with broccoli) the green substance parents try to get their kids to eat. This

essay is not the space for such an effort, but rather serves as an attempt to show how a green does in fact connect with the world, remaking landscapes and diets, though on a more modest scale than cotton, say, or even oranges (McPhee, 1967). Spinach, though bubbled up in popularity in disparate lands and cultures over the course of several centuries, has never really fused with a region, becoming part of its terroir, it's part of a culture region. By examining the processes of how an assemblage come together and relatively quickly falls apart, does not take, or is nondurable has the ability to shed light, illuminate, the logics of nutrition, profit consumer demand, land, and the dynamics of place

TRUCK FARMING BEGINNINGS

Moton Crockett, who later on became known as the “spinach king of Austin” (Robertson, 1928), was one of the central business and political figures in Austin from the early 20th century till his death in 1963. Self-branded as a self-made man, he had his hands in many different arenas over the decades of his life: real estate, west Texas oil, grocery retail, filling stations, ice manufacturing plants, and truck farming. Distantly related to the famous Davy Crockett, his father had been a grocer in Austin, and that was how he got his start in the food business. In his words, “In 1902, on April 15th, I borrowed \$500 from the Austin National Bank, bought a wagon and two mules, and went into business for myself. After that day, I never worked for anybody again” (Crockett, n.d.). He was also an inveterate sympathizer of the confederacy and

an outspoken proponent of eugenics (Robertson, 1928). Reflecting on his time as a “spinach baron”, he bragged “nearly all the Negroes and Mexicans about town...used to work for me” (Crockett, n.d.).²

It was in 1906 that he got the idea to ship a few barrels of spinach north to St. Louis, Chicago, and New York via rail. In his reflections, he does not mention from where he procured or produced the spinach, nor why he thought it to be a good idea. The rail intermediary he was working with at the time did not think it was a particularly good idea, thinking that the product would spoil in transit (“Moton Crockett: Third Cousin of Davy Crockett,” 1957). He packed the barrels with ice and closed them tight and gave it a shot regardless. The barrels arrived in tact and turned a decent enough profit to continue the project.

The next year, Herman Wettegrave planted less than an acre and netted a good return (\$7.50 a barrel), and then increased his spinach plots tenfold the following year (“Express Man’s Idea Put Austin On Map as the Greatest Spinach Market,” 1917). Within a few years there were several more farmers and likely hundreds of acres of spinach under cultivation in the Austin vicinity. In 1910, the first classified ads soliciting for spinach cutters appeared for Wettegrave’s farm in Govalle. The *Austin Statesman* referenced farmers who were shipping spinach to northern markets “by the crate and carload and who make bushels of money and say nothing about it”

² Document found under AF-Bio File: Crockett, MH at Austin History Center

(“A Word to City Builders,” 1910). By the winter of 1912-1913, the *Austin Statesman* reported that there was one rail car a day leaving Austin packed with spinach for the north (“7500 Crates of Spinach Shipped from Austin Since Season Began,” 1913), and by 1915, the paper reported 3500 acres of spinach were being grown in Travis County: “all within a 15 mile radius of the capitol dome” (“Express Man’s Idea Put Austin On Map as the Greatest Spinach Market,” 1917). By December of 1914, the Statesman was declaring Austin the largest shipping point for spinach in the nation, and the Walker Farm to be the largest in the world (“Pearson tells about largest spinach farm,” 1914).

This was the first foray of Travis County farming into the truck farming “poker game” and it was marked with its typical unpredictability. Press reports ping-ponged back and forth between announcing great returns in northern cities—\$3500 in one day in Chicago!—to early frosts killing the first plantings of the season (“Will Grow New Vegetable,” 1914). Gluts were a constant worry but generally left out of enthusiasm for the good prices fetched in New York or the yearly increases in acreage in Travis county. Though spinach was a cool season crop and the winters in Austin are generally mild, most growing seasons were bitten by frost at some point. During the years of World War I, spinach seed from Holland was hard to come by, which also created some hardship for the farmers.

The operation that Crockett and others were pursuing was known as “truck farming”. “Truck” was not so much a reference to the vehicle, but to “barter” (from

the French word *troquer*). That is to say, the growing of fresh vegetables to bring to market rather than the kitchen gardens for home consumption. In the United States, truck farming came to mean a kind of interregional trade involving the transportation of fresh vegetables to distant urban markets. In particular, this involved the shipping via rail and steamer crops from the southern United States to the northeastern urban markets (McCorkle, 1992; Van Sant, 2016). Its origins are traced to the period just preceding the Civil War when steamers full of cabbage and watermelon made their way from Norfolk, Virginia to the wholesale markets of New York City. However, it was the expansion of the railroad system in the postbellum decades that truly cemented truck farming. The rapid urbanization and its concomitant shifts dietary preferences towards more vegetables also played a crucial role in the expansion and development of truck farming.

In a sense, truck farming was a kind of subversion of Von Thunian geographies, which had dictated that perishable vegetables would need to be close to their market and the price premiums they would fetch. This need to be close to market as well as the relative price such crops would fetch, would allow them to outbid more extensive crops and be in the ring just past the dairies. Though Von Thunen conceived his model as static, which some scholars have critiqued him for (Cronon, 1991), but others have shown it has flexible capacities (O’Kelly & Bryan, 1996; Peet, 1969).

The appeal in truck farming laid in its potential to diversify southern agriculture, which many observers felt was too dependent on cotton (McCorkle, 1998).

By taking advantage of their longer growing seasons, farmers could plant off- season crops such as watermelons, tomatoes, cabbage, and spinach around the cotton sowing and harvesting. The market was almost entirely northern cities whose more local or regional farms were under ice or frost, and urban dwellers who had grown to demand fresh produce for much of the year, provided the market.

But the system was viciously precarious. The fresh produce market was not as absorptive as cotton, and not well coordinated. Farmers typically had to front the cost of freight, so any shipments that arrived damaged or already spoiled would be a loss. Information channels would be slow and/or incomplete, and certain market days at the wholesale markets in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, among others, would find themselves with more produce they knew what to do with or on the other hand have very little to move at all. At such times, the produce would fetch a good price and some individual farmers would win big. That's why truck farming came to be known as a "poker's game" (McCorkle, 1998; Oemler, 1913), with farmers always gambling on the outcome of their produce. Truck farmers would also run into issues with the railroads too as their shipping prices would also fluctuate and be hard to predict (McCorkle, 1999).

Truck farming also relied on an itinerate labor system, usually Mexican immigrants or children of the ex-enslaved, to work (Van Sant, 2016). One of the early guides even insisted that a large and consistent pool of labor was the most critical component to successful truck farming (Oemler, 1913). Because vegetables were

more delicate, the harvesting process resisted mechanization. Also, because speed and volatility were such key factors, farms would only need a larger labor force for only a few weeks at a time to get the crop out of the ground and quickly packed up and shipped out. Growers lacked control over much of the truck farming process, so they were often disciplinarian in dealing with their labor populations.

SOIL, WATER AND DREAMS

The headwaters of the Colorado River begin a few hundred miles northwest of Austin, in between Abilene and Odessa. As it makes its way through the Balcones escarpment, the river flows swift and straight, picking up sediments along the way. It drops out of the escarpment just west of Austin, and as the land flattens out, the river begins to meander. Less capable of bearing its sediment load, the river deposits the sediments along its banks. Along with deposits of sand and gravel (which became key elements of the city's early construction), it is a rich bottomland soil capable of supporting a wide variety of agricultural activities. It was partly this mixture of soil and water that stirred lust in the hearts of the early colonizers (Kerr, 2013). When then-president Mirabeau Lamar fought to make Austin the capital of nascent nation-state of Texas, he imagined the reports of fertile soil and ample water from the Colorado River and its many springs would make the region an agricultural and commercial powerhouse, a gateway to the western part of the continent. Lamar envisioned Texas to be the nation to push westward to the Pacific coast and thought it would be incumbent upon the government to establish a toehold in Central Texas (Kerr, 2013).

The settlement broke right across two eco-regions, the hilly, scrubby, karstic Edwards plateau of what would become the eastern limit of ranching country, and the Blackland Prairie, which would become the western frontier of the U.S. cotton empire. The Colorado River flowed through it, continuing down to the Gulf of Mexico, would serve as a key conduit of goods, people, animals, and the like.

However, Austin had a fraught relationship with its river. For all its branding as an oasis, the Colorado could easily transform into a destructive force. Heavy rains on the rocky hills to the west would fill the creeks and send water flashing down the channel, often washing out houses, streets, and people. Dates of several floods—1867, 1900, 1915, 1982, 2015—punctuate the city’s history. It also shaped the cultural landscape of the city. Those with means would live in the hills and be relatively safe in the high ground during those Central Texas torrents. Those living along the creeks or in the flatlands on the eastern side of the city would bear the brunt of the waters force. Disproportionately the poor and racialized would live there, where land was cheaper and life more precarious (Tretter & Adams, 2012).

When the river was not being destructive, it was often a disappointment. Certain that the river was navigable by river, Lamar and others foresaw a mini St. Louis, boats stacked high with cotton bales and other products to be shipped down to the Gulf of Mexico. It was not to be. Early trips discovered that the river got too silted up and shallow to allow barges through. This not the only way the river proved not up to the task presented it by city leaders.

Subsequent city leaders turned to damming the river for purpose of generating

electric power, industrial capacities, agricultural production, and recreation. Mayor A.P. Wooldrige was elected in the 1880s on a platform of getting the bond package necessary to build a dam just west of the city center. Completed by 1894 and one of the largest in the world at the time, it was initially deemed a success. It was the first instance of water recreation in the city (Busch, 2017), and the flash floods that had tormented the city were diminished. However, it was unable to generate the kind of power needed to attract heavy industry, and even struggled to provide electricity to residences. It also failed to play any meaningful role in irrigation projects for farmers (Humphrey, 1985). A few years later, disaster struck as the dam broke and water poured into the city with force unmatched before or since. In the wake of that disaster, city boosters struggled to get the funding to build another dam. Another flood in 1915 folded the project for good until the 1930s when New Deal money made it possible to build the set of five dams still standing today. It is possible Austin's development may have turned out quite different if it had managed to power industry and agriculture through large scale dam projects (Tate, 2015).

In part due to the failures to enact large scale irrigation projects, Austin area agriculture was heavily based in corn and cotton. According to the 1910 Agricultural Census, Travis County agriculture produced just over five million dollars' worth of value in the previous year, with cotton accounting for just under eighty percent of that (United States Bureau of the Census, 1910). Austin is situated just east of the 98th meridian, which Walter Prescott Webb posited was the cutoff point where agriculture

could be successful without irrigation. Locations west of the meridian would generally need to rely on irrigation to survive (Webb, 1931).

IN THE FIELDS & IN THE CITY

There are two temporal rhythms to the spinach fields. There was the seasonality of sowing the seed into the soil and the harvest which occurred two months later. In Austin, spinach seed was sewn no earlier than mid-October, after the summer heat had broken. Seeds were either broadcasts liberally or drilled into the soil. While no large-scale irrigation projects were forthcoming, the spinach fields' proximity to the river allowed growers to dig channels and divert water from the Colorado and direct it into the fields. The growers would make *melgas*, or a 25 ft wide strip surrounded by a small berm which allowed the area to be flood irrigated. As a fast-growing crop, it would be harvestable within two months. Once a plant has five or six leaves it is ready to be harvested, the first shipments typically going out just before Christmas.

The other was the daily rhythm of the laborers once spinach harvest season was underway. From mid-December through April, starting from 1911 and through the mid-1920s, the classifieds were peppered with requests for spinach cutters. In 1912 and 1913, The Walker's Farm in along the river banks called for workers to meet under the Montopolis bridge, and to "bring your own knives". By 1914, operations had expanded so that they needed up to 250 cutters a day. In 1915, the Walker Farm began providing wagons from downtown Austin, picking up at their canning and food

processing factory, picking up at 6 a.m. and returning at dawn. Moton Crockett made similar arrangements as well.

In these mundane rhythms of moving from factory to field and back in the wagons through the dusty streets of Austin, that tied spinach production to the racial dynamics of the city. For the growers, the entrepreneurs, the ones placing ads in the paper were all white and male, and the laborers were majority Black Americans or Mexican nationals. The labor market was one of the principle ways in which the socio-spatial and economic separation between whites and non-whites enacted in Austin (Busch, 2017; McDonald 2012). Because of labor shortages that occurred during World War I, that led the Austin Chamber of Commerce to garner special permission from the federal government to import more laborers from Mexico (Busch, 2017; Chamber of Commerce, 1917). While spinach production was not necessarily the initial reason for the influx, spinach producers likely welcomed the hands. In 1919, after the war had ended, the Chamber continued contracting to bring Mexican labor to Austin, documenting that 811 Mexican Laborers came in 1919 (Chamber of Commerce, 1919).

From the point of cutting spinach from the fields to finding their way into the wholesale produce dealers in northern cities, it was imperative to keep handling to a minimum. Due to their tender nature, mechanized harvest was impossible. Workers would walk through the rows of spinach with long butcher knives and find a spot to kneel. First trimming the dead and decaying leaves off, with the knife they would slice the stem just above the taproot and pinch the fresh leaves off, squeezing them with their

thumb and making a flick of their wrist, separating the leaves. Under moist or humid conditions, the cutters often let them lie out in the sun for a minute or two to dry and get slightly wilted, which helps them survive shipment. On the first cutting typically, only the largest plants were cut, and thereby allowing more room for the smaller plants to grow out for the next harvest.

There were several ways of collecting spinach into baskets. Sometimes alone, and other times in pairs or small groups, the cutters would place a basket close by and slowly fill it up with the tender leaves. Once it was filled, they would stand up and bring it to the nearby packing shed. In some instances, certain cutters would be tasked only with stripping, distribution, and hauling of baskets. The cutters would let the leaves on the ground and others would trail behind and gather them into the baskets. In the case of spinach destined for the cannery, large wooden crates were placed out in the field and would be filled up and trucked to the intown cannery.

GETTING TO MARKET: ROT VS. RAIL

In the midst of the all the actants that are connected to the spinach fields Austin's much of it came down to how fast, how well could spinach packed in ice and sent via rail compete in a race against time against "soft rot". Bacterial soft rot is caused by a consortium of plant pathogens that themselves are harmless to humans but create conditions that are many times more likely to carry *Salmonella* (Wells & Butterfield, 1997). This is because the pathogens facilitate a pectolytic breakdown of plant material, making it softer, creating liquefaction and exudates that can create a medium for the

spread of bacteria (ibid).

As soon as the leaves were cut from the stem, they were on the clock against wilt and decay, making it essential to get the leaves out of the sun as quickly as possible, and secured into baskets. Out from under the sun, the packers would sometimes wash the spinach leaves; dunking the plants in cold water in large vats of either wood, iron, or concrete, where they were stirred gently a few minutes to loosen as much dirt as possible. Spinach is a plant that grows low to the ground, and prefers sandy soil, so it is often caked with dirt upon arrival to the shed. This effort was largely for cosmetic effect, though- the more attractive the plants looked upon arrival in Chicago, the better. But researchers found that washing the plants left moisture residues that precipitated the leaves' decay while in transit (Ridley, 1921), this particularly being the case for the early Texas growers, with their shipments traveling three or four times further than their Virginia counterparts.

At first, the growers and shippers responded by adding more ice to the baskets, in hopes that in keeping the leaves cooler longer throughout transit, and arrive in fresh condition. That did not solve the problem either, so in 1918, the Bureau of Markets commissioned a study into the safe and effective means of transiting spinach and other perishables via rail. They did an experiment in which spinach baskets were held in stationary box cars for 10 days to simulate transit. The lots that were washed prior to packing saw a soft rot rate of about 37 percent, while the unwashed lots developed rot at a rate just under eight percent (Ridley, 1921). The next year, the investigators found that these results were confirmed, and that became

standard practice.

Whether or not they were washed or not, the next step was packing the spinach in the bushel baskets. Their size, roughly the width of an adult man's chest about a foot and a half deep, they were made of slatted pieces of wood to provide ventilation. Packed in the field or a nearby shed, the baskets were then made into the railroad platform. Before the baskets were sealed though, a few shovelfuls of ice, roughly 10-12 pounds, was placed in the center of the basket. Eventually, crushed ice was not just put within the baskets, but also a one-ton piece of slab ice is slipped over the top row of baskets and under the ceiling to add extra cooling effects. (Ridley, 1921).

Investigators found that ice was best when scattered in multiple layers throughout the barrel. By travelling on the train, they took different temperature readings of the spinach baskets and the outside air at various points throughout the trip. They found that spinach packed above the ice had a starting temperature of just over 60 degrees Fahrenheit and steadily dropped to the lower 40s by the time it arrived 90 hours later. Conversely, spinach packed *under* the ice remained at a steady 35 degrees throughout. Therefore, it was best if the packers distributed ice throughout the basket and add a layer on top to keep temperatures uniform.

While ice was essential, the true force, and one that made spinach truck farming feasible was the railroad. Perhaps no other force or technology has remade American landscapes and cultures more than the railroad. It refashioned our sense of

time— both by shrinking the time of travel from scales of weeks or months to days and hours, and by forcing a standardization of time that overrid local autonomy; and radically remade landscapes such as the northern plains (Cronon, 1991). For some, it took on its own agentic, almost supernatural power. Cronon also cautioned trains to be regarded as mediators, not ‘mechanical deities. But that mediation created grooves in the economy and landscape that led to a kind of path dependency on the part of growers and consumers. The spinach growers of Austin had a fraught relationship with the railroad, often complaining that the rail companies were not suppling enough cars to ship their product north, and later on, filed a complaint—which they later won—that the rail was charging too much for shipment.

The spinach growers had frequent difficulties securing railcars to handle their spinach. In the fall of 1919, W.F. Gohlke of Walker Farms, along with C.W. Barker, and Walter Davis (the agricultural commissioner of Travis County) travelled to St. Louis to meet with the regional director of the U.S. railroad commission to make sure that there would be enough cars available for the upcoming season, and came back with a promise of 700 cars to be made available. According to an article in the Statesman (“Spinach Growers Ask for Cars,” 1918), the difficulty in getting refrigerated cars available needed to be towed by passenger trains necessitating the needing to be able to be hooked up to lines. The Austin Chamber of Commerce also got involved, working as a go between with the rail companies to make sure enough cars were arriving. It is perhaps the case that the rail companies did not provide enough

cars because it was not in their economic interests in doing so. That perhaps could explain why in 1920 they changed the billing weight of a bushel of spinach from 22 pounds to 33.

“Billing weights” became an easy shorthand way to estimate the cost of shipping rather than having to weigh out everything individually. When the spinach industry was first getting off the ground in Texas, rail companies charged spinach bushels as an average of 20 lbs. For example, with the freight rate at \$1.785 per one hundred pounds, the spinach growers could ship 5 bushels for that price, or 36 cents a bushel. The express rate was \$2.55 per one hundred pounds, or roughly fifty cents a bushel. This was done, it seems, mostly by ‘eyeballing’ so to speak. It was not until 1919 that the Director General of Railroads appointed a committee to ascertain that actual weight of a spinach bushel, and thereby charge a weight more in line with its actual weight, with the expectation that the rail companies would be thereby be able to charge growers a higher price for shipment. Indeed, that was the result, as the committee found that the average weight of a bushel of spinach, with ice, was between 32 and 40 lbs., which meant they should have been charging substantially more.

In February of 1920, Director General cancelled the previous billing weight and put it to the Western Weight Bureau to determine a new billing weight, which they settled on 33 pounds. Under the same shipping rate of \$1.785 per hundred pounds, that would make the rate close to sixty cents a bushel to ship freight, or 85 cents via express. Such an increase would make spinach production in the Austin-area

untenable, so the spinach growers, led by Moton Crockett and C.W. Barker, filed a protest with the Interstate Commerce Commission to contest the rate increase. Crockett himself filed the motion and arrived in Houston to give testimony. The protest was filed in January of 1921.

Despite the fact that the weights determined by the railroads were a more accurate reflection of the actual weights, the ICC ruled in favor of the growers. Here is the text of the final ruling by the committee:

While the weights proposed are more nearly in harmony with the actual weights than those now maintained, the latter have been in effect since the inception of the industry and the rates have been made with relation thereto. In a case of this kind where the practical and only effect of the proposed increases in estimated weights would be a substantial increase in transportation charges, the respondent should show not only that the proposed estimated weights are not excessive, but also that the application of the existing rates to such estimated weights will not result in unreasonable transportation charges to the shipper. This has not been done. We accordingly find that the proposed increases have not been justified, and an order will be entered requiring the cancellation of the required schedules.³

The ICC ruled in favor of the growers because of their own precarity. Their viability was predicated on the shipping weight originally agreed upon between them and the railroads, with its artificially low price became an absolute necessity to keep the enterprise going. As evidence to the ICC, the growers entered the various of examples of gluts and wild swings in price that had occurred over the years.

THE NATION LEARNS TO EAT ITS VITAMINS

In 1912, a European chemist by the name of Casimir Funk became the first one to

isolate the invisible qualities of foodstuffs that made them essential for health- vitamins. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s vitamins A-E were isolated as well as some minerals. These new discoveries, which had previously been intuited, took various segments of the population and food world by storm, and were dubbed “protective foods” (Levenstein, 1988). Food industries promulgated the ideas through their advertisements. Nutritionists and medical professionals, across a spectrum of repute, spread the evangel of vitamins. As it was a few decades off before scientists could figure how to isolate them and wrap them into pill forms, or even had much notion of how much someone would need in a day, consumers were at the mercy of needing to get it from foodstuffs. The 1920s saw middle class diets go nuts for vitamins with impressive speed. Milk, cheese, vegetables, and fruits came to be thought of as the all-important foods for a healthy diet. Advertisers for milk companies such as Borden and Post Cereal’s Grapenuts sold America on new ideas of health. Vegetable production skyrocketed. Spinach would later get its own unofficial spokesperson in the form of Popeye.

Spinach had already garnered a reputation as a kind of superfood. Physician Leonard Hirshberg wrote a syndicated column that often advocated consuming spinach to aid digestive issues and tuberculosis. Advice would range from rather staid

³ Increased Container and Carload Minimum-Weights on Kale, Lettuce, and Spinach from Southern Ports (1921) *Interstate Commerce Commission* (Investigation and Suspension Docket No. 1282). Washington DC: Government Printing Office.

advice to more flamboyant claims. One article read that spinach with its high iron content would fix everything from fatigue, ‘poor complexion’ to liver disease, even going so far to state, no doubt facetiously, that “perhaps when all the earth’s supply of iron has been dug up and put into railroads and machinery the Andrew Carnegie of that far off day will draw his supplies from vast fields of spinach” (“A HEALTHFUL FAD,” 1899), and with the help of spinach we’ll turn into a “strong, iron-built, fresh complexioned, anti-bilious nation” (ibid).

By 1910, spinach was not confined to the dietary advice of influential quacks or fancy French *florentine* dishes. A study from that year showed spinach was served as a side dish in the homes of semi-skilled steelworkers (Levenstein, 1988). By 1935, the agronomist at UC-Davis agricultural station proclaimed spinach to be the most important green vegetable grown in the country (Scott, 1935). While that is a contestable claim, it certainly outpaced similar greens like kale and collards.

The spinach crop in the US rose substantially between 1900 to 1910. While it was grown in small quantities across nearly every state, it was a handful of states that stood out: California, Virginia, Maryland, and Texas. According to the 1900 agriculture census, spinach production was miniscule even in relation to other vegetable crops. Just over 1,000 farms reported growing spinach around 3,500 acres under cultivation—which did put it at the highest acreage per farm ratio among vegetables. However, compared to the 300,000 farms growing tomatoes and 200,000 reporting watermelon production, spinach was barely on the radar. Almost all of the

production came from the mid-Atlantic states and New York, with a particular concentration in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. By 1920, though, these numbers had tripled with over 10,000 acres of spinach being grown. The same states were dominant, with Texas clocking in with 145 farms reporting just over 1200 acres in spinach harvested, the overwhelming majority coming from Travis County.

Nationally, the average acreage of spinach per farm was about five, but in Texas it was closer to 90 acres, suggesting a larger scale of operation relative to other farms around the country.

EXPANSION, GLUTS & PRECARIETY

In March of 1918, the spinach growers of Austin met at the Driskill Hotel in downtown Austin to discuss the various matters afflicting their industry. While the number of rail cars had doubled from the 1915-16 season to the 1917-1918 season, from 150 cars to 300, they had made less of a profit. At the meeting, Crockett convinced the growers that publicity of the industry had done them great harm. Tales of good prices led too many growers to plant, and subsequently harvest and ship to market, leading to gluts. As a solution, they agreed to form a committee in which “the matter of publication of articles involving the spinach business at Austin shall be left entirely in the hands of this committee, and that this committee be instructed to confer with newspapers of Austin and request their editors to make no publications without the authority of this committee” (“Spinach Growers Attention,” 1919). The three members of the committee were Moton Crockett, W.F. Gohlke—the manager of

Walker's & Sons—and C.W. Barker, another prominent grower.

By this time, the spinach industry in Austin had come to seem “permanent” in the words of the Chamber of Commerce (Chamber of Commerce, 1922). However, acreage tallies, or *accurate* acreage tallies, are a bit hard to come by. Both Chamber of Commerce reports and the *Austin Statesman* have numbers. There were around ten acres planted in 1909-1910, and from less than ten acres in 1909-1910, to 2500 in 1915-1916, to 3500 the following year. According to the paper, close to 12,000 acres were planted in Travis and surrounding counties (“Frost Kills Over Half of Spinach,” 1917) for the 1917-1918 season, but half of it was killed by a December frost. But the agricultural census had 871 harvested acres in Travis county in 1919 (Works Progress Administration, 1935) which was still easily the most in the state for that year. The main source of information for these reports, when it was mentioned, was Walter Davis, the agricultural commissioner. It is not clear if he was overestimating, or if the US census was underestimating. There is also a distinction to be made between the acres planted and acres harvested. Often truck farmers would turn their fields over and not both harvesting if they feared getting stuck with a shipping bill. In any case, we can say spinach growing in Austin went from being nothing to a significant production region and the second biggest shipping point in the U.S. But, the increase in acreage would not necessarily mean a successful outcome for the growers. Spinach production in Austin was plagued with two problems that made it difficult to be a long-lasting phenomenon, or “assemblage”. Paradoxically, their product was prevented to getting

to market due to the aforementioned railroad complications, but markets were often glutted which would often make it not even worth the trouble to harvest, and would get turned over.

Nearly all the spinach that was grown in the Austin area was shipped thousands of miles away. The papers referred to these destinations as the “northern markets”, which referred to places as disparate as Denver, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Washington DC, Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City. While technically, in terms of latitude, these places were all north of Austin, but it was framing that put the emphasis on the distance, and difference, between Austin and “northern markets” even though this process of truck farming was further integrating these relationships. While Austin had distanced trade networks since even before the arrival of the first rail line of 1871, shipping its production of corn and cotton and providing a market for exotic goods such as bananas (Humphrey, 1985; Orum, 1987), what was required for truck was quite different set of relations. For instance, cotton purchasers would buy the cotton from the farmers in Austin, which would then be sent up the chain to large depots in Galveston and New Orleans. While the price could fluctuate some, there was a seemingly bottomless thirst for cotton worldwide, and the market would absorb all of it (Beckert, 2014).

Spinach, and truck farming generally, had to rely on an ad hoc network of shippers and wholesalers to work out a deal. Often produce would be packed into the railcar with no knowledge of the market conditions in New York, or wherever

else. And, unlike cotton or even corn, the demand for spinach would often be pretty fickle. The market was extremely volatile. In December of 1919 one car of spinach fetched a price of \$1,357.28 and the following week, with roughly the same amount of product only sold for 422.92 (Interstate Commerce Commission, 1921). Often times farmers would lose money on the cost of shipment. Here is a telegram from Crockett's New York connection: "Regret exceedingly having report spinach market deplorable condition. Ten cars Texas here today selling slowly 25 to 75 cents. Three cars refused: not worth freight... Supply excess of demand. Regret no prospects for improvement near future" (Crockett, 1924). The telegram would go on to say that there were 77 more cars of spinach on the way to add to the current glut. Crockett estimated that many growers would lose \$400-500 per car. When cars would get refused on the tracks, the spinach would eventually spoil and need to get dumped on the tracks.

The pact that had been made in March of 1918 did not last very long. The very next season, however, the committee broke apart. Gohlke advertised in the paper a shipping price that was going to northern markets. Crockett and Barker responded with a jointly written public letter which castigated Gohlke for not only breaking their agreement to collaborate on any publication of spinach markets, but also for providing what Crockett deemed from his own sources to be flawed and misleading information. Crockett pulled an advertisement that loudly proclaimed, "Warning Spinach Growers!" ("Spinach Growers Attention," 1919). It went on to say, "over-production and over-advertisement has about ruined the industry at

Austin” (ibid). This was a problem that plagued truck farmers constantly. Word of good prices would encourage farmers to grow a certain crop, and by the time what they grew got to market, the market would be glutted.

DECLINE

In February of 1924, Crockett offered a dire assessment of the spinach industry in Austin. He argued that the primary reason for the volatility and frequent failures of the market was the channels of communication that led to farmers having outsized expectations, stating “the profits in the industry have about been advertised out of business” (Crockett, 1924, p. B9). Success in the business requires knowing when to ship and when to just plow the fields under and start over. He criticizes the Texas Radio Market Service for its inaccuracies, pointing to examples of discrepancies between his records and those of the radio service. They had tallied ten total cars from Texas arriving in Minneapolis during the 1922-23 season, but his records indicated that he had shipped over twice that amount himself. More damning, and damaging, was what he believed to be the overstatements on expected profitability. The report issued on November 1st, 1923 which summarized the previous season stated that growers should expect a net profit of just under 300 dollars a car, based on the averages tallied up by market reporters around the country (Crockett, 1924). Crockett testified that he had not received that kind of profit; and seeing himself as one of the most shrewd and well-connected growers in the country, threw shade on the idea that anyone else was either. The result of such inaccuracies

would be to drive even more farmers into the spinach truck industry, which would exacerbate the issue. Crockett posited that there were 500,000 acres of farmland in Texas that would be suitable to grow spinach, but the northern markets would be sated with about one percent of that acreage.

Now Crockett was no neutral party in this discussion, as his previous entanglements have already demonstrated. He would certainly benefit from there being less competition for farms. He gives this away in the same document when he says that the spinach industry ought to be handled by experienced operators, that is those who can expect “to handle a large volume of business on a very small profit per car” (ibid). That is to say, the small operators consigning a handful of rail cars are not only undertaking a risk that they may not make any money, but in aggregate are damaging the overall conditions of the market. But he probably is right to point out that the gluts that result from a precarious market.

Regarding the Austin situation in particular, Crockett states that while it was once the largest growing and shipping region in Texas it was quickly being displaced by what became known as the “winter garden triangle.” Del Rio, Laredo, and San Antonio formed the points of the triangle, with counties such as Uvalde and Dimmit being central (Dainello & Morelock, 2009). He lamented that they had more cheap land and labor, not to mention weather that was less prone to freezes, and once they had the ability to get the infrastructure in place to produce and ship spinach to distant markets, they quickly displaced the Austin area.

Crockett was wrong though about the limits of the spinach market in Texas though. 1924 saw Texas statewide grow 8,700 acres. That bumped up to 14,440 the following year, was over 28,000 in 1928, reaching a peak of 44,000 in in 1932 (see figure below). The dollars per acre value though did also take a big drop. Spinach farming in Texas netted \$309/acre, by 1936 was at 61. At such a profit per yield, it would be difficult to operate on the higher-priced land near the city. Much of the acreage in Texas came from the Winter Garden Triangle area; including Crystal City, Texas, where they became so entrenched in the spinach industry that they erected a statue of Popeye in 1937.

TABLE 18
Spinach: Farm Value Per Acre, United States,
California, Texas and United States Excluding California
1919-1948

Year	United States			California			Texas			U.S. excluding Calif.		
	Total value	Total acreage	Farm value	Total value	Total acreage	Farm value	Total value	Total acreage	Farm value	Total value	Total acreage	Farm value
	thousand dollars	acres	dollars per acre	thousand dollars	acres	dollars per acre	thousand dollars	acres	dollars per acre	thousand dollars	acres	dollars per acre
1919	2,909	13,380	217	662	3,920	169	1,482	4,800	309	2,247	9,460	238
1920	3,388	15,740	215	723	3,750	193	1,349	5,620	240	2,665	11,990	222
1921	4,250	24,730	172	835	6,060	138	1,158	8,320	139	3,415	18,670	183
1922	5,012	25,710	195	1,107	6,790	163	1,494	8,210	182	3,905	18,920	206
1923	5,601	32,040	175	1,352	9,710	139	1,274	9,440	135	4,249	22,330	190
1924	6,162	32,770	188	1,372	10,420	132	2,055	8,700	236	4,790	22,350	214
1925	7,034	41,420	170	785	11,500	68	3,088	14,440	214	6,249	29,920	209
1926	6,393	44,720	143	1,071	11,340	94	2,050	16,820	122	5,322	33,380	159
1927	7,123	50,550	141	1,203	12,200	99	2,100	19,450	108	5,920	38,350	154
1928	7,560	59,940	126	1,440	13,340	108	2,304	25,600	90	6,120	46,600	131
1929	7,904	71,860	110	1,816	17,190	106	1,890	28,650	66	6,088	54,670	111
1930	6,901	55,480	124	1,057	9,920	107	3,357	25,060	134	5,844	45,560	128
1931	6,571	59,720	110	915	7,550	121	2,688	27,850	97	5,656	52,170	108
1932	6,540	58,110	113	707	5,870	120	2,975	30,800	97	5,833	52,240	112
1933	5,260	77,020	68	801	9,890	81	2,002	44,000	46	4,459	67,130	66
1934	6,325	76,260	83	1,085	15,640	69	2,233	35,500	63	5,241	60,620	86
1935	7,746	77,150	100	1,475	15,710	94	2,192	36,000	61	6,271	61,440	102
1936	7,349	108,540	68	1,229	15,140	81	1,862	54,400	34	6,120	93,400	66
1937	6,912	105,460	66	1,433	19,120	75	2,046	54,000	38	5,479	86,340	63
1938	6,116	92,510	66	936	12,270	76	1,536	48,000	32	5,180	80,240	65
1939	6,120	83,610	73	1,003	10,860	92	1,671	41,400	40	5,117	72,750	70
1940	7,686	86,240	89	1,018	12,740	80	2,887	37,900	76	6,668	73,500	91

Table 1: Spinach Farm Value Per Acre. **Source:** (Hoos & Habib, 1949)

By then Crockett had turned his interests fully away from spinach and more towards real estate. He had pushed for dams to be built since the first decade of the

20th century, but it was not until the 1930s that that Austin dream came to fruition. When the dam arrived, Crockett was one of its biggest cheerleaders. In 1935, he stated, “The biggest thing which has come to South Austin is the influence of the C.V.A. flood control, which will eliminate all flood hazards along the two miles of river front...One thousand new homes should be constructed on the many beautiful sites available and all South Congress must grow rapidly as a business center” (“M.H. Crockett: Tireless Worker for South Austin,” 1935). It seems likely then that the spinach farms met the fate so many other farms in that they got rolled up in urban development. Crockett though profited substantially from owning and acquiring land by the waterfront. His family still owns a tract of land on the southside of the Colorado River, in direct view of the Capitol Dome (Novak, 2015).

CONCLUSION

This chapter posits that Spinach fields are more than just sites. They are sources of flows involving the materiality of farm products flow, and simultaneously nodes of convergence for materials, bodies, and knowledge. From its origins in 1906 to its decline in the late 1920s, Austin’s spinach industry was highly volatile and non-durable assemblage. They were enrolled in forces of territorialization and deterritorialization. The regionwide development of truck farming opened up the opportunity but the contours of industry were never well enough defined. Growers were always working with incomplete knowledge of market conditions and unpredictable weather. There was also the tender nature of spinach leaves themselves

and the impact they had. Not inert matter, their propensity to develop bacterial soft rot impacted the durability of the assemblage as well, as it was marketable for only a short amount of time. The tenderness also made mechanization infeasible so that the spinach growers were dependent on the hands of a precarious and exploited labor force.

In conclusion, this is a story of how windows of opportunity can open and close in a short amount of time. Myriad factors such as influx of an exploitable labor supply, the technologies of rail and ice and the increased interest in spinach as a nutritional supplement, as well as some entrepreneurialism enacted by a handful of men all together provided the matter and energy of a new agricultural assemblage.

However, there were perhaps too many factors working to preclude the entrenchment of spinach into Austin's local food culture and food production. There was not enough cooperation among the growers and other interested parties, particularly the Chamber of Commerce, which periodically helped but not on a consistent basis. The constant wrangling with the railroad companies, the fickle nature of the northern markets, not to mention the Austin weather and the local land value pressures grew to be too much, such that commercial spinach production no longer served as a viable option. Too many contingencies piled up. There was also a matter of timing. Spinach consumption in the US shot up shortly after the main operations shut down. This is partly attributed to popularity of the Popeye cartoon. In fact, in Crystal City, part of the winter triangle region, erected a statue of Popeye in their town square and they called themselves the "spinach capitol of the world." In contrast, neither spinach production nor

consumption really took root in cultural landscape of Austin. Perhaps its production did not capture the imagination of either the capital class or the public.

The growing of spinach in Austin may never have been able to compete with Laredo and later California, but there perhaps could have been some missed opportunities. At a few different junctures, particularly on the downslope of spinach growing in Austin, Crockett would advertise that he was going to give away his recently harvested spinach rather than ship it. He announced for all “housewives” to come to his shed downtown to get as much spinach as they could take home (“Free Spinach for Housewives Today,” 1922). Perhaps the diffusion of the taste for spinach could have been cultivated in Austin. Grocer advertisements did show fresh spinach among their offerings, but by that time spinach had shifted towards Laredo and Crystal City. So, in a sense, Austin’s spinach fields show a kind of negative example of how a particular assemblage of practices falls apart when it does not quite fit spatially, culturally, or economically. Oddly, though, the spinach farms do continue to get referenced in somewhat vague terms among contemporary Austin farmers, which perhaps speaks to some residual resonance they have that has endured over time. Carol Ann Sayle of the local Boggy Creek farm referenced how “this whole area used to be the spinach capital of Texas” (Monson, 2016) in an article in *National Geographic* about the local food system. Spinach also gets referenced in the local advertisement website for the annual urban farm tour; which is ironic given that the whole enterprise was decidedly not local.

Chapter Four: Circulations & Sacrifices: The Austin Municipal Abattoir

INTRODUCTION

On Sunday March 15th, 1931, the city of Austin hosted an open house for its shiny new municipal abattoir. It was a rainy day, but close to 1200 folks from across the city made the journey to the site just beyond the city limits, following the road signs, trudging through the mud, and hopping across the railroad tracks to come up to the building (“1167 Persons See Abattoir on Rainy Day,” 1931). The brick and concrete building had AUSTIN MUNICIPAL ABATTOIR written in big block letters in the front. Visitors were instructed to go around the back in the still unfinished holding pen. Under their umbrellas they stared up the 110-foot-long ramp leading up to the third floor. Groups of 10 to 20 folks would be led up the ramp by the plant’s super intendent, one R.L. MacTavish, with the goal of walking the guests through the process the hogs, cattle, and other livestock would undergo in the plant (“Abattoir Opening Day Set Sunday,” 1931).

As they walked up the ramp, visitors were expected to marvel at the sophistication of the building, the sturdiness of its construction, its strict compartmentalizing of the process of slaughter, of maintaining the edible and inedible animals’ parts separate. The first thing on the third floor was a row of individual compartments where the animals would first be held. MacTavish would explain how an attendant would then come by and knock the animals on the head with an axe. The compartment would then be opened via lever system and the animal

would be dumped on the concrete floor and subsequently beheaded. McTavish would call attention to the hooks on the ceiling that would hoist the beasts up to let their blood drain out onto the floor. he would point out the small troughs that would channel the blood away into another room. While hanging from the floor, an inspector would come by and determine whether the flesh was condemnable or not (ibid).

The party would move then to the second floor and take in the imagined scene of what happened next. The approved carcasses would take the elevator into the cooling room where they would again be hung up and chilled for 24 to 36 hours. The room was big enough to contain 125 animals. The air would be chilled by an overhead spray of brine. They would be led into the cooking room which housed a series of large vats for converting the inedible offal into chicken feed and tallow. On the second floor were also, as MacTavish pointed out, the restrooms for white employees, a casually brutal reminder of the realities of the Jim Crow era. On the bottom floor, visitors would behold the electronic switchboard controlling the various circuits of the plant, the large delivery cooler where the ready-to-deliver meat would wait for pick up (ibid).

In sum, visitors were supposed to walk away from the abattoir with three concepts in mind: hygiene, separation, and automation. The hygienic nature of the facility due to the fact that the whole structure was made of brick or concrete. There was also a separation of the “edible” and “inedible” divisions of the abattoir: “a solid

wall representing the barrier between these two departments” (“Austin Invited to Inspect Abattoir,” 1931), which would allow residents to be assured of no chance of mixing “wholesome” and “condemned” meat. Then there was the automation. An automatic float valve on the two brine tanks to control the level of brine and ammonia. Not a single piece of equipment was placed on the actual floor. In what was likely the only time the abattoir was open to public viewing, the day represented for Austinites a new geography; one with precursors with the Napoleonic abattoirs from years previous. It represented a change in governance, of a progressive era governance exercising control over the food supply. By being on the outskirts of town in a concentrated location, the new abattoir sought to reframe its relationship with animals-for-food, by maintaining their supply lines but simultaneously obscure the process.

The establishment of Austin’s municipal abattoir then represents the culmination of a phase in which hogs, cattle, and other livestock were systematically circumscribed from the limits of the city as live beings to one in which their circulation as meat was controlled and regulated by government. While such a shift reflects changes in provisioning by ostensibly making the meat supply more reliably safe, it also points to questions of how human-animal relations are central to how the “urban” is defined (McNeur, 2011). While such changes often come to be seen as common sense, they are part of a historical, political, and ultimately *spatial* process that is linked into societal tensions and is often subject to contestation. Or as Chan & Miller (2015) put it: “every

food production system necessarily involves regulatory mechanisms that rely upon the deployment of governing technologies. These technologies, if they are to be effective, must resonate to a greater or lesser degree with the subjectivities of those who are embedded in the system" (p. 1038). There were a handful of different competing subjectivities that touched upon the issue of meat circulation in Austin. For Austinites in the opening decades of the twentieth century, the struggle to sanitize the meat supply of the city pointed contestation over place and process, while also pointing to deeply held notions of progress and anxiety that transcended the meat supply itself.

ANIMALS, CITIES, AND MEAT

For much of urban history, and still today, farm animals have had vital roles to play in the everyday functioning of cities. Chickens and pigs in particular provided an important food source, especially to the urban poor; they provided fiber; up until the late 19th century, horses were the main vehicles of transit; and pigs were crucial to the waste-management systems of a city prior to the development of sewerage systems (Brinkley & Vitiello, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2015; McNeur, 2011). But also, those cities were, at least to most our sensibilities, were, to put it mildly, unpleasant. The intermingling of stench and filth permeated the crevices, epidemics of cholera and yellow fevers would devastate cramped populations. In any discussions of these times, scholars are challenged to hold these two visions together. On one hand, urban environments would be in dire need of more sanitary environs, and the steps taken to achieve that, culminating in the Progressive Era, were largely successful in doing so. On the other

hand, such events should also be seen as a power struggle, one in which the urban poor were largely excluded from policy-making, and in the process lost some of their autonomy in their food sources. Also, the eventual removal of animals from cities had the effect of an ever-increasing separation from between humans and non-humans (Fitzgerald, 2015). Starting in large cities in the United States and Europe, the 19th century saw municipalities restricting the use, presence, and movement of animals in the city. Starting with outlawing of pigs and livestock from being “at-large”, and then restricting how animals could be used as transport, to finally restricting how they could be kept, raised, and killed in urban communities (Brinkley & Vitiello, 2014), these ordinances set the stage for Progressive Era and other political movements.

The removal and restrictions of animals in urban environs was concomitant with a paradoxical increase in the demand for animal protein in those same environments (Atkins, 2012). That is to say, as live animals were increasingly unwanted within cities, dead animals were increasingly desired. Meeting such a demand required the development of new sites, as the scale necessary was far more than the local butchers would be able to handle. The abattoir became the invention necessary to both sanitize and supply the urban populations with meat.

The terms ‘slaughterhouse’, ‘meatpacking plant’, and ‘abattoir’ contain a certain degree of overlap and interchangeability, but it is worth taking a moment to explicate their differences. Fitzgerald (2015) identifies the main difference between slaughterhouse and meatpacking plant is mainly a linguistic one- the former focusing on the act of killing animals, the latter ‘meatpacking’ a more bloodless, genteel word focusing on the end

product. Abattoir and slaughterhouse too have to some degree become synonymous, but originally there were two key social and spatial differences between them. Abattoirs were supposed to be both part of the public realm, and generally kept away from public sight. Increasingly there was a need to get live animals *out* of the city, and dead meat *in*. Animals were increasingly “out of place” (Cresswell, 1996).

Before the advent of the 19th century Napoleonic abattoirs, killing was done in alleys and back courtyards, usually in close proximity to the public (Lee, 2008). Separate structures for the expressed purpose of slaughter arose out of the need to get a reliable source of meat to Parisian consumers. This increase in demand made these older models untenable, as the intensity and frequency of animal slaughter demanded new facilities to make the act both more sanitary and more visible. The abattoir then, was predicated on an acute separation. The full definition from a 19th century French dictionary is: “Place set aside for the slaughter of animals such as bullocks, calves, sheep, etc. that are used for human consumption. Abattoirs are *located outside the surrounding walls of towns*” (Vialles, 1994, p. 15, emphasis mine). Its placement often moved further away as settlements grew (ibid). This spatial separation was significant because it was rooted in the paradox that it was increasingly “uncivilized” to kill animals but increasingly a mark of social status to consume more meat.

While the exclusion of many kinds of animals from the city, from those that are useful (e.g. the horse) to those considered a nuisance (e.g. rats, pigeons) and those that are perhaps a bit of both (pigs) may strike many contemporary folks as rather

common sense. But it is important to highlight both the historical and contentious nature of the shift. The discursive moves and policy-making choices that became the way the problem was solved also work to reveal deeper questions around power relations.

According to Brinkley & Vitiello (2014) the regulation of animal agriculture was a major factor in the development of zoning and other land-use regulations that developed in the early 20th century. The city that was full of manure and stray hogs coupled with a heaping of health scares and the lack of sanitary infrastructure did necessitate reform. However, the impact also separated the poor from their food sources. They note four waves of regulation, typically starting with the banning of stray animals in the street. By transforming the street from a vital, chaotic commons space into a hygienic space. There was also a crackdown on slaughterhouses and transport animals. Pigs in particular got conflated, mistakenly, with cholera. The efforts to regulate dairies also had an impact. Taken together, Brinkley and Vitiello (2014) argues that the ousting of animals from the city remade the economic, ecological, and social landscapes of American cities. The challenge of removing urban livestock reflected large-scale decisions in how cities function, access to opportunity, and the like. With animals seen as both necessary and a nuisance, it became necessary for reformers and urban elites to devise ways to disentangle. Their main mode of this was to wage war through the press and pass restrictions on the use of animals. The impacts to such an approach were multiple:

“They established key precedents for the planning profession, including not

only its separation of land uses but also its regulation of the urban poor and the demise of the organic infrastructure that connected waste streams back to the food supply....Removing animal agriculture thus dismantled key dimensions of community food security as well as older, more organic systems of urban land use, economies and waste management” (Brinkley & Vitiello, 2014, p. 126).

The idea of the abattoir as a public good dovetails into the Progressive Era that marked the turn of the 20th century. While the industrially scaled stockyards and meatpacking plants like Chicago’s Union and others were privately run, rather than public (Young Lee), they were still the part of the rationalizing ethos that marked the era (Boyer, 1983). It was a complex and contradictory era marked both by the grassroots community organizing approaches exemplified by Jane Addams and Hull House, as well as the paternalistic, elitist approaches typified by Jacob Riis. They were united in the demand for intervention in urban environments, particularly in the realms of public health and public space (Biehler, 2010). Linking together the rise of supervised play areas, tenement regulations, social organizations along with neoclassical architecture associated with the city beautiful movement, and the parks movement of inspired by Olmstead, the rise of urban planning was about disciplining space and disciplining people in a “quest for rational order” (Boyer, 1983)

In her fascinating article Dawn Biehler (2010) outlines how the early 20th century urban reform movements were ablaze with how to best protect urban environments from disease. With outbreaks of diseases like typhoid and cholera being a constant part of urban life, reformers ran the gamut Jane Addams from Hull House and

their allies who insisted on socio-environmental interventions to other reformers who called for reforms to mainly be centered on individual household behavior and intervention. In the case of controlling flies, thought to be a main vector of disease, these contrasting portions played out in terms of intervening in terms of improving sewage systems and systematically inspecting horse stables to prevent fly breeding versus an approach centered on providing window screens to households and educating (or disciplining) women, mainly, to keep flies out of the home. What both approaches acknowledged was the interconnected, transgressive nature of flies to flit between and connect manure, street, garbage, food, and kitchens but the way of dealing with those interconnections diverged wildly.

Yet, for all their associations with rationalization and modernity, the urban slaughterhouses were also sites of urban reform. Upton Sinclair's infamous *The Jungle* which exposed the degraded conditions of the Union is credited with sparking federal legislation. However, the publication of Sinclair's book and subsequent meeting with President Roosevelt was not just a lightning bolt, but one that had resonance with the groundswell of social reform around the food system at the time (Levenstein, 1988). The reaction to the book was curious, given Sinclair's aims. A socialist wanting to expose the plight of the workers, the book's outrage was caused mostly by the detailed descriptions of the unsanitary conditions of meat production. Sinclair later lamented, "I aimed for the reader's heart, but I hit them in the stomach" (Fitzgerald, 2015).

One of the key elements of the Progressive Era was marked by contentions around the ideas of governance. Along with the reforms to regulate meatpacking,

foods, and drugs, reformers also worked to strengthen anti-trust laws. Writers like Walter Lippmann and Herbert Croly argued for the idea that the government could be a source for good in ordinary lives (Pastorello, 2013). However, governance issues in slaughterhouses precede the Progressive Era. The 1873 Supreme Court cases known as the *Slaughterhouse Cases* (83 U.S. 36) established a precedent of allowing state and local governments to regulate, and even ban, lawful occupations (in this case butchery) (R. E. Barnett, 2016).

SPECTACLE & SACRIFICE ZONES

While the overriding rationale for consolidating slaughtering facilities in select, removed areas, they also became objects of spectacle. As referenced in the introduction of this chapter, the Austin Municipal Abattoir had an open house for citizens to tour and inspect the facility. Albeit, this tour took place before the operations were up and running, so people did not bear witness to the actual processes and outcomes, but rather had a picture of it painted for them by the plant's superintendent. In the Union Stockyards in Chicago, however, tourists were allowed to tour the facilities during working hours. Cronon writes how it became a tourist destination, perhaps the greatest evidence of Chicago's achievement in efficiency and progress. Visitors would be subjected to the brutal sensorial experience of hog-squeals, buzzing machinery, and leave with blood-spattered shoes (Cronon, 1991). Some, such as Rudyard Kipling, were appalled by the sight, and then appalled at the seeming indifference of others (ibid). Yet, at the same time, Vialles' (1994)

observation that, “whereas the slaughter of a few animals may be a festive occasion, slaughter on a large scale is different. It is disturbing, therefore means must be found of putting it out of mind” (p. 70), seems to hold true. Perhaps the spectacular element of the abattoirs was important to the project that it symbolized. Infrastructural projects in general existed on a spectrum of invisibility to spectacle. (Amin, 2014; Deener, 2017).

The spatial separation had the impact of rendering whole neighborhoods of cities as ‘other.’ In Chicago, the “Back of the Yards” section of town, adjacent to the stockyards were often barely habitable in terms of their sanitary conditions but also were spaces of solidarity for the Polish immigrants who made it their home (Pacyga, 2008). The folks who lived there had much higher death rates compared to the rest of the city. Labor associated with the meat industry was also often tainted (Gouveia & Juska, 2002). In sum, the abattoir often was enrolled in other exclusions as well as the sanitized vision of urban space is predicated on the despoilment of other spaces.

A useful way of understanding this is to think of the abattoir as a “sacrifice zone”, for not only is there the lives that are exchanged in the form of livestock *within* the abattoir, there is also the myriad ways in which the space and bodies around the abattoir are also sacrificed. Reinart (2018) argues the power in using the word “sacrifice” comes from the ability to name the “bundle of techniques, practices, terms, and devices by which the exercise of destructive violence can be erased, trivialized, naturalized, justified, and rendered as innocuous or necessary” (p. 598). It is a powerful metaphor used most frequently around environmental justice and

degradation issues (Nixon, 2011). It enables us to think (and perhaps feel) more deeply about the process of change as not a smooth transition, but one that involves the loss and exchange of something for something else; with the anticipated returns used as justification of the process. Religious scholar Annette Reed (2014) points out that the intellectual interest in animal sacrifice from 19th century scholars like E.B. Taylor and James Frazier was contemporary to the increasing removal of animal death from public sight.

The “where” of toxic waste facilities, oil spills, nuclear storage facilities becomes of crucial important of uncovering how they became “sacrifice-able.” In the case of Austin, the siting of the abattoir does cause some consternation in and of itself, but I also put forward that the abattoir was also just an early step in the process of rendering Austin’s east side a sacrifice zone for industrial waste, which continued for decades after the abattoir closed in 1969.

GEOGRAPHIES OF LIVESTOCK IN AUSTIN

Before the Austin municipal abattoir opened in 1931, the city had been trying for decades to better regulate its meat supply. In the early 1890s, the city, was in competition to be the site of a major abattoir to be built in Texas by the National Butcher’s Association of America with the goal of cutting into the business done in the Chicago stockyards (“DIRECTOR’S MEETING,” 1891). They lost out, most likely to Fort Worth, but city leaders approved the permit the construction of an abattoir on the eastern outskirts of the city. But because the city was unable to enforce the

codes, the site for the most part was unsanitary and uninspected. Between the turn of the 20th century and World War II, Austin was mostly a sleepy town, but it was continually wrestling with the same issues as many of larger cities in terms of its animal relations. 19th century Austin allowed livestock to roam free, causing problems between neighbors. For example, an early newspaper account states: “A warning to all whom it may concern: Pigs are troublesome about these diggin’s, breaking down fences, and rooting up gardens, - Those persons who own pigs had better therefore, keep them at home, or some of their pigs will be rendered unable to walk home by being metamorphosed into pork.” (Austin History Center, 2013). Even more dramatically, an incident involving a local French diplomat and his neighbors over his inability to control his pigs led to the severing of diplomatic ties between the then-nascent nation of Texas and France.

Though animals likely played important roles in the functioning of the city, as hyperlocal food sources, transportation, and waste disposal, the record of city ordinances reflect a pattern of controlling and circumscribing the presence and circulation of live animals in the city. In 1884, the city passed an ordinance outlawing pigs from being able to roam outside the bounds of their owner’s property lines. In 1902, cattle were banned from the city limits, and in 1906, pigs too were not allowed to be kept in the central city.

As is typical, the major discourses and practices of the day reached Austin towards the tail-end of what is conventionally thought of as the end of the

progressive era (1917), but, especially with an outbreak of typhoid in 1912, and the continuing boosterism of Austin's elites, reforms around infrastructure and public health were making headway throughout the 1910s. They were perhaps best exemplified by Professor Hamilton, a sociologist from the University of Texas at Austin. In his a 'social survey' of the city (Hamilton, 1913), he documented the social and material conditions of the city, particularly the conditions of housing and food production, distribution, and consumption. He enumerated a host of problems, from the instable and overcrowded structures along Waller and Shoal Creek, the unregulated dumping of garbage in black neighborhoods, the lack of safeguards in the milk supply, and the bakeries left unprotected from dust and flies.

Published in 1913, the year after a typhoid outbreak, Hamilton saw the city as one big vector for disease and paints a picture of the "racialized geography" (Busch, 2017) of early 20th century Austin. It was a combination of poor habits and poor structures that created such a danger... According to Hamilton, the city of Austin was in the "Dark Ages of civic sanitation". Austinites risked exposing themselves to disease at any turn. Waller Creek was an open sewer. Its open wells were fly-infested and its alleys full of garbage. Everything was covered in dust. For Hamilton, then, the city was one big vector of disease, fostered on killing floors, bakers' cutting board, milk bottles, open garbage containers and wells; transported by wagons, flies and mosquitoes, and dust, and arriving in the hands and mouths of Austin's citizens as well as leaching into the soil. Vulnerable populations such as the Mexican immigrants

and African Americans were particularly at risk, occupying over-congested housing and often relying on possibly contaminated food scraps to survive. Food was one of the principle carriers of disease.

But it seemed Hamilton (1913) saved particular ire for the slaughterhouses and butcher shops of Austin, stating “the conditions under which meat is butchered in Austin are the worst I have seen in the entire State of Texas” (p. 32). Here are some of the choice descriptions Hamilton uses to describe the slaughterhouses:

“The surroundings are very unsanitary. Much decaying animal matter may be seen strewn about the whole place. The odor is sickening. Numbers of bones are piled up in the corner. These are covered with swarms of green flies. The entire premises are unclean and unsatisfactory” (p. 36).”

He deplores the sloppy habits of many of the employees, such as taking home meat scraps. Most slaughterhouses were wood constructions with difficult to clean floors and lacking window screens. They also lacked drains and the blood and hog entrails littered the premises. Sometimes the offal was fed back to the hogs, which could further spread disease

Hamilton noted, however, that much of the problem stemmed from their geography. The majority of the slaughterhouses were just outside the city limits at the time, clustering on east 12th street, Cameron Rd, and adjacent to the Montopolis bridge. By making it illegal to slaughter livestock within the city limits and consigning such activity to the outskirts, it made it difficult for the slaughterhouses to have access to the water and sewer systems that would be necessary to maintain cleanliness. The only extant slaughterhouses that had a “right to exist” in Hamilton’s

estimation were the ones by the Montopolis bridge which had access to the Colorado River, which could provide both the water to clean and means to dispose of waste. For a Progressive reformer like Hamilton, the most suitable solution was for the municipal government to take a more active role in solving these various problems. In the case of meat circulation, this meant a municipal abattoir that would bring the slaughter of livestock under governmental control to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the citizenry of Austin. In the wake of his report, the city did pass a series of sanitation ordinances.

Around the same time as Hamilton's report, it appeared that the city, in collaboration with local butchers, stockmen, veterinarians, health inspectors, and businessmen, were on the verge of getting a local abattoir built. The mayor of Paris, Texas had recently seen the completion of the first municipally owned and operated abattoir and had come to Austin on a kind of speaking tour to evangelize the benefits of abattoir as public good ("How Paris Proceeded to Build and Abattoir," 1912).

There were other proposals too. Del Walker, who already owned substantial farmland along the river banks, food processing facilities downtown such as a canning plant and chili factory, as well as several groceries downtown, requested to buy one of the slaughterhouses under the Montopolis bridge and reform it into a modern facility.

Walker pledged to place his plant under federal government inspection and to do all necessary financing himself ("WILL BUILD ABATTOIR," 1911). Another proposal floated by Mayor Wooldridge sought to bring the butchers of Austin together in a

joint stock company in order to finance the construction and operation of an abattoir. While there was a good deal of enthusiasm for that route, Wooldridge determined that the city would need to take on the debt of a bond in order to finance it, roughly estimated to be at \$50,000. Perhaps due to the financial albatross of the still-unconstructed dam that he felt the public would not have the appetite for it. Therefore, it would be better if the butchers got together themselves and formed a joint-stock company that would raise the necessary capital for the construction and subsequent operation. But this too failed to come to fruition (“CITY ABATTOIR NEEDED SAYS FOOD INSPECTOR,” 1913; “MAYOR OUTLINES CIVIC PROGRESS PLAN FOR AUSTIN,” 1913).

Throughout the summer of 1911, men met to discuss the best course of action, eventually the mayor appointed a committee to travel to Houston and Galveston and study different models of abattoirs and beyond. The headline in early September read “Abattoir a near-reality” (“Abattoir a near-reality,” 1911). The architect George Enders, having gathered some ideas from the emissary, had begun drawing the plans. A two-acre lot at the intersection of two rail lines on the eastern edge of the city had been donated by one H.C. Nolen. The mayor felt so confident about the plan going through that he mandated that the previously open slaughterhouse close by October 1st of that year. It appears that such a demand led to the unraveling of the plans before they even got off the ground. The butchers complained they were being forced to rush into permanent agreements that they were unsure of. The butchers in the end, decided not to make the

risky investment (“COMPREHENSIVE PEAN FOR STREETS IS PLAN,” 1912). It is not clear exactly how, but over the course of the winter, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that abattoir-advocates pinned their hopes on some out-of-town meat packing enterprise to be allowed access to the Austin market to build a stock yard. Dr. T.J. Bennett of the local health board called on the city government to step up and fund the project, which he claimed could be built for under \$25,000, which he considered a pittance to avoid the negative consequences of an untrustworthy meat supply (“Packing House Only Hope,” 1912).

This failure to get the project off the ground had two main sticking points. The first was spatial. Slaughterhouses were perhaps a prototypical NIMBY issue in Austin and residents complained about the current slaughterhouses, and generally complained against the various proposals that were floating around at the time. The other was, as mentioned, financial. Wooldridge had originally decided that the public would not support a bond for it, but he later supported it (“MAYOR PROPOSES THREE MUNICIPAL BOND ISSUES,” 1913). no matter how important, there was a contingent of business elites that felt the city had been much too tight with the purse strings (Busch, 2017). In order to become the industrial powerhouse envisioned, public investment was a necessity. The system of government was thought to be detrimental in this pursuit. As Tretter (2016) points out, the Austin Chamber of Commerce repeatedly pushed for governmental structures that would create prosperity/capital accumulation. This typically involved a triad of reforming the makeup of the city council, a master planning process, and a

large bond package to fund the projects outlined in the master plan, with the chamber of commerce usually serving as the linchpin for success and failure of those movements. In the 1910s, the city was under a commissioner system that had adopted in 1908 in the hopes of the business leader-reform candidates would be able to push changes in the city government such as financing various public works projects. Frustrated with the results, the Chamber of Commerce, under the direction of long-time secretary Walter Long, pushed for further reforms, resulting in the creation of the city manager-council form of government in 1924 (ibid).

After the failure to get the bond money through in 1915, the abattoir issue went dormant for a while. But whispers of its necessity and inevitability persisted. The young men's business league formed a committee to explore the matter at the end of the decade ("Y. M. B. L. Urge Municipal Abattoir; Hear Sam Sparks," 1919) though there is no record of what came of it. In 1923, the public safety superintendent Harry Nolen was quoted saying "I am now in touch with Austin parties who are eager to build an abattoir for the city. They have the financial backing to give their offer considerable weight. All they want the city council to do is to pass the necessary city legislation that will protect them in their enterprise and make the undertaking worthwhile" ("CITY MAY SECURE MODERN ABATTOIR SAYS CITY OFFICIAL," 1923). While that is one rather cryptic and vague statement, it reveals that the momentum here had swung more towards a private enterprise financing the building and operation. What they wanted from the city was an ordinance that made it mandatory for all animals to be killed in the city abattoir.

Those private parties, too, failed to get the financing necessary to build the abattoir, and the issue found itself on the public agenda a few years later as the broader context of some of the most consequential remaking of the city.

The major complaint of business leaders during the 1910s was the inability to get bond packages on the ballot. Under the city manager system, in which the manager has more concentrated power, the change in 1924 opened the door for broader reforms. The chamber of commerce having successfully gotten the composition of the city government changed to a city manager-council, the new city manager Adam Johnston announced in 1927 his intention to get the abattoir as part of a major bond package. A million dollars in total, the biggest ever in Austin up to that point, with somewhere between \$50,000 and \$75,000 earmarked for the abattoir. Johnston, for his part, argued the abattoir to be the third most important issue to be funded, after street paving and the sewer system (“CITY ABATTOIR,” 1927).

The local stockmen also came out in support of the abattoir. One such stockman stated that a municipal abattoir would be vital in the development of local competition against the big packing houses of Chicago, stating that much of the livestock raised in the region was shipped to the packing houses as cattle and shipped back as dressed meat, with the local farmers paying twice over for the freight. Cutting out that part would make meat cheaper to the consumer, and more trustworthy. Another ancillary affect would be increase in raising feed for cattle as opposed to cotton (“Cattle Man for Abattoir Here,” 1928). As city council members mulled over the proposal, they simultaneously needed to discuss the abattoir within the context of

regulating the meat supply as a whole. Just as the private investors had stated that they would only build the abattoir if the city would regulate the supply of un-inspected meat, elected officials figured that the abattoir would only partially work as a municipal reform if they simultaneously made it difficult for other meat to circulate through the city. They passed an ordinance that made any slaughtering for sale illegal within city borders.

“A MODERN ABATTOIR FOR THE CITIZENS OF AUSTIN”

Along with the changing of the city’s governance structure, and the newly greased wheels of bond money, the most long-lasting legacy of the period was the 1928 Master Plan. The first comprehensive plan the city ever put together, it proposed a widespread remaking of the city’s urban geography. Incorporating the language of the dominant planning vocabulary of the day, the plan called for increasing and planning for green space, improving sanitation and streets, and implementing the first land use zoning system of “residential, commercial, industrial” the city had seen (Busch, 2017). The plan also, infamously, made an explicit appeal to further segregate the city. At the directive of the document, city officials began providing social services to Black residents only if they relocated to the so-called Negro District, which was bracketed by East Avenue to the west, Manor Road to the north, and First St. to the south. This meant that if a Black household wanted to be hooked up to the public utilities, they needed to move to the east side, if they wanted their children to attend their local schools, they needed to live on the East side. So,

while zoning by race had been ruled unconstitutional, the city managed to de-facto segregate the city in deep and profound ways. Still, today, the plan is often referred to as exhibit A of the evidence of structural racism and spatial inequity in Austin.

Crucially, as I will discuss below, the plan also called for siting the bulk of the newly minted industrial zoning on the east side. While the plan does not make any explicit reference to the abattoir, its siting just outside the city limits in the would-be negro district, is all part of a piece.

Preliminary discussions of the siting of the abattoir were just as contentious as they had been in decades previous. One J.B. Pearce offered to sell a plot of land for \$20,000 for its construction. As it already was the site of old decrepit slaughterhouse, they reasoned there would be no protests from neighboring residents. The council declined though because the site was too far away from the railroad facilities (“Buy Abattoir Site,” 1930; “Submit Abattoir Site,” 1930). In March of 1930, the council authorized the purchase of a 9-acre plot for about \$8,000. They hired two engineers, M.L. Diver and H.G. Kuehne, to design and build the space. Optimistic that the plant would be built that year and operational by the fall, council members and other interested parties began a public campaign through the press and various meetings to tout the benefits of the new abattoir. It was supposed to lower the retail cost of meat and stimulate the local livestock industry.

However, there was almost immediately conflict arising from the proposal. The residents of the Govalle neighborhood filed a petition in March of that year citing concerns about the effect on quality of life and property values that the

slaughterhouse would have. The petition, signed by 115 people, read “you would not build the abattoir in the city limits, therefore we do not believe you should build it within sight, sound, or smell of Govalle” (“Govalle Protests Abattoir Building,” 1930). By so doing the petition echoed long-standing concerns around the geography of urban slaughterhouses. As they were often “sacrifice zones”. Property owners led by one Tom Gregory threatened to take legal action against the siting of the abattoir. When presented to the city council, officials dismissed the complaints saying it was too late to do anything about it. One spokesperson said that it was public knowledge for several months that it was planned to site there and now after the purchase of the property it was no longer feasible to do anything about it (ibid).

While the petition did not gain much traction, an effort that was able to be centered not on the siting of the abattoir, but on its operation. When the money and plans came through, the city council and city manager made a tentative agreement with a San Antonio company to oversee the day to day operations of the plant. A group of about a dozen or so butchers and other food-related entrepreneurs argued that it would be a betrayal to the local businesses and people of Austin to award the contract to an out-of-town company.

The issue at stake, according to Adam Johnson, the city manager of Austin, was that whatever company overseeing the operation of the plant needed to have sufficient resources to pass federal inspection. Whatever firm undertaking the project would need the \$25,000 necessary for an indemnity bond for federal government

inspection. Being subject to federal inspection was crucial to the success of the plant as that would allow it to sell to major buyers in the city such as the state government and the Walker Chili Factory (“Abattoir Soon Is Assured by Johnson,” 1930) 4/8/1930). In response, a local group of bankers and butchers organized a joint stock company that attempted to raise the money necessary to meet city councils’ requirements. The summer saw a delay in the construction of the plant as a group of local business men filed an injunction stating that the plans of the council overstepped the language in the bond issue and that the project was therefore going to be overbudget. It was a move instigated by Tom Miller (future mayor of Austin), Col. Andrew Zilker, and a collection of local cattle raisers and butchers. The injunction was denied by the courts and construction continued again in September.

The conflicts surrounding the completion of the abattoir highlight two important themes. The first is that while the press consistently wanted to build consensus around the construction of the abattoir, the petition filed by the residents of Govalle showed that wasn’t the case. Secondly, the coalition of butchers feared the loss of control brought on by the impending establishment of the abattoir.

IMPACTS OF THE ABATTOIR

After the many decades of wrangling, boosterism, arguing, and persuading, it seems that the abattoir for the most part was more or less forgotten about in the minds of most Austinites. There were not any reports either in the media or to the city council (though that doesn’t mean there was no community resentment to it).

After an initial fight over the prices between the abattoir administrators and stockmen got sorted out (“Lower Prices Sought at Abattoir,” 1932), through the course of the 1930 and 1940s, the abattoir was largely presented as having solved the issues that it was meant to. There was a general increase in the amount of cattle, hogs, and other livestock taken through the abattoir, and after a few years, the plant was actually a net positive revenue generator. In 1937, it was dubbed the largest municipal abattoir in the country, apparently using a combined metric of physical size and number of animals (“City’s Abattoir Largest Munny,” 1937). The abattoir perhaps brought about a change in livestock production. The 1935 agricultural census counted 17,624 cattle in Travis county, compared with 50,655 in the 1949 census. (United States Bureau of the Census, 1949)

The press liked to also tout the way in which all the animal byproducts were used. Head, lung, stomach, blood, and shinbones would be cooked down, filtered, and turned into dried blood for fertilizer, tallow for soap-making, and whatever else remained turned into pulverized chicken and hog feed (“Revenue Gains At Abattoir,” 1940). The tallow in particular was often a valuable item that kept the abattoir in the black. As a publicly owned institution, the abattoir was likely generally seen as a well- functioning government agency that provided its services without costing the taxpayers and was generally non-controversial.

During World War II, the abattoir became a more integral part of Austin life, as it was able to provide a local meat supply during a time of rationing. Though, their abattoir did get some harassment from federal agencies for overproducing. In March of

1943 attempted to get it shut down, leading to a series of lawsuits (“City Not to Shut Down Abattoir,” 1943; Staff, 1943). The issue was one of quotas. The federal government agency, the OPA, charged the city with going over the quota, and ordered the abattoir shut down as a result. In court, the city argued that if the abattoir were shut down, they would end being far under the quota of 1.75 lbs. of meat per person per week (“CC Directors Back City’s Fight on Abattoir’s Close,” 1943). Eventually an agreement was reached, and the abattoir remained open. Later reports reflected back saying that the largely avoided the deprivations of the war due to owning its own abattoir (“Work Reset On Abattoir Addition,” 1945).

The abattoir played a major role again the early and mid-1950s, as a crippling drought hit Texas. In October of 1952, the plant slaughtered 4,122 animals, the largest monthly total in six years (“City Abattoir Business Up,” 1952). The drought caused both a rising cost of feed as well as an overall crop shortage, which pushed up the demand for other food. As the abattoir kept its prices set, it remained a viable option both for the stockman, and butchers, but also for the consumer as well (“Drouth Boosting Abattoir Totals,” 1952). 1953 saw the trend increase, with more than doubled the among of cattle slaughtered over the course of the year compared to 1952, including over 6,000 in the month of September (“Abattoir Better Its Own Mark,” 1953). The startling increase put some strain on the plant, and it ended up running a deficit, which caused the city to raise rates by fifty cents a head to make up the deficit. That did not slow down the usage of the plant though, as September of 1954 saw another all-time record for monthly total, at 6,676 (“Abattoir Sets Another Record,” 1954).

The local paper's coverage was mostly confined to these sorts of tallies, which told a story of the usefulness of the institution, and how various factors would impact the consumer's price point and access to meat. But there was very little space devoted to how the abattoir functioned as an everyday space, and how it fit into the neighborhood. In what follows, I attempt to reconstruct the everyday rhythms of the abattoir and then unpack how its presence may have affected the development on the East Side.

EVERYDAY RHYTHMS OF THE ABATTOIR

Six days a week, Eldred Perry, the superintendent of the Austin Municipal Abattoir for close to three decades, would leave his Hyde Park residence in dressed in a tailored shirt and tie. In the morning twilight, he would turn south on East Avenue, the wide tree lined boulevard that bisected the town. On his left, he would see the University Tower and shortly after the state capitol building. He would turn left on 5th street, where the topography flattened out and he would drive three miles past small bungalows which gave way to rail platforms, a couple of cotton gins, and early oil refineries.

Antero Carrillo's journey to work was significantly shorter. He lived on east 9th street, just a block from the Texas State cemetery. He and his brother (relative), Juan, were both butchers at the plant. Perhaps they shared a car, or perhaps they walked the mile and a half to the plant on the outskirts of town. The plant opened for business at 7 a.m., six days a week. There would likely be a few dozen cattle and hogs already in the adjacent stockyards. Some had arrived the day before but were too late to

go through intake. The railroad spur jutting off from the Houston and Central R&R, the chute that rose at a thirty-degree angle from the ground to the third floor, all creating a space. The inspectors were out there giving their final inspection before the animals would be admitted into the building.

From 1936-1939⁴ the superintendent of the abattoir, Eldred Perry, would draw up a yearly report of the operations of the plant. The monthly reports consisted of how many animals were killed, the names and salaries of the laborers, the overall operating gains and losses, detailed descriptions of the maintenance required in the building and machinery to keep the operation running smoothly, and a collection of photos of the plant in action. They were a convenient way for the city council to keep tabs on the place without physically being there. For all the ammonia and formaldehyde, the controlled canalization of blood draining from the killing room floor through narrow channels into tanks, and the pictures of the slit open and drained out hogs—all of which depicting a fastidious approach to meat circulation— there was no doubt that the abattoir was a nasty business, best left to those with an obligation to be there. The purpose of the report, then, was to assuage any concerns among city council that the abattoir was anything less than sanitary, safe, and professional. The employees were all vouched for as experienced meat packers, the building was guaranteed to be both of a high standard but also looking for ways of improving.

⁴ These years are the only surviving records. There could have been reports submitted in the years preceding and following.



Figure 5: Hogs after Slaughter

Source: (City of Austin, 1939).
Everyday life at the abattoir began at 7 a.m., which was when the clerks would begin the intake of the livestock. Often the ranchers arrived late in the afternoon or early evening on the day previous, so there would already be some ready to go into the building right at opening. Any animal that comes to the abattoir must first enter the stockyard where a drover brands the animal with the abattoir brand, weighs the animal and writes up a full description of the animal. The receipt is then signed by the owner, which is to be redeemed at the end of the process. The animal as a singular subject essentially ends there in the stockyards but lives on in the piece of paper. It is the copies of paper that pass from the hands of the drover to killing floor operator,

from owner to clerk that make sure that the final products have a through line to the original animal that it came from.

Next, the animals are driven up the ramp and up to the third floor and onto the killing floor. The animal is first stunned via a whack on the head, then is strung up via a meat hook where the knife slits vertically down their middle and their entrails are removed. The end result is a dressed carcass and offal, which are put in the elevator and brought down to the second floor. The second floor is the chill room, which is where the carcass and offal are held overnight, covered in a white shroud.

The next day in the morning, the shroud is removed, and the carcass and offal sent down to the first floor where they await the patron's return with their receipt to retrieve their products. The livestock owner gets a ticket and then mills around, or perhaps stays at the nearby hotel, or maybe goes into downtown for supplies. They would come from all around... At the end of the day, the only parts that could not be used---the hog hair and beef tails---would be incinerated to prevent "unsanitary conditions and disagreeable odors.

The opening epigraph for the report offers a brief summary for the document, stating: "the animal brought to the abattoir is traced through all the steps from the time that it is received in the stock pens until it is loaded into the customer's truck as dressed meat ready for consumption" (City of Austin, 1939). This facile description cuts to the bone, so to speak, of the translation of animal into meat. The disassembly of the animal creates a myriad of component parts: a dressed carcass, heart, liver, cheek

meat, tongue, sweetbreads, kidney, kidney fat, hide, head, lung, stomach, blood, shinbones, hair, tails. Most of these parts go the patron who was then able to sell the meat and other products to the butchers and meat markets in and around Austin, while the others undergo more processing by the abattoir and turned into the byproducts of meat and bone scraps, tallow, and dried blood. There are several byproducts are kept by the abattoir. The head, lung, and stomach, and bones are washed with a pressure sprayer and then steamed in large vats. A machine then presses the offal into extract that separates it into three parts. The first part extracted is tallow (mostly animal fat), which gets sold to soap companies. The bits of bone and meat that are left at the bottom of the vat are ground up some more and sacked into hog and chicken feed. Finally, the blood is left to dry and is then gathered and sold as fertilizer. Each of these byproducts has their geographies. The feed is sold to local feed stores, the dried blood fertilizer to a firm in Fort Worth, and the tallow sold to Colgate.

Even for a small facility like this one, the maintenance would be intense. The result of so much careful attention and control was a pretty rigorous maintenance regime. The acidity of the blood would burn holes in the tanks. Bits of bone would get stuck in the gears, requiring constant repairs. The original “hog de-hairer” was too small and could only handle animals of around 300 pounds, so animals got damaged in the process. The belt scrapers (what are these exactly). The brine tank that was originally on the second floor needed to be moved to the first because the salt was

eroding the floor and would eventually give way. All throughout, Perry's terse language in the report belied the kind of rationalization and distance that Smith (2002) referred to as the "rationalization of slaughter" in which "The rationalization of the procedures, the repetitive nature of the tasks involved, the speed of the conveyor belt, and the partitioning of tasks all act as a form of ethical insulation, they encourage a feeling of detachment from the task at hand" (p. 52).

According to the 1939 report, there were 24 employees at the plant: the superintendent Perry, both a fulltime and part-time inspector, a drover, 7 butchers, a killing floor operator, offal washers, offal cookers, plant engineer, 3 cooler operators. Eldred Perry appeared to be hardworking man, only taking two days of vacation and one sick day in 1939. The report also functioned to put some of the labor on display. There was a picture of the inspector gazing at a cow. The picture of the seven butchers surrounded by the hung and washed carcasses of cows. The caption describes the condemned carcasses in order to show to show the plant doing its job as keeping the public safe from the condemned meat. The photos also betray a kind of sanitation in action. The carcasses drained of blood. and hanging lifeless from the meat hooks. The clean uniforms of the butchers.

Labor in the abattoir was split into two tiers. Eldred Perry, the superintendent, John McCutcheon, the clerk, and Fred Johnson, the plant engineer all commuted to work at the abattoir from addresses on the richer side of town. Perry, from Hyde Park on Duval Street. The butchers, Andres Aragon, Andres Mendoza, lived on Santa Rosa

Street, could walk to work, could wash their apron and walk home. Sherman White, was a black man, was an offal washer.

In this way, those closest to the job, closer to the meat of the job, were also the ones who lived closest to the vicinity, who left with aching muscles, the repetitive stress injuries of wielding the knife hundreds of times a day, perhaps became a way in which their bodies merged with a landscape, their toil coming to define a space, joining the other racialized. There were poor whites working there too.

ZONING AND SACRIFICE ZONES

According to Andrew Busch (2017), life for people of color in Austin from the 1930s through the 1950s is often shaded with a positive hue from those living at the time. There were small local businesses that served the needs of residents. Segregation and concentration bring a collateral benefit of communal cohesion. If you trace the zoning maps from the first one published in 1931, in the wake of the 1928 Master Plan, through to the 1970s, you can see the spread of industrial zoning throughout the East Side. In 1931, there was a thin strip of industrial zoning starting from East avenue and following about a three-block swath between Fourth and Seventh street running Eastward before fanning out in a delta-like pattern till the eastern border of the city. Technically, in the 1931 plan, much of what was east of Chicon street was labeled as “indiscriminate”, or for all intents-and-purposes unknown. This configuration more or less corresponded with the layout of the railroad lines entered from the eastern part of town. The abattoir was just past the city limits at that

time but was annexed shortly after.

The zoning, however, did not reflect the on the ground reality. While there were a number of wholesale oil and grease establishments, and warehouses and depots lining the railroad tracks, much of the city's industrial activity was mostly 'light industrial' and still concentrated on the southwestern quadrant of downtown. For the most part, what was zoned "industrial" in East Austin was largely residents. And, through the 1950s, residences made up a substantial portion of parcels along what continued to be zoned industrial. Because of what was known as "cumulative zoning," all 'higher' uses were permitted in the 'lower' ones. In other words, residentially zoned land was protected from industrial uses, but houses could be built and occupied in industrial zones. East Austin was disproportionately impacted by having residences in industrially zoned areas (Tretter, 2016). It was not until the late 1950s and 1960s that heavier industry moved into that section, particularly with the arrival of the infamous "tank farms", or large storage facilities of used petroleum. In the decades leading up to this, the zoned industrial land was largely a projection by city leaders, an act of erasure of the communities occupying the land and imposing of a new reality.

There was one major exception to this though: the slaughterhouse that had been built in the immediate context of the master plan. In 1941, the city modified its zoning slightly. There was no more "indiscriminate zoning" though most of that was turned into industrial, with much of it deemed the new category of 'heavy industrial'.

The abattoir was smack in the middle of the splotch of blocks coded as such, and as of 1941 was the only activity that would likely qualify as heavy industrial use. While there is no evidence of the abattoir being a health hazard (to humans at least), Perry reported there being occasional complaints of foul odors. So, while it is not likely the abattoir was a toxic risk to their neighbors at nearby Santa Rita courts (one of the first public housing blocks in the nation), it did likely contribute to a stigmatization of the neighborhood. As one of the early active industrial sites in the area, it led the way to justifying the continued expansion of industrial uses in the decades that followed. The slaughterhouse was positioned as a space that was already ‘sacrificed’ and justified the expansive and continuing sacrifice of the neighborhood.

In 1948, the zoning board of Austin recommended an area of 40 blocks be considered as a starting point for an industrial zone expansion (“Council to Study Area For Industrial Expansion,” 1948). The abattoir was the only block that was zoned heavy industry, with the others being commercial and residence. The 1957 zoning update that was made in conjunction with a revision of the 1928 plan did end up expanding industrial zoning both eastward and northwards.

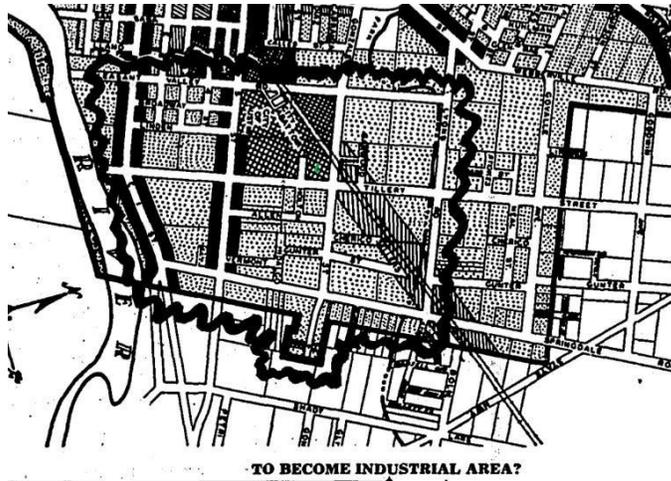


Figure 6: News clipping demarcating new potential industrial zones in East Austin.

The plan was finalized in 1961 and was dubbed the Austin Development Plan. While lacking in grandiosity in its name, it made up for it with its vision of future Austin: broad swaths of East Austin were to be labeled into industrial zoning-- bound by East avenue to the west, First Street and Seventh Street to the south and north, respectively, and highway 183 to the east. Also, there were predictions (that largely came to pass) of immense population growth, the remaking of central business districts, and large-scale suburban growth (Tretter, 2016). Industrial growth, according to the 1961 Austin Development plan was being inhibited by the “scattered residences, small parcels and inadequate streets” (p. 10). The planning documents of the 1950s and early 1960s Austin were set to perpetuate east Austin as a sacrifice zone.

THE CLOSING OF THE AUSTIN MUNICIPAL ABATTOIR

Less than ten years after its record-setting year of 1954, city officials were

questioning whether or not it was worth maintaining the abattoir. Largely running a net positive cash flow for its first twenty-five years of existence, it found itself increasingly in the red in the latter part of the 1950s. In September of 1961, the citizens of Austin were put to a vote: “Should the Austin City Council get out of the abattoir business?” The answer was an affirmative. By a margin of 7,258 to 6,687, Austin voters gave the council permission to sell the abattoir (Weddell & Williams, 1961). An almost indispensable, though problematic and troubling, part of the food system just a decade prior, found itself teetering on the verge of obsolescence.

The 1950s saw a shift in the meatpacking industry from a several small, low-volume operations to a small number of large, high-volume ones (Handbook of Texas Online, 2010). By 1968, the two major players in the Fort Worth Stockyards, Swift and Armour, closed their operations. With supermarkets arriving in the 1950s, marked by the first HEB in Austin 1957, the meat industry had continued its trajectory of rescaling and restructuring begun nearly a century earlier. The postwar period saw new forms of cutting and transporting meat, increasing speed and automation. Boxed beef, in which the fat and bone were removed in the packing plant and then vacuum sealed fit perfectly with the new supermarket-led food infrastructure and its demands for precut meat. The older, smaller, generally more urban slaughterhouses became obsolete as slaughterhouses shifted to increasingly more rural, and more separate from urban-suburban consumers (Fitzgerald, 2015).

It was not until a year later that the matter of the future of the abattoir was

brought before the council. What started as a request from a subcontractor to sell low-quality cuts of meat from the abattoir (and potentially gaining unfair advantage from) turned into a wide-ranging discussion about the fate of the place altogether. One council member asked, “what would happen if we closed it?” and pointing out that most of the big chain grocers were not buying meat processed at the abattoir, and the local wholesalers were doing so less and less as well. It was proposed the city make a more concerted effort to act on their license to sell it (Williams, 1962). Early in the following year, the city council heard bids from two different enterprises on leasing out the plant: the Austin Community Livestock Processors vied with the Dallas-based Samuels and Co. With one more nod to supporting local businesses, council awarded the contract to the Austin-based firm.

The Austin company signed the lease and took over the operations in April, paying rent of \$1,000 plus utilities, the company tried to make the abattoir profitable, but found itself in an uphill struggle. In the years leading up to the transfer, revenues had dipped nearly \$60,000 and the company found it difficult to stop the bleeding. The biggest potential clients—the supermarkets—were not getting their meat from the abattoir, but from the larger, faster, further out plants. In 1964, matters were compounded when a federal inspection led to slapping the company with a bill to make \$60,000 worth of improvements. The company paid up, with \$20,000 chipped in from city council, but the writing was on the wall.

In May of 1969, the abattoir closed up shop. The reaction was muted, to say

the least. At the council meeting that decided the vote, it was asked what impact closing the abattoir would have. The reply from both the leasees of the plant and others was a resounding “none”. Ray Knippa, one of the co-owners of the Austin Community Processers said “the building is obsolete and maintenance has been high...major packers are tearing down plants like these and building new ones” (“Abattoir Operation To Cease,” 1969, p. 16). He added that he himself intended to make use of those newer plants.

The closing of the abattoir did not elicit much in the way of defense, or grief, or retrospection, or nostalgia. Though perhaps the attempts to try to make it work through the 1960s were made out of a sense of attachment to it. After all, it had served the public well for some three decades and was undone by the familiar forces of industry concentration and development. On the day of the abattoir’s closing, the statesman ran one last article that did reflect on its legacy. “The abattoir dies” read the headline. It reflects on the original purpose, to eliminate the slaughterhouses along the Colorado river that were seen as menaces to public health and provide the public with a more trustworthy meat supply. It concludes: “Today, most slaughtering is done by the large meat packing firms; very few custom slaughtering houses remain” (“The Abattoir ‘Dies,’” 1969). The text is largely straightforward, but the photos that accompany it do give a hint of nostalgia. Empty stockyards with metal barrels overturned and weeds poking out, stationary wheelbarrows, two workers on their last day sitting on a stoop, waiting for that last whistle to blow.

In the time immediately after its closing, the site was perfect for the city's junkyard of all the impounded and abandoned cars under the city's control. In the late 1980s, the local transportation agency, CapMetro broke ground on their new headquarters building, excavating cattle bones in the process.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of the abattoir was connected to conflicts and dynamics within Austin's system of local governance. It was the changing to a city manager system that enabled the bond funding necessary to construct the public abattoir. While this created divisiveness and some ill-will in terms of local governmental intervention, it eventually won out. Indeed, the abattoir was a source of conflict from many sides, from the residents of the neighborhood of Govalle who filed a protest with the city, to the local butchers who feared being cut out of the industry all together.

For the time that it was operational, from the early 1930s through the 1960s, the abattoir operated as a useful public utility. It helped the residents get through difficult times such as World War II and a crippling multi-year drought in the 1950s. On top of that, for many years it was often a revenue generator for the city, with the animal byproducts such as tallow and dried blood sold to glue manufacturers and fertilizers.

There was another side to the story though. Even at a small scale, the strain of daily operations was wearing on its infrastructure. The abattoir served as a way in which the space of East Austin got racialized and, albeit in a small way, racialized the labor force. The sacrificing of animal life also brought with it a more general sense of sacrifice.

Rationalization belied the sacrifice of both animal life and eventually the space of East Austin as a whole. Though the Master Plan of 1928 and subsequent zoning regimes defined large swaths of East Austin as an industrial zone, for many years the abattoir was one of the few actually existing early industrial land uses of Austin. So, even though the abattoir fell into obsolescence and eventually closed in 1969, its impacts on the cultural landscape of East Austin have continued to be felt. References to it in the urban farm controversies over forty years later demonstrates some of its lingering effects.

Chapter Five: Narrating Urban Change & Contestation Through Austin's Changing Restaurant Landscape

INTRODUCTION

Space is a precarious and convulsive entity in cities. A city is always churning through old forms, and new ones are flung up. Bungalows turn into skyscrapers. The tectonic pressures of the real estate market pushing buildings taller and taller. In Austin, there are only a handful of buildings that maintain a reasonable shot at still being here in 50 years, 100 years, or beyond: the state capital, main tower at the University of Texas., perhaps some of the arts buildings. Now there will likely be plenty of homes and offices still around, there are a lot of historic buildings though. To live in a city is to experience loss; and it is through the experience of loss that while disorienting, it is also paradoxically a way in which meaning and sense of place can be constructed. In writing about New York, Colson Whitehead (2007) states, “No matter how long you have been here, you are a New Yorker the first time you say, That used to be Munsey’s, or That used to be the Tic Toc Lounge... You are a New Yorker when what was there before is more real and solid than what is here now” (p. 3). The quote seems to suggest that in a city nothing ever really dies, not an establishment or a building, as long as there is a kind of memory hitched to someone or a group of people.

Austin has plenty of places on that ledger, with 2018 perhaps serving as bumper year for closures, places that will survive in the memories of its residents.

The early months of 2018 saw a rash of food establishment closings. Springdale Farm announced it was closing in the summer of 2018 (Cape, 2018). Beloved BBQ joint Ruby's shuttered in March. In late April, the local zero-waste grocery store, in.gredients., closed its doors. In the case of in.gredients, a villain was figured for its demise. Here is Melody Harker of the *Austin Chronicle*: "Thanks rising rents. Way to go, tone-deaf development. Let's hear it for that sweet, sweet capitalism, right" (Harker, 2018) This recent spate of closures is part of a larger trend of restaurant volatility (Willis, 2016). Alarm bells had begun to ring within the restaurant industry in 2016 as two high-profile, feted restaurants closed, asking one author to ask what was causing a downturn in such a fast-growing, foodie-centric, and well-heeled city as Austin. 2016 saw eight restaurants close for every eleven that opened.

Restaurants are quick to go under in economic downturns and sprout like mushrooms after a soaking rain when capital is flowing again. This rapid overturn makes them useful in studies of enterprises and economic environments (Carroll & Torfason, 2011). But that volatility makes them also valuable objects of study for cultural geographers and others interested in place making; the way bodies, memories, eating, interacting get fused into meaning and emotional resonances. For if nearly all restaurants are doomed to obscurity, the ones that take root and establish themselves do so against great odds, and therefore become repositories for cultural meaning.

When they are open, they not only serve up a balance of food at the right price point but play an outsized role in the social functions of place, and may even

become a microcosm, a quasi-synecdoche for the city itself. There have been a few studies of what various typologies of restaurants say about urban space/place. In a study of the proportion of chain restaurants versus independently-owned restaurants across 50 metropolitan areas, Carroll and Torofson (2011) found that chains were more prevalent in areas of demographic instability, i.e. a faster cycle of people moving in and out, while independent restaurants were more likely to be found in areas of higher income.

More than many other parts of the built environment, restaurants can become laden with symbolic meaning. The relative prominence of haute cuisine restaurants can indicate the overall health of the city, culturally and economically (Mac Con Iomaire, 2011). Restaurants play a major role in the shaping of neighborhood perceptions (Hyde, 2014; Zukin, Lindeman, & Hurson, 2017). The loss of restaurants can be unmooring, as Christine Yano (2007) work on Hawaii's rapidly disappearing *okazuyas* demonstrates.

While restaurants today feel like permanent structures in urban landscapes, historian Paul Freedman (2014) cautions us to consider that restaurants are a particular invention of a time and place, namely late 18th century Paris (Spang, 2001). What makes restaurants special, in part, is that they offer a greater degree of choice compared to inns and similar eating establishments that predate restaurants. Restaurants have a menu from which you can select rather than being served whatever what was on hand; they have a broader selection of times at which they are open for one's attendance; and

thirdly, is a choice with whom you eat (as opposed to the big common tables that were common previously) (Freedman, 2014). The restaurants that sprung up in Paris, in a similar way to the coffee houses, catered to a bourgeoisie population interested in discussing politics and philosophy. It was a population that while relatively wealthy, did not have manors and estates of the aristocracy. That is, they were people with money, but without space. As such, restaurants took on this role as a kind of public space, that accommodated a certain kind of public.

THEORY

Urban space, that is to say, everything in the built environment is something both planned and unplanned. For instance, the laying out of a street grid shades more towards the imposition of order, while the street itself takes on a life of its own, what Jane Jacobs referred to as the “street ballet” (Jacobs, 1961). Henri Lefebvre (1991) refers to this dynamic as the *spatial practices* and *representations of space*. It is spatial practices that “secretes” a society’s space, creating cohesion and continuity, while representations of space are conceptual, typically pulled out of the minds of economic and political elites. Scholars of various concerns and stripes have pointed to the tensions within this dynamic. It is sometimes couched as “Jacobs versus Moses”; referring to the outsized power of the mid-twentieth century New York planner (Berman, 1983). Others have framed it as the securitization and control of urban space over the free association and political demands (Davis, 2006; Mitchell, 2003; N. Smith, 1996). In a closely related way, others have pitched the tension as one

between use value and exchange value, where the former refers to the uses and practices of urban space (e.g. home-making, gardening), while exchange value referring to the rents that can be reaped (McClintock, 2018). It raises a couple of long-standing questions: who constitutes the public and why do they need space?

Thinking through the politics and socialities of urban space has been a puzzle for much of urban theorizing and practice. In particular there is an interest in public space, which has taken on a 'normative' definition, or the open and inclusive stage for social interaction, political action and cultural exchange" (Carmona, 2015, p. 376).

Usually, the space does have to literally be public in the sense that no private person or entity can regulate its use (that's up to the state), but there are many spaces that serve kind of quasi-public spaces in that they facilitate human assembly. In a move that may be a bit simplistic, they can be broken into two camps. One camp looks to public space in terms fulfilling a role of social cohesion and reconciliation. Public and quasi-public spaces ideally serve as a unifying force for city life. Others see the importance of public space as a tool to be used by the politically and socially marginalized to make demands to the public at large and/or the power brokers. For these theorists, Don Mitchell perhaps being the most prominent, is interested in public space primarily in terms of *contestation*, rather than unification. There is a narrative floating through each of these accounts (to be expanded upon below) that over the course of the twentieth century, and continuing up to the present, public space has slowly disappeared from urban space, and consequently civic life. But the two camps take away different conclusions from this seemingly inexorable demise. For the Oldenburgs of the world,

this has meant a loss of social cohesion and an uptick in entrenchment around political and socio-cultural identities. For Don Mitchell, what they see as increasing securitization and privatization of space makes political organizing for oppressed groups less salient. In what follows below, I expand on these two approaches and their relationship with urban space at large.

Early generation urban scholars such as Lewis Mumford (1961) looked to the Greek Agora of antiquity as an imperfect ideal ‘place of assembly’ where commerce intermingled with politics and other forms of social gathering. Such a space was necessary for the social cohesion of both small towns and urban settlements. As Mumford puts it: “Even the most primitive community must handle its common affairs and face its common difficulties, breaking unbearable tensions of anger, fear, suspicion, *restoring the social equilibrium* upset by assault and revenge, by robbery and arbitrary reparation” (Mumford, 1961, p. 149, emphasis author’s). Even as institutions such as courts handled those specific matters that Mumford describes, the idea of multi-use, open gathering space as necessary for social cohesion has perpetuated. For example, it was Olmstead’s stated goal for Central Park to have such a purpose (Gandy, 2002).

While some of the characteristics of public space entail not being able to exclude people because they are unable or unwilling to buy anything, sociologist Ray Oldenburg argues that there are several places, such as restaurants, cafés, libraries, and barbershops that function as mundane, everyday places of gathering that serve important roles in the construction of social worlds (Oldenburg, 1999). Dubbed “third spaces” because they are not home (“first place”) or work (“second place”);

and while not technically “public”, they ideally function as social levelers. One’s presence in third places are not contingent on social status, one is not obligated to be there, and one should expect a welcoming and accommodating environment. According to Oldenburg, these kinds of humble spaces are absolutely essential to the fabric of democratic societies. They make us more tolerant and more connected. He posits that American society has undergone a widescale destruction of these places, leading to a kind social and political fragmentation. This thesis is echoed in Robert Putnam’s “bowling alone” thesis (Putnam, 1999) that Americans are less and less engaged with informal civic organizations. Much of the blame for this decline is laid at the feet suburbanization, with its isolating separations of private and public (Jackson, 1985), producing a spatiality in which the public square is replaced by the private backyard.

Don Mitchell is one of the most forceful thinkers in arguing for the need for public space in the physical, material sense. As he puts it: “rights have to be exercised *somewhere*, and sometimes that ‘where’ has itself to be actively produced by taking, by wresting, some space and transforming both its meaning and use- by *producing* a space in which rights can exist and be exercised” (Mitchell, 2003, p. 81, italics in original). This can often lead to struggle over a patch or parcel of space. He makes great use out of the example of “People’s Park” in Berkeley, California, which was a contested block appropriated by a collective of student activists beginning in the 1960s. As both a ‘symbolic’ and ‘physical’ struggle between the powerful forces of the university and government (backed up by the police) that want an orderly space versus the righteous

nonconformists and vulnerable populations that claim the space for both the everyday use for mundane activities and a space from which to voice their political concerns. The park functioned as a public space because it was open to the homeless to use, for anyone to 'lie down if they were tired (Mitchell, 2003, p. 124). It was that the space allowed for 'unmediated interaction' unimpeded from the powerful forces of the state and market that made it a truly public space.⁵ When university officials were successfully able to remove the 'undesirable' elements of the public and ensure the use of the space for an "appropriate public" (i.e. students).

Mitchell positions the demise of People's Park within a broader trend in which public space is increasingly being circumscribed, and as a result, the ability to dissent becomes increasingly difficult. On one hand there is the militarization and securitization of space that connects crack downs on homelessness (Davis, 2006; Dooling, 2009) and the delimiting of public assembly (Mitchell & Staeheli, 2005), in an effort to make urban landscapes appear safe. On the other hand are the malls and "festival market places" (Goss, 1993, 1996; Sorkin, 1992) that are designed to mimic true public space but are nothing more than nostalgia-drenched spectacles for an 'orderly public'. For Mitchell, and his fellow traveler Mike Davis, there are two diametrically opposed visions of public space. There is the disorderly space that is overtly political

⁵ It bears mention that not everyone sees it the same way as Mitchell. Greg Knapp, geographer professor at UT and member of People's Park feels that the project was likely to be short lived regardless because its users had little long-term vision or planning (Knapp, G., Personal Communication)

and marked by free interactions, user determination, and lack of coercion and there is the orderly public space designed for leisure and consumption for an “appropriate public” (Mitchell, 2003, p. 128). This has the double impact on marginalized populations (generally conceptualized by Mitchell along lines of class and income) in that they are unable to participate in the semi-coerced consumption of the festival market place, but also find themselves with less capacity to make their voices heard. To paraphrase Smith & Low (Low & Smith, 2013), a re-spatialization of the public would go a long ways to the re-politicization of the public.

Not everyone agrees with this materialist assessment. Amin (2008) for example argues that we should de-couple what he calls the *sociology of public gathering* from the *politics of the public realm* (p. 7). Hoelscher and Parekh (2015) caution against the propensity to “bemoan a linear downward slide of public space” (p. 79). While the trends of the twentieth century may indeed be troubling, it is more constructive to look at the histories that different spaces embody. They take the example of Congo Square in New Orleans, which has gone through various iterations from a space of free expression for the city’s free people of color, to a space subject to the brutalities of Jim Crow policies, to an upscale place with an opera center, to now functioning as a park both for tourists and a site for political manifestations. As they remind us, there is no real public outside of what is made within space. The tension identified by commentators may not be unique to public space, which shows the potential for slippage within the concept. The sit-ins of lunch counters across the U.S. South in

the early 1960s provide an illustrative example.

While there were documented sit-ins of restaurants, lunch counters, at various points from the 1930s through 1960s, it is the Greensboro Sit-In that began in February 1960 that kick-started a wave of similar direct actions across the U.S. South throughout spring of that year (Andrews & Biggs, 2006; Schmidt, 2015). It was February 1st, 1960 when four freshmen students from North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro, NC entered the local Woolworth's and sat down at the lunch counter to order coffee. They were told by their server, who was also black, "we don't serve Negroes here" ("The Greensboro Sit-ins," 1997). They came back the next day with four times as many folks, stayed at their barstools all day, and were denied service again. The next day, A&T students were joined by black women students from Bennett University—who had helped plan and organize the actions (L. M. Brown, 2018)—as well as white youth. Crowds of white counter-protestors would surround the folks at the lunch counters and would jeer at them, often pouring ketchup, sugar, salt, and pepper over their heads. A few weeks later, as tensions continued mounting, local city officials and student groups, along with old standby civil rights organizations, entered into negotiations and called a moratorium on the sit-ins (Schmidt, 2015). It was not until July that Greensboro officials agreed to desegregate all restaurants and lunch counters (Biggs & Andrews, 2015). In the intervening months though, the protest by then had spread through dozens of cities of all sizes throughout the South (Andrews & Biggs, 2006). Historically it was

considered a major accelerator of the civil rights movement that had stalled out somewhat in the years following the *Brown* decision in 1954 (Olds, 1961; Schmidt, 2015).

A sit-in is “the physical occupation of segregated public spaces, thereby challenging and disrupting the normal operation of business” (Biggs & Andrews, 2015, p. 418). Note in the definition provided by these two sociologists, they use the word “public space” juxtaposed with the “operation of business”, thereby highlighting the tension between public and private space. Both scholarly and popular accounts of the sit-ins assert a kind of fuzziness between the public and private. Perhaps in the segregated south, where ostensibly public spaces, like parks, were not actually public, the distinction made less sense.

Legal scholar Christopher Schmidt (2015) points out that there were several other arenas of attacking the Jim Crow apparatus of the South: schools and transportation were still largely segregated despite the *Brown* decision of 1954; African Americans faced widespread disenfranchisement; and the criminal justice system was systematically racist towards Black people. Any of these would have made appropriate action targets in the mold of the NAACP strategy, but the students and others who followed the lunch-counter sit-ins were not interested in the assertion of rights in the courtroom, but in daily life. There was a daily indignity of being able to shop at the downtown pharmacies and department stores but unable to be served with lunch plate or a cup of coffee. It was perhaps the very mundanity of eating and drinking in space that made among the most salient points for the purposes of contestation. Echoing Mitchell, though tweaking it

account for race and ethnicity, there needed to be a “somewhere” to assert rights. The students who organized the campaign in Greensboro were intent on a different kind of challenge to the status quo. Tired of the meandering machinations of the court system, which had been the main strategy pursued by civil rights organizations up till that time (Schmidt, 2015), the students looked to assert their rights to be served in public accommodations. The lunch counter then demands a flexible understanding of social space. As it straddles and complicates conceptions of public and private, leisure and politics, place and diffusion. It shows that eating establishments hold both stable and unstable notions of place.

Place, like many geographic concepts such as scale and territory, is both simple and beguiling; is a term that is used unreflexively everyday but its exploration of its meanings and implications. One common starting point for understanding place goes back to Yi-Fu Tuan’s classic *Space and Place*, where ‘place’ becomes such through practice and experience. A ‘place’, whether it be a home, a neighborhood, or city (to name a few) gets differentiated from abstracted space and concepts through the experience of an individual and/or some communal unit (Tuan, 1977). This process leads to feelings of attachment for those inhabiting place certain values and meanings, which gives place an inherent subjective quality to it. Such a definition of place makes it stable and bounded. Henri Lefebvre’s distinctions between absolute space (abstract space) and social space (lived, meaningful space) carry echoes of that idea as well (Hoelscher, 2011; Lefebvre, 1991). One can see similarities in this idea from Marxist geographer David Harvey when he describes place formation as a “process of

carving out ‘permanences’ from the flow of processes creating spaces” (Harvey, 1996, p. 261). While the three are connected in seeing place as something that forms through process (and practice), the distinction that Harvey wants to turn our attention to the forces and flows that we can observe impacting, molding so to speak, place (while Tuan is generally more interested in the practices of place-making by its users). Harvey then is echoing the concerns of Doreen Massey (1993) in her calling for a “progressive sense of place”; that is to say, place is not bounded and stable but forged through relations around the planet.

What makes restaurants particularly useful ways in thinking through the tensions in sense of place is that they can be both be a kind of reflection of capital accumulations, the landing lights or honey trap of capital. But they also function as places to be defended against the “creative destruction” linked to generating capital.

SEGREGATION AND INTEGRATION: THE NIGHT HAWK DINER AND THE CONTESTATION / RECONCILIATION OF AUSTIN’S DOWNTOWN RESTAURANTS AND LUNCH COUNTERS

One of the first important restaurants on the Austin landscape was the set of Night Hawk Diners, a steak diner with a handful of locations dotting the city. The first one opened in 1932 on South Congress avenue, just on the other side of the river from downtown, with a second one opening near UT campus just a year later. Though the chain grew to seven locations in Austin and San Antonio, plus a frozen food division, it was the first two locations that were the most important to the cultural landscape of Austin. The chain was the brainchild of Harry Akin, a larger than life figure

who trained countless chefs and restaurant managers in the city (including Hoover Alexander of today's Hoover's Cooking), was prominent in the local and national civil rights struggles, served one term as mayor in the late 1960s, and died a legend in 1976. The chain struggled after his death, with the beloved UT location closing in 1979 and the original location succumbing ten years later.

Harry Akin was born in Longview, Texas in 1903. He moved to Austin 1922 to attend the university and a plan to become a physician. Instead, though, he caught the acting bug and joined an acting troupe that travelled around the state. That dried up and he made it out to California in the 1920s to keep the acting dream alive. In between sparse gigs, Akin worked odd jobs- sold vacuum cleaners, drove taxis, and—crucially—worked at a hamburger stand. It was there he picked up the both the skills needed to cook up a juicy burger but learned the some of the ins and outs of the restaurant management business. Perhaps just as importantly, he got the vision of creating a late-night place for a kind of late-night crowd. A self-proclaimed night owl himself, he later remarked that when he started the diner in Austin, his was the only establishment that would stay open past 8 o'clock p.m. (Wood, 2001).

Akin returned to Austin in 1932 and took over an abandoned fruit stand, and quickly built a four-walled structure that opened on Christmas Eve of the same year. Due to the niche it filled, the Night Hawk was a hit Hamburgers were sold for fifteen cents and the coffee was free from midnight till 6 a.m. Three different floods hit the restaurant throughout the 1930s (still in the days before the Colorado River was under control), one was particularly devastating, causing Akin to need to rebuild. But by then, the Night

Hawk was well-ensconced and posed no long-term trouble for the restaurant.

Akin set the tone for the egalitarian, freedom-loving place by calling it “Liberty Hall”. He took the line from a now-forgotten film, *She Stoops to Conquer*, and printed it on handbills advertising the place. “This is Liberty Hall, gentleman. You can do as you please,” it read. Akin seemed to relish the rough crowd that his establishment would attract. He was quoted in the paper several years later, “people would bring in their own home brew in the cans. Fist fights in the front always brought in a good crowd” (“Carved Table Top ‘Relic of the Past,’” 1973). A long-time employee put it this way, remembering back fifty years:

Ah, the times we had! Customers took Harry at his word when he told them, “You are welcome, Gentlemen: you may do as you please here.” Patrons would bring along jugs of home-brew and swill whiskey while eating Harry’s burgers and chili. Our customers got drunk, were thrown out, and returned the next night to begin all over again. Our pine tables bore their initials, carved deep into the wood. They were true “night birds,” as Harry himself was (Spillar, 1982).⁶

Other old Timers would reminisce about the anarchic, freewheeling nature of the place. Police and prostitutes would go shoulder to shoulder drinking coffee late at night (n.d.).

The Night Hawk and Akin played an important role in another way of expanding the public. Even as early as the 1930s, he was not only hiring women and Black folks, but he was promoting them within the organization. Isaac Craig, hired as a dishwasher when the first Night Hawk in 1932, was named manager in the 1930s. Though, they were not public about it, Craig typically remained in the back of the

house rather than show a Black man in leadership role (Writer, 1973). In April of 1958, the Night Hawk began serving Black patrons, becoming the first integrated restaurant in the city, a few years before restaurants became a contested ground in Austin, and around the city.

The sit-ins that caught fire across the Piedmont South in February of 1960 reached Austin in April of the same year, its spatial and social distance perhaps playing a role in the diffusion delay (Andrews & Biggs, 2006). The Austin movement was led by students from the HCBU Huston-Tillotson, as well as the University of Texas and St. Edward's University. According to Humphrey (1985), the sit-ins were mostly ignored by the broader public: "Most Austinites took the sit-ins in stride, some shoving and name-calling notwithstanding. Most downtown eateries stood pat" (p. 217). In Austin, sit-ins were part of a series of escalations, starting with student groups making public statements about starting a picketing and sit-in campaign in downtown Austin. In the last of week of April, starting with picketing on the sidewalks, 30 students picketed Congress Avenue in the morning of April 27th, holding signs like "Is Austin Progressive?" "Sit-ins? It's up to you?" On April 29th, between 75 and 100 activists participated in sit-ins across seven different lunch counters on Congress Avenue ("Business On As Usual At Lunchrooms," 1960). With

⁶ Document from Austin File- Restaurants "N", Austin History Center

instructions to be quiet, courteous, and to not respond with physical violence if provoked or assaulted, the mostly young people sat in groups of two or three and waited service (Kuhlman, 1995). The demonstrations continued the next day, with individual or small groups were served at some counters without issue (“Reaction To Sit-ins Is Varied,” 1960). Renfro Drug store stood pat, however (ibid). White’s Pharmacy ripped up its tall chairs rather than serve black customers, and then permanently closed its eating section. Scarborough’s temporarily closed rather than serve black patrons (Orum 1987).

In between the public demonstrations, there were meeting going on behind the scenes. On April 20th there was meeting arranged by the Austin commission on Human Relations between eating establishment operators, Black preachers, and students to discuss segregation. But no conclusion was reached (Weddell, 1960). A meeting the following week had the same result. Part of the issue was that the chain places like Woolworth did not want to be the first ones to integrate, lest they be branded as “Yankee subversives” (Biggs, 2014).

In the midst of this, Mayor Tom Miller had formed a human rights commission with the hope of encouraging private enterprises to voluntarily desegregate. Activists, however, were looking at pushing for a city ordinance that would ban racial discrimination in eating establishments. The level of violent backlash in Austin was muted relative to other places in the deep south. A handful of other downtowns like Bray and Jordan lunch counters opted to desegregate in early May

and that temporarily put an end to the actions (Kuhlman, 1995). Broader picketing and sit-ins took place in 1963, with a heavy focus on movie theaters. It was not until 1964 that a full-scale desegregation ordinance was implemented (Orum, 1987).

As the fight continued, Akin implored his fellow restauranteurs to voluntarily de-segregate their restaurants. He delivered a speech at the rotary club in which he urged fellow businessmen to “think in terms of individuals instead of generalities” and made a case for protestors true mission was fighting for “complete equality of opportunity and total freedom to avail himself of accommodations and services which are afforded other citizens (“Businessmen urged to develop consciousness over racial matters”, 1963).⁷ Akin would also make personal entreaties to cafeteria owners. He sent a letter to the president of Piccadilly Cafeterias, T.H. Hamilton, a chain headquartered in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, requesting that he consider voluntarily de-segregating his cafeteria in Austin rather than wait for legislation (federal, state, or local) to force him to do it. He argued that there have been minimal economic consequences or incidences thus far in the process, and that demonstrators have promised to keep at bay as long as progress continues.⁸ In this period, choice of eating establishment became an ethical concern on the matter of segregation. Akin

⁷ Austin File, Night Hawk Diner, Austin History Center

⁸ *ibid*

received letters from folks thanking him for his efforts and claiming they will be sure to patronize his and other integrated establishments. Others wrote in to say they will eat only at places that maintain the Jim Crow status quo.

Harry Akin died in 1976. In the late 1960s, he served one term as mayor, during which he tried to push through a fair housing ordinance. The issue went to a ballot referendum and it lost, badly. It was probably the principle reason that he lost the election (Orum, 1987). He did not seem too eager to get back into politics after the experience, “no one likes a crusader” he said (Jackson, 1973). After his passing, his widow took over the operation and due to a combination of factors, the Night Hawk went into a decline. The Night Hawk by UT closed in 1979. The Night Hawk #1 was struck by a fire in 1985, burning it to the ground. The executives made a fateful decision to instead of recreating the old restaurant, they dramatically increased its size. Making it three times bigger and adding banquet rooms. It turned out to be a fatal error (Wood, 2001). It took nearly two years to build and open the new Night Hawk, and in that time, the restaurant landscape in Austin had diversified, and steakhouses were out of fashion. The new place did not offer the same coziness and sense of place that the previous iterations had, and their older clientele did not return. It closed just two years later. When it did close, there were quotes from the prominent and non-prominent contingents of Austin. Political consultant Ed Wendler Jr. said: “It’s almost like the end of an era. It’s the last real visible thing left from those early days in Austin”

(Associated Press, n.d.). In sum, Night Hawk Diner served as a both a space of leisure and sociality, in particular to subgroups that would need a place. But also, the establishment became a political lightning rod for change in the city.

LES AMIS: RADICAL THIRD SPACE

Les Amis was founded in 1970, at the crux of the Austin countercultural movement that had swept up the city. Designed to look like a Parisian-style bistro, it was replete with a dark red portico festooned with vines hanging over an outdoor seating area of wire-spool tables and plastic chairs. Being at sidewalk level, and just a block away from Guadalupe St., a.k.a. “The Drag”, and UT’s campus, it was the perfect vantage point to watch an afternoon pass by, with a cappuccino or a cheap meal of rice, black beans, and whole wheat bread (Haupt, 2013).

Graduate teaching assistants grading papers, students studying for exams certainly made up part of the daily milieu,¹⁰ but it was much more than student life. Like Nighthawk, Les Amis was a place for misfits, but with an added 1960s countercultural hue. There’s no stories of politicians or businessmen making informal deals here. In the lovely documentary *Viva Les Amis* (Higgins, 2005), the overriding ethos of the place is shown to be one of debauchery and anarchy, likely making anything happening at the Night Hawk look tame in comparison. “There was something about that place that made people get naked,” remarked former employee. Its parking lot served as one of the main locations for punk shows. It was also a refuge for protestors who got gassed by police on campus.

The main character of the film is Newman Stribling, who took over as manager a few months after the opening and ran the place till it closed in 1997 (while living in a small flat above it), is shown as a man not driven by trying to make money but trying to “create something cool”. It was the perfect embodiment of that time and a particular subculture of Austin, caught in the Richard Linklater film *Slacker*. *Slacker*, which today many conjures up images of a kind of lazy do-nothingness, at the time of the film and heyday of Les Amis was more of an intentional stance against the establishment. A “slacker” was someone who worked just enough to pay for food and rent in order to spend their time on more creative pursuits. Les Amis was the “third place” of Austin’s slacker community. You could go there and strike up conversations and friendships with strangers. The documentary details the comraderies among the staff and regulars, with copious amounts of alcohol, illicit drugs, and nudity. Punk rock concerts, variety shows cast the space as one of self-expression and communal belonging.

The film offered a kind of wistful window for the film’s participants to look through and reminisce about the past. One interviewee talked about how sad they get whenever they go by the site, now occupied by a Starbucks, ‘I just always thought it would be there,’ she remarks. Much of the film is set in Stribling’s cab, which he started driving after the closure of Les Amis. Driving through the shimmery, new skyline of

¹⁰ Since the old geography department was just three blocks away, Les Amis was a favorite haunt of the profs and grad students (Knapp, personal communication)

Austin, past new construction zones of upturned earth and tall cranes, or past the remade Bluebonnet Plaza, the message is clear: the closure of Les Amis was not an isolated, unfortunate event but part of a larger trend of loss, sanitization, progress, and upscaling. Stribling remarks: “over time as things become more prosperous and safe, they become less peculiar and interesting. And that’s evident no place more than here”. The film juxtaposes the corporate culture of Starbucks, by interviewing contemporary employees, with the free-flowing, anything goes nature of Les Amis. Starbucks employees have to wear black slacks and shirt, closed toe shoes and have a limited number of piercings. Les Amis had an almost clothing optional policy. Starbucks had secret inspectors come into the place to test the employees on their decorum and making sure their café lattes were the proper weight. Les Amis had a pretty loose relationship with the health code. Starbucks standing for a kind of corporate homogenization over the Austin landscape

Lee Daniel, the co-producer of the film *Slacker* remarks towards the end of the film, that not just Les Amis, but most of the places shown in the film (which was released in 1989) were no longer there. When asked why that was, Daniel replies with some combination of a chuckle and a smirk: “Progress”. Indeed, ten years after Les Amis closed, the trend continued with the fight and eventual closure of another beloved place, Las Manitas.

LAS MANITAS: A BATTLE FOR THE CITY'S SOUL

The food at Las Manitas was known as being cheap and satisfying in a kind of belly-warming way. You could spend less than five bucks on a coffee and two tacos. Or you could get a plate of scrambled eggs, tomatoes, and serrano peppers. For lunch you could get quesadillas or carne guisada. The flautas were deep fried yet greaseless tortillas. They would plan their menu for the month with the specials, e.g. chicken mole, caldo de pollo. printed on little calendars patrons could take home with them. They took care to make sure the re-fried beans were well seasoned and not bland, by simmering them with bell pepper, onion, and garlic (“Best Argument for Cooking the Same Food Twice,” 2002). An early critic from the early days of the restaurant said, “This is authentic interior Mexican food. They are doing on a shoestring what other places with lots more money do—cooking a real menu that has some thought behind it, not just the typical gloppy chain stuff that you find everywhere” (Barna, 1986, p. 58).

Despite some high early praise and a small spot in *Savour*, a preeminent gourmet magazine, when *Las Manitas* became enmeshed in controversy and public lamentations, the food generally summed up as “good, not great.” The quality of the food was more or less an afterthought, and what took up much more ink was the clientele- the famous, the infamous, and the ordinary. Las Manitas was the central hub of political deal-making and gossip in Texas (Bustillo, 2006). It was often remarked that more deals were cut in Las Manitas than at the capitol itself. Located on Congress

Avenue, the ‘main street’ of Austin, just a few blocks from city hall and the state capital building, it was where politicians, artists, construction workers, students, all rubbed elbows in a cramped, quaint space, occupying the storefront on the low-slung commercial strip, increasingly surrounded by towering sky scrapers.

Out of towners luminaries like Lili Tomlin and David Byrne made their way there while passing through town. It just missed out on the food-travel-TV nexus, but it no doubt would have been featured.

But it more than just a site for the powerful, luminous or trendy. Their first customer base were construction workers in the 1980s, Mexican/Mexican-American and non-Mexican alike who needed quick breakfasts and lunches while on the job. It was known as an egalitarian place where Karl Rove, the infamous Republican strategist, was a loyal customer despite the political leanings of the owners, Cynthia and Lidia Perez. In its nearly thirty years of existence, Las Manitas became emblematic of what considered to be the “real authentic Austin”. It was “our Main Street café” as local journalist Katherine Gregor (2006) put it. Former mayor Kirk Watson wrote that “At any booth and at any time, the stories of Austin are being told. From those in Austin who have very little to those who are quite powerful, Las Manitas feeds them all and in different ways... you can just feel Austin’s unique sense of happiness with who and what it is” (ibid). Las Manitas was a kind of “commons”, which one supporter of the restaurant explicitly referenced (Bustillo, 2006). Much of the spirit of gathering place that Las Manitas embodied was by design. While its establishment and

popularity in downtown was certainly contingent on good fortune, the sisters had a very clear vision of what they wanted the restaurant to be. Cynthia in particular was interested what were called *peñas*, which were cafes established by Chilean exiles in Berkeley. Of a particularly progressive bent, they were places to organize and educate on leftist politics. Almost concurrently with the establishing with the restaurant, the sisters opened *La Peña* which was to "to support artistic development, to provide exposure to emerging local visual artists, musicians, poets and other performing artists, and to offer Austin residents the full spectrum of traditional and contemporary Latino art" (Gregor, 2006). Over the decades much of the profit from the restaurant went into supporting this part of the project.

The Perez sisters started in 1979 as a taco stand on the Drag, the main strip adjacent to the University of Texas's campus. Outflanked by another food stand that sold Vietnamese food *and* tacos, the sisters found themselves crowded out and begin looking for new outlets. For a while, they delivered their fares to hungry office workers in downtown as well as up in the nascent tech centers on Research Boulevard in (at the time) far north Austin. They were able to lease a building on Congress Avenue, the old Avenue Café, whose art deco sign still graced the entrance. Unable to afford to take the sign down, they instead incorporated it into their name: Las Manitas Avenue Café.

From its inception the restaurant tracked its fortunes with downtown development. When it first opened, downtown Austin was in a doldrums of capital flow. Congress Avenue was a kind of a skid row. An early article spoke of how the strip was liberally peppered with liquor stores. Fortunate to have an established

customer base of office workers as well as the construction workers looking for a cheap and quick meal, Las Manitas café became a mainstay of downtown life. The gathering place for a swath of the population. With the Night Hawk closing in 1989, Las Manitas took over as the site of informal deal-hashing in the city (Wood, 2001).

The Perez sisters were always aware of their precarity of being a downtown restaurant. They first felt a squeeze back in the mid-1980s when Austin was going through a construction boom and assumed, they would soon be flattened and smoothed over for a new skyscraper (Barna, 1986). Their fatalistic vision did not come to pass until twenty years later. One morning in the summer of 2006, a Richard Suttle Jr. walked into the restaurant and grabbed a seat at the countertop. After ordering breakfast and coffee, he discreetly told Cynthia Perez that he was a lawyer representing White Lodging Company, which had recently leased the block from the Perez's landlord, Tim Finley, and they intended to bulldoze the whole block and build a hotel complex. Rather than respond subtly, Perez called attention to the other diners and announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is the lawyer who represents the white guys who plan to bulldoze Las Manitas" (Cartwright, 2007, p. 84). It's not known if the man was allowed to finish his breakfast before leaving.

The story quickly turned into a rallying cry for residents all over Austin. There was lamentations and outrage. Citizens sent letters to city hall demanding that they do something to keep the restaurant afloat. An online campaign dubbed "save Las Manitas" sprung up and gathered funds. The sisters called on their well-connected

friends, such as former mayor Gus Garcia to represent them in negotiations. The editor of the “Losing Las Manitas is the greatest threat to my enjoyment of Austin that I can possibly imagine... Closing Las Manitas would be a terrible blight on the culture of the city” (Gregor, 2006).

Eventually, public outcry grew to a level at which the city government got involved. In the fall of 2006, a city planning commissioner floated an ordinance that would protect “iconic businesses” similar to the way iconic buildings would be preserved (Cartwright, 2007). A letter from three city council members to the Marriott corporate office asking them to re-think their plans in a way that would allow the restaurant to stay. One CM, Brewster McCracken, became perhaps the most vocal, writing an op-ed that argued that the Marriott was essentially being unethical, and antithetical towards the public interest with their actions. There was a proposal to create a fund to help preserve small businesses which would be drawn from fees charged to developers.

There was hope that there would be some compromise between the two parties. They had been some precedent in the past. Another iconic eatery-Taco Xpress- had been able to negotiate a deal with a developer that wanted its property to move to a new location and thrive (Gregor, 2006). The sisters owned the building that was an art gallery, and many thought it was feasible, though expensive, for the sisters to renovate it and relocate just a couple of blocks away from the original location.

Amidst the public heat and controversy, the two parties directly went through some difficult negotiations. While most of the leverage was in the hands of the Marriott and White Lodging, the Perez sisters did own a building on the same block that allowed access to the alley that the Marriott would need to complete their project. Given that, the original offer made by the company offered to extend the sisters lease till June 2007 coupled with a year's free rent which would ostensibly be put towards relocation fees. While that seemed like a reasonable offer, there was a provision that gave the sisters pause: the right of the company to terminate the agreement if the city caused any delays to the project. While that was likely put in place to keep something like filing the building as an historic building, it seemed vague and threatening enough that they rejected the offer and countered with a lease extension request till June 2008 (which was well into construction project's timeline) and a guarantee to be able to stay permanently. The company did not respond to the offer which led to acrimony and the temporary cessation of negotiations (Cartwright, 2007). Some months later, the Marriott offered \$72,000 for relocation, which would not even cover a tenth of the moving costs (Burnett, 2007).

Amid the public outcry and lamentations of the potential fate of Las Manitas, the local government stepped in. In February of 2007 they devised a loan program, dubbed the Business Retention and Enhancement Program (Coppola, 2007). The program was to be funded from the fees obtained from developers during construction for street closures, utility hookups, and the like. The program was designed for retail businesses,

entertainment venues, and restaurants along Congress Avenue from Town Lake to the Capital building, and east 6th street between Congress and I-35. Eligibility was available for businesses that already existed along the strip to local businesses seeking to relocate there. While the fund was ostensibly for any business that qualified, many saw it as a naked display of favoritism on the part of the city government towards a local business (ibid).

With the talks stalled, the city stepped in with a proposed solution- offer a forgivable loan of \$750,000, that would be paid back within five years. The move actually provoked a counter-backlash of a different sort. It was seen as a lot of money to throw towards a small business and reeked of favoritism. Partly due to that backlash and the hesitancy of some of the terms of the loan, the sisters turned the loan down in August 2007. Things continued on in limbo for a while.

Matters were not helped much when J. Williard Marriot, the son of the creator of Marriott Hotels was quoted in the press saying “Why should you hold up a several-million-dollar investment because of a small little restaurant? They can move and should move” (Burnett, 2007). A Faustian turn of phrase if there ever was one. Not only did it probably poison the well in terms of productive dialogue, it put in stark relief the two competing notions at play in the controversy: the vision of a place that needed to be preserved because it was both emblematic and a lived example of some strain of Austin’s values, while the process of progress and development on the other.

In January of 2008, it was announced in the *Austin American-Statesman* that an

agreement had been reached between White Lodging Services and the Perez Sisters. There were not any details, but it was stated that the restaurant would remain open till the end of summer of that year, and then would begin its renovation of their nearby building and reopen sometime in the future.

The restaurant's last day was August 31st, 2008. A sign was hung from the door saying "Here the battle for Austin's soul was fought. Austin lost" (Long, 2010). It raises the question of what does it mean for a place to have a soul? And why is that soul contingent on the prosperity and longevity of a particular restaurant? It seems that while it was open, Las Manitas served as a micro-narrative of a version of Austin that many Austinites tell about itself. That is to say, a liberal bastion that gamely tolerates the presence of right wingers in its midst, that its loyalties lie in the small and quaint spaces, the 'humble' and classic dishes of *norteño* cuisine, not in the pretentious food served up in trendy restaurants. The prospect of losing it would be both an opportunity to meet its opposing forces (homogenization and greed, mainly) but also reckoning with the prospect of that perhaps those values were more tenuous than previously thought.

CONCLUSION

What this chapter ultimately indicates is that restaurants are particularly flexible and important urban places. This is true both in terms of their use and practice and also in terms of their capacity to meaningful. They can be gathering places for a wide spectrum of the public, from powerful politicians and business people, but also the

countercultural types and marginalized public. In the case of Austin, and indeed, the United States more broadly, restaurants became important sites for civil rights struggle. Restricting access to their use, though despite being privately owned rather than an “official public space” was such an affront to young Black students that it was essential that it was brought to bear in the struggle for equality. This suggests that restaurants transcend their transactional nature to go going beyond mere exchange. In terms of meaning, restaurants can take on iconic, emblematic status within a city; they can become known as institutions.

Simultaneously, they can be repositories for the accumulation of everyday life.

The case of each of these restaurants had similar starting points as modest establishments that managed a many-decade long longevity. Each became a place with a wide clientele, touching the lives of many different people. In some sense the restaurant was able to serve as a social leveler in part because of its tolerance for the “aberrant” and marginalized behaviors. The freewheeling, late nights of the early days gave way to a more normalized crowd of business dealers. But each place also engaged in a particular kind of politics too. The Nighthawk becoming a leading example in restaurant desegregation. Les Amis with its slacker, anti-establishment ethos, and the Perez sisters also were connected to left wing and Latinx identity socio-political movements.

As each restaurant closed, first the downtown Nighthawk in 1989, Les Amis in 1997, and Las Manitas in 2008, each one marked both a shift in the city’s food

culture and the impact on changes in its economic status. Night Hawk's closure was blamed in part on the somewhat brief economic downturn of the late 1980s, compounded with the aftereffects of rebuilding after a fire. Crucially, the rebuilt restaurant was unable to capture the same intimate charm of the original and was unable to regain its clientele.

The loss and closure of Les Amis and Las Manitas were more emotionally pitched. An Austin without Les Amis as a gathering place was an Austin in which the slacker culture was increasingly becoming less viable. An Austin without Las Manitas was one that was losing its distinctiveness. Both lost to the corporate behemoths of Starbucks and the Marriot, respectively, their disappearance signified distinctiveness of place pressing against the homogenizing forces of capital and ultimately giving way.

Chapter Six: An Austin Found at Whole Foods Market

INTRODUCTION

In downtown Austin, at the intersection of 6th street and Lamar, is the flagship Whole Foods Market, its 80,000 square foot foodie temple, as well as the corporation's headquarters. At six stories high, it is somewhat imposing, but is increasingly getting dwarfed by the skyscrapers built up around it. At street level is a kind of simple metal sculpture that nonetheless shines bright when the sun hits it; a stencil of ATX. A kind of valentine to its hometown, the sculpture stands as a kind of fusion between the store and the city.

In an article from esteemed local writer Gary Cartwright explaining the particularities of the Austin cultural and political milieu, he repeats a remark heard from a friend of his: “if Willie hadn't been forced out of Nashville and if dope hadn't been so cheap in Austin, and if Michael Dell hadn't dropped out of UT and started selling computers from his dorm room, and if Whole Foods founder John Mackey hadn't believed he could make a buck selling sprouts and granola bars, who knows where'd we'd be today” (Cartwright, 2006, pp. 84–85). For some decades now, John Mackey and Whole Foods have been embedded in the cultural geography of Austin. For example, a 2016 National Geographic article credits the store as the seed of the city's local food movement (Monson, 2016). Whole Foods, in sum, is very much a part of the city's evolving brand. What I suggest here is that Whole Foods' growth and development, the ways in which it gets praised and criticized, the values that have clung to its names track

well the development of discourses around the city of Austin.



Figure 7: ATX statue outside of Whole Foods Market

In many ways, the standard narratives of both Austin and Whole Foods track together in almost uncanny ways. Their growth, both in their literal sense of expansion of population and footprints, but also in the public consciousness outside of Austin, have unfolded in a similar pattern. They both have a residue of the 1960s and 1970s counterculture clinging to them, both expanded rapidly from the 1980s till today. Just as Whole Foods presents a biographic myth of itself as a kind of scrappy upstart that has expanded through sound and ethical business practices, Austin too is a “model” (Long, 2014; Tretter, 2013a) for development. A shared vocabulary has

developed around each of them: sustainable, foodie, lifestyle, progressive, benevolent, feel-good, special. The downtown Whole Foods is one of the amenities that drives downtown consumption but extends beyond that. Whole Foods is part of Austin's brand, a metonym for the city and its subtle paradoxes.

This chapter will explore the geographies of Whole Foods Market by toggling back and forth between a semiotic analysis of the interior of the store with a historical narrative of how the company has developed over time in conjunction with Austin's own development and brand. What I propose here, is to take what Goss (1999) referred to as a semiotic approach in his study of the Mall of America, to understand the meanings, desires, anxieties, and values that are embedded in commodity products and consumer space. Additionally, I seek to connect the constructions of the implied geographies contained within whole foods, and the way they have altered over time, to the broader imaginaries that Austin presents externally.

Flaneurie straddles both a conceptual framework and a kind of methodology. Rooted in the image of a dandified male walker strolling through the streets of 19th century Paris and taking in the streets' energy and vitality, and reveling in its intoxicating energy (Bassett, 2004), the flaneur is seen as a special walker gifted with poetic and critical insight. As Amin and Thrift (2002) put it, the flaneur is the "reflective walker" who through "sensory, emotional, and perceptual immersion in the passages of the city, engages in a two-way encounter between mind and city" (p. 10).

Walter Benjamin was known for trying to render the flaneur out of individuated experience and into awakening a more collective mind (Bassett, 2004). Rob Shields (Shields, 1996) states that Benjamin's method of cataloguing all the different commodities in the old arcades of Paris was in the name of "uncovering the mythical structure of impulses, aspirations, and anxieties within street life" (p 230).

Buck-Morss (1989) works in a similar vein, describing Walter Benjamin's work as trying to bust open the soothing utopias projected through commodity images.

While the practice of flaneurie is one that is conventionally associated with the street, a lot of academic ventures have a touch of flaneurie to them, including much of the work in social sciences and cultural studies done on Whole Foods. By which I mean, wandering through the store, examining the packages and labels of food products, making observations from the shopping environment, and then making a critical analysis of the ideology of the images, sensations, and representations on display.

Working with a Whole Foods location in Oklahoma, Lindsey Smith (2012) argues that the ways in which indigeneity is depicted on food packages serves to fetishize indigenous people, simulate an ethical stance towards a "global" sense of indigenous persons. For example, while "staples" such as flours and grains are often absent of signs of indigeneity, and thereby branding them as Euro-American or 'normal', the more luxurious or discretionary items are more apt to reference indigenous practices or be marked with indigenous symbols. Coconut oil comes from many indigenous cultures call "the tree of life" (p. 64). Sambazon, which markets açai berries from Brazil is festooned with a stylized depiction of an indigenous man's face and an invitation to

“join the tribe” (ibid). Smith also juxtaposes this romanticized image that is distanced in both time and space, with the food insecurity faced by actually existing local indigenous groups.

Adam Mack (2012) focused on the sensory design of flagship store in downtown Austin, arguing that space “sought to fuse gustatory pleasure with liberal politics” and, historically speaking represented something new in American consumer society. It turned the food shopping experience into a pleasurable one.

Serazio focuses on the rendering of the word “natural” and “earth” as a way of “relentlessly locat[ing] the consumer through perceived “back to nature” preferences and organic redemption” (p. 169). There’s “Earthbound Farm” organic salads, “Nature’s Choice” multigrain cereal bars, and the redundant “Natural by Nature” organic milk. He also points out how many products make pledges to donate a percentage of profits to environmentalist organizations. Spiritual imagery is prominent as well, with “Dagoba Organic Chocolate Company” claiming the name to mean “temple of the gods” (not to mention the home planet of Yoda), and the Ezekiel Bread claiming, “this Biblical Brand is truly the stuff of life” (p. 170). Serazio (2011) argues that “by carving out and colonizing a space—physical and imaginary—for ethos groceries, Whole Foods imbues its food offerings with...larger themes of politics, culture, and lifestyle; Whole Foods nurtures this consumer culture of food fetish through its soothing tale of wholeness” (p. 160).

Johnston (2008) is also broadly interested in how WFM “frames shopping as an ethical activity” (p. 249) via the messages on food labels and throughout the store.

However, rather than focusing on individual products, she makes observations such as

the fact that with the mind-boggling array of choices (147 different kinds of chips, 72 different kinds of bottled water, etc.) creates an imbalance between consumer and citizenship ethics. That is, the store projects a kind of aura that suffuses all the products, even the conventional ones like Heinz ketchup, so that there are no bad choices at Whole Foods, and the consumer-as-individual has sovereignty to make their choices. And because choices are easy, there is not a really hard look at the complications of consumption choices.

THEORY

Sociologist Alan Warde (2005) defines consumption as a process "whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive, or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion" (p. 137). This definition is suitably broad and flexible: as animals, all we can ever be is consumers, always engaging in acts of appropriation, of taking the energy embedded in material and nonmaterial elements and ingesting them into our own being. But in addition to being a utilitarian, basic necessity, practices associated with consumption are also modes of expression, signifying things such as lifestyle and identity (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Weismantel, 1988). Consumption then is not only a material process, but one that is simultaneously discursive and ideational. While past theorists of consumption focused on the consumption as a individuated, rational action, newer research has focused on the social, and meaning-making, contours of

consumption (H. S. Brown, 2014). Consumption is perhaps both the most mundane and profound act that structures our lives. It keeps our bodies going, it connects those bodies to landscapes near and far, it marks our bodies with identities and meanings. As Bryant and Goodman argue (2004) “landscapes and livelihoods are fashioned out of commercial practices” (p. 360) of both the alternative and conventional variety. As such, consumption is inherently political as a suite of practices that when aggregated profoundly shape our intersecting social, economic, and ecological worlds, and bring up a thicket of thorny ethical concerns.

Ethics around consumption, food consumption in particular, are not particularly new issues. There was a movement in the northern United States to only buy products that were not made with the enslaved labor of the south (Vitiello & Brinkley, 2013). A 17th century Englishman expressed a sensation of ethical concern when lamenting how he is able to pay for a pineapple when the man who grows it would not be able to afford it (Green, 2018). But it does seem that there has been a proliferation of talk and action around it over the last few decades.

The notion to “vote with your fork” has been a consistent refrain that explicitly makes eating political. “Voting” typically occurs via the selection (or the non-selection as well) of labels, such as “fair trade” or “organic”, from within a food space, such as the conventional grocery store or supermarket. The selection of the food space itself, e.g. a farmer’s market, the farm-to-fork restaurant, the food co-op, or Whole Foods Market. Voting, then, depends upon a kind of citizenry of eaters who

are well-informed, know what issues matter most to them, and plunge their fork, so to speak, accordingly.

Such an ethos gets criticized for setting up this dichotomy of the “good voters” and the “bad voters”. Or as Agyeman & Alkon put it: (2011) "By combining a prescient critique of industrial agriculture with a consumption-driven response, the food movement marks a particular set of foodways (organic, local, and slow foods) as right and proper, and condemns what Michael Pollan (2006) calls "industrial eaters" as less worthy others" (p. 12). Galt et al (2014) deride what they call “foodie logics” rooted in neoliberal ideology as the “oxymoronic solving of political and distributional problems through individual consumption patterns” (p. 141). Other critics complain that the emphasis on consumer choice crowds out thinking about and envisioning other, non-market-based solutions. Though, one person’s oxymoron is another’s paradox. Such critiques have a point though, it is also the case that consumption remains perhaps the most immediate part of our daily lives in which we can intervene as individuals (Adams, 2016).

Whatever effectiveness consumptive choices have in terms of enacting ethical stances is derived from the communicative element of the act (ibid). That despite the multiple, overlapping or divergent ethical stances available (what is more important- the livelihoods of farmers, the degradation of the environment?) and the multiple, overlapping or divergent motives driving the consumption (pursuit of pleasure, extension of care, concerns about personal health, perhaps unconscious

performance), the act still emits a signal towards solidarity, towards a taking on broadened “scope of responsibility” (C. Barnett, Cloke, Clarke, & Malpass, 2005, p. 30).

Michael Pollan puts it like this:

One of the key innovations of organic food was to allow some more information to pass along the food chain between the producer and the consumer—an implicit snatch of narrative along with the number. A certified organic label tells a little story about how a particular food was produced, giving the consumer a way to send a message back to the farmer that she values tomatoes produced without harmful pesticides or prefers to feed her children milk from cows that haven’t been injected with growth hormones (Pollan, 2006, p. 136).

So, even if we hold skepticism of the market’s ability to provide, we should recognize that what does get through the communication and infrastructural channels of capitalism perhaps should not be dismissed completely.

Understanding commodities is what is at the heart of understanding the complexities at the heart of consumer capitalism, and food commodities are no exception. The process of turning matter and experience into commodities is what Nigel Thrift (2008) calls “the beating heart of capitalism” (p. 29). Marx (1972) understood commodities as the functional unit by which capitalism can be understood. He called attention to a couple of things in relationship to commodities. One was the way in which a commodity’s value was derived not so much in how it could be utilized, but how it could be exchanged through a market. In a system in which everything is driven to be a commodity, that means basic necessities are obtained via exchange. Marx refers to commodities as “masses of congealed labour- time” (Marx, 1972, p. 307). The

process of production necessarily involves the extraction of labor, which is then abstracted, and the laborer is thereby alienated from the commodity, which is the foundation of what he calls “commodity fetishism”.

The term “commodity fetishism” still has tremendous resonance with scholars of many stripes, from commodity chain analysis to others. However, the focus has shifted somewhat from Marx’s focus on labor alienation to a focus on consumers. Jane Bennett, for example, defines commodity fetishism as the “idolatry of consumption goods” (Bennett, 2001, p. 113). Allan Pred (1998) characterizes commodity fetishism as a kind of collective amnesia. “Why is it,” he asks “generally unrecognized that every instance of localized everyday life, every moment of situated practice is a conjuncture of here and now humanly embodied nature and products whose ultimate natur(e)al resource origins are more or less geographically dispersed” (p. 153). Much of the work around the defetishizing of commodities is centered around an act of “unmasking” the commodity to show all the embedded relations within it. Most such approaches still retain the core idea that “there the things of *qua* commodities, and the value relation between the products of labor which stamps them as commodities have *absolutely no connexion* with their physical properties and the material relations arising therefrom (Marx, 1972, p. 321, emphasis author’s). Commodities take on a kind of mystical quality that provoke desire.

Another approach that has related to commodity and consumption research is looking not so much at commodities as hiding social relations, but rather examining

what they reveal. Rather than taking cues from Marx directly, they look to thinkers such as Walter Benjamin and his notion of the phantasmagoria (Benjamin, 1968; Buck-Morss, 1991) and Guy Debord's "Society of the Spectacle" (Debord, 1994).

These thinkers are more interested in the generative, depictive, representational, and revelatory quality of commodities. The key to this line of thinking is to think about commodities in terms of how they are assembled in space. Benjamin for example excavated the dominant collection of images, products and presentations of the 19th century such as world's fairs, department stores, rail stations, boulevards, and, especially, the arcades of Paris. He posited that the sum impact of the "commodities-on-display" was to convince the working classes of social progress and material abundance had been achieved without the need of a disruptive, violent revolution (Buck-Morss, 1991). Debord, for his part, refers to the 'spectacle' as

"*capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image" (Debord, 1994, #34).

Commodities in space, on display, in landscapes, function then to legitimate certain orders. They function, as Debord calls the spectacle, as indisputably positive:

"spectacle manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute. All it says is: 'everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear'"

(Debord, 1994, #12).

PART I: "WHOLE"

Coming into the Whole Foods Market, the first stimulation is visual: the stacks of produce in the front popping in colors, stacked into an order, with a slight disheveled look. Not the garden of Versailles straight, but not like in old pictures of the vegetable

markets. In fact, nearly everything we eat first passes through our other four sense channels. Not just beheld with our eyes, but usually read into existence as well (Hertweck, 2015). In some cases, it is the smell first that engages us, the way smell wafts and hits us pre-vision. Crucially, though, in Whole Foods, it is the eyes first. And it under the light that we see the differentiation of whole foods. For though it is recalling, or as Goss (1999) puts it, “quoting” the old partially covered market, Whole Foods is rather devoid of smells, offering up a sanitized version of a past.

Whole Foods Market has always touted itself as the alternative to the blanched-out, soulless, overly sanitized conventional supermarkets, and perhaps it starts with, not the produce and the other products lining the shelves, but the lighting. The lighting is just a bit toned down from the blanched-out overhead lighting found at Kroger’s or HEB. Not quite as dark and atmospheric as a dimly-lit study either, but just right amount to feel a kind of enveloping warmth from above. The walls, floors and columns, also instead of being off-white are an array of muted browns and yellows. The wooden crates stacked three feet high hearken back to old food markets, or perhaps the old food co-ops with their just arrived freshness popping out.

It is a kind of rustic sheen that characterizes the produce section. Just of a splash of old-timey nostalgia and inviting atmospherics, a warmth not found in other supermarkets. This is not a trivial matter, as the tongue is perhaps the last sense organ we use before we eat. The visual and other sense apparati well before we put anything in our mouths. John Mackey and the whole foods leadership knew this long ago. In their

newsletter announcing the opening of their second store, nearly one third of the text was taken up describing the atmosphere:

One of our goals in planning the second Whole Foods Market was to design a truly beautiful shopping environment. Over 400 square ft. of murals by Austin's own Doug Jaques will be featured as well as radiant stained-glass panels throughout the store. Full spectrum Vita Lights (same as Whole Foods I), handsome wood detailing and lots of healthy plants will accent the overall atmosphere. ("We're Expecting," 1982)

While the original supermarkets from Piggly Wiggly till today's corporate giants were trying to figure out the best way to get customers to move both efficiently through the aisles, but also into a maze of unexpected finds and impulse buys (Patel, 2007),

Whole Foods has tried to instill different tempos in its shoppers.

In the space of the walls and columns are opportunities to tell stories, assuage anxieties and whisper to the customer. Above the greens and root vegetables that are on the shelves above the wall is the message that reads "supporting environmentally responsible producers, ensuring fair wages and empowering workers around the globe" adorned with the stamp of the "whole trade guarantee". The *Whole Planet Foundation* sign adjacent to it touts the microcredit programs it funds for small farmers around the world. There is an implicit "you" in the phraseology, as in "you are supporting" you are "ensuring" and "empowering". This is because the consumer at Whole Foods is made into the center of the store's operation. That is entrepreneurship 101, to be sure, but the Whole Foods takes it to a different level.



Figure 8: Messaging of ethical consumption on the wall.

It is only in the produce section, crucially, that there are photographic representations of farmers extraneous to any labels. There are large photos of farmers extended above the aisle of tofu and juices. There are four panels of local farmers: South Texas Organics in Mission, Texas, Johnson's Backyard Gardens in Austin, and Nortex Nursery from Wylie, Texas, and Gundermann Acres from Wharton, Texas. In their photos, these farmers are all in a state of repose: smiling with their fields stretched out behind them, posing on the tractor, or holding up a tray of herbs from their greenhouse.

There is only one photo of a non-Texas producer, and that is the banana grower, Hernan, from Ecuador. In his photo, he is in the act of labor. Though the photo is taken as a close up, and the sack of bananas is largely cut out of the photo, one

can tell from the way his head is tilted that his back and shoulders are under strain. While the local farmers just have the name of the farm and the word “LOCAL” foregrounded, there is a lot more text and symbology accompanying the photo of Hernan. THANK YOU it says in in all caps, continuing: “your purchase of Whole Trade® bananas are helping Hernan and 146 other small banana farmers to repair the roads to they use to bring their produce to market” (see figure). At the bottom of the image, there are four snippets as well. By supporting this product, you are supporting better wages and working conditions, promoting environmental responsibility and community development. Also, by 1% of the purchase going to the Whole Planet Foundation, the benefits extend beyond just you the consumer, and Hernan and his compatriots, the producers, but potentially to an investment fund that would fund microfinancing of different projects around the world.



Figure 9: Images of distant and local producers, conveying distinct and somewhat

contradictory appeals to goodness.

It is worth commenting on the strange specificity of the information presented here.

You are helping exactly 147 farmers fix their roads through your purchase. The fact that they need helping fix their roads speaks to an anti-state bias. Now, it is not for me to determine whether or not Hernan is getting a fair deal here, if this text is accurate, or anything like this. My guess would be that Hernan is better off than he would be on a banana plantation run by United Fruit. But the stark difference between how Hernan and Johnson's Backyard Garden is represented is worth interrogating. Why does the purchaser need to be thanked for buying Hernan's bananas while the support of "Local" (which Whole Foods as typically defined as anywhere in the state) does not? Is it a question of geography? The difference perhaps comes from power differentials. The whole foods consumer and the south Texas farmer could look each other in the eye, figuratively speaking. The level of articulated benevolence belies a more unequal power relationship. Buying local is a way of 'making yourself whole', but the reciprocity of the relationship does not need to be emphasized. Hernan, on the other hand, needs to be named to forge a closer tie, bridging the geographic and socio-economic distance; he really needs the favor.

The store fits messaging into many of the spare spots it can. Peppered around the columns, have popped up the #makesmewhole campaign. Advertisements for certain food products that aim at getting the consumer to think of themselves as unfinished, and in need of being made whole. The hashtag, #makesmewhole, is interesting for two reasons. One is the centrality of the self, of the "me" in relation to whole. I have seen

this campaign centered on chocolate, ham, wine, blueberries, guacamole, artichokes, and halibut (see figures below). The more you go through the store and examine how products are communicated is the pitch to the individual.

Either in terms of their pleasure or health, or as is often the case, both. While that is not only message typically, it is the most present. It seems that these products have in common in their invocation of taste, pleasure, and health is that there are mostly non-staple items.



Figure 10: Images posted in Whole Foods as part of the #makesmewhole campaign

At Whole Foods, then, while it can be said that there are a whole swirl of discourses and implied geographies from seeking pleasure to supporting causes of better livelihoods and landscapes, the first principle, the alpha and omega of whole foods is on the customer-as-self. While there are myriad ways in which products will connect to this

cause or that, they will almost invariably ping back to personal health and personal pleasure. This is what Mackey himself refers to as “enlightened self- interest” and it is weaved into the connections of his business model, his spiritual leanings, and his libertarian-inflected world view. The Whole Foods that currently stands is often compared to the earliest days of the store and is often dubbed as a kind of “selling out” (Foster, 2017; Serazio, 2006), but in many ways the store has been remarkably consistent in its messaging and mission that is focused primarily on the customer.

EARLY DAYS—1970S AND 80S IN AUSTIN

Much of what is considered part of dominant Austin culture is rooted in the local developments that took place (Barnes, 2016). Many cultural institutions that are still present today got started then, and many that did not survive to the present still are potent reference points (like Armadillo’s World Headquarters). Things were always arriving a bit late in Austin, and this applied to the counterculture as well. For instance, the first protest against the Vietnam War was not held until 1970. But once it took root in Austin, it had such a profound impact on the city and its culture that though much of that revolutionary energy has dissipated by now, its legacy has cemented in place a liberal identity that remains today. 1970s Austin was on the cusp of a handful of movements. The postwar plan of diversifying the economy beyond the university and capital by attracting tech industry was paying off with the attraction of new tech-based industries like IBM, Motorola Tracor, and Texas Instruments. The political landscape altered with the with city council election of Jeff Friedman, a long- haired anti-Vietnam

lawyer-activist, as well as the first Black and Latino CMs, Berl Handcox (an IBM exec) and John Treviño, respectively. For the latter two, this was the beginning of the “gentleman’s agreement” in which one CM spot each would be reserved for the Black and Latino communities. The music scene that Austin became famous for blossomed in the 1970s with legendary venue armadillo headquarters and establishment of Willie Nelson and Jerry Jeff Walker. While the city had been growing at a steady pace for close a century, it was not until the 1970s that the growth started being felt, with the arrival of the baby boom generation. However, this was also the city that just a couple of years earlier, in 1968, voted against the Fair Housing Ordinance and voted out Harry Akin, the beloved restaurateur-cum-civil rights activist for his crusade to get it passed. But it was in the 1970s that “hippies took over the Austin City Council, music sprang up on every street corner, nightlife extended well into the morning, the counterculture spawned its own version of a start-up revolution, and people of color finally secured a grasp on the levers of power” (Barnes, 2016).

Much of that energy got channeled into burgeoning co-operative movement. Seen as ways as both working within, but also undermining and eventually transform the system, co-operatives were entities in which the “owners” of the enterprise, whether it be housing, production, or service provision were some combination of the workers and consumers. Unlike private companies in which authority is wielded by the CEO, or publicly traded companies in which most power is derived from the number of shares one holds in the company, co-operatives were either worker- owned, in which workers made decisions on pay, time-off, who and how management was allocated,

etc., or consumer co-ops in which a “one-member, one vote” system way in which similar decisions were made. It was seen as a more democratic, though, often inefficient means of service provision. They were seen as every day, more mundane ways of engaging with what saw as an oppressive economic system.

Food co-operatives in particular were quite prevalent in this time (Belasco, 1989). “Freaks” wanting to wholesale reject “pig” mainstream society of militarization, standardization, and conformity, would turn to food as “medium” to confront the divisive socio-political issues of the day. Eating Brown rice, baking your own whole wheat bread, buying the gnarled tomatoes at the local grocer were acts both political and personal that stood in opposition to the mainstream. Food co-ops, or what Belasco (1989) calls the “neighborhood outposts of the countercuisine (p. 87), became key spaces for acting out one’s political principles.

Austin in this time period saw its fair share of food co-ops. One of which, Wheatsville, opened in 1976 and is still open today. Many others fizzled out quickly. The first documented one was in 1974. An all-volunteer affair run out of a garage and payment was made on an honor system with a box by the door (J. Jones, 2013). It was called Milo Minderbender, a name in step with the times. But this was just a first step, though, as many people committed to making a co-operative economy function in Austin. The newsletter *First Flower* documents the flourishings and frustrations of the times. For example, an organization called the Mutual Community Development sought to work on a neighborhood scale to make much of the food and other service

provision, as well as housing, co-operatively owned and run (Shepard, 1978). At one point in time, there were many co-ops for car service, childcare, food, housing.

It is worth explicating this part of Austin's history because it is in this milieu that John Mackey formulated many of his notions around food, health, and community. He lived in a vegetarian housing co-op called Asana. In his book *Conscious Capitalism* (co-authored with Raj Sisodia), Mackey recounts his early days in Austin as a kind of wandering free spirit: growing out his hair, living in a vegetarian commune, working at various food co-ops and attending whatever classes interested him. He aligned with not just the lifestyle values of self-expression, of avoiding the bureaucratic, corporatist system, he aligned with the political-economic critiques of the broadly defined Left: corporations and businesses, because they sought solely to maximize profit, were agents of iniquity and destruction against the public interest. "For several years, I believed the co-op movement was the best way to reform capitalism because it was based on cooperation instead of competition" (p. 5). A store owned by the customers would be more socially just and keep prices lower.

The story of Whole Foods has been relayed as marked by several episodes of selling out (Serazio, 2006; Foster, 2017). What started as a small health foods store giving in to consumerist greed and peddling of unhealthy products. Mackey certainly does not see it this way. To him, a business that is based on ideals so pure that it cannot do business will not accomplish anything; as he put it in a recent interview, "I'm just... an Austin, Texas guy who built a business" (Foster, 2017). Indeed, the

“Whole Foods sells out” does deserve some more nuance, but not just because of Mackey’s protestations about not being driven by greed, but a higher purpose. If you look closer at the core ideals of the very first Safer Way store, you can see the same through line around personal health and self-fashioning as being the core to the operation. This is the center of the lotus, so to speak, of Mackey’s vision, and anything else needs to be in service to that part of the vision, or it gets renegotiated or left off the agenda all together. In a recent article, John Mackey recalled the early days of SaferWay/Whole Foods (Foster, 2017). SaferWay was a hardcore health store: “It was vegetarian. We didn’t sell sugar. We didn’t sell meat. We didn’t sell alcohol. And we didn’t do any business either. We were averaging about \$10,000 a week in sales, and I began to realize that we needed a bigger store, and we needed to make our product mix a little bit less narrow”. He described this moment as a kind of epiphany, that is his ideals needed to fit into the framework of a market or whatever idealism his vision was infused with would die anyway.

There was an early ad in *First Flower* for Safer Way for classes relating to “optimal health”- including nutrition, fasting, spiritual healing and psychic adventures, as well as running, herbs, natural foods, and the emotions (Shepard, 1978). In their outline of their company philosophy, Mackey and his then- girlfriend/business partner lay out their principles. The first is to make money honestly and without compromising their other goals. The second is to “promote the health and well-being of our customers through the products we sell and the environment we create”. They also sought to

make the store a kind of community center with health-related classes. In terms of labor, they sought to discourage “repetitious work” and promote creativity, as well as pay decent wages and provide profit sharing”¹¹. The document goes on to describe why they do not sell meat (because they cannot find a source for low-fat, organic meat) and how their main concern is providing customers with both the knowledge of how to make healthy food choices and provision what they need in order to do so. They criticize supermarkets and restaurants for not making the nutritive value of food part of their economic calculus: “their working philosophy is to sell whatever people want to buy... it is neither necessary or desirable to take a moral stand on what one sells”. Mackey and Lawson state, they unequivocally reject that philosophy. Summing up, they say, “in short, we really are concerned with providing you healthy, nutritious food” (ibid, emphasis in original).

These early documents show many of the same concerns reflected today in the company literature. And while the identification of many goals and stakeholders persists, it seems the central core value is around nutrition and taste. So, when Mackey closed down Safer Way after two years, and combined with Clarkesville Natural Grocer, another local natural foods store, to form Whole Foods Market, he

¹¹ AF File- SaferWay, Austin History Center.

did so with the intention of continuing to provide health food, but in order to do so, was going to need to create or find the market for it.

In this focus on individual health, Mackey reveals his influence from Milton Friedman, who he had also begun reading during that time. In short, Mackey took on the some of the spiritual experimentations and lifestyles but ended up largely rejecting the more radical political elements of the time period.

PART II: FOOD

Whole Foods is predicated on providing choice but also on the idea that one cannot make a bad choice there. As one former employee wrote in an essay examining the logics of the store: “Whole Foods is anti-exploitation; our suppliers are without sin, and by the transitive property of moral mathematics, so are our customers” (Wurgaft, 2002, p. 87). It is an emporium for all the dietary fads and trends of the past 30 years. If you want paleo-friendly food, the signs will light the way for you. If you want gluten free, the products will announcement loudly. In the original lay out of the store, there was a whole section dedicated to raw foods, but that was gone by 2018. In the 1990s, the store would tout its selection of low and non-fat items. But each item in the store gets “sold with a story” (Freidberg, 2003).

Take for example, the Lotus Rice brand. On the shelves are a few different varieties. There is Jade Pearl Rice, which is infused with bamboo to give it a greenish tint. There it the Imperial Black Rice, with a black dragon rice, and there is the

Jasmine Brown Rice with a woman from Cambodia in the process of scattering seed in the rice paddies. Put together, the products next to each other function to both offer choice and put to bed any anxieties about quality or ethics. Do you respond more positively to the woman working in the fields and the simplicity of brown rice? Do you respond to the exoticized mysticism of the porcelain Buddha statue in the bamboo forest or the black dragon set atop a mountain? For that is what first will grab your eye. And then the top of the package has a slogan: “Healthier Rice for a Healthier Life” or “Wholesome Rice for a Better Life”. Each calls to you to think about your own body, your own nutrition. If it catches your eye well enough and you pick it up, you might read the back and see how this good choice you are making for yourself fits into a virtuous chain from the field to your stomach.

On the back, it is detailed how the rice is good for you. The germ and bran layer is left intact, which provides both more fiber and a richer flavor. It cooks fast and easy too- so fast that you won’t believe you’re eating a whole grain. The rice is better for people too because the company works only with small organic family farmers in co-operatives. By being Fair Trade and Organic, the farmers’ income is higher. The produce is better for the planet too because rather than flooding rice paddies, which uses quite a bit of water, they have developed a “System of Rice Intensification” that uses half the amount of water and one-tenth the amount of seed, which makes women’s labor less burdensome.

The marketing of the rice package makes several appeals simultaneously, but it pares down the complications and anxieties while also appealing to an expanded moral imagination. Providing some fairly dense information on the package, making appeals to pleasure and the senses, prompting some sense of attachment to a simplified, distant landscape, assuaging any concerns of difficulty cooking. Topping it off, is a sense of global citizenship.

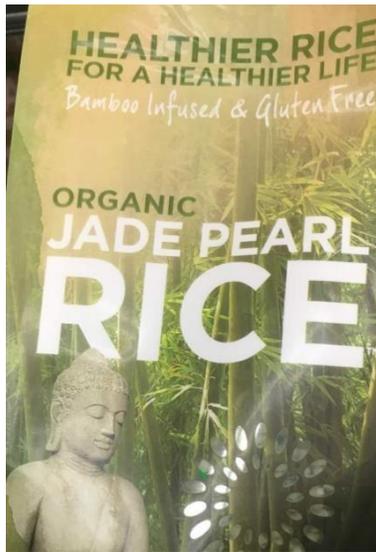


Figure 11: Ethical and spiritually-infused rice

The meat section is rather different in relation to the produce or the packaged foods like rice. Their resulting 5-part rating system hangs above the meat display. The minimum, first step is no cages or crowding. The second is an “enriched environment”, the third is “enhanced outdoor access” and the fourth is “pasture

centered”. The fifth and “fifth plus”, respectively, are “animal centered, no physical alterations” and “animal centered, entire life spent on farm”. The first step and the fifth+ step are relatively self-explanatory, but the others are a bit vague. There is a bit more information on their website, but nothing that really explains the differences in the stepwise rating system. A consumer could always ask what the distinctions are, but that may not be so helpful. On the same webpage touting their system is a brief, fifteen second video in which a customer, wearing a business suit, asks the employee “what’s the deal with this rating system?” The employee responds: “Let me put it to you this way.” He makes one hand into a fist and says “step 1 is *kaboosh*...” and releases his fist to signify mind blowing. He then makes a fist with both hands and says “step 5 is *KABOOSH*...” releasing both fists simultaneously. Apparently satisfied with that explanation, the customer barely hesitates and, says “Alright, let me get a pound of the filet mignon”.¹²

Perhaps this brief commercial was an attempt at levity, but the whimsical nature of it is puzzling given both the serious nature of animal ethics generally and seriousness with which WFM takes its standards. It is, however, a return to the idea that there are no bad choices in Whole Foods. “There is a trust halo” as one retail expert puts it, “Consumers are going in a shopping for these items because they do trust them”

¹² wholefoodsmarket.com/5step

(Shanker & Mosendz, 2017). In order to really know what each step entails, you have to go to the third party system that is actually doing the leg work. This too, is a bit complicated as the specifics of what constitutes “enriched environment” varies from animal to animal. For example, Step 2 for chickens for instance, denotes that there is an enriched environment, which requires some space for exercise or foraging. But there is no requirement to be outside, that’s what gets you to step 3. For cows though, a step 2 rating does mean they are outside.

CONSUMPTION/EXPANSION

In March of 2005, marking the 25th anniversary of the company under the guise of Whole Foods Market, Whole Foods had a ribbon cutting ceremony for their new flagship store in downtown Austin. Measuring at 80,000 square feet for the store and 125,000 square feet for the new corporate headquarters, with 25,000 square foot park and playscape on the roof, the facility took up a whole block, and fittingly dubbed the party a “Whole Block Party”. It was all in honor of the “temple to natural foods” (Chisholm, 2005). Mackey himself proclaimed it be the finest supermarket in the world, his “love message to Austin, Texas” (“Whole Foods Goes Whole Hog with Landmark Austin Store,” 2005). It had five different restaurants in house- a seafood restaurant, sushi bar, a barbeque joint, a salad and raw foods bar, and a trattoria.

The news of the giant store made it into papers across the country. The *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, for example, ran a feature on it. Here’s the opening line: “It has

the complexity of an exotic marketplace, is almost as big as a Wal-Mart and serves up as much fun as Kennywood Park” (a local amusement park) (Parrish, 2005). The descriptions of the cornucopia were effusive: There were 18 wheels of cheese, vats of chili, pastries, a nut butter machine that let you pick your own seasonings, there are hundreds of beers and wines to choose from.

Local food writers, while exhibiting enthusiasm, also developed some pointed critiques of the place: The wine selection did not offer much from Texas (Marshall, 2005), the fattiest beef they carry was still at 85% lean, thereby leaving out the famed “Wagyu” beef (Vann, 2005). Most disappointing, the world food section was not up to snuff, as it lacked variety in coconut milk, curry paste, and a host of other semi-common international items (Vann, 2005). The author speculated that this was likely due to the space taken up by more profitable items, such as their lucrative body product section and extensive take out options.

The celebration was essentially a dual celebration of the success of the company and the economic success of the city. City hall members were in attendance and arrived late to the day’s council meeting with stuffed bellies and feelings of satisfaction. Mayor Will Wynn apologized for the late start of the city council meeting because he and other members were at the ribbon cutting (City of Austin, 2005) touting the place as a “homegrown Austin fortune 500 company (ibid). The fact that Whole Foods started in Austin, is often a point of pride. At the city hall’s commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Austin Organic Growers Association,

both the mayor and a few other speaks referenced the fact that Whole Foods started here was indicative of the city's commitment to alternative agriculture.

From its beginning Whole Foods had an evolving relationship with downtown. The original Safer Way (1978) which was just a few blocks from downtown and the first Whole Foods (1980) was a few blocks further west on Lamar Boulevard. Following going public in 1992, they moved their corporate headquarters and flagship store to the western edge of downtown in 1995. Mirroring the late 1990s rapid growth of the city, Whole Foods exploded itself. It increased from 40 stores in 1995 to 143 by 2003, buying out a handful of other natural foods stores, open up celebrated locations in New York City and expanding into Canada (Breyer, 2003). The city of Austin too was being touted as an economic powerhouse, being named among the top places in the U.S. to do business by *Fortune* in consecutive years in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The company had radically outgrown its headquarters and was looking to expand. The lot next to them, on the corner of sixth and Lamar had been sitting vacant for much of the decade. It was owned by Schlosser Development Corporation, which had been working on a deal with the bookstore chain Borders to develop the block. These efforts found itself in the crosshairs of the “Keep Austin Weird” movement (Long, 2010). This block in particular was surrounded by a handful of well-established, iconic businesses, namely BookPeople and Waterloo Records. When the city offered Borders about two million dollars in subsidies to

develop the project, the two local store owners turned to their customer base to contact city officials to oppose the deal. Borders backed out of the project in April of 2003 and Whole Foods stepped into its place, with an agreement that did not include public subsidies (Breyer, 2003).

While the fact that Whole Foods did not cut a deal with city subsidies certainly made it more palatable, the role of Whole Foods as an original Austin business certainly helped as well. Mackey was quoted as saying “we’re an original weird business” in response to any misgivings some may have had about what was then a large, publicly traded corporation (Long, 2010). In fact, city officials and downtown boosters were effusive and giddy at the fact. CM Betty Dunkersley said “It’s a homegrown company. They’re exporting a little bit of Austin to a lot of different places...Having them stay here is so important, both symbolically and because of the real impact they’re going to have here” (Breyer, 2003). The then-directory of the Downtown Austin Alliance, a coalition of downtown property owners, stated “Whole Foods is so important to Austin...Having their world headquarters in downtown Austin is a big deal. Having their flagship grocery store downtown certainly makes residential development even more attractive” (ibid).

These statements highlight a few themes to the importance of whole foods to the cultural and economic geography of the city. One being the idea that Whole Foods is an “Austin export”, perhaps circulating as a sign of Austin’s progressive, environmental and entrepreneurial values. The second being the role Whole Foods

plays in the development of downtown capital accumulation based in leisure and consumption and couched in terms of ethical consumption. I do not mean to suggest that Whole Foods is single-handedly responsible for Austin's economic rise to prominence or the densification of downtown Austin. Some semblance of those phenomena would still exist without Whole Foods, but they would be missing a bit of their gloss. For it is remarkable how perfect a business like Whole Foods was, and is, to both the transformation of downtown and the imaginaries of Austin projected out into the world. With elements such as the bootstrapping narrative, countercultural ideals, New Age spirituality, environmental ethos, and entrepreneurial spirit, Whole Foods can serve as a key referent point to the various ways in which Austin sells and imagines itself. Ethical consumption takes on new interscalar meanings, as the consumption that takes place within whole foods can bring. The consumption that takes place within the store is doubled by the fact that the consumption is taking place downtown in a dense(ϕ) urban environment that is thereby reducing suburban sprawl.

In 1998, the Sierra Club had Austin ranked second among mid-sized metropolitan areas (between half and one million people), which was seen as a potential threat to the region's economic development (Florida, 2005). The year prior, city officials instituted the "smart growth initiative" designed to bring more development into downtown and the eastside of Austin. This is in the same context as the with the Save Our Springs initiative that protected Barton Springs and the Edwards Plateau

watershed that covered much of west Austin and its western suburbs (Swearingen, 2010). The push to develop downtown was seen as a compromise, or *détente*, between the “environmentalists” and “developers”. Development was to be restricted in the environmentally-sensitive areas to the west, thereby limiting sprawl, and protecting the watershed and endangered species such as the Barton salamander. As a trade-off, downtown and the other less sensitive areas would be subject to greater in-fill development as a means of handling the city’s growth and limiting urban sprawl (Tretter, 2013a). The resulting consumption and lifestyle-led growth perhaps couldn’t find a better fit than that of the Whole Foods. City employee Sue Edwards predicted substantial growth in the retail sector in connection with the opening of the new store (City of Austin, 2004).

PART III: MARKET

The word ‘market’ is often dropped colloquially when speaking about whole foods. But the word is equally important to the other two in deriving the ethos of Whole Foods Market. In early 1990s, WFM published a newsletter called *The Whole Story: A marketplace of ideas*. Issues were typically filled with three things: an article that discusses the health consequences of particular food items, a recipe section, and an op-ed penned by John Mackey himself, titled “The Accidental Grocer”. Combined they bring together the elements of knowledge, responsibility, ethics, and anxiety together and perpetuate the discursive frame under which Whole Foods operates. Mackey used the editorial to speak more in-depth to the issues and philosophies driving the company.

Peppered liberally with quotes from Adam Smith and Milton Friedman, the consistent refrain in these early pieces is that capitalism is an advanced form of democracy because you vote with your wallets, that it is a system of mutual, un-coerced exchange, of reciprocal altruism.

Perhaps the most revelatory writing is in response to a letter he received, and posted in full (Mackey, 1990). The letter writer, who identified herself as an African-American woman, had taken umbrage with Mackey for his full-throated defense of free market capitalism, arguing that it was predicated on the exploitation of the labor and resources of poorer countries and party to the enslavement of Africans and the genocide of indigenous peoples. Curiously, she ends the letter clarifying that she would not stop shopping at Whole Foods but would prefer it if Mackey would get off his soapbox and just sell groceries, so to speak (Mackey, 1990).

For Mackey, though, profits are not derived from exploitation, but rooted in voluntary exchange. He closes the letter with this statement:

I believe that the world is evolving towards universal peace, unity and prosperity. Free market capitalism and environmental consciousness are the twin beacons of hope in the world today for helping move toward this reality. I created Whole Foods Market to help feed the world nutritious food and to help manifest joy and love wherever our stores exist. Rather than perpetuating the limitations of env and resentment, I see visions of what could be. I choose to create them and to share my visions with others. This is the delight of my heart; it is the purpose of my life (Mackey, 1990).

In April of 2017, the famously mellow John Mackey was stressed out. He had arrived in New York for a book tour for his new diet book, *The Whole Foods Diet*, when a

New York based hedge fund, Jana Partners, announced it had bought nine percent of the company's shares and was going to pressure the company to make changes (Foster, 2017). Rumors began swirling. Grocery chains like Albertsons or Kroger were going to take like what?). Mackey was aggressive in the media, referring to the hedge fund managers as "Ringwraiths," stating, "these people, they just want to sell Whole Foods Market and make hundreds of millions of dollars, and they have to know that I'm going to resist that... That's my baby. I'm going to protect my kid, and they've got to knock Daddy out if they want to take it over" (Foster, 2017).

Whole Foods had been showing cracks in its armor for a while. In February of 2016, they reported their sixth consecutive quarter of losses in terms of same-store sales. Nine stores were announced to be closing shortly, putting plans to expand on ice (Dewey, 2017). From a peak of just over \$65 share in 2013, WFM's stock price had fallen to around \$30 within two years, where it has hovered since. Some shareholders voiced solidarity with the Jana threatened takeover, with one quoted in the *Texas Monthly* piece as "they are hemorrhaging customers" (Foster, 2017). Scandals such as the 2015 infamous 6 dollar "asparagus water"—3 stalks of asparagus in bottled water (more than a whole bunch)—caused equal parts derision and outrage. A New York city investigation revealed gross miscalculations in terms of weight in various Whole Foods locations across the city. Together they pointed to a company that was perhaps losing a step, perhaps less confident.

To a great extent, the larger food retail world had caught up to them. After decades of being the shark swallowing the smaller natural food stores, whole foods

suddenly found itself facing competition from the true behemoths of the food retail world. Wal-Mart had started its organic sales in 2006, with Kroger and Costco following suit. By 2016, both Kroger and Costco were outpacing Whole Foods in terms of organic sales, and for the first time the conventional food retail giants sold more organic produce than Whole Foods and other natural grocers (Foster, 2017). They were also getting outflanked by outlets like Trader Joe's as well, which through its smaller store layouts, unique packaging and buying schemes, have been able to find a niche for themselves as well.

Amidst all this pressure, instead of the hedge fund Jana forcing changes, the biggest fish of all, Amazon, swooped in and bought the company in June of 2017 for just under 14 billion dollars (Thompson, 2017). It sent shock waves through the retail industry. The headline at Business Insider proclaimed “Amazon is acquiring Whole Foods—and Wal-Mart, Target, and Kroger should be terrified”. The motives for the acquisition were not entirely clear to many observers. Why would Amazon, an online company that made its name driving the brick and mortar retail out of business? The *Wall Street Journal* posited that it was they were looking for new ways of collecting consumer data by using store environments (Stevens & Haddon, 2017). Derek Thompson from *The Atlantic* offered that Amazon was interested in the prime urban real estate and the customer base, quoting “Amazon did not just buy Whole Foods grocery stores. It bought 431 upper-income, prime-location distribution nodes for everything it does” (Thompson, 2017). Perhaps more troubling (or terrific, depending on

one's perspective, or mood) is that which Thompson calls Amazon's "life bundle". There were jokes that between Amazon Prime and Whole Foods, Jeff Bezos would start raking in half of millennials discretionary income. Amazon was seeking to provide all services, necessities, and entertainment, and to give consumers the option of receiving them without needing to leave home.

Amazon's takeover, while undoubtedly part of a national conversation, it took on a local flavor in Austin. The local weekly, *Austin Chronicle*, detailed how local producers were now being squeezed out of the supply chain. The wholesale manager for a local farm described the exactitude and efficiency of the Amazon model, he was quoted as saying, "they're demanding produce with no blemishes, no discoloration- almost extra perfect produce" (Devenyns, 2017, p. 44). Also, their standards of exactitude were so demanding that if the weight of their products sent their distribution center is off by a pound from their contract, the shipment gets sent back (Devenyns, 2017). In sum, for Austin area producers, they were feeling a squeeze that was going to adversely affect their ability to stay in business.

Austin too is under the threat/opportunity of being (over)taken by Amazon as it is on the shortlist of cities for the company's proposed expansion (King, 2017)(Pope, 2018). If Amazon were to pick Austin (which as of writing is given odds between 3rd to 5th best, but is not the frontrunner), it would be a repeat of the same issues of the corporatization and commercialization of the city.

CONCLUSION

Whole Foods Market presents itself as a mission-driven company, identifying stakeholders more broadly than is typical of large corporations (Cheretis & Mujtaba, 2014). But the starting point has always been the customers. The company's approach has shifted somewhat from its days as part of the "countercuisine" milieu of 1970s Austin in which John Mackey and his comrades had very firm ideas about what healthy eating was about. Today's Whole Foods has become much more of an emporium for a variety of ethical and dietary ideas and discourses creating both a knowledge regime and sensual atmosphere to help navigate the anxieties and aspirations of grocery shopping. The presentation of the food products, the various sources of information of farms, landscapes, and labor combine to create an atmosphere in which the central ethical decision is made by coming to Whole Foods. Doing so makes all other decisions within the store into different flavors of "goodness"; pressure is taken off the consumer to make decisions but one can still feel that one's consumption is ethically improved. They can either seek out their own particular ethical axis, whether it be around issues of environmental sustainability, labor rights, fair trade, organic production, or animal rights, or personal nutrition choices such as gluten free, high-fiber, high-protein, low-fat, low trans-fat, vegetarian, vegan, probiotic, paleo-friendly, or keto. One is assured that whatever you buy at Whole Foods is the right choice. However, by paying close attention to its representations, one can begin to see the tensions that lie between the variety of different goals, and *Wholes*.

Chapter Seven: Final Thoughts

This dissertation revolves around five different narratives of different foodspaces in Austin at different points of time. It is rooted in the premise that through narrating the trajectories and interactions of different foodspaces our understanding of place and food can both be improved. Literary theorist Jonathan Culler argues that across human societies there is a deep-seeded need for narrative (Culler, 1997). Narratives are crucial ways in which people move towards understanding the world in which they live. The explanations and lessons are built into the narrative. But, at the same time, all story tellers have to ward off the “so what?” question. What do stories do exactly?

Culler warns that narratives can operate as clarifying or deluding mechanisms, or often a bit of each. The simplification and selection needed to construct any given narrative both distorts and gives insight. One way of understanding discourse is ideology as a kind of collective narrative, often imposed both consciously and unconsciously by elites. For example, there are a couple of dominant narratives about Austin that have been told through time and that weave throughout this dissertation. The first half of the twentieth century a narrative of progress and modernity was often dominant. The consortium of business leaders, Chamber of Commerce, civic leaders, as well as the dominant news outlet, the *Austin Statesman* made the project of the city to be more modern, more in line with the Progressive Era values and governance of the day. This took the shape of needing to control the flow of the

Colorado River, which were meant to irrigate farms and needing to change the system of government to finance public infrastructure projects, which included the Austin Municipal Abattoir. Such things needed to be enacted through politics but was undergirded by the ideology of progress. Similarly, there are some narratives within contemporary Austin regarding its status as a rising powerhouse of a city. A city that has a model of development that manages livability, environmental preservation, and economic growth in a creative and ecologically minded city (Long, 2014). While scholars and activists push against such narratives (cf. Busch, 2017; Jones, 2016; Tretter, 2016), there is still a great deal of investment in them by members of the business community, as well as spokespeople for various levels of government, and various contributors to local arts and news media. Something I hope this dissertation has accomplished is to show how as narratives of different food spaces get constructed they weave in and out of larger narratives of the place. This is true in ways that both uphold and trouble dominant narratives.

Some foodspaces in Austin achieved an emblematic status. That is to say, they became a kind of badge signifying the meaning and value of the city. Urban farms were framed as what made Austin special and unique. They fit with a dominant ethos of Austin's cultural geography, symbolic of the city's environmentalist credentials. Certain restaurants such as Les Amis and Las Manitas also got represented as being a kind of concentrated embodiment of the city's spirit; with Las Manitas dubbed as the site of the city's very soul by its defenders. Whole Foods Market too is perhaps the most iconic food-related enterprise in Austin, its biography uncannily mirroring the city's

biography in many ways. Naya Jones (2016) speaks to the pervasiveness of Whole Foods' brand which extends in East Austin in ways that play into how different parts of the city get branded. Whole Foods' signification of wealth and health contrasts with the historical signification of East Austin as a disinvested sacrifice zone, a place for making food but also a place replete with unhealthy environments and people (Herrick, 2008). Indeed, the story of Austin's abattoir makes an apt comparison and contrast with that of Whole Foods. For one, it is an example of a crucial piece of infrastructure for a local food system, but one that did not gain any kind of emblematic status. Though it was spoken of loudly during the decades leading up to its funding and eventual construction, once in operation, it became silent in the way infrastructure often does (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Thrift, 1996).

Many of the places that were written about in this dissertation are no longer present in any material form. The site of the abattoir is now the CapMetro headquarters (the city's public transit agency). There is little trace of the spinach fields as much of the waterfront has been developed or preserved as parkland. The building that once housed the original Nighthawk Diner is now an anonymous building with a handful of banks as tenants. Infamously, Les Amis is now a Starbucks and Las Manitas' ruins sit under the massive Marriot Hotel.

These figurative ruins speak to the ultimate instability of foodspaces and the places in which they are embedded. There are always forces of deterritorialization at work; processes operating beyond the extent of the field, restaurant, and grocery store. Spinach growers ultimately succumbed to economic conditions that rendered the

venture non-viable. The abattoir that provided a useful service for several decades also became obsolete rather quickly. Though their circumstances differ, the restaurants fit into a narrative of a changing city as they each bowed to development pressure.

This interscalar interplay demonstrated through the different elements of food space bring up political and ethical questions as well. Over the last couple of decades, as concerns over the food system operating at a global scale have proliferated, a re-assertion of the local scale as a source of solutions has come to the fore (Feagan, 2007; Winter, 2003). Food systems have become a new target for intervention among urban and regional planning (Pothukuchi, 2009; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000). Raja et al. (2008) have argued for a “community food system” that has four elements: It is 1) place-based and promotes local and regional networks, 2) it is rooted in using environmentally sustainable methods of production and distribution 3) it is oriented towards social justice; paying particular attention to marginalized groups such as immigrant labor, small farmers, and the urban poor, and 4) it promotes food security through providing affordable, healthful, culturally appropriate food at all times. Born and Purcell (2006) however, warn against the “local trap”, which is to say, to presume an inherent virtue in a food system that operates at the local scale. Specifically, desired outcomes of food quality, economic justice and sustainability, are necessarily found within the local scale. For them, a labelling system is no less trustworthy than the face to face encounters of the farmers market, for instance. Similar to the arguments of Massey, they propose weaving together network theory and scale theory so an understanding of

interscalar processes can be leveraged for the outcome of better food systems. There are, I believe, some lessons that could be drawn in similar terms as well from the cases discussed in this dissertation.

Each story touched on questions of local governance in relationship to foodspace in various ways. The most obvious of which was the establishment, maintenance, and eventual closure of the abattoir. The abattoir was built in response to a fairly well-defined public problem in regard to needing a sanitary meat supply. The problem existed at two scales, one was that the local supply of meat was unsanitary, and there was insufficient infrastructure to deal with the problem: slaughterhouses had limited access to the municipal water supply, for instance. Also, the meat circulating at a national scale, through the Big Four of Chicago meatpackers was deleterious for local producers who had limited options as to where to market their livestock. A publicly owned abattoir in which the service provision functioned as a public utility was a locally-scaled solution to the problem that necessitated a reorganization of the city government in order to come to fruition.

The local government got involved in unexpected ways when it came to Austin's restaurants as well. Not only in Harry Akin's rise from restaurateur to mayor, but in the Las Manitas case as well. When the establishment was threatened with closure, the local government stepped in and designed a loan fund meant to preserve local 'iconic' businesses. Many saw it as a transparent attempt to play favoritism towards a business that had a lot powerful politicians and journalists among their clientele.

Several other restauranteurs wondered, with a strong hint of complaint, what made Las Manitas so special? It is a potent question even if the Perez sisters ended up not taking the loan and closed down because it suggests that local government can sometimes take the role of protecting local businesses in the face of economic pressures arising from urban development and larger-scale economic processes.

The urban farms provoked not just divergent forms of place imaginaries, but also divergent ideas around land use. The urban farmers were of a libertarian bent that argued they ought to be free to do what they want on their own property. Urban farm critics clung to a fairly conventional zoning by land use in which single-family zoned property would be subject to protection against sundry commercial, industrial, and noxious land uses. Conflicts over urban farms also initiated a public process that sought to delineate the rights and obligations of urban farmers existing within the city. Questions like how many animals could be kept on how much property, how many laborers could one employ, how many animals could be killed on site, and how much non-farm related activity would be acceptable, actually speak to quite pertinent questions as to what it means to exist in conflict and compromise, to what it means to exist within a neighborhood. The role of the city government was primarily to build consensus or devise acceptable compromise. What these all suggest is that a politics of place needs to be well attended to; meaning that there needs to be more room for multiple narratives, more attending to power dynamics.

In closing, I would like return to narrative, particularly Jonathan Smith's (1996)

explication of geographic modes of appeal. Smith offers four modes: the *romantic*, the *comedic*, the *tragic*, and the *ironic*. What differentiates the appeals revolves around what conclusions readers are to draw from the events, phenomena, characters, facts, discourses, assembled by the author. The romantic mode is one in which the hero who overcomes some kind of challenge or nemesis; an opponent is vanquished. The romantic mode is the most morally explicit of the four modes, offers the most hope for a kind of radical possibility. It bears mentioning here that notions of progress are essentially romantic modes and whether in regard to beloved restaurants or “whole” foods, the romantic mode links nutrition to place.

The tragic mode is, as Smith makes clear, not just about “sad endings” but about the moral lessons to be drawn from when actors act against the stringencies of a stern and inflexible world. Icarus’ melting wings and subsequent tumble into the sea are tragic, not just because he was young and lost his life, but because he pushed against forces you cannot push against (heat and gravity, in this case). The deterministic sensibility rubs many scholars the wrong way so they advocate a romantic triumph over necessity. Food may be a necessity, but we resist thinking of it as a grim necessity and rarely frame its places as tragic.

The comedic mode keys around harmony and reconciliation of conflict. It differs from romance in that it is not about the destruction of the old (oppression, dragons, etc.) in order to make way for the new. Rather, the old and new are incorporated into each other. As Smith puts it: “obstacles are . . . discredited and the characters are reabsorbed into a reformed society” (p. 7). He describes the idea of

“sustainable development” as comedic. This mode can be found in responses to the City Council decision following the urban farm controversy in which people from all sides make gestures towards reconciliation.

The ironic mode is the disillusioned and ‘undeceived’ mode. It is the mode in which “detachment in the key, the emphasis on standing apart from the gullible crowd, staying cool and avoiding dangerous enthusiasms” (Smith, 1996, p. 8). Its “reasonableness” is rooted in its own self-perceived honesty in its own ineffectualness. It does not make any claims towards understanding, or doing, has no interest in struggle or making things intelligible or integrated. By taking an assemblage theory perspective, this dissertation has perhaps adopted the ironic mode in that it points to all outcomes being possible.

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