

Accessing the Alternative Food Movement:
Considerations towards Disability Justice

Shannon K. Tyman

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Branden Born, Chair

Stephen Meyers

Mark Purcell

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Shannon K. Tyman

University of Washington

Abstract

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Shannon K. Tyman

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Branden Born, Chair

Urban Design and Planning

The alternative food movement makes claims to seek a more just food system, and interdisciplinary scholarship has investigated the consequences of different facets of the movement to its transformative potential. In this work, scholars and activists have studied the impacts of race and class. Few have addressed disability in any way, let alone produced research—or activism—that comprehensively examines ableism as an oppressive structure or seriously considers (dis)ability as a category of difference. The purpose of my research is to ask how critical disability studies deepens intersectional analyses of oppression within the food movement, and specifically within urban food provisioning. Empirically, I examined three case studies in Seattle, Washington, each of which represented a different alternative food organization governance model, each of which tells a story about *access*, both to food and to

resources that improve food access. These case studies included a healthy corner store project run by a public health department, a democratically run food cooperative, and an anarchist free market. In each case, I reflect on a particular concept key to critical disability studies: interrogating health, crip time, and interdependence, respectively. Collectively, these cases provide evidence for the relevance of a critical disability studies perspective for the alternative food movement as a whole. I conclude that critical disability studies provides both methodological and theoretical frameworks to highlight ableism and center (dis)ability. It encourages relationship-based methods such as participatory action research and provides tools to identify ableist biases. It enables recognition of normative ideologies and their impacts within the food movement, and seeks a nuanced understanding of access for different bodies. In fact, in this dissertation, I *used* critical disability studies as a tool to understand what is happening in the alternative food movement. Interrogating health opens a new window into the goals and the achievements of of public health. Crip time offers a way to understand inclusion from a temporal perspective. Interdependence shows up where every body is deemed equally important *because* we recognize different levels of need and different capacities to participate. Ultimately, this research not only offers a critique, through the lens of ableism, of oppression and marginalization within the food movement, but also demonstrates what can be gained from thoughtful engagement with (dis)ability and ableism within food studies more broadly.

Dedications

Marilyn Wanda Repeck

(1953–2004)

Damon Paul Tyman

(1985–2014)

Both of whom, as we all do, faced temporarily abled bodiness.

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CHAPTER 1:

Food & (dis)Ability

Among other things, this dissertation is about access. The context of interest is the food system. Though hunger is ground zero for food access, this work emphasizes what kind of food we have access to and how we access this food; in other words, acts of food provisioning. As a scholar and activist, I began this project wanting to think about the transformative potential of food activism. Is the impact of all food activism the same? What do we learn in the process of organizing together? And what are the different consequences of different forms of organization? Amidst the generally recent and now relatively vast literature on what is known as the alternative food movement, there is agreement that the conventional food system, if one can understand it as such a singular entity, is neither just nor sustainable. Among invested activists and academics, however, there is debate regarding what exactly needs to be changed, who is responsible for enacting this change, and how we/they might do so. This is not surprising; it is perhaps even heartening, when one considers that the alternatives are endless.

The alternative food movement claims to seek a more just food system and interdisciplinary scholarship has investigated the consequences of different facets of the movement (see for example Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012). Scholars and activists have studied the impacts of race and class (see for example Guthman 2008a and 2008b; Lockie 2013), but few have comprehensively examined ableism as an oppressive structure or seriously considered (dis)ability as a category of difference (exceptions include Hall 2014 and 2017; Wilkerson 2011; Simpson 2017). In fact, there is little

research specifically addressing food and disability within the multidisciplinary field of food studies and the literature that does exist fails to critically consider disability or ableism (Schwartz et al. 2019; Gerber 2020). Yet, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 61 million Americans or 26% of adults live with a disability in the US alone and this population faces a higher risk of food insecurity. What are the consequences of this oversight?

In my attempts to understand, I discovered answers in the work of critical disability studies (CDS). Critical disability studies provides both methodological and theoretical frameworks to highlight ableism and center (dis)ability. It also enables recognition of normative ideologies and their impacts, and seeks a nuanced understanding of access. It encourages relationship-based methods such as participatory action research and provides tools to identify ableist biases. The purpose of my research in this dissertation is to identify what insights critical disability studies can offer the alternative food movement and food studies more broadly. My argument is that critical disability studies deepens intersectional analysis of oppression in the food system by, at least, demanding that scholarship identify and interrogate dominant ideologies, problematize access, and pay attention to the bodies impacted. CDS thus provides methodological and theoretical tools useful and even necessary for food studies more broadly. I use three empirical case studies to ask the following questions in my research: *(a) How does critical disability studies deepen intersectional analyses of oppression within the food movement? (b) How do dominant ideologies within the alternative food movement normalize certain values? (c) What role does access play within the alternative food movement and how might it be problematized? (d) Within the alternative food movement, what is the impact of discourses around food and access on different bodies?*

To be clear, this dissertation is not about providing better food to disabled people.¹ It is about using critical disability studies as a tool to understand what is happening in the alternative food movement currently and to conceptualize productive directions activism might take in order to achieve a more comprehensively just food system and a politics of inclusivity. The integration of disability studies broadens the inquiries in food studies, questions its assumptions, and contributes to an intersectional analysis of the food movement. This research is meant to not only offer a critique of oppression and marginalization, particularly through the lens of ableism, within the food movement, but also to demonstrate what can be gained from thoughtful engagement with (dis)ability and ableism within food studies more broadly. This dissertation argues that through engaging questions of access, normativity, and the body, critical disability studies provides theoretical and methodological tools to increase food (and social) equity.

When I started thinking about these cases I knew they were interesting because of the way they represented different kinds of alternatives. But I was unsure as to how I wanted to approach them; I was unsure of the narrative I wanted to tell. One of the angles that sounded good and had some resonance was governance. And I did a lot of thinking around how these different groups organized themselves. I still think this is important to consider and offer reflection on organizational structure. As I analyzed what I learned from my engagement with these groups through participant observation and discourse analysis, I discovered that there was one commonality that really struck me. The work of each of these groups was really about

¹ There are varying opinions regarding language to describe impairment. I use both person-first language—people with disabilities—and identity-first language—disabled people. I strongly believe it is an individual preference as to which is preferred and may change contextually, which is why I oscillate between the two. In addition, I refer to differently abled, “non-normate,” and “misfit bodies” on occasion (Garland-Thomson 2019b). Bodies are diverse and our abilities situationally understood.

access, both to food and to resources that improved food access, including money, power, cultural normativity, bodily privilege, and information.

The Question of Access

In relation to food, we may at the very least consider access as a caloric figure, an economic calculation, a physical feat. Are people able to access enough food to provide the proper calories needed by their bodies? Is the available food affordable? Does the physical environment accommodate user access? Circumstances in my own life have compelled me to expand my thinking around access, both in relation to food and in general. I began this dissertation a non-disabled, white woman. Though my race and gender remain the same, having broken my neck and severed my spinal cord in a mundane bicycle accident, I am paralyzed in all four limbs, a tetraplegic, a wheelchair user, severely disabled. This new identity has encouraged me to consider my research (and my relationship to each food organization I researched) from new perspectives. And has offered a new depth to the concept of access.

Disability studies scholar Tanya Titchkosky defines access as “a complex form of perception that organizes socio-political relations between people in social space” (2011, ix). Importantly, she does not deny the materialist perspective of (denial of) access; access (and disability) are relations between bodies and environments. She observes that access, like privilege, often serves as an unquestioned value that matters only if you don’t have it. But, she suggests, access itself can be a “questioning orientation” (Titchkosky 2011, x). I return to this thinking throughout my work. By using access as a frame for my thinking, I explore how the availability of certain foods in certain ways becomes a point of political action and social relationship in each of my cases.

In this dissertation I contribute to a conversation begun by queer, feminist philosopher Kim Q. Hall (2014) in an essay entitled, “Toward a Queer Crip Feminist Politics of Food.” She explicitly asks, “Might disability bring something else to the table [of the food movement]?” (177). Hall begins with a comment from Harlan Hahn in the film *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back*, “If disability is an identity with a culture,” Hahn says, it has to have its own food. Every culture has its own food. “You know,” he continues, “. . .we do have a food—fast food! It’s so much easier to go to the drive thru than it is to park, get in and out of the car, and go into a regular restaurant to eat” (Mitchell and Snyder 1995). Whereas I can relate to Hahn’s struggles, I cringe at the thought of assigning fast food to disability culture. I am, after all, a disabled foodie. But the stark reality is that disability often correlates with poverty and poverty with fast food. Plus, there is an undeniable physical and economic ease to the drive-thru. Which is to say that there is an ease of access to fast food that makes it particularly compelling to people who struggle with access in other facets of their lives. Because I do not personally believe that fast food need be the food of crips simply due to a lack of access to other foods, I turn to disability studies to ask the tough questions necessary to include a wider swath of bodies in the benefits fought for by the food movement.

The alternative food movement is primarily concerned with two aspects of access: what food we have access to and how we access it. Hall makes the point that disability functions as the background against which the food movement defines its alternatives as “good.” The consequences of industrial eating, according to the movement, are, at least, chronic illness, farmworker injuries, pesticide poisoning, habitat loss, genetic homogenization, and corporate personhood; in other words, these foods as well as the land and labor required to produce them are debilitating and disabling to both the human body and the environment writ large. The

understanding of “real” food (healthy, unprocessed, organic or more-than-organic, etc.) as savior by preventing or curing bodies within the discourses of the US alternative food movement thus perpetuates the notion that disability is undesirable. Hall argues that the position of the movement that eating “real” food is desirable because it prevents or cures disability is *alimentary ableism*, an ideological perspective that privileges a certain kind of body and obscures the needs and even existence of non-normate bodies. Part of my investigation in this dissertation is to highlight moments of alimentary ableism in the hope that by first identifying it, we can eliminate it.

Importantly, not all experiences of access are created equal. Disability justice activist Mia Mingus explains, “We have all experienced access that has left us feeling like a burden, violated or just plain shitty” (2011). In this vein, Hall insists that access must be differentiated from accommodation, which “leaves untouched institutional norms and practices” (2013, 171). Singular moments of exception, then, are examples of accommodation, often individually-performed. Access, in Hall’s understanding, is collective, a coalitional tool that is “critically transformational and attentive to relations between and among groups” (2013, 168).

According to queer disabled femme writer, organizer, performance artist and educator Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, access is a process and a weapon of collective love; she writes, “When I think about access I think about love” (2018a, 46). Along these lines, Hall aspirationally seeks “an access that opens the way to elsewhere, to something else,” one that “changes the relationships and assumptions that structure spaces or define field” (2013, 169). In such understandings, access paves the way for another possible world and different ways of being in relationship to each other, the physical world, and even the more-than-human world. Access then is not simply accommodating a user with a differently-abled body or selling apples

at the corner store, it asks for a fundamentally different relationship between bodies and between bodies and space. It is a collective and ongoing process that requires flexibility, humility, and empathy for the experience of others.

Access functions in my work both as an investigatory tool—Titchkosky’s questioning orientation—and means of moving toward a desired future—Piepzna-Samarasinha’s love and Hall’s elsewhere. In social movement work this is often articulated as justice—food justice, disability justice, environmental justice, social justice. Rather than thinking of access as a sort of watered-down vision of justice, I use it to concretize demands and drive productive critique. I take seriously this warning from Psyche Williams-Forsen:

When we move from thinking of food as unraced, unclassed, and unfettered by the binds of sexuality and physicality and therefore socially equal, to discussions of food as an inherent part of the social inequality of our lives, then the “real” complicated nature of our field begins to unfold. When we branch out from the food as object to consider thinking in more integrated ways, then the intersections are exposed, the obstacles are made clear, and opportunities revealed that force us to confront the complexities that inhere and surround the study of multiple peoples, cultures and behaviors. To do any less is to perpetuate the conversations that reinscribe the oppressions that food-related activism hopes to displace. (Williams-Forsen and Wilkerson 2011, 11)

If we are to continue to reframe food movement work from a whitewashed, ableist and privileged foodie orientation to one more inclusively considerate of myriad foodways and identities, which food justice activists demand, we need to reorient ourselves to what access means. My research suggests that alternative food discourse is already inclusive of many non-traditional food concerns (e.g., sustainable businesses, democracy, public space). It is key to this reframing to first recognize this. It is also clear that food-related needs differ across communities and bodily-differences, and developing flexible systems to help define access in community is vital.

Defining Disability

With Sara Hendren (2020), I am less concerned with the question of “What is disability?” and more interested in “What does disability do?” (45). That said, it remains crucial to this work to understand disability and constructions of disability outside of the individual body. Disability is not a stable category. Disability studies teaches us that abilities exist along a spectrum, and there is a “universality of impairment” (Ghai 2015, 253). There are, simplistically speaking, two ways that disability has been explained: the medical model and the social model. I elaborate on these two models below, but fully acknowledge that there is dialectical tension between the two as well as a rich landscape of transnational disability frameworks (some of which I draw on in my work). My intent here is to introduce recognizable constructs through which disability is generally understood, but the reality is necessarily much more complex.

The “big idea” of disability (Shakespeare 2014, 11, quoting Hasler 1993), the social model posits that one’s bodily condition is not at fault for marginalizing individuals, but rather a combination of the social, political, economic, cultural, and built environment is to blame. Sara Hendren describes this interaction as “body meeting world” (Hendren 2020, 15). This perspective accomplishes at least two significant moves: it is liberatory for people with disabilities (Shakespeare describes this as moving from self-pity to anger), and it identifies recognizing and removing barriers as the key political strategy (Shakespeare 2014, 12-13).

The (bio)medical model, on the other hand, is considered “backward and reactionary” (Shakespeare 2014, 11). It “conceptualizes disability as deviance and lack located within the individual, and therefore all medical (and educational) interventions are geared toward bringing the individual as close to normalcy as possible” (Erevelles 2011, 19). As I discuss in Chapter 4 in relation to Healthy Foods Here, this model is predominant in understanding the relationship

between diet and chronic disease. Disability studies are certainly not limited to these two polarities, but it is helpful to begin with an understanding of the range of approaches.

In my work, I think *with* critical disability studies. Disability studies has traditionally been a subfield within sociology, medical anthropology, special education, and rehabilitative medicine; in contrast, critical disability studies work generally occurs within the humanities and the social sciences and is considered transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary. As in *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997), where Rosemary Garland-Thomson begins formulating what disability studies might look like as a subfield in literary criticism and cultural studies, in this dissertation I look at what disability studies might look like as a subfield of food studies. I follow in her footsteps by theorizing the operation of disability in food studies, particularly focused on (alternative) food activism. I am not concerned with the disabled figure itself but interested in interrogating the ways in which certain bodies (healthy, white, wealthy, educated, etc.) are normatively accepted to the exclusion of other bodies.

According to Shakespeare (2014), critical disability studies troubles “the category of disability, and emphasize[s] the role of discourse rather more than the impact of material forces” (5). His critique is that critical disability studies does not adequately consider impairment, a concern that stems from his investment in “actually existing disability” (2014, 4). McRuer (2006) asserts a related unease with the tendency of critical disability studies “to focus on the image apart from the space where the image and the (disability) identities associated with it are produced” (34). Though I do not see these as hollow complaints, I do see discourse as foundational to an understanding of how society interacts with (physical) impairment, difference, and even deviance. In the context of (dis)ability, language matters especially in group identification and the struggle to access resources, services, and to call upon one’s (human)

rights. I simultaneously echo Iris Marion Young's sentiment that "the immediate provision of basic material goods for people now suffering severe deprivation must be a first priority for any program that seeks to make the world more just" (1990, 19). As with food, engagement with disability is academic but also activist. There are associated social movements, namely the disability rights and disability justice movements. Much like the "mainstream" alternative food movement, as Hall calls it, the disability rights movement has remained comfortably within the system (and predominantly white-led) whereas disability justice requires intersectionally rethinking structural inequity and centering the experiences of people of color.

Little has been written about (dis)ability within the food movement, which is all the more reason to consider the impact of this spectrum of existence, and intersectionality more broadly, on alternative food futures. It is no coincidence that my literature review identifies the most cutting-edge and progressive food activism and scholarship where it intersects with disability studies. This, I believe, is because there is a vulnerability of the body essential to both. This vulnerability begs attention to the interdependence of our health with natural systems, animal welfare, federal funding, farmer livelihoods, and corporate whims. Though we often neatly segregate each into its own disciplinary ecosystem, ecosystems are not so neatly defined. Food, economies, governments, environments, and bodies coexist, creating unique ecotones.

Disability studies is focused on identifying oppression and marginalization and thus might help overcome the "limited critical examination of the underlying relations of power that inform discourses about sustainable eating initiatives" (Lynch and Giles 2013). One of the ways that critical disability studies engages with oppression and marginalization is through its critique of capitalism and its attendant expectations of productivity and adoration of globalization. Nowhere is transnational injustice more apparent than in a system whose neoliberal policies

“withdraw all subsidies for poor people, privatize the state sector, deregulate the market, and decrease wages” (Ghai 2015, 132). In delineating their vision for a disability studies for the global South, Cutajar and Adjoe (2016) observe, “Transnational companies as well as supranational organizations with their headquarters in the global North promote the deregulation and liberalization of the market,” in turn disabling people (512). And Erevelles (2011) observes, “it is not disability that is inherently lacking, it is the material conditions of transnational capitalism that produce disability as lack” (196). In the United States, slavery has been part and parcel of agricultural history, transnational trade, and defining valuable bodies. Yet, these connections are often overlooked. Guthman (2008a) observes, “the mission of correcting eating practices is kept ideologically separate from the fact of US capitalist development, much of which is founded on the devaluation of racialized labor, most manifestly in the food and farming sectors, that made many who work(ed) in that sector dependent on cheap food” (436). I discuss critical disability studies as a method in greater detail in Chapter 3.

The Food Movement and Disability (Studies)

Kim Hall (2014) argues that food justice is “access to the food we need to flourish” (192). Flourishing, for Hall, happens in community and is reminiscent of the environmental justice goal of thriving, not just surviving. Considering how we access food then is important to understanding how we achieve the goal of flourishing. In my view, the food movement has the most to gain from a critical disability studies analysis through reframing the question of access. Because Hall specifically engages with the intersection of the food movement and disability studies, I turn to her work to identify discourses of import to look out for in my case studies. Below I introduce discourses that provide insight into the question of how critical disability

studies helps reframe the question of access in the food movement. As I discuss in Chapter 3, I used participant observation, meeting notes, organizational publications, interviews, and other documentation from each of my cases to identify the discourses at work within each group. I then analyzed those discourses in relation to the ones below to which critical disability studies brings particular attention.

First and foremost, critical disability studies explicitly engages the question of the physical body (although it is worth noting that some strong proponents of the social model almost ignore the body). Hall packages this question by asking what conceptions of community, relationship, bodies, and identity are assumed, made possible by, or foreclosed by food discourse. In my work, I note both discourses of the body and discourses of community and observe them playing different roles in each of the organizations I studied. That said, as bodies that eat, our identities are entangled with our foods, what Elspeth Probyn (2000) refers to as “alimentary assemblages.” She explains, “it is here that we see glimpses of the types of intermingling of bodies that suggest other ways of inhabiting the world” (Probyn 2000, 8). Inspired by the work of Açıksöz (2019), I recognize these entanglements as bodies-in-relation. Conceptualizations of health, self-sufficiency, and “self-righteous paternalism” (Hall 2014, 189) are all part of this conversation.

Hall pointedly asks us to consider what makes a particular food “good.” This question has been part and parcel of my research from the beginning and appeared regularly in my coding exercises. In each case study I consider how “good food” is defined within that organization and the attendant actions and expectations this creates. As Hall masterfully illustrates using Michael Pollan’s work, food movement discourse is littered with alimentary racisms and ableisms. Alimentary racism captures racialized perceptions of (good/bad, healthy/unhealthy) food (and,

by extension, the bodies that eat it) (see, for example, Fielding-Singh 2021). It also helps described racialized inequities in food access (captured in terms such as food apartheid). Alimentary ableism, often a form of eco-ableism within food sustainability discourse, occurs when food practices (e.g., cooking, shopping at farmer’s markets, using only fresh, local produce etc.) are inaccessible to disabled people because of time, money, energy, or physical accessibility. The term also refers to attitudes and practices that discourage availability of accessible food options, and practices that limit disabled people’s agency in determining their own alimentary preferences (see, for example, Gerber 2020; Swenor 2021). I look more closely at the food movement and attendant criticisms in Chapter 2. Finally, I consider the role of normativity, and its corollary, conceptualizations of alterity. Interestingly, the idea of alterity is oft explored in food movement discussions, yet rarely is normativity broached. What is it that we’re taking for granted in our alternatives? Critical disability studies helps answer this question by giving us tools to identify the ideologies at work and the normative consequences for different bodies.

My Research: Case Studies of Alternative Food Organizations (AFOs)

For my empirical work, I chose three case studies of alternative food organizations (AFOs)² in Seattle, Washington that deal with urban food provisioning, the less glamorous cousin of growing and eating food. Each of the organizations I studied are creating alternatives to the dominant system of urban food provisioning: the traditional supermarket. Each case reflects a

² Alternative food networks (AFNs) and alternative food organizations (AFOs) are used somewhat interchangeably in the literature. I use AFO to describe each of the projects I study as cases. I acknowledge that organizations compose their own networks, but differentiate alternative food organizations as singular entities with particular organizational structures, values, and cultures. I use the term “project” as well as “organization” to describe the collective actions that together compose these AFOs to reflect the fact that AFOs can be more or less formal in their structure.

different governance model of alternative food organization (top-down, democratic, grassroots) and orientations to solving “problems” of the food system (reformist, progressive, radical), thus representing the broad spectrum of food justice activism. Collectively, these cases provide evidence for the relevance of a critical disability studies perspective for the alternative food movement as a whole while acknowledging its internal diversity. My work also offers a basis to understand how food studies more broadly would benefit from this kind of thinking. The three cases work in tandem to show a range of critical disability studies tools. They give me the opportunity to highlight three specific concepts that are key to disability studies thinking: health, crip time, and interdependence. These concepts are not unique to each of the three cases and in fact are woven through each one to a certain extent. These are not the only concepts important to disability studies, but by highlighting three different examples I am opening the door to more expansive analysis.

The first case is a federally funded healthy corner store project in King County, where Seattle is located. Such projects have occurred across the United States in different configurations; all are designed to address the absence of healthy, affordable food through small business training and other supports. This reformist form of food activism operates under a hierarchical structure. Access is singularly characterized through “healthy foods” which are defined primarily as fresh fruits and vegetables. The dominant ideology at work is that of public health, which administered the program. The bodies with the greatest impact were those considered obese as well as immigrant bodies, the recipients of most of the program’s services. I highlight health in this case because it is the goal of public health, broadly speaking, and is problematic from a CDS perspective. Questions of access arise in terms of who has decision-making power in the program and how health (and obesity) are defined. I conclude that the

missing voices are those most impacted and that what CDS helps us accomplish in this case is to interrogate simplistic definitions of healthy bodies, healthy foods, and whose right it is to define these.

The second is a co-operatively owned food store, or food co-op, in the densest neighborhood of Seattle. The democratic governance model of food co-ops allows them to be guided by values other than the economic bottom line, such as labor rights. In this progressive organization, access shows up most prominently in the form of access to membership but also to a certain kind of food namely local, organic, fair trade. The most prominent ideologies are those of cooperative ownership that come from the larger cooperative movement and, also that of sustainability. Though cooperatives claim to be inclusive environments I am not the first to recognize their “paradox of exclusion” (Zitcer 2017), though previous scholars discuss class and race, not ability. By introducing the concept of crip time in this case I suggest that what Central Co-op does not do is to provide a temporally accessible environment either in terms of possibilities for participation and engagement or in terms of the kinds of food and orientation to that food that are celebrated in this space. What we learn from CDS in this context is that models of participation and membership and ideas of sustainability can be alienating not only along lines of race and class but also in terms of questions of ability and different bodies. Crip time offers a model of understanding inclusion from a temporal perspective.

The third and final case is an anarchistic food-share collective that gathers what would otherwise be wasted food from grocery stores and meets in a park in a fast-growing downtown neighborhood every Sunday for a free market event. This radical orientation to food activism provides access to free food and prioritizes an ideology of sharing. In this context everyone is deemed equally important as bodies that participate. In this case study I am less critical and more

laudatory of the practices at work. From a CDS perspective, not only does the group preach interdependence, but I observed it in action. There is certainly a differential in the work that people do, but that is part of recognizing different levels of need and different capacities to participate.

Contribution to Research

As the food movement has attracted greater attention in food studies and food systems research, there have been calls across disciplines for empirical examination of food change practices (e.g., Lockie 2013; Sprague and Kennedy 2016). My case studies of AFOs are examples of such empirical examinations. They contribute to knowledge development of how AFOs are organized, their specific strategies, and their visions of change. I believe we need to look to critical disability theory for a more inclusive approach to food activism for inclusion of marginalized bodies. My research, at least in part, answers the call of Cadieux and Slocum (2015) for “a more rigorous body of scholarship on food justice, and increased accountability in food activism” (2). They also encourage empirical work and note the opportunity to recognize transformative potential. They write: “Studying their [AFOs’] practice, as we suggest is necessary, provides not a thumbs-up or -down conclusion, but an analysis of how transformative food work *gets stuck* and what might enable it to move toward socially just food systems” (Cadieux and Slocum 2015, 13). My work here is, as they describe, not about a definite conclusion but rather recognition and evaluation. From a disability studies perspective, my work also responds to a research demand. Wilkerson explains:

In many ways, food tells the story of the sociopolitical situations of disabled people. Food studies is already thoroughly saturated with social relations of disability. The field will benefit from more deliberate attention to disability, and—more substantively—from considering disability also as a category of analysis, just as exemplary food scholarship does with gender and race (2011, 17).

Without a doubt, food activism and disability studies are compelling to me because both are concerned with oppression and marginalization. In my work and life, I am interested in identifying hegemonic structures and emancipatory openings. This dissertation is an exercise in doing so.

Structure of This Dissertation

In Chapter 2 I introduce literature and research on food activism, the alternative food movement, and alternative food networks and organizations. I go into greater detail about the research on food justice, as it is particularly relevant to my search for “transformative potential” and reflects the diversity of disciplinary and methodological approaches to the topic as well as the diversity of views on what food justice is (values) and the means (activism) by which it could be achieved. Chapter 3 is a similar exploration of the disability rights and disability justice movements, and the development of critical disability studies.

In Chapter 4 I introduce my three cases and I elaborate on my choice of methods. I explain why critical disability studies as an investigative tool and emergent qualitative research in the form of case studies are appropriate methodologies employed in answering my research questions.

The following three chapters are the heart of my research: the case studies of AFOs. After introducing each more thoroughly in Chapter 4, I begin each case study with a short narrative account to offer readers a sense of the experience of participating. This is meaningful in the context of this work to understand the food system as social space as well as agricultural fields, distribution centers, and dining room tables. It is important to acknowledge who is sitting at the table and who set the table (Guthman 2008a), but also to listen to the conversations being had

(and understand who shapes these conversations). Drawing on my research materials, I then elaborate on the important discourses adopted by each AFO.

Chapter 5 looks at Healthy Foods Here, a healthy corner store project. Here I emphasize the role of the medical model and the oppressions (cultural imperialism and marginalization) that accompany it. The following chapter examines Central Co-op, a cooperative grocery store. I look here at concepts of participation and engagement, and layer that with the term “crip time” used to describe a kind of slowing down that disability often entails. In Chapter 7, I situate Food Not Bombs as a mutual aid organization and discuss the role of interdependence in food activism. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the potential for disability-informed access-thinking to influence future research and activism within the food movement.

CHAPTER 2:

Recognizing Oppression in the Food Movement

This dissertation is about the relationship of different human bodies to the alternative food movement. Therefore, in this literature review I examine the growth of the food movement and the role of particular types of bodies in its development and ideologies. Discussions of classism and racism in the food system are not new; though today, more than ever, intentionally anti-racist practices are urgently called for in our food system. The alternative food movement, however, has been less willing to admit its classist, racist, and sometimes gendered tendencies. This can be witnessed by the move towards food justice and its differentiation from, as Hall (2017) calls it, the mainstream food movement. The presence of ableism remains largely absent from both. In my work, I contribute to the conversation by centering the question of (dis)ability. Simpson (2017) explains the importance of this move and suggests how this body of research as a whole offers a broader view of food activism within which to situate work on social change-making through food provisioning:

The food justice movement is rightfully meant to center the experiences of poor Black communities and other communities of color; however, it also often centers specific notions of health, which can erase food access struggles experienced by disabled people, including disabled people of color, as being an expression of ableism. Conceptions of food access can be expanded within the context of ableism. I believe this recognition and, further, the potential for more mobilization around this is particularly vital. Most importantly, the food justice movement has the potential for transforming society beyond increasing food access; through a disability justice politic, food justice is a site where ideals privileging “normal,” “healthy” bodyminds can be challenged (405).

Key to this conversation are the terms “if they only knew” and “who sets the table,” both of which are used by Julie Guthman. Guthman has done extensive research on the alternative food movement; she notes that the movement as a whole predominantly discusses social (in)justice as

a lack of access to alternative food and the presence of resulting health impacts, notably obesity (2011, 4). Rachel Slocum (2006) uses the phrase “bringing good food to others” to describe her observations of the pervasive whiteness of alternative food movements, but also the progressive inclinations of whites in such projects. Guthman (2008a, 2008b) builds upon this argument with the use of “if they only knew” to describe a tendency among her undergraduate students doing internships in the food system to blame disinterest in agriculture and “good” eating on ignorance. “If they only knew” about the state of the food system and where their food came from, these students argue, people would want to be more involved in growing food, preparing it, and, ultimately, would eat differently. Unfortunately, this sentiment is not solely the purview of well-intentioned University of California undergraduates; Turner et al. (2016) observed a similar phenomenon. “At a community event in March 2012 organized by Portland State University (PSU) and People’s Food Co-op to promote the release of the *Cultivating Food Justice* reader (Alkon and Agyeman 2011), the first comment from the audience was: ‘I’ll say what I know we all are thinking... poor people are just ignorant about good food!’” (Turner et al. 2016, 104). In moving towards a food politic that asks, “who sets the table” Guthman suggests that we turn “away from proselytizing based on universal assumptions about good food” (2008b, 395). The following section examines the foundational views of the alternative food movement that have led to these universalisms. I report on the diversity of food activism and ask what view of a just food system underlies food movement work.

The Alternative Food Movement

In a 2011 report, Oxfam described the world agri-food system as “broken” (Milmo 2011). Various referred to as the corporate food regime (Holt-Giménez 2011), food industrial

complex (Nestle 2002), mainstream foodways (Belasco 1989), industrial agri-food system (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011), and food dictatorship (Shiva 2000), critiques of the dominant food system include concentration of power and profits (Patel 2007); corporatization and industrialization (Kimbrell 2002); mechanization and decreased biodiversity (Perfecto et al. 2009); and increasing rates of global hunger. Conventional food practices and politics are characterized by ecological destruction, social corrosion, unfair labor practices, diet-related diseases (i.e., diabetes and obesity), inhumane treatment of animals, and urban/rural divisions. Across the board, there is general agreement that the food system is failing to provide equitable access to nutritious, affordable, and fresh food that is grown, harvested, and prepared with fair labor practices and ecological considerations.

Certainly, prescribing alternatives to the conventional food system is not new (see for example: Merrill 1976 and Robbins 1987). In the face of rising food costs, increasingly precious agricultural land being used for production of agro-fuels, land grabs, and debates around genetically modified organisms, we have witnessed a resurgence in social movements around food during the past few decades (see Holt-Giménez et al. 2009; Holt-Giménez 2011; Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012; Counihan and Siniscalchi 2014; Alkon and Guthman 2017). The political interests range from the cultural politics of food consumption to the racialized political economy of food. There is general agreement that the alternative food movement lacks agreement on exactly what alterity is; “‘alternative’ in alternative food networks is a fuzzy concept, lacking precise and fixed meaning, thereby making it difficult to describe what is and what is not included” (Trenouth et al. 2016, 270). Julie Guthman uses the term *alternative* “to describe institutions and practices that bring small-scale farmers, artisan food producers, and restaurant chefs together with consumers for the market exchange of what is characterized as

fresh, local, seasonal, organic, and craft-produced food” (2011, 3). Hers is a narrow interpretation of what has become a wide-range of practices and political positions.

Food movement activists argue that they guard a more virtuous, just, and righteous (food) system, but agreement does not exist on exactly what this is or how to get there. Some people are demanding a democratic say in decisions that impact not only the kinds of food grown (i.e., genetically modified crops) and on what land but who has access (to the land and the resultant crops). Other food activists seek accountability and transparency from food producers, processors and distributors. Internationally, the food sovereignty movement, for example, demands not only change, but, importantly, opportunities to participate in and steer change. As it gains in popularity, though, there are those who argue that the movement for alternative food, especially in the North, has matured into a new regime of “food from somewhere” (Grasseni 2013; McMichael 2009) that represents “bastions of white privilege” (Lockie 2013) that veer towards “defensive localism” (Guthman 2011; Slocum 2006).

Eric Holt-Giménez and Annie Shattuck (2011), food activists and researchers, usefully categorize the political trends within food politics in two categories: the corporate food regime and food movements. They divide the politics of the former into neoliberal and reformist, and the politics of the latter into progressive and radical. They argue that the corporate food regime seeks to change outcomes (e.g., hunger) but not the underlying framework that produces them (e.g., poverty). Changes to policy and farming techniques may be sufficient to satisfy reformists, whereas transformative groups demand progressive and even radical change to the status quo, including new property relations and more democratic institutions. The spectrum of change-making from neoliberal to radical is one important window through which to begin to understand difference within this vast movement. We might also look at scale, for example whether

practices are individual focused, systems-focused, or community focused (Werkheiser and Noll 2014). The point is to allow us to more clearly analyze the possibilities and challenges of food activism.

Academic researchers have exhibited particular interest in the nature of this movement, its composition, critiques, and possibilities (see Allen 2004; Wittman et al. 2010; Alkon and Agyeman 2011), but also the underlying causes of the inequities it seeks to mend. As illustrated in Table 2.1, how the problem is framed impacts the issues and practices different elements of the movement adopt in their attempts at creating a better food system. It also greatly determines one's research angle. Marion Nestle (2002), for example, takes a public health perspective and critiques the current relationship between the food industry (and their powerful lobby) and the US government. She publicly advocates for more government accountability and regulation of the current food system. Amartya Sen (1981), however, identifies hunger as the key indicator of poverty and, as such, characterizes it as a political economic failure. As an economist, he discovered in his research on famines that starvation is about ownership and *the exchange entitlement relation* between the commodity (food) and the person. This may include food policies, employment, public resources, value of labor, current prices, etc. Hunger, it turns out, is closely tied to the politics of distribution and the politics of access. For him, nothing less than a more just and, importantly, democratic society with equitable distribution will solve the joint problems of hunger and poverty. Though each has an interest in public health, Nestle works on a reformist platform while Sen's position is progressive, if not radical.

Table 2.1: Summary of Food Movement Politics

Lens of Analysis	Public Health	Environmental Sustainability	Social Justice	Cultural Meaning
Issues of Concern	Food safety Food labeling (e.g., caloric content and nutrition information) Diet-related diseases (e.g., obesity and diabetes)	Pesticide use Habitat loss Soil erosion Fertilizer run-off Animal liberation Food miles	Food access Farmworker rights Fair wages for food workers Fair trade Land ownership Food deserts Inequity, particularly related to social groups (race, gender, ability, etc.)	Social connectivity through food Agri-food education Food traditions

Food Justice

Though much, but certainly not all, of the food movement is motivated by a vision of social and ecological justice, a specific branch of the movement in the United States centers the experiences of people of color. The broadly construed food justice movement describes a body of work being done by activists, academics, community groups, non-profits, governmental entities, etc. at the intersection of food and social justice to increase food access equitably and/or dismantle inequitable structures that impact food access especially in the context of racial discrimination. Though it was not until the 1990’s that justice and food were explicitly connected by the alternative food movement in the United States—possibly by New York’s Just Food in 1994 (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010)—the concepts it espouses are not new. Raj Patel (2011), for example, observes that food justice discourse was an inherent part of the Black Panthers’ struggle for Black power in the 1960s. Their Breakfast for Children program was started when they realized that hungry children were at a disadvantage in school and many African American

children were attending school having eaten no breakfast. At one point the Panthers were providing food to 50,000 children daily in 45 US cities (Patel 2011, 126).

Within food justice discourse, injustice is framed as a result of historical processes, especially through institutionalized racism (Alkon and Norgaard, 2009; Alkon and Agyeman 2011). According to Cadieux and Slocum (2015), food justice means transformative change at four key points of intervention: trauma/inequity, exchange, land, and labor. Food justice, both as a site of social struggle and academic research, connects issues of environmental justice work and community food security. The goal of the latter is self-determination (see for example: Koç et al., 1999; Bellows and Hamm, 2003), a theme throughout work on food and justice. Emphasis is placed on cross-sectoral partnerships, civil society and civic agriculture, and economic democracy. Gottlieb and Fisher (1996) were at the forefront of making this connection. Their work highlights the tension between an anti-discrimination perspective and a broader movement for social change. Through strategies such as community economic development, farmland preservation, urban greening, direct marketing of food, and urban agriculture, they highlight the community-centered “empowerment framework” of food security focused social movements in the United States. Gottlieb and Fisher see strong potential for community food security to bridge the divide between policy goals, localized day-to-day quality of life concerns, and environmental issues, thereby building coalitions across food system interests. In their work, Gottlieb and Fisher frame justice as equity of impact and decision-making power.

In 2000, *Race, Poverty, and the Environment* used an environmental justice framework in their special issue on food and the environment. In it, they defined the environment through an environmental justice *and food* lens as “where, what, and how we eat” (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010, 4–5). Today, it is more commonly phrased, “where we live, work, play, and eat.” Academic

research on the topic was increasing. By 2007, Patricia Allen, for example, observed increasing justice-oriented purpose statements among alternative food organizations. The 2010 publication of *Food Justice* by Gottlieb and Joshi was both a response to this burgeoning academic and activist interest in food justice as well as a call for further action and research. In their book, Gottlieb and Joshi argue that, as a concept, food justice does not specify precise actions or changes, “but it does open up those pathways for social and political action, and it helps establish a new language of social change in the food arena” (5). Here they acknowledge food as a locus for community action and social inquiry. As Alkon describes, “it has the potential to enrich both social theory and social change” (2013, 295).

Food justice is also a response to the criticism lauded at the alternative food movement that it is overwhelmingly “white” (Guthman 2008a, 2008b). Slocum (2006) accuses community food organizations of “not connect[ing] the dots among white privilege, institutionalized racism, their community food work and the larger food system” (330). She argues that the movement would benefit from an analysis of oppression in the food system. Allen (2007) observes “a gap between intent and outcome in food justice” which leads to alternatives being more “accessible to relatively more privileged people, despite intentions to the contrary” (159). Billings and Cabbil (2011) found that poor people were underrepresented in the decision-making processes of non-profits, thereby adding to the “unjustness” of the food system by not allowing the community to self-identify its own needs (104). Freudenberg et al. (2011) observe the “missing voices” of lower-income residents and people of color in New York City’s food movement. We begin to see a reoccurring theme here: lack of self-determination, democratic involvement, and power for marginalized social groups. These three themes serve as hallmarks of a food justice analysis.

Food justice does not escape criticism. Guthman (2011), for example, argues that a food justice perspective overtly highlights race and class in the food system but does not problematize the oppression of non-normate bodies, disallows for a process-oriented, democratic approach to defining and redressing unequal distributions, and is politically ambiguous (155–6). It is, in fact, criticized for many of the same failures as the broader alternative food movement. The inability of the food justice movement to materially differ from the food movement writ large is evidenced in the practices of each. Among the social-justice-oriented actions within the alternative food movement, Allen (2007), following Buttel (2000), identifies the prevalence of market-based solutions including CSAs, farmers markets, and ethical labels. Tactics of resistance within the food justice movement include these market-oriented approaches—including culturally attractive farmers markets—and protest (Alkon and Norgaard 2009). Sbicca (2012) agrees that, “localized consumer politics is insufficient to bring about [food justice]” (465). In discussions of food access, this becomes a particularly salient point as the ability to procure food is generally reduced to one of two relationships: (1) a consumer able to purchase food from the free market; (2) a client of the capitalist-welfare system. The practices of the alternative food movement and the food justice movement are often indistinguishable. Thus, Guthman (2011) has productively critiqued the food justice movement for uncritically adopting “much of [the] on-the-ground work” of the environmental justice and local food movement including educating, taste-testing, and increasing availability in low-income communities of color “on the assumption that if you build it, they will come” (154). Cadieux and Slocum (2015) agree that “it is not clear whether established and more recent food movement actors that conceptualize their work as food justice, are doing anything truly different. Research thus far offers little clarity on this point” (11).

Alternative Food Organizations

Amidst increasing research on the moral economy of food (Jackson et al. 2009; Morgan et al. 2006) and ethical foodscapes (Goodman et al. 2010), alternative food organizations (AFOs) are prominent. The term broadly describes “communities of practice” that enact new economic and cultural spaces in food provisioning, notably in production and distribution (Goodman et al. 2012, 7). They are collective attempts to provide alternatives to conventional foodways—namely, traditional supermarkets. These networks exist on different scales. One AFO may include a network of farmers, local processors, a distributor, and consumer. Examples include CSA’s, food co-ops, fair trade networks, and farm-to-school programs. These organizations are networks in and of themselves, but together they also form regional networks. Alternative food organizations can serve as spaces of resistance where people come together to confront inequities through food. Among their successes, they count respatializing localized food production, distribution, and consumption (Jarosz 2008); strong relational networks that connect consumer-citizens and producers (Whatmore and Thorne 1997); and increased traceability (Whatmore 2002, 144).

As with much food activism, alternative food organizations tend to pursue predominately market-based approaches that provide alternatives to neo-liberal policies and capitalist economies. Yet, there is great variation among alternative food organizations, especially regarding their purposes, strategies, impacts, and participation (see Levkoe and Wakefield 2014). In illustration, particularly of the latter, below I provide two international examples of research on different alternative food organizations. In their research on EarthShare, a Scottish CSA, Cox et al. (2014) frame participation in AFOs through an ethic of care. Through interviews, workshops, and in-depth household studies, they researched subscribers’ motivations to join the

CSA. Their study complemented previous studies (e.g., Feagan and Henderson 2009) which found individual participation in CSAs to be patchwork and messy, “a harmonious, though multi-faceted enthusiasm” (72). They found that interacting with the food itself provided a more compelling source of reflection and change than interaction with other members. Cox et al. (2014) found that few subscribers attended meetings; people involved themselves in a “pick and choose” manner (73). They conclude that the “live and let live” attitude of the CSA members “does not operate as a group or a ‘food democracy’ in any meaningful way,” though overall the CSA provides a supportive place to enact change and raise issues of importance. This CSA, they determine, is a potential “forum for political action” (76) amidst the “political potential of everyday actions” but not one that *all* participants care to engage (78).

In a very different vein, Grasseni (2013) observes “active citizenship through economic practice” (5) within solidarity purchase groups in Italy. These groups, termed *gasistas* (GAS), are collectives of families that source Mafia-free, organic, local, and sustainable products to meet the needs of their members. These self-organized groups rely solely on volunteer activity where one family may take responsibility for sourcing, collating orders, and managing delivery of parmesan while another manages oranges. Grasseni notes that while philosophizing why people participate is important, “questions of practice precede, inform, and literally unpack wider political and epistemic strategies” (68). Both within individual *gasistas* and the larger networks they have formed, “GAS affect is about reciprocal responsibility, conscientious participation, and collective learning” (28). While the work of procuring the food product and organizing logistics is fundamental to the *gasista* experience, the act of networking, in Grasseni’s view, is how an alternative politics is constructed.

The differences between AFOs run deeper than participatory variation, though, as we would see if we analyzed the previous two cases in greater detail. For example, and of great relevance to this research, Goodman et al. (2012) usefully identify three variations of justice enacted in the alternative food world. The first they term *anticorporate globalization*. This conception of (in)justice is founded on a critique of capitalism and seeks transparency, small-scale production, and increased knowledge about food production. *Communitarian* AFOs aspire to the “good life” through a community of shared values founded on trust, community-based autonomy and personal connections. They term a third category *egalitarian* to describe organizations that seek identity-based, group-differentiated rights achieved through fair process (as opposed to shared vision). These collectives may or may not overtly claim to seek justice, *per se*, but aspire to at least a variation of the above categories. Goodman et al. (2012) also note that “food movement activists tend to draw upon one or other of these perspectives *without reflexively recognizing the tensions between them*” (29; emphasis mine). They note that “modes of governance created through open, deliberative, public processes are most likely to take account of...different kinds of justice” (172). Their conclusions suggest that further research is necessary to understand how these various conceptions of justice manifest within alternative food organizations, how they are disseminated both within individual organizations and across networks, and what organizational differences, if any, impact how these discourses are communicated and understood.

Clearly, the struggle for equity in the food system is not a singularly understood concept. Through discourses such as sustainability and local economic development, the alternative food movement has consistently proven its interest in social critique and visioning. The lens of justice helps us understand what changes to increased access to (good) food are being pursued by

different organizations, what values motivate these actions, and the broader networks of association that are formed in the process. In her research on fair trade, a branch of the alternative food movement, Sarah Besky (2014), observes: “Discourses of justice serve not only as critiques of current political, economic, or environmental circumstances, but also as enactments of visions for the future and of the conditions necessary for social change” (19). In their work on justice theory and food movements, DuPuis et al. (2011) argue that a more reflexive understanding of social justice, one that is cognizant of the embedded complexities, contradictions, and “processes of collaboration” (290), is necessary in the alternative food movement. For them, a reflexive food justice seeks the contradictions and complexities of everyday life, emphasizes process over vision, does not favor one scale of political practice, works within multiple notions of privilege and economy, distinguishes between equality and charity, retains a strong memory of past inequalities, and does not insist on shared values or even shared views of the world. Ultimately, they urge researchers to recognize the “imperfection of the political contestation over food” (301). I follow this advice in my own research. Below I introduce the three typologies of alternative food organizations and food activism that I examine as case studies in this dissertation: the environmental policy approach to food deserts, food cooperatives, and an anarchistic food share event.

Food Deserts: Too Little Food or Too Much?

Food (in)security is the most common frame to understand (in)equity within urban food distribution. On its website, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food security as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.” Food insecurity is therefore defined by the inability to access sufficient food. From a distributional

perspective, this injustice manifests empirically in cities as uneven, capitalist-driven development (Smith 2008; Harvey 2009). The result is geographic differentiation between neighborhoods that receive investment dollars and those that do not. Areas suffering from disinvestment classically exhibit lower land values, lack of public transportation, and the loss of businesses, including grocery stores, that follow potential capital. In food lingo, this results in food deserts, a spatial manifestation of food insecurity. Introduced in the 1990s, the term *food desert* elicits a particular type of obesogenic (obesity-causing) environment: an urban neighborhood with no supermarkets but littered with liquor stores and fast food restaurants. Early food desert research (mid-1990s) focused on how to measure food access and identified socio-economic and racial/ethnic correlations with areas of low access. Results showed that areas without access to supermarkets were correlated not only with health disparities, including heart disease, diabetes, and obesity, but also with poverty and non-white populations, particularly in urban areas. Simultaneously, transportation was found to be a challenge in these communities because of low rates of personal car ownership (see Walker et al. 2010 for a review of early research).

This primarily academic research led to government attention. The 2008 Farm Bill, which mandated further study of food deserts, defines them as an “area in the United States with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of predominantly lower income neighborhoods and communities” (Title VI, Sec. 7527). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) manages a Food Access Research Atlas that aggregates income levels, vehicle ownership, and distance from supermarkets. Originally defined as a 1-mile radius from supermarkets, the USDA definition of a food desert has become more nuanced, varying the distance-to-supermarket measure from ½ mile to 10 miles depending on the urban

versus rural location and considering the percentage of the population that lives that distance from full-service food stores. According to the USDA, somewhere around 2.1 million US households live in food deserts.

Food desert statistics are the evidence underlying interventions termed healthy retail or healthy corner store projects, supply-side approaches whose guiding assumption is that it is the lack of availability that prevents healthy eating and leads to obesity (Alkon 2013). The justification for these projects falls broadly under an environmental policy approach to health that is pursued by public health, urban planners, and municipal governments. As a social-ecological model of obesity, this approach assumes that modifying the environment leads to behavior change—here, new eating habits. Typically, GIS (Geographic Information System) analysis is used to identify priority areas for intervention (Shannon 2014). The research is limited to drawing correlations between obesity and the so-called wrong environments rather than proving causation.

Critiques of this approach are varied and extend beyond the correlation/causation debate. The term *food desert* itself has received criticism from academics as well as community and food activists. First, food deserts are typically not devoid of food, but saturated with unhealthful foods. *Food swamp* has been offered as an alternative, and researchers have developed metrics to measure areas truly devoid of food versus those saturated with low-nutrient, highly processed foods (see for example Bridle-Fitzpatrick, 2015). Both terms are contrasted with *food oases*, neighborhoods practically brimming with fresh, organic produce and the vast array of healthful choices presented by the American supermarket; these are the very definition of neighborhoods of (food) privilege. The term *grocery gap* is used to describe the discrepancy between these food environments. Those attempting to draw attention to the racial composition of food swamps

(largely people of color, particularly African Americans) versus food oases (primarily white) suggest the use of *food apartheid*.

One of the takeaway points here is the intention embedded in word choice. These terms are heavily laden with value judgments regarding the root of the problem and the key to solving it. None of them describe processes, but rather on-the-ground spatial realities. The exception to this may be the term *supermarket redlining*, which describes both the retreat and avoidance of supermarkets from low-income neighborhoods (Eisenhauer 2001). As such, it alludes to the urban processes of chronic disinvestment and uneven development (Harvey 2009). Embedded in the language, though, is an assumption that the problem of supermarket redlining is more supermarkets. It asks nothing of community ownership of food businesses, for example. Terminology aside, food deserts, essentially a spatial analysis of food access defined by proximity to supermarkets, can be further understood by examining corporate benevolence and foodways. I discuss each of these in greater detail below.

Corporate Benevolence

One of the key results of identifying “the problem” with the food system as obesogenic environments, specifically food deserts, is that “solutions” tend to focus not on the bodies impacted but on outside forces such as corporations, governments, and infrastructure. Jane Dixon (2009, 2014) refers to the resulting trifecta as the nutrition food regime, a set of stable state–corporate–consumer relationships. From a social justice perspective, there are both laudatory and damning elements of such an analysis. Though celebrated for its move away from a healthism that holds individual choices accountable for obesity, the logic behind obesogenic environments demands a healthy dose of skepticism.

Food activism experienced a watershed moment with the election of Barack Obama in 2009. Not only was healthy eating and living part of the Obama family's lifestyle, tackling the problems of obesity and physical inactivity were part of the Obama campaign's platform. In an interview with *Time* magazine, for example, the future president referenced the diet recommendations of the alternative food movement guru Michael Pollan (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010, 77). Later, President Obama allegedly asked Pollan if there was indeed something that could be called a food movement (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010, 79). Once Obama took office, First Lady Michelle Obama responded to a campaign to (re)plant a White House garden by breaking ground with a group of schoolchildren at her side. She proceeded to launch the Let's Move campaign, which encouraged healthier individuals and communities through diet and exercise. The successes of the campaign include Kids Live Well, an initiative in which more than 42,000 restaurants began to offer healthy menu options to children, and The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, an overhaul of school nutrition standards to which some students sarcastically responded with photos of their healthy lunches and #ThanksMichelleObama. With the ambitious goal of eliminating food deserts in the US within seven years, the Obama administration also launched the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, a partnership between three US departments: Treasury, Agriculture, and Health and Human Services. This initiative provided financing tools for grocery stores, small retailers, corner stores, and farmers markets selling healthy food in underserved areas, in the form of tax credits, grants, or low-cost loans and technical assistance.

In pursuit of the goal of food desert eradication, Michelle Obama constructed what the *Washington Post* astutely described as a "network of corporate relationships" consisting of major food retailers willing to reinvest in community health by (re)entering neighborhoods deemed unprofitable. From one perspective, this was a win-win situation: state subsidies cushioned the

financial burden of operating in these former food deserts, these companies gained attention as do-gooders, and more Americans had access to healthy food. Of course, these same full-service supermarkets carry foods high in fat, sugar, and sodium alongside offerings such as produce and whole grains. More importantly, though, scholars and activists have argued that such “corporate opportunism” (Ken 2014,19) impedes the movement for food justice.

Ivy Ken (2014) examines this question by critically interrogating the “meaningful commitment” to healthy food access in and around food deserts made by Walmart, the largest food retailer in the US. She concludes that such state-subsidized corporate solutions to the food desert problem ultimately impair the movement for food justice. In support of her argument, she cites research demonstrating that (a) access to a supermarket has no impact on body mass index (Cummins et al. 2014); (b) supercenter stores like Walmart have contributed to the growth of the obesity epidemic (Courtemanche and Carden 2011); and (c) shoppers at supercenters are more likely to buy less healthful foods (Volpe et al. 2013). This research supports Julie Guthman’s (2011) claim that the existence of obesogenic environments (i.e., food deserts) is founded on co-production. A term borrowed from science studies, co-production refers to a circular logic whereby one’s study of a topic is founded on a set of pre-formed assumptions. As such, Guthman argues, “science helps produce the social worlds it is intended to explain” (2011, 68). Research on obesogenic environments, she argues, has been driven by data availability and has generally been limited to demonstrating association, rather than cause. In this case, the co-production behind obesogenic environments precludes solutions outside of the supply-side focus. Yet processes such as redlining and uneven development led to the race- and class-based spatial patterning that constitute food deserts. Supply-side approaches fall short of addressing these much larger questions of social justice, but, as Guthman insightfully observes, they “are

reasonably palatable politically and provide clarity about what to do” (2011, 88). Chicago food activist LaDonna Redmond asks us to “say no” to food deserts because it is “another one of those cute terms masking the harm of a food system in our community. It really is the Trojan horse of increased corporate control of a food system.”³ At root, her criticism is that if we identify food deserts as the problem with the food system, we preclude a deeper critique that may well implicate the very corporations who claim to have solutions. Reframing the food system problem would inevitably offer more expansive avenues of action and potential actors.

Foodscapes & Foodways

Increasingly, research has shown that the complexity of human behavior eludes easy categorization. People, it turns out, do not necessarily procure food at the closest store. Convenience does matter, but affordability, marketing, and cultural preferences all have a significant impact on food procurement choices. Alkon (2013), for example, found that communities in Oakland and Chicago prioritize price over convenience. Particularly relevant to this work, a study published in 2014 found that only one-third of surveyed residents of King County, Washington, used their nearest supermarket for primary food shopping (Aggarwal et al. 2014). The same study determined that fruit and vegetable consumption was higher among women, people over 65, those with more education, and people who shopped at low-cost supermarkets, but *no association was found between proximity to primary supermarket and produce consumption* (Aggarwal et al. 2014; emphasis mine). The authors inconclusively concluded that more research is needed to determine food shopping patterns.

³ Recent food justice research has critiqued the usefulness of such a designation and its implications for justice, equity, identity, and appropriate actions. LaDonna Redmond, who grew up in a neighborhood of Chicago where it was “easier to get a semi-automatic weapon than a tomato,” encourages the use of the term “food mirage” to describe what she characterizes as a misidentification of the problem (presentation at CCMA 2014).

In lieu of conclusive quantitative data to explain food shopping preferences and dietary practices, researchers use two terms that illuminate the social complexities of food that the French have always assured us exist (Bourdieu 1984; Certeau et al. 1998): *foodways* and *foodscapes*. Both terms seek to understand the different food procurement strategies and behavioral norms associated with the food environment by different cultural, socio-economic, and ethnic groups. *Foodways* describes “the cultural and social practices that affect food consumption, including how and what communities eat, where and how they shop and what motivates their food preferences” (Alkon et al. 2013, 127). The term *foodscape* captures the contextual processes that underlie food provisioning, with particular emphasis on space relations (see, for example, Miewald and McCann 2014). The latter arguably has more potential to draw attention to contemporary and historical urban processes such as gentrification, whereas the former elucidates personal meaning associated with food practices. I briefly consider the implications of each term in understanding food desert research.

A foodscape approach seeks to understand the relationship between the food environment and its inhabitants rather than anticipate inhabitant behavior due to environmental features. Though he does not use the term, Nathan McClintock’s (2011) analysis of the structural role of capital and historical geography in the formation of Oakland’s food deserts exemplifies the insight offered by a foodscape perspective. Understanding the confluence of planning policies, institutionalized racial discrimination, and (dis)investment, for which McClintock uses the term *demarcated devaluation*, suggests a broader set of solutions to the food desert problem than the (re)introduction of supermarkets. Indeed, in his historical investigation, McClintock traces the rise of supermarkets and eventually supercenters as markers of food access. Such historical and geographic examination of the economic and political processes behind foodscapes encourages a

reframing of the food desert problem as a result of structural inequity and uneven development rather than solely a public health issue. Food deserts as foodscapes help us to examine the causes of this phenomenon and ask critical questions of the solutions it has inspired.

In its emphasis on process, especially spatial process, a foodscape perspective may be important in terms of anticipating and observing the impacts of initiatives designed to eliminate food deserts. In particular, the supermarket solution to food deserts has led to what has been dubbed the Whole Foods Effect, a term that describes the gentrified redevelopment of a neighborhood that follows the opening of new grocery stores, particularly those that mark themselves as healthy (Anguelovski 2015, 185). As urban sustainability measures and brownfield redevelopment projects gain momentum, displacement due to amenities such as improved access to fresh food are increasingly common, earning them the name green or environmental gentrification (Anguelovski 2015). A foodscape-driven analysis offers a longer view of neighborhoods now deemed food deserts, interrogates when and why environmental change has happened, and examines who has decision-making power and who has been impacted by policy and planning decisions. Foodscapes unearth casual elements obscured by food desert studies.

While foodscapes emphasize the processes that create food environments, foodways draw attention to social factors. The environmental policy approach assumes that the environment plays a decisive role in diet choices. But, as explored above, this assumption has been difficult to prove. It appears there are other factors influencing food choices than simply availability. Authors of the Seattle Obesity study, for example, conclude that “food shopping decisions are constrained by more than geographic boundaries and may include underlying personal factors such as economic considerations, food preferences, attitudes, and cultural factors” (Aggarwal et

al. 2014, 921). We may add accessibility, broadly construed, to this list. These are the very topics of interest to a foodways perspective.

Understanding foodways is generally the result of in-depth, immersive involvement with a community of eaters. This kind of research has generally been the purview of anthropologists studying the unknown other. Yet policy interventions are founded on a thick set of assumptions regarding normative food practices. In this sense, foodways matter both as a matter of understanding difference as well as in understanding the behaviors and bodies we take for granted as ordinary or typical. The little foodways research that has been done on communities living in food deserts has found, contrary to environmental policy assumptions, “people embedded in social relationships of reciprocity and obligation” (Alkon et al. 2013, 131). These are not passive bodies whose food procurement strategies are limited to accessing transportation to the nearest grocery store. By revealing the narrative richness of place and community, foodways and foodscapes offer avenues of analysis that question the assumptions behind food desert interventions and offer alternative possibilities for action to better the food environment.

On the whole, as Alkon et al. (2013) convincingly demonstrate, “the myopic focus on the existence of food deserts as the primary cause of American health disparities cannot be demonstrated empirically” (128). Nonetheless, food deserts, myth or fact, continue to motivate governments, non-profits, and activists to act in the name of a better, more just food system. And the undisputed reality is that food prices, especially for the low-energy-density foods which are generally those categorized as healthy, are rising (see Monsivais and Drewnowski 2007). The term *food desert* attempts to describe spatial injustice unearthed by GIS scholar-activism, but also a foodscape reality for millions of Americans. The term has been the impetus for state regulation, often accompanied by discourse that invites corporate solutions, as well as for

Healthy Foods Here, a federally funded response to obesity and food deserts that I discuss in Chapter 4.

Cooperative Activism

In order to understand the activism of cooperatives in the food movement, I begin with the story behind, what I would argue, are the three most influential co-ops today: the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society, Mondragon, and the Berkeley Co-op; the first because it left us with the seven cooperative principles which continue to be referenced internationally, the second because it has proven one of the most dramatically successful, and the latter because of its enigmatic failure.

Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society

Rochdale, England was known for its homespun flannel until the industrial revolution disenfranchised human labor and American tariffs on cotton made the industry economically unviable (Fairbairn 1994). These misfortunes, though, were the impetus for the origins of “modern cooperation” (Walton 2015). As the story goes, 28 disenfranchised artisans began a cooperatively owned general store in 1844 to provide affordable goods to their members. That same year Karl Marx published *Economic and Political Transcripts of 1844*, often referred to as The Paris Manuscripts, and British Parliament passed the Joint Stock Act, which created the basis for the modern stock corporation, as well as the Bank Charter Act of 1844, which established the constitution of the Bank of England. Capitalism was well on its way to institutionalization. And cooperation, as a response and reaction, was right on its heels.

Though Walton (2015) appropriately questions the historical accuracy of the occupation and abject poverty of the founders of the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society, as it was called, there is agreement that these were reform-minded working folk. Owenite socialism, Christian socialism, and socially just idealism were drivers of these Rochdale Pioneers and other cooperative activists of the time. All of the founders were men, but historical records do indicate that women, even single women, were able to join as members, and thus share in ownership and voting rights (Walton 2015; Thompson 1994). One of the primary goals of the Rochdale Pioneers was provision of “pure” foods. Food was expensive in the 1840s and often adulterated. As Thompson (1994) describes: “Only potatoes were cheap enough for everyone” (59–60). The Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society was first stocked with only five items: flour, sugar, butter, oats, and candles. Over time the store became increasingly successful and by 1875 it had expanded to 16 stores selling basic provisions, draperies, shoes, laundry and coal (Thompson 1994, 49).

Though certainly not the first cooperative, the efforts of the Rochdale Pioneers have taken on a mythic influence in the contemporary cooperative movement. The original location at 31 Toad Lane is now a museum and these Rochdale Pioneers are widely seen as “the inspiration and model for a movement that now includes nearly 700 million people around the world” (Fairbairn 1994, 1). The international influence of the Rochdale Pioneers can be seen today through the impact of their seven cooperative principles:

1. Voluntary and open membership
2. Democratic member control
3. Member economic participation
4. Autonomy and independence
5. Education, training, and information
6. Cooperation among cooperatives
7. Concern for community.

Though initially written as a response to impacts of the industrial revolution on labor, these principles still guide cooperatives today, including Central Co-op which I discuss in Chapter 5. These principles translate to, among other things, businesses that operate with open financial books, democratically elected boards, and reliance on member capital. The original Rochdale store housed a library on the second floor; educational opportunities for members continue to be emphasized in cooperatives. As Principle 6: Cooperation among Cooperatives suggests, Rochdale was inspiration for larger cooperative endeavors including cooperative alliances. In particular, the International Co-operative Alliance was established in London in 1895. It is now based in Geneva, Switzerland and represents 1.2 billion cooperative members, 310 organizations, and 109 countries. It defines a cooperative as an “autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.”

Mondragón, Spain

Based in the semi-autonomous Basque Country of northern Spain, Mondragon Corporation is a worker-owned cooperative group. Though not a food co-op, it is relevant to this work as a “concrete real-world example of co-operative success” (Molina and Walton 2012, 227). Legally recognized as a co-op in 1959, the Mondragon Corporation has grown impressively through the years and has remained resilient in the face of economic downturns. According to the website, it boasts of at least 98 autonomous and independent cooperatives, 143 production plants, and over 80,000 workers. It is the largest business group in the Basque Country and the largest workers’ cooperative in the world. Mondragon was founded in the 1950s by Jose Maria Arizmendi, a priest with a background in Catholic social thought who believed

strongly in bringing about social transformation. Secular interpretations of his ideas include comparison to the leftist ideologies of 1968 (Molina and Walton 2012). The four principle values of Mondragon stem from Arizmendi's teachings: cooperation, participation, social responsibility, and innovation. These values influenced the 2015 revisions to the Purpose of Central Co-op. Driven by values of self-help and economic self-sufficiency, the Mondragon Corporation runs its own university and bank. It was paramount to Arizmendi that the cooperative be driven by the principle of labor over capital, hence the power and responsibility given to workers.

As with any worker-owned cooperative, worker-members all have a share in the business as owners and decision-makers. Mondragon has consistently shown a commitment to worker solidarity, echoing the belief in labor over capital. For example, when a mainstay business within the cooperative went bankrupt in 2013, other cooperatives in the group offered employment to those who were worker-members (Barandiaran and Lezaun 2016). At difficult economic moments, the collective has decided to cut wages as opposed to laying off workers. The wage differential between highest and lowest paid employee is 1:9 (Barandiaran and Lezaun 2016, 284); whereas, in 2018, the average CEO made 361 times more than the average worker. Mondragon has also worked in solidarity with the United Steelworkers, a US-based trade union, to create cooperatives from struggling steel firms (Molina and Walton 2012).

Mondragon is not perfect. The employees of foreign firms are not given the opportunity to join as worker-members thus "they remain in effect employees of capitalist firms" (Barandiaran and Lezaun 2016, 287). The cooperators appropriating the surplus of noncooperators are therefore "becoming capitalist" (Gibson-Graham 2006, 123). Though democratically governed, the group has been accused of leadership by an elite "co-operative aristocracy" led by disciples of Arizmendi (Molina and Walton 2012, 234). On the one hand,

Mondragon as a whole suggests cooperatism can be a successful model for (more) equitable economic growth. Gibson-Graham praise it as an “inspiring vision that can take root in any locale” (2006, 183). On the other hand, its experience hints at scalar and philosophical challenges. These are not necessarily unique to Mondragon and provide lessons relevant to food co-ops. The success of Mondragon does seem to prove “on a daily basis that co-operative principles of organization and ownership are compatible with the highest standards of economic performance” (Barandiaran and Lezaun 2016, 287). For some in the food cooperative world this parallelism between cooperatism and capitalism is a failure of cooperatives as food activism. I revisit this in Chapter 5.

Some suggest Mondragon is facing an identity crisis amidst secularization in the Basque Country and the struggle of ideology and scale amidst a global economy. Though not rooted in the Rochdale tradition, as Arizmendi’s ideas are secularized, Mondragon is upheld as a part of the cooperative world seen to be founded by the Rochdale Pioneers; these ideologies are increasingly indistinguishable. Arizmendi may not have struggled to preserve a separatist identity, though; in his words, “our co-operative is an organic process of experience” (Molina and Walton 2012, 233). Others see Mondragon as an experiment in democracy but not necessarily a cooperative. Barandiaran and Lezaun, for example, argue that Mondragon is not a cooperative but a “form of practice [...] that at its fullest embodies and actualizes a founding commitment to the emancipatory power of co-operative associationism and workers’ ownership” (2016, 292).

Berkeley Co-op

In the United States, there are considered two primary surges of cooperatives. Certainly, cooperatives have been a part of the American economy outside of these two moments, though. As evidence, the Cooperative League of the USA (CLUSA) was founded in 1916 (Knupfer 2013, 18) and is still active today. The first wave of cooperatives followed New Deal funding in the wake of the great depression (1929–1939). Notably, the Self-Help Cooperative Program was a part of the New Deal’s Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Established in 1933, its mission was to help existing cooperatives produce goods for themselves and to also help groups that wished to start cooperatives (Knupfer 2013). Though primarily based in California, the cooperative movement was closely aligned with Utopian Socialism specifically Upton Sinclair’s End Poverty in California (EPIC) campaign. Unfortunately, many of the cooperatives that were started through this program did not remain viable once the funding stream ended. Thirty or so years later, in the face of supermarketization and an independently vibrant countercultural movement, a “new wave” of food co-ops blossomed (Brown 2011). Buying clubs, or “food conspiracies” as they came to be known in California, were groups that bought food in bulk and distributed it among the members cheaply. They were in fashion in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a reaction to the processed foods craze of the fifties. Americans were looking for a way to buy affordable, healthy food and women (especially liberated hippie mothers) often led the charge by connecting producers to consumers. A particular household would buy in bulk, representing a group of families, then distribute items purchased at wholesale prices from a central location (usually the home of one of the buying club members). These were a means of procuring affordable “natural” foods, often locally produced.

The Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley (CCB), also known simply as the Berkeley Co-op, opened in 1937 but in many ways exhibited traits of a “new wave” co-op. It started, as many US food cooperatives did, as a buying club, and it was somewhat ahead of its time in its enactment of food politics. For many years the co-op flourished, and eventually consisted of 12 food stores plus auxiliary services like a bottle shop and garden nursery. One CCB store even had the distinction of having the highest sales per square foot of any grocery store west of the Mississippi River (Fullerton 1992, 11). What is most instructive about CCB in the context of this work is the universal story of struggle faced by, particularly, new wave food co-ops in the United States. I will highlight three elements most relevant here: identity, democracy, and growth. Again and again, accounts of why CCB failed include mention of a loss of identity. This stemmed at least in part from the tension surrounding the Co-op’s engagement with food politics. In 1968, the Berkeley Co-op supported the United Farmworker’s labor struggles. In 1970, CCB began carrying organic produce, banned the sale of pesticides in its stores, established a community recycling center, and lobbied for bottle deposit legislation (Fullerton 1992, 94). Some of these issues were more controversial than others. The involvement of the Co-op in these campaigns increased solidarity among some shoppers and alienated others. At heart, there did not appear to be clear consensus on whether the Co-op was a natural food store, an expression of member’s values, or simply a well-priced grocery store. As one former employee explained, “activists from different sectors of the membership put CCB in the position of being all things to all people—an impossible dream for any organization” (MacDonald 1992, 54). This is a common frustration among cooperatives today. Brown identifies this as tension and symbiosis between two prevailing interests: one focused on increasing affordability and availability of healthy food and one wanting to challenge corporate control of the food system, and radically

change the capitalist economic system with repercussions throughout the community (Brown 2011, 301). The Park Slope Co-op in Brooklyn, for example, dealt with very near irreconcilable differences of opinion regarding whether or not to join the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement to pressure Israel to abide by international law and to protest illegal occupation of Palestinian land. With a significant base of members who identify as Jewish (including BDS activists), the atmosphere at the members-only Co-op was charged. *The New York Times* reported members being “kicked, pushed and spat on” (Semple 2012).

As demonstrated in the second of the Rochdale Principles, democratic member control is key to cooperative governance. This element is generally embedded in the legal framework of the business. In the case of CCB, nine volunteer board members were elected from the membership. This is inevitably a very small percentage of cooperative membership, which for CCB at its height was 116,000 people. At CCB, the Board was in a position to make tough labor and real estate decisions. The collective experience seems to be that this group became increasingly exclusive. As member Doug Buckwald tells it, “The board began to feel that they were the co-op—not merely individuals acting to carry out the wishes of the membership” (Fullerton 1992, 80). The reality of democratic participation is such that often the continual effort of showing up is not possible or interesting to a majority of a population and so, by default, a small group becomes the voice of the community. This continues to be an all too common narrative of cooperatives.

Finally, the question of growth is closely related to democratic control. In CCB’s case, the 1974 acquisition of three failing grocery stores in Oakland is frequently cited as a contributor to its eventual bankruptcy. The purchase of these stores entailed significant financial risk as well as a new customer base of people in a different community who did not necessarily share similar

values. Robert Schildgen, member and former board member described the Oakland stores as a “missionary mission” (Fullerton 1992, 40) because of the relatively white and left-leaning population of Berkeley, where the original store was located and from whence the original membership hailed, versus the poorer and more diverse (primarily African American) population of Oakland. Aside from the specific concern around this particular purchase, the question of appropriate scale haunts the story of CCB. Some people felt that as it grew, it became less responsive to member needs. Others felt that it lost its values as a cooperative and instead pursued capitalistic aims. In Chapter 5, I elaborate on each of the themes from these examples in discussion of cooperative activism at Central Co-op.

Food Not Bombs

Food Not Bombs (FNB) was started by anti-nuclear activists in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1980. In the wake of organizing for a protest to stop the Seabrook Nuclear power station in near-by New Hampshire, activists discovered that food was a powerful organizing tool. They began collecting free food in the form of excess, expired, and what would otherwise be wasted food for redistribution. They delivered the food to local shelters, housing projects, and rehabilitation centers. They eventually began cooking vegan meals and publicly sharing them in Harvard Square. The presence of food helped to draw a crowd. In the spirit of street theatre, the activists used these gatherings as an opportunity to distribute radical literature, discuss politics, and sometimes hold puppet shows. Initially interested in making the connection between nuclear power and militarism, these activists broadly critiqued domination and violence. Homelessness and hunger, they argued, are the result of poverty, which is a kind of violence. Thus, their response was to draw attention to the root causes of oppression and question the

mentality of profit before people (Butler and McHenry 2000; McHenry 2015). Sharing free food has become the tool through which these activists express their position that hunger is a result of societal misappropriation.

For years this small group organized direct actions and fed protestors and community members alike. People began to hear about FNB and emulated their work. After helping to start a group in San Francisco, co-founder McHenry wrote-up a how-to pamphlet, *Seven Steps to Starting a Food Not Bombs Group*, with tips and principles for those who want to start their own chapter. An up-dated version can be found on the Food Not Bombs website. Food Not Bombs is founded on inclusion, decentralization, and nonviolence. The point is to create positive alternatives based on responsibility and mutual aid. “Above all,” the manual reads, “the Food Not Bombs experience is an opportunity for self-empowerment” (Butler and McHenry 2000, 7).

In 1992, around 70 Food Not Bombs members from the US and Canada met in San Francisco and drafted these three guiding principles: (1) always vegan or vegetarian and free to everyone; (2) each chapter is independent and autonomous and makes decisions using the consensus process; (3) Food Not Bombs is not a charity and is dedicated to nonviolent social change. The first point is partially driven by food safety concerns; meat and dairy can prove dangerous if not properly refrigerated and rarely do FNB groups have access to equipment such as refrigerated trucks. Philosophically, this principle is driven by inclusion, of dietary needs and choices, levels of sobriety, socio-economic status, etc. Everyone is welcome to the food; the food should be accessible to all. The second principle addresses governance. Each FNB group is entirely self-directed and elects to adopt the name and principles freely. Within collectives, decisions are made with a consensus-based model and leadership is nonhierarchical. The third

principle is especially significant in the context of the alternative food movement. It reflects the intentionally political position of FNB that food is a right, not a privilege.

Today Food Not Bombs is an international organization with autonomous chapters around the world (the FNB website lists over 500 chapters but estimates there to be over 1,000 worldwide) engaging in food share projects appropriate to their communities. One of the co-founders describes it as “a living, dynamic global project” (McHenry 2015, 17). Most FNB groups serve hot food in parks to hungry people. The food is generally food waste that has been dumpster-dived, donated, or otherwise procured. It is collectively prepared in someone’s home or perhaps a community kitchen. The pots, pans, and labor are all shared, a radical act in and of itself. Furthermore, the actual sharing of the food occurs in a public place, usually a park. Inspired participants have formed allied projects including Homes Not Jails; Free Radio; Food Not Lawns; and Really, Really Free Markets (of which Seattle’s Cascade Free Market discussed in Chapter 6 is one). The Free Market as an FNB event is more unusual than serving a hot meal, but fulfills the same goal of collectively providing free food in a politicized environment.

Conclusion: Joining the Conversation

It is notable that contemporary food scholars are arguing for lessons of activism that push beyond the focus on our food system, in order to understand food as “a lens through which systems, structures, and institutions of dominance are made visible and, subsequently, contestable” (Passidomo 2013). Grasseni (2013), for example, situates her research on solidarity purchasing groups in Italy as “a study of a grassroots model of provisioning practice that calls into question a number of tacit assumptions about capitalism, globalized food systems, and civic participation” (3). Alternative food organizations contain emancipatory elements that can cross

over into other forms of social inquiry and broader social movements, contributing to a broader sense of “emancipation” but are equally susceptible to unacknowledged oppressions. In Chapters 5, 6, and 7 I explore these elements using insights from critical disability studies within three specific alternative food organizations, explicitly paying attention to normative ideologies, (in)access(ability), and the impact on particular bodies. Each is practicing a different form of (food) activism and I emphasize these differences while noting, for good or for bad, that each is complicit in fostering the narratives of the alternative food movement.

CHAPTER 3: Critical Disability Studies

In the previous chapter, I discuss activism that falls under the purview of the alternative food movement along with the now-robust body of academic work that reflects on this movement. This inter- and multi-disciplinary scholarship is housed in many fields, but also falls broadly under the umbrella of food studies. In contrast to critical disability studies, or CDS—the focus of this chapter—food studies scholarship is not inherently activist or in search of greater justice and inclusivity. The slice of academia that examines the food movement arguably *is*, but that is a small portion of the pie. However, as CDS scholar Minich (2016) explains, CDS operates “*with the goal of producing knowledge in support of justice*” (n.p., emphasis hers). As with academic study of the alternative food movement, though, it is essential to understand the social movement in tandem with the academic area of study, and that is where this chapter begins. After surveying the history and development of disability activism, I describe the rise of (critical) disability studies and important developments in the field. I then introduce the sliver of work that currently exists at the intersection of the food movement and disability justice. Finally, I present an intersectional analysis of conversations among two celebrated food movement actors, including regenerative farmer Joel Salatin, as evidence of the connection between alimentary racism and ableism. This is important to understand not only research on the movement, but the discourse of activists themselves.

Disability Activism

In the Smithsonian Institute sits a chunk of concrete labeled “Curb cut, Denver, 1978.” It is part of an online exhibit entitled *Everybody: An Artifact History of Disability in America*. The caption reads: “This is a concrete chunk of street corner from a do-it-yourself curb cut. A group of activists took hammers to the corner because the city had discontinued its curb-reduction program and people trying to get up impassable curbs frequently had been hit by cars. The activists were from the Atlantis Community, an independent living center, and the protest launched the disability rights group ADAPT.”⁴

The curb cut is symbolic of attitudinal, structural, institutional, legal, and physical barriers people with disabilities face. The DIY activism such as that of ADAPT⁵ is a response to societal discrimination. While food activism targets real-world environmental and health problems, it differs significantly from disability activism, in which people are often acting under duress due to pressing survival and quality of life issues.

Disability Rights

As with much social justice activism in the United States (e.g., civil rights, women’s rights, the environmental movement), the disability rights movement found its voice in the 1960s and 1970s. There are significant examples of earlier activism though. The polio epidemic of 1916, for example, had widespread disabling impacts. With no laws ensuring accessibility, activism on the part of parents and survivors led to innovations in architectural accessibility and social inclusion (see Nielsen 2012; Hamraie, 2017; Williamson 2019). As was characteristic of

⁴ Smithsonian National Museum of American History, <https://everybody.si.edu/media/672>.

⁵ “ADAPT is a national grass-roots community that organizes disability rights activists to engage in nonviolent direct action, including civil disobedience, to assure the civil and human rights of people with disabilities to live in freedom.” Home page, National ADAPT website, <https://nationaladapt.org/>.

early disability rights activism, however, these small victories were hard-won and individualized, and most often benefited the white elite.

In 1940, the first national cross-disability activist organization, the American Federation of the Physically Handicapped (AFPH), was begun. AFPH linked labor struggles and disability rights, drawing attention to the disabling impacts of industrialization (e.g., factory work, mining) (Nielsen 2012, 151). War exacerbated these concerns and created a new constituency for the not yet fully formed movement: disabled war veterans. These individuals demanded access to the society they had sacrificed their bodies to protect.

It was in the 1960s, amidst civil rights struggles nationwide, that the disability rights movement coalesced. Following a lawsuit against the University of California, Berkeley, polio survivor, quadriplegic, and white man Ed Roberts was allowed to attend the university, but was required to live in the infirmary due to lack of accessibility in the student dorms. As more physically disabled students found their way to the university's infirmary, often escaping institutionalization themselves, a political consciousness ignited. These students named themselves The Rolling Quads, and, as historian Scot Danforth (2018, 509) describes,

they became the influential disability rights political action coalition whose work led to the development of over four hundred independent living centers⁶ across the United States and the enactment of the first national disability anti-discrimination law, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

This politicization of disability led to policy change. The Architectural Barriers Act, passed in 1968, required that federally funded facilities remove obstacles in the built environment. Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act reached beyond environmental

⁶ The Independent Living Movement fights for the right of disabled people to live in the community with assistance as needed rather than in institutions. As polio survivor and lifelong disability activist Judy Heumann (2003) explains, "Independent living is not doing things by yourself. It is being in control of how things are done" (n.p.). Independent Living Centers support community living and independence for people with disabilities. Some independent living programs are supported through funding authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

accessibility and was the first disability civil rights law to be enacted in the United States: it prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in programs that are recipients of federal financial assistance. The enactment of these laws required activism, too. In 1977, organized protests across the US demanded regulations be written and enforced for Section 504, which had heretofore been essentially ignored. One notable protest that year was the sit-in at the San Francisco Department of Health Education welfare building, which lasted 26 days; during that time, the Black Panther Party served one hot meal a day to the predominantly white disabled protestors. The disability rights movement had matured as a struggle against discrimination, yet it would be almost 20 years before a law with wider scope was passed.

On March 12, 1990, ADAPT organized a protest in support of pending national disability legislation. The protest ended dramatically, with 60 or so of the 1,000 participants casting aside mobility aids and climbing the stairs of the US Capitol. The Capitol Crawl, as it came to be known, is remembered as an important moment in disability rights activism because of the undeniable visibility it lent to the struggle of inaccessibility. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law within months. As federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities, the ADA is meant to guarantee equal opportunity in everyday life, including employment, education, public transportation, and participation in government. This legislation was the first of its kind in the world and has inspired similar laws worldwide.

As is the case with other civil rights legislation, however, laws matter but are not sufficient. The disability rights movement continues to fight institutionalization, exclusion, and unequal treatment. But it has firmly established disabled people as a minority group facing discrimination. This brief review of the movement focuses on activism in the US not only

because it is the location of my dissertation work, but also because the ADA—as the first major piece of national legislation in the world to address the systematic discrimination faced by people with disabilities—inspired similar legislation within a decade in Luxembourg, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. Globally, awareness of disability rights increased alongside moments such as the International Year of Disabled People in 1981 and the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Disability Justice

Though the disability rights movement is potentially as diverse as the bodies that experience disability, it continues to be dominated by those with more power and resources, namely white, cis, heterosexual US citizens. In addition, people with physical disabilities, and their attendant access needs, have found more purchase within the movement at least partially due to their easy visibility. The needs and experiences of people with invisible disabilities such as psychiatric and intellectual disabilities have not historically been given as much attention. Much like the food justice branch of the alternative food movement, disability justice activists and allies have articulated a different set of priorities. As the second wave of the disability rights movement, the term “disability justice” was coined in 2005 by the Disability Justice Collective, a group of disabled, queer activists of color including Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, Stacey Milbern, Leroy F. Moore Jr., Sebastian Margaret, and Eli Clare (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018a, 15; Kafai 2021, 23). This same group started Sins Invalid, which articulated 10 principles of disability justice: intersectionality, leadership of those most impacted, anti-capitalist politic, commitment to cross-movement organizing, recognizing wholeness, sustainability, commitment to cross-

disability solidarity, interdependence, collective access, and collective liberation⁷ (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Disability Justice Principles Formulated by Sins Invalid

10 PRINCIPLES OF DISABILITY JUSTICE

- 1 INTERSECTIONALITY** *"We do not live single issue lives" --Audre Lorde*
Ableism, coupled with white supremacy, supported by capitalism, underscored by heteropatriarchy, has rendered the vast majority of the world "invalid."
- 2 LEADERSHIP OF THOSE MOST IMPACTED**
"We are led by those who most know these systems." --Aurora Levins Morales
- 3 ANTI-CAPITALIST POLITIC**
In an economy that sees land and humans as components of profit, we are anti-capitalist by the nature of having non-conforming body/minds.
- 4 COMMITMENT TO CROSS-MOVEMENT ORGANIZING**
Shifting how social justice movements understand disability and contextualize ableism, disability justice lends itself to politics of alliance.
- 5 RECOGNIZING WHOLENESS**
People have inherent worth outside of commodity relations and capitalist notions of productivity. Each person is full of history and life experience.
- 6 SUSTAINABILITY**
We pace ourselves, individually and collectively, to be sustained long term. Our embodied experiences guide us toward ongoing justice and liberation.
- 7 COMMITMENT TO CROSS-DISABILITY SOLIDARITY**
We honor the insights and participation of all of our community members, knowing that isolation undermines collective liberation.
- 8 INTERDEPENDENCE** We meet each others' needs as we build toward liberation, knowing that state solutions inevitably extend into further control over our lives.
- 9 COLLECTIVE ACCESS** As brown, black and queer-bodied disabled people we bring flexibility and creative nuance that go beyond able-bodied/minded normativity, to be in community with each other.
- 10 COLLECTIVE LIBERATION** No body or mind can be left behind -- only moving together can we accomplish the revolution we require.

SINS INVALID 2015
www.sinsinvalid.org

⁷ "10 Principles of Disability Justice," Sins Invalid, September 17, 2015, <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/10-principles-of-disability-justice>.

Where the disability rights movement has sought to solve the problems of ableism through legal tools that guarantee physical access, reasonable accommodation, and opportunities for participation, one of the tenets of the disability justice perspective is that these tools are not evenly applied. Disability justice activists do not deny the powerful work of the mainstream disability rights movement, but are actively drawing attention to the causes of uneven access to hard-won rights—causes including heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and colonialism capitalism. In the words of Shayda Kafai (2021, 19),

Truth: I wouldn't have had the access, pride, and political empowerment I have today as a disabled, Mad, queer, femme of color were it not for the labor and cultural shifts of these activists and dreamers. There were, however, also communal erasures within the mainstream Disability Rights Movement. The movement, including its historical retellings, primarily centered the organizing of white disabled activists; the academic extension of the movement, Disability Studies, similarly centered the experiences of white scholars.

Disability justice activism invites cross-community and cross-disability solidarity and, importantly and in parallel to food justice activism (but arguably more effectively), has actively recentered leadership. Disability justice activism is a collective practice of listening to the stories of disabled people themselves, especially those most marginalized. It is changing the language that we use to describe each other's bodies and calling for a radical acceptance of all bodies. Mia Mingus' term "access intimacy," discussed in Chapter 1, is brought to mind (Mingus 2011). As with disability justice activism, it is about emotion and forging deep relationships over time.

Disability Studies

In academia, disability studies emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as an identity-based interdisciplinary field. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson describes disability studies as "a grass-roots scholarly movement...that defines 'disability'...as a way of interpreting human variation" (2019a, 12). Recognizing disabled people as a cultural category of historically marginalized

people, in tandem with the disability rights movement, disability studies was and is composed of both self-identified disabled scholars and allies. The field recognizes that disability was already a topic of study prior to the development of “disability studies,” while doing the work of continuously refining and reclaiming the term disability itself. As Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009) describe it,

disability studies can be thought of as a critique of specific approaches to disability; a project to evolve an interdisciplinary frame that can be incorporated into multiple disciplines; and a new sphere of scholarly work that has a similar legitimacy to women’s studies, black studies and queer studies. (49)

In early disability studies scholarship, disability was being reclaimed from a negative identity into a complex concept. A pivotal and still influential moment occurred in 1983 when Mike Oliver, in conversation with academic and activist dialogue, coined the term “social model of disability” in his book *Social Work and Disability*. Thus the big idea of disability studies was born, and the medical and rehabilitation models of disability—which argue that disability is solely a bodily limitation in need of cure and/or corrective action to return it to a “normal” state—were identified and rejected in favor of an understanding of society’s role in constructing disabling conditions. Disability was no longer the fault of the individual body, but of the disabling conditions of society and the physical environment.

This dialogue remains a foundational and ongoing debate in CDS. Early academic work aimed to deconstruct the medical and rehabilitation models of disability and instead emphasize the structural, attitudinal, and material environments that cause a bodily impairment to be disabling. Later debates have asked for more nuanced interactions with bodily impairment, seeing the differentiation between disability and impairment as simplistic and binary. Reflecting on his initial publication 30 years later, Oliver (2013) summarized the ongoing critiques of the social model:

The first of these [critiques] suggests that there is no place for impairment within the social model of disability. The second alleges that the social model fails to take account of difference and presents disabled people as one unitary group, whereas in reality our race, gender, sexuality and age mean that our needs and lives are much more complex than that. (1025)

The Critical Turn

In fact, the 1990s were a productive time for disability studies scholarship (see Swain et al. 1993; Mitchell and Snyder 1995; Garland-Thomson 1997; Linton 1998). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson describes this period of scholarship as “focused on recuperation and revelation” (2013, 916). At the turn of the twenty-first century, disability studies matured. Where the first wave of disability theory was associated with materialism and neo-Marxism (Goodley et al. 2021, 29), in its second wave of thinking, the field now called CDS draws from “a much more eclectic mix of critical theories” (Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009, 56), including poststructuralism, phenomenology, critical psychology, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, posthumanism, critical realism, and new materialism. People who were already thinking with feminist studies and queer studies in particular began to dig deeper and found commonality with disability studies at the sight of the body, which reveals relations of power and representation (Reeve 2012; Kafer 2013; Thornton 2019; Bylund 2020). Queer theorist McRuer (2006), for example, developed “crip theory,” which he argues resists normalization in the form of compulsory able-bodiedness and able-mindedness.

There is still argumentation around whether or not the social model of disability matters or is enough, or how many models of disability exist. But the field has and is becoming more diverse and nuanced, evolving to consider digital futures, family, intersectionality, ethics, eugenics, and, always, accessibility. This critical turn “represents a distancing from those who have coopted disability studies for simply normalizing ends” (Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009, 51). As CDS develops, it also employs more complex conceptual understandings of disability

oppression and its consequences. As Goodley et al. explain, “We believe that Critical Disability Studies start with disability but do not necessarily end with disability...Criticality involves opening up one’s thinking to reflexively account for some of the connections and differences that are raised by disability’s intersectional politics” (2021, 35).

Despite the inherent nature of intersectional politics within disability itself, and the increasing engagement with intersectional analysis within CDS, there is, ironically, also tension around inclusion. Though there are now journals titled *Disability and the Global South* and *International Journal of Disability and Social Justice*, as well as the scholarship to justify their existence (e.g., Kohrman 2005; Erevelles 2011; Ghai 2015; Heyer 2015; Aramayo et al. 2016; E. Kim 2017; Açıksöz 2019), the field continues to be dominated by white voices from the Global North. As Goodley et al. describe it, the field “suffers from a within-nation self-referentiality and fails to engage with other geopolitical spaces” (2019, 975). There is work to be done to incorporate a broader swath of voices and experiences to more honestly capture a cross-cultural and global perspective.

In the meantime, CDS continues to insist on the materiality of the body, and here access is pivotal. Garland-Thomson (2019a) explains:

What is most significant about disability as an object of study is its distinct materiality—its configuration of body and world, the way that the human variations we think of as disability shape built and social environments and the way those environments shape bodies. Access is a path to critical analysis of what counts as knowledge, who makes that knowledge, who acquires it, and how it shapes the material space of academic institutions and the larger world; who and what is included and excluded is at the heart of critical disability studies. (13)

Nishida (2019) agrees, identifying “practising holistic access and developing intimate community–academia relationships” as one of three foundational principles of critical disability praxis (the other two principles are: “dismantling the knowledge hierarchy and engaging in action”) (240).

Holistic access is not born instantly—it takes trial and error and thus requires input from various people, it is collective work...Also crucial in the work toward holistic access are financial access and the dismantling of the aforementioned hierarchy of knowledge...How can we engage in a culture of access, instead of making access an individual responsibility (Price, Salzer, O’Shea, and Kerschbaum, 2017)? How can we creatively achieve accessibility together?...Besides spatial and material accessibility, how about temporal and emotional accessibility? (Nishida 2019, 244).

At its most radical, CDS asks us to interrogate our own physical frailty. One of the most radical concepts of disability studies and disability activism is that we are all only temporarily able-bodied. CDS is thus characterized by critical self-reflexivity. It resists forces of normalization and pursues practices of social justice. It centers the lived experience of disabled people while challenging forces of disablism. “The task is always to balance the activist’s cry for accessible conceptualisation with the scholar’s understanding of the complex, interwoven but continually changing fabric of human societies” (Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009, 64).

A New Window on Food

As I write about disability and the kind of need it entails, and the love and the passion and the commitment that people throw into the movement because of their need for survival and their need for community, the alternative food movement begins to feel like a luxury. But here is where we must remind ourselves that human society is the very reason the food system is broken and why it is not meeting the needs of the human and the more-than-human world. Thoughtful consideration of both the food system and the human body involves us in an absolute mess of entanglements. We are reminded that,

as human predicaments are those of the planet and its inhabitants, so the very existence of humankind depends upon our successful and sustainable coexistence with animals, machines, the environment and other humans. Now is the time to rethink human and non-human interrelations in ways that mutually sustain us. (Goodley et al. 2021, 31).

Colonialism, the food movement, food studies, and CDS and its inherent quest for social justice all force us to ask if our research considerations “include im/migrant workers, including agricultural or care labourers, from the Global South slowly becoming disabled and sick as they engage in lower wage and harsh working environments in the Global North?” (Nishida 2019, 240). The great wisdom that the disability justice movement can offer the food movement is to deeply understand both the failure of the food system and what it might mean to act together with deep empathy to meet human and more-than-human needs.

Food Activism & (Dis)Ability

As I state in the introduction to Chapter 2, although the food justice movement has begun to more comprehensively acknowledge oppression within the food movement, (dis)ability has remained mostly unremarked on. One exception is found in the vegan movement, which has done some soul-searching around ableism. After all, eating certain kinds of food (for example, raw vegetables) is a privilege not all bodies have. We might remember the suggestion that, due to access issues, fast food is the food that represents disability culture (see Chapter 1). Meanwhile, it is an unfortunate but perhaps not surprising truth that US households that include a disabled adult are disproportionately food insecure (Heflin et al. 2019). There is thus need for greater consideration of the specific needs of this population when envisioning food system futures. Cadieux and Slocum (2015) report that “food policy councils from around the US suggest that white imaginaries prevail, making African American and Latino people show up in the food system only through reference to pathological conditions (e.g., obesity, diabetes)” (11; see also Guthman 2011). In this same vein, it could be argued that ableist imaginaries prevail, whereby people with disabilities appear only as recipients of much needed aid to afford and access food.

And, just as scholars have observed of whiteness, ability is an “unmarked category” (Slocum 2006; Lockie 2013). For example, the urban agriculture arm of the food movement has been criticized for its frequent insensitivity to the history of slavery and the resultant relationship between Black bodies and cultivating land. It also, much like the environmental movement as a whole, quietly assumes bodies that can bend, kneel, grasp, and lift. How do we then create opportunities for diverse bodies to participate in the alternative food movement? What happens when we use a more nuanced understanding of intersectionality to deepen the work of food justice?

Wilkerson argues that “further attention to disability will advance ongoing work on food access...[and] illuminate the significance of which food one can access, how and why it matters” (Williams-Forson and Wilkerson 2011, 19). As evidence, she cites research that has both intentionally and unintentionally established this link. Consideration of disability has what Wilkerson calls “universalizing potential” (Williams-Forson and Wilkerson 2011, 19), because, as pointed out by disability studies, we all face varying levels of abilities throughout our lives. The resulting vulnerabilities impact how we each, as individuals, define good food and our level of access to it. Ability thus broadens our conception of access (Simpson 2017), as we consider the complications of safely leaving our homes and the physical difficulties and mental complexities of preparing food, along with the oft-discussed challenges of food affordability, proximity, and knowledge.

Disability studies and crip theory also have rich insights to offer food studies more generally. They lead us to inquire: “Who else is in the kitchen? Who should be there, but isn’t?” (Williams-Forson and Wilkerson 2011, 7). The application of disability studies to food work thus extends beyond questions of access and draws attention to issues such as the exclusions inherent

in foodways (e.g., dining out) and the health dangers embedded in the agricultural industry (e.g., farmworker injuries, hearing loss, and farmer suicide), among others. When Wilkerson argues that normativity permeates foodways, here, especially, are key concerns for my research. What taken-for-granted norms impede new relational possibilities? What identities are taken for granted in the world of food activism? How can awareness of (dis)ability's impact help us imagine otherwise?

Hall (2017) is concerned with both ability and (hetero)normativity at the table itself, an iconic place for conversations that define food systems. Her work seeks to “crip” the meaning of sustainability using queer and disability theory. She asks what truly sustainable *and* accessible foodscapes would entail, and concludes that vulnerability, instability, and dynamism must be included and “the myriad disabling effects of the industrial food system, pharmaceutical industry, and heteronormative family” must be acknowledged (Hall 2017, 439). Simpson (2017), among others, recognizes the intersectional nature of both food justice and disability justice. They both seek structural change and analysis of the implications of structural oppressions. Simpson believes in “the liberatory potential of food justice for disabled people” (Simpson 2017, 405), whereby systemic oppressions might be recognized and overcome. The point is to acknowledge the diversity of lived experiences that might inform both how we frame “the problem” (of food access in particular) and how we conceive of a range of practices that translate to more just experiences of food. This intersectional perspective creates a transformational orientation (Hall 2017) that helps us challenge the concepts of “normal” and “healthy” bodies (e.g., Simpson 2017; Guthman 2011).

In summary, studying the relationship between food and social justice and diverse bodies links complex, multi-issue politics. Key concepts include power and privilege (Guthman 2008a;

Billings and Cabbil 2011), democracy (i.e., “public participation” in Gottlieb and Fisher 1996), the structural and institutional nature of justice/equity (Alkon and Agyeman 2011), and community self-determination (Sbicca 2012). Despite the instability of its meaning, though, there is agreement that the role of social justice in food system change is compelling because of its cross-movement potential (Gottlieb and Fisher 1996; Alkon and Norgaard 2009; Gottlieb and Joshi 2010; Freudenberg et. al. 2011; Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011). As Gottlieb and Joshi (2010) contend, “the food justice argument brings together an array of arguments about food and environment, food and health, food and labor, food and hunger, and how food is grown, produced, accessed, and eaten, and situates them within a justice framework” (230). Unfortunately, however, the framing of food justice is better equipped to recognize injustice than prepared to define the precise parameters of just food provisioning. If we are to understand food access as the result of contested politics, diverse members, and networked associations, we must investigate the actual.

Conclusion: Intersectional Analysis

Because my work examines the food movement, it is necessary to understand not only how academics have studied and framed food politics and food activism, but also the messages of the movement itself. To conclude this literature review, then, I apply an intersectional lens to two highly visible food movement actors in public conversation. Specifically, to journalist Michael Pollan’s work and to the celebrity of regenerative farmer Joel Salatin. Michael Pollan (as seen in Chapter 2 in the discussion regarding President Obama) is consistently referenced in both academic and activist work, in both praise and criticism; in fact, he has been called “the most influential food pundit in America” (McGrath 2019, 197). His is thus a well-recognized

name in the literature. Rather than rehash prior discussions, here I use intersectional analysis tools from CDS to consider recent blog posts by farmer Joel Salatin, who has been highly praised by Pollan. The intent is to exemplify the use of such analysis on a small scale, with familiar figures, before moving on to my case studies. This example can also help us understand how dominant ideologies within the alternative food movement normalize certain values.

Michael Pollan is a scholarly journalist who wrote the best-selling and influential book *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006) and is a frequent contributor to *The New York Times*, often focusing on the food movement (including, notably, in a 2010 piece entitled “The Food Movement, Rising”). He has subsequently published a number of other books about the food system, specifically about what we should eat and why (e.g., Pollan 2009, 2013). Hall (2017) uses Michael Pollan’s work to masterfully illustrate the alimentary racisms and ableisms that litter food movement discourse. One of Pollan’s books, *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation* (2013), was turned into a Netflix show, which A. Breeze Harper, the academic blogger and author known as sistah vegan, described in a Facebook post as white men experts reporting to us from “civilized spaces” (February 22, 2016; see also Harper 2015a).

Pollan is no nutritionist; his arguments exist somewhere between ethical eating and environmental awareness, with a healthy dash of the gourmand. This combination is indicative of reformist and, to a certain degree, progressive food activism in the United States. He is joined in this camp by other movement leaders, such as Alice Waters, Francis Moore Lappé, and Wendell Berry. Though not apolitical, these early but still influential leaders of food activism promote heirloom flavors and knowing one’s farmer over a potentially more inclusive and transformative prefigurative or oppositional politics. Critics such as Hall argue that this avoidance is exclusionary for the movement as a whole and represents the interests of a privileged few

unconcerned with price; these folks do not face the threat of hunger or malnutrition (Hall 2017). This form of food activism reflects the “general hegemony of privileged positions such as White, heterosexual, and men” (Pilgeram and Meeuf 2014, 14). This dissertation hopes to add (dis)able(d) bodies for consideration.

In *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* (2006), Joel Salatin’s Polyface Farm occupies an entire chapter as Pollan’s example of alternative food (his other chapters examine industrial, organic, and foraged food). I want to spend some time here telling a story of the food movement through the celebrity and adoration of this farmer, Joel Salatin. By all accounts, Salatin is generally personable and has proven a successful spokesman for the sustainable pastoral idyll. He is also unabashedly libertarian, ridicules environmental policy, and insists upon doing things on his own terms; as evidence, the title of one of his books reads *Everything I Want to Do Is Illegal* (2007). As proof of his celebrity, since the publication of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* (2006), Salatin has appeared in a variety of food films, including *American Meat* (Meriwether 2013), *Farmageddon* (Canty 2011), *YERT: Your Environmental Road Trip* (Evans 2011), *Fresh* (Joanes 2009), and *Food, Inc.* (Kenner 2008).

On July 25, 2019, Chris Newman, a Black Indigenous farmer, published an online article titled “Small Family Farms Aren’t the Answer: The Romance of Neoliberal Peasant Farming Blinds Us to Our Collective Power.” In it, Newman makes a case for small farmers to join together in cooperatives that allow for shared administrative time and energy, but might restrict individual choice (in crop selection, for example). He argues that there is great danger in “farmers internalizing the mythic virtue of rugged independence, which keeps us isolated and denies us the efficiency, effectiveness, and power of acting collectively to countermand the efficiency, effectiveness, and power of private capital” (Newman 2019, n.p.).

Joel Salatin got wind of the article and, on November 22, 2019, wrote a rebuttal on his blog, *Musings from the Lunatic Farmer*. The second paragraph reads,

The problem with disagreeing with Chris is that I'll be called a racist. That's unfortunate. Is it more racist to play the race card to anybody who dares disagree with you than it is to actually be a racist? I'm bringing this up because all races need to understand that when you use that term, it shuts down all communication. So I'm going out on a limb here in saying anything negative about someone who is not white. For non-whites to assume the default "racist!" accusation fits most circumstances is to stall forward progress. Period.

Not only is this statement a microaggression, it exemplifies observations of color-blindness (Guthman 2008b) across the food movement and beyond.

Newman became aware of Salatin's post after being invited to write for *Mother Earth News*, an mainstay alternative food and lifestyle publication dating back to the 1970s. Salatin had a regular column in the journal and often acted as keynote speaker at events. Newman contacted the editor to ask that Salatin's racism be addressed, especially if he (Newman) were to contribute to the magazine. *Mother Earth News* did not immediately respond to Newman's request, but, in response to a public post by Newman, Polyface Farm (but not Salatin himself) was pressured into an apology about a week later. After increasingly racist comments from Salatin to members of the farming community were made public, *Mother Earth News* did drop Salatin as columnist—without public acknowledgement.

Newman was not new to discussions of racism in agriculture; in the wake of the 2017 Charlottesville protests, he wrote an essay titled "Farming While Black," in which he identifies himself as an "exceptional negro" and a success story that proves racism can be overcome and therefore need not be intentionally addressed (Newman 2017). He pointedly observes the benefits of farming while white, which include inherited land (Salatin inherited his farm) and networked apprenticeship opportunities. He was also already familiar with Salatin and Polyface;

Newman uses a livestock rotation system inspired by Salatin and describes him as an early “beacon” (Newman 2020).

This dialogue exemplifies the struggle to access decision-making power within the food movement, as well as the hesitation to admit the failures of established heroes. A. Breeze Harper (sistah vegan) had drawn attention to Salatin’s racist behavior already, four years earlier (Harper 2015a), and called into question the movement’s inclusion of his leadership, but was largely ignored. This dialogue is also evidence that the food movement will need to more intentionally define shared values if the goal is to move towards a more just and inclusive food system.

It is perhaps unsurprising that Black bodies are not the only casualty of Salatin’s worldview; his position on the 2020 pandemic lays bare his ableist perspective. He publicly stated that he wanted to contract COVID-19 and that, in his opinion, the most vulnerable should isolate at home while everyone else continues with their pre-pandemic behaviors (Salatin 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). This kind of segregationist perspective is reminiscent of the institutionalization of mentally and physically disabled peoples, a practice that remains in place in various manifestations to this day. Salatin’s concept of inclusion suffers from a similarly narrow view.

After a 300-person maskless gathering at Polyface, Salatin made a public statement about inclusion on his blog, in which he wrote, “We are open to masked AND unmasked; that is inclusion in its practical form” (Salatin, 2020d). In an earlier post, he explains his position on the virus and bodily injury more broadly:

Here on the farm, we make economic judgments about life every day. How much do we invest in saving that sick cow? In fact, my family knows not to resuscitate me for any reason. If I have a heart attack today, let me go. Now if I have an accident, like cut my arm with the chain saw, that’s a different story. I’d like to survive that. But I have no desire to burden my loved ones with years of care just to squeak out another few years of breathing. This sounds harsh and hard, but it’s also harsh and hard to watch aspiring young entrepreneurs in food trucks lose their dreams over a 2-month hysteria about a new

virus that inconveniences the vast majority of people for a couple of days. Or struggling restaurant servers unable to earn an income. ... Is a life worth \$1 billion? (Salatin, 2020b)

In these statements, Salatin evokes care as burden and conjures quality of life constructs to justify marginalization and discrimination of certain bodies. While Salatin is alternative because of the way he farms, he is unconcerned with structural questions of access (he self-admittedly markets to “soccer moms” who can afford his products).

As the example of Joel Salatin all too clearly highlights, alternative agricultural practices are entirely compatible with racism and ableism. There is other evidence of Salatin’s racism, but above we saw him comment on Newman’s race (and by default his own) as a means to deflect possible criticism. The comments of Newman’s were not race-related, yet Salatin makes this a pivotal element of his commentary. His ableist remarks do not criticize people with disabilities, but he makes abundantly clear that certain bodies are more valuable than others. Salatin’s work as a farmer involves physical labor. His life, in his own estimation, is valuable and worth saving only if his body is in a condition to sustain such labor. In addition, his views on Covid suggest bodies are only as valuable as their contribution to capitalist productivity. This is an instructive example because Salatin is an admired and financially successful regenerative farmer, and simultaneously overtly racist and ableist. It is a story of the failure of the food movement to include a wide swath of bodies, a story that helps us understand how leaving one type of body out inevitably excludes others as well.

I want to be clear that there is no equivalency between racism and ableism; there are parallels and intersections. Oppressions that are always interrelated are decidedly differentiated because of history and circumstance (Young 1992). Yet there is a kind of camaraderie between non-normate bodies that I wish to identify and encourage in order to move towards an inclusively transformative food movement.

CHAPTER 4:

Thinking with Critical Disability Studies—Methodology and Methods

As I argue in the previous chapter, critical disability studies developed and is in constant conversation with disability rights and disability justice activism. It is also a methodological approach. In this chapter, I introduce my research as emergent qualitative inquiry, define the role of critical disability studies in developing my research questions, and explain why case studies were an appropriate method to answer these questions. I also describe the types of data collected for each case and my approach to data analysis.

This project consisted of case studies of three alternative food organizations within the metropolitan network of Seattle, Washington: a healthy corner store project, a community co-op, and an anarchist weekly free market. A summary of each organization is provided in Table 4.1. After paying close attention to the way things worked and using available documentation to discern organizational narratives, I coded my research materials to identify themes. Emergent qualitative inquiry of this kind seeks to learn from the efforts of those who are organizationally and actively involved and requires contextualized and in-depth knowledge. This approach maintains two important values of research that I have taken from academic food activist Patricia Allen (Allen 2007 and Allen et al. 2003, respectively): designing research projects that engage real people and real lives; and maintaining awareness of wealth, power, and privilege differentials among members of the community. That is to say, it is important to me to keep research connected with lived realities. In my view, it is equally important not to suppress

divergences and controversies: doing so would sacrifice the complexity of the lessons learned. Critical disability studies held me accountable to both goals.

Critical Disability Studies as Methodology

Described as both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary (Jaarsma 2020), and often hailing from feminist worldviews, critical disability studies emphasizes mode of analysis rather than objects of study (Minich 2016). Sami Schalk clarifies that “the methodology of disability studies...scrutiniz[es] not bodily or mental impairments but the social norms that define particular attributes as impairments, as well as the social conditions that concentrate stigmatized attributes in particular populations” (2017, n.p.). As we saw in Chapter 2, food deserts, for example, pathologize bodies subject to food choice availability. The central question of my research is this: *How does critical disability studies deepen intersectional analyses of oppression within the food movement?* One of my conclusions is that it does so by offering methodological tools.

I note that critical disability studies does not necessarily entail examining the disabled body itself. As Schalk argues, “One can study disabled people and not be doing critical disability studies and one can be doing critical disability studies and not be directly studying disabled people” (2017, n.p.). In research and methodology, critical disability studies means “understand[ing] (dis)ability as a social system that impacts all of us in a wide variety of systemic and quotidian ways” (Schalk 2017, n.p.). Importantly, she distinguishes between (dis)ability—“a system of social norms which categorizes, ranks, and values bodyminds”—and disability—“a historically and culturally variable category within this larger system” (2017, n.p.). In other words, critical disability studies recognizes non-normate bodies without

handicapping them. Minich (2016) further explains that this involves identifying normative ideologies “*with the goal of producing knowledge in support of justice*” (n.p., emphasis hers).

Within a (food) movement that makes its own claims of justice-seeking (see Chapter 2), it seems apt to use this methodological approach to explore its efficacy. Critical disability studies deepens intersectional analyses of oppression within the food movement by asking, as I do: *How do dominant ideologies within the alternative food movement normalize certain values?* In the context of my cases, this question forced me to pay close attention to the normative ideologies at work in the organizations that led to decision-making priorities and inclusions/exclusions of people and ideas.

As discussed in Chapter 3, access is a priority of disability activism and research. Minich agrees that critical disability studies “must be a methodology enacted in and through a commitment to accessibility” (2016). Jaarsma (2020) too argues that “critical disability studies puts forward ‘access’ as a problematizing question,” even suggesting describing it as “access-as-practice” (25). Thus, critical disability studies deepens intersectional analyses of oppression within the food movement by asking: *What role does access play within the alternative food movement and how might it be problematized?* As Sara Ahmed (2017) reminds us, “access can be the formal requirements you might need to enter a world. But accessibility and inaccessibility are also a result of histories that congeal as habits or shared routines” (109). Here we more deeply grasp the meaning of an emergent methodology that problematizes the question of access rather than defining it. The emphasis is no longer contained by particular bodies who are problematized or particular disciplines with their attendant perspectives. Neither is access about inclusion or accommodation in this conception. In fact, “accommodation undercuts, rather than

fosters, solidarity” through assumptions of deficit and ableist, after-the-fact designs (Jaarsma 2020, 20). The activist Mia Mingus explains poignantly her vision of access:

So that when I say something is inaccessible, you don't just think 'there's no ramp' or 'there are no places to sit' or 'there's no close, accessible, free parking.' Instead, you feel. You feel the weight of what inaccessibility means to us. You understand inaccessibility to mean isolation, shame, exclusion, disappointment, loneliness, anger, privilege, sadness, loss of community and disconnection. (2010)

Much like the food movement, Minich, referencing disability studies, recognizes “the field’s persistent difficulty in addressing questions of race” (2016, n.p.). In conversation with Minich, Jina Kim (2017) argues for a critical disability methodology that is “a mode of analysis that urges us to hold racism, illness, and disability together, to see them as antagonists in a shared struggle, and to generate a poetics of survival from that nexus” (n.p.). This recalls Kim Q. Hall’s argument, which I recount in Chapter 1, and is also intersectionality in action. Within the food system and alternative food politics, racism, illness, and disability are sources of oppression. Stiegman (2022) helps us ask:

If we, as food scholars, consider the global food system as shaped by the same toxic juggernaut of power relations [that compose white supremacy and ableism as articulated by Piepzna-Samarasinha (2019)], how might examining the food system in relation to structural ableism deepen our analysis? What groups of people are we excluding as a result of this blind spot? And how might taking their experiences seriously deepen our work? (271)

She continues:

For example, processed and packaged foods are often shunned as seductive evils of the capitalist food industrial complex (Pollan, 2006). But what about the disabled people unable to prepare meals from scratch? How does this discourse further stigmatize and exclude disabled persons from normative framings of health (Hall, 2014)? And how might disabled-led initiatives within the food movement analyze and confront these phenomena? (Stiegman 2022, 272)

The intersectional and transdisciplinary process of critical disability studies (Hamraie, 2018; Jaarsma 2020) deepens intersectional analyses of oppression within the food movement by encouraging my final research question: *Within the alternative food movement, what is the*

impact of discourses around food, access, and normativity on different bodies? In the context of each case, this question translated to paying attention to cultural norms and critiques of obesity, observing who was potentially missing from the table, and asking what radical inclusion entails.

Donna Haraway's (1998) argument that we need situated and embodied knowledge is important here. Her work, like critical disability studies, builds on feminist theory to argue that we are embodied entities and our life knowledge—dare I say bias?— is founded on the experiences we have in these bodies. This renders objectivity less potent. Identifying positionality takes center stage. For me, this translates to an awareness of my own biases and role as a white researcher, but also that I am a woman and disabled. Haraway insists, though, that simply because we are marginalized doesn't make us more profound observers. In the same breath, she acknowledges that a methodology that recognizes our positionality is essential to fighting forces of marginalization. What situated knowledges—Haraway's language for embodied methodology—asks is for is a different standard of rigor: one that prioritizes sensitivity to context. This means being transparent in the research process, involving participants in data analysis to truth test the work, and centering relationality as a way to be accountable to the broader community. My close involvement with each of my case studies lends me rich insight, but also a sort of blindness that comes with closeness. By acknowledging these multiple identities, I do not hope to overcome them, but to pay attention to how they influence my thinking.

Why Case Studies?

Case studies are in-depth studies of a subject in a situational context. They are particularly relevant to “topics that deeply involve the study of human beings” (Casanave 2010, 12), as mine does, and encourage thick description of organizations (Geertz 1973). The in-depth narration allowed by case studies respects both the situated nature of knowledge and the complexity inherent in social interactions and acknowledged by critical disability studies. In the context of my research questions, case studies allowed me to investigate different kinds of food activism in one study, thereby strengthening my conclusions in relation to the work CDS can accomplish within the alternative food movement. They also allowed me to dig into the insights CDS work offers in a real-world context.

Qualitative research requires flexibility. In my work I have been nudged “to tolerate ambiguity” (Charmaz 2008, 168). Case studies leave room for this; as Stake (1995) argues regarding case studies, “the researcher makes a flexible list of questions, progressively redefines issues, and seizes opportunities to learn the unexpected” (29). As Stake (1995) usefully points out, though, “good research is not about good methods as much as it is about good thinking” (19). Directed and well-considered research questions are important, and these questions inevitably evolve throughout the research process (Charmaz 2005; Stake 1995).

In a similar vein, Erevelles (2014, n.p.) argues:

ambiguities frame the field of disability studies providing several manifestos for life at the borderlands. These manifestos are replete not with directives but with the most radical re-imagining of possibilities. They thrive on the unthinkable of ableist discourses. They produce few answers but rather embrace the infuriating practice of constantly troubling the questions. They make even the radical seem quite conservative. Take any radical theory—radical humanism, marxism, post structuralism, critical race theory, feminist theory, queer theory, etc. Place a disruptive disability studies in its midst. Tentatively pose questions. Trouble their assumptions undergirding their alternative/radical conceptions of the normal. What is autonomy? When exactly is life not worth living?

Why does rationality have to be the sole determinant of our humanity? How do we define limit? Listen carefully to their answers.

Garland-Thomson (2011) similarly reminds us that a feminist disability studies methodology “asks difficult questions but accepts provisional answers,” privileging “the partial, the provisional, the particular” (40–42). Tentatively posing questions and listening carefully to what emerges in the context of the cases are the bedrock of my method.

Casanave, an academic who teaches courses about qualitative inquiry, case studies, and the use of narrative, is part of a diverse group of academics pushing for a broader acceptance of writing styles in the academy. She argues that currently only established, tenured faculty generally have the luxury of exploring nontraditional forms of academic communication, but that an openness to, for example, literary, narrative styles might offer new ways of representing knowledge. Though I do not take any great risks, so to speak, in this dissertation, I do attempt to narrate complex organizations enacting social change through food.

Case studies are commonly employed in food studies research to narrate the practices of food activism (see for example Alkon and Norgaard 2009; Maye et al. 2007; Sbicca 2012). Though case studies focus on particularities, the comparative nature of my research design allows for broader generalizations that would not be possible within only one case. Using multiple cases allowed me to speak to the spectrum of practices that compose alternative food organizations. I specifically worked on these three cases not only because of the convenience of being a part of each of them, but because each case represents a different governance model of an alternative food organization (top-down, democratic, grassroots) and a different orientation to solving “problems” of the food system (reformist, progressive, radical). The three cases also gave me the opportunity to highlight three specific concepts that are key to disability studies

thinking: interrogating health, crip time, and interdependence. Though I use one case to highlight each concept, each concept is relevant to all the cases and to the food movement more broadly.

In Chapter 2, I provided specific background material on the case typologies within the alternative food movement. This was necessary to understand each case as an example of an organizational type. Table 4.1 provides a very basic summary of the spectrum of (food) activism my research covers.

Table 4.1: Summary of Case Studies

	Healthy Foods Here	Central Co-op	Food Not Bombs
Governance Structure	Partnership between Seattle Office of Economic Development, Public Health and University of Washington	Democratically elected Board; general manager hired by Board	Anarchist, volunteer-run
Funding Structure	Federally funded (US Department of Health and Human Services and Public Health–Seattle & King County)	For-profit, member-owned business	Participant donation
Mission	The goal is to make healthy food available to all in King County through business support and incentives.	Central Co-op is a community-owned natural foods cooperative open to everyone, with locations on Seattle’s Capitol Hill and in Tacoma’s West End. Owned by our shoppers and workers, we’re a complete grocery store dedicated to high-quality products, sustainable practices and strong relationships with Washington farmers and artisans.	Food Not Bombs is committed to building a vital and caring movement for progressive social change and to challenging the invisible barrier that separates the poor and homeless from a so-called “normal” society.

Within each case, I collected data in three ways: I participated, read documents, and talked to people. These became my data sources. For two years I served as a technical assistance provider for the healthy corner store project Healthy Foods Here. For three and a half years, I served on the Board of Trustees of Central Co-op, a member-elected group that governs the cooperative. I have informally participated in Food Not Bombs (FNB) on a semi-regular basis for more than 10 years, since 2011. My participation in each of these organizations places me in a better position to understand their organizational cultures (Neyland 2008, 34).

One of the challenges of this project was the dissimilar nature of the three cases. There simply was not the same documentation available for each organization. I therefore identified roughly equivalent sources of information for each. My research questions ask me to consider the organizational type and embedded norms rather than individual experiences. Therefore, I conducted semi-structured interviews only in the case of FNB, where there were no organizational materials to draw on.

As each organization inevitably experiences change, I also wanted to create a similar snapshot in time. While there is a six-year time span across the project as a whole, the data represents a one- to two-year time span for each case. Another challenge was the scope of including three case studies. I did not want to find myself with more information than I was able to process. As a general rule of qualitative research, when one begins to encounter redundant information, known as saturation, the research may be considered complete. Of course, there is always more to discover, but this creates a reasonable and practical stopping point. Thus, as I investigated possible sources for each case, I asked myself: What will this tell me about the organization? Is this new information? Table 4.2 lists the final sources used in this project.

Table 4.2: Sources of Information

Food Organizations		
<u>Healthy Foods Here</u> 2010–2012	<u>Central Co-op</u> 2014	<u>Food Not Bombs</u> 2014–2016
GIS baseline assessment Team meeting minutes (x29) <i>Healthy Foods Here: Recommendations for Future Programming</i> report	Board meeting minutes (x12) Articles of incorporation Bylaws Newsletters (x4)	Field notes from weekly event (x12) Personal interviews (x5)

Data Analysis

I used the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti to undertake thematic content analysis through coding. Coding is “a focused way of viewing data” (Charmaz 2005, 70). A code is a word or short phrase that is used to describe a chunk of text, image, observed action, etc. which “symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña 2016, n.p.). Codes are conceptual labels which help researchers characterize ideas and phenomena that emerge in individual and organizational stories.

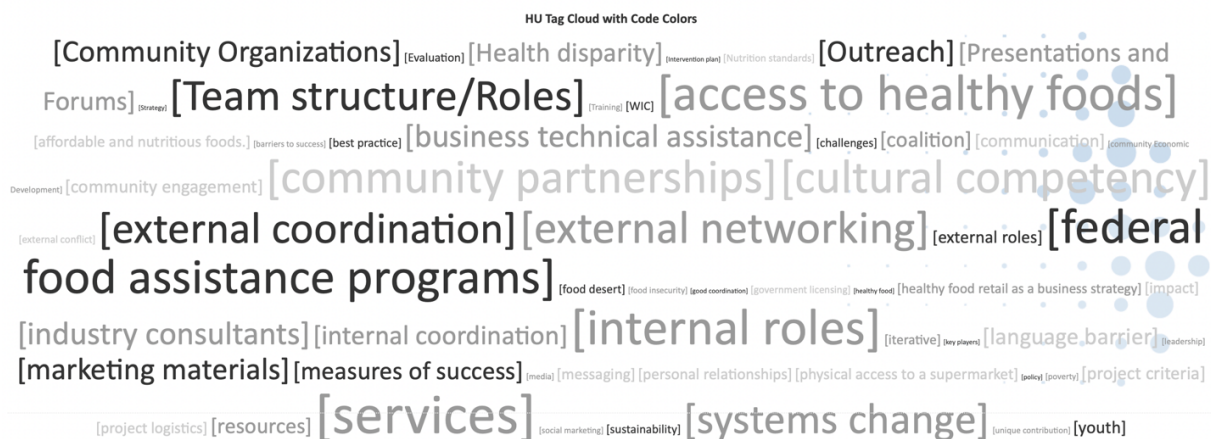
There are many ways to approach the process of coding. My approach was driven by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006; Strauss and Corbin 1994, 1997), which is an emergent qualitative method that calls for concentrated examination of a subject. It is data-centric; that is, theory is built inductively from data rather than deductively using data to prove or disprove a theory. This is achieved, in part, through the constant comparison of different kinds of data in search of analytical insight. It is an “iterative process of going back and forth

between data collection and analysis” (Charmaz 2008, 168), which I did in conversation with CDS. This process was particularly suited to discerning how each group operated and what was of import to each group in the three comparative cases in my project.

As most grounded-theory projects do, I began with an open-coding process through which themes emerged in the review process. I primarily practiced in vivo coding, codes taken directly from the participant/document. This method prioritizes and honors the voice of participants/organizations (Charmaz 2008). In this sense, much of the coding was already done for me. Coding is interpretive, however, and the initial coding process was messy. At times I changed codes to match participants’ language. Sipe and Ghiso (2004), in their revealing narrative about coding dilemmas for a children’s literacy study, note that “all coding is a judgment call” since we bring “our subjectivities, our personalities, our predispositions, [and] our quirks” to the process (482–3). I often changed initial codes to reflect more fitting language, and many codes only appeared once or twice and therefore were not deemed significant. As I coded, my codes became increasingly focused. When I completed coding for each case, I used Atlas.ti to create a tag cloud, a visual depiction of content tags with increasing font size to match frequency (see Figure 4.1). These clouds helped me identify categories that represented themes from the data which was the basis of my analysis. Figure 4.2 is a visual example of coding within the Central Co-op data (a newsletter). Membership was a code that appeared with increasing frequency in the documents. As you can see in the Central Co-op tag cloud (Figure 4.1), it, literally, showed up front and center in the case.

Figure 4.1: Tag Clouds for Each Case Study

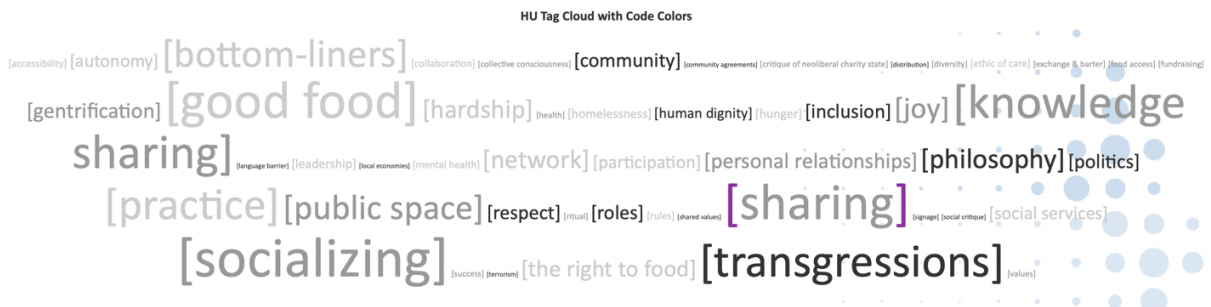
HEALTHY FOODS HERE



CENTRAL CO-OP



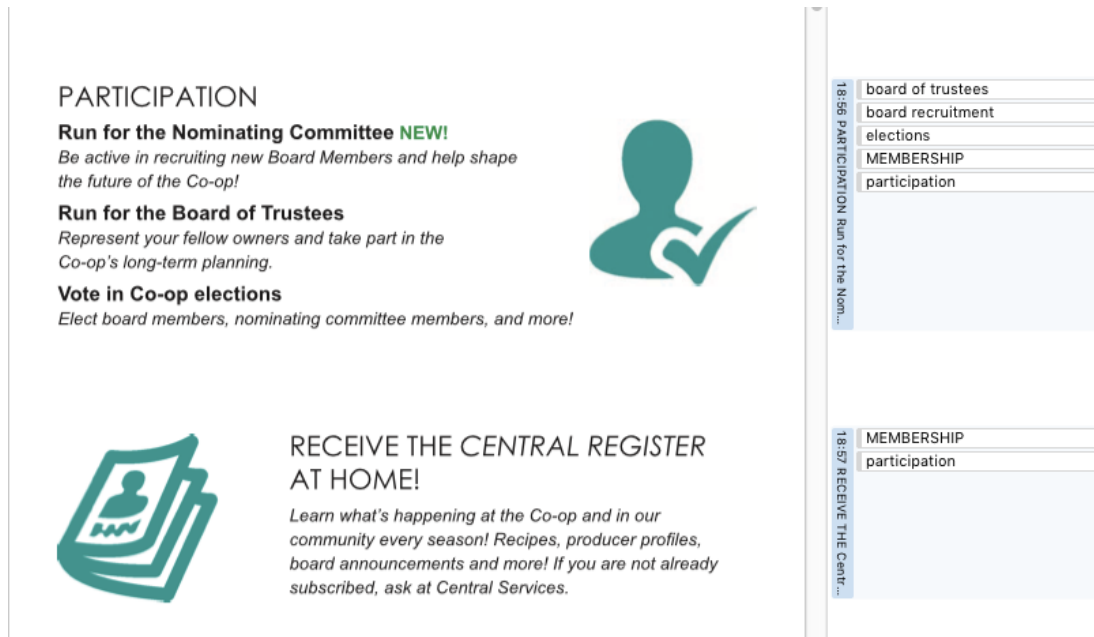
FOOD NOT BOMBS



From Atlas.ti:

Description: A tag cloud is a visual depiction of content tags used in your HU. More frequently used tags are depicted in a larger font; display order is alphabetical. This lets you find a tag both by alphabet and by frequency. Codes can also show their assigned colors (both in the code selection and the result box).

Figure 4.2: Example of In Vivo Coding from Newsletter Data



As I progressed with my work, I began to identify recurring ideas, patterns, and themes, both within a particular case as well as between cases. This process of identifying emergent themes was iterative. There was continual interplay between my personal knowledge of the cases grounded in my own experience, formal bodies of knowledge developed from my secondary research, and the primary source material in each project. The tag clouds helped me identify categories that represented the most important (and frequently occurring) themes from the data. I would then return to the source material to find appropriate quotes that conveyed these central themes. I used the grounded theory strategy of memo writing to elaborate on central themes. These informal memos became early drafts of my cases.

This process led me to the three concepts that I highlight in the cases: health, crip time, and interdependence. In Healthy Food Here, the hierarchical structure of the organization was

clearly seen in my coding and reflected the significant amount of time involved in defining roles. It was access to healthy foods to ensure health within this paradigm of roles that drove the program. Health was a driver, but not one open for programmatic reflection. In conversation with CDS, I wanted to explore the consequences of unquestioningly pursuing (public) health through the food system.

Membership, as seen above, took center stage in the Central Co-op materials. Membership was defined both by identification with certain kinds of foods and cooking that took time and ability and by a dedication of time in the form of organizational participation. CDS reminds us through crip time that our bodies operate on different temporal planes, and this case allowed for exploration of this in the context of food co-ops. Finally, the clear import of relationships in FNB could be seen through codes such as socializing, sharing, community, network, and even transgressions. As CDS demands acknowledgement of interdependence (essentially reliance on relationships), FNB offered an opportunity to examine what interdependence means in the context of food activism.

Limitations of This Research

The alternative food movement is vast, as explored in Chapter 2. Though I have attempted to cover a spectrum of food activism, these three cases cannot totally encompass the entirety of food activism. In addition, though I make an argument more broadly that food studies has much to gain from the analytical tools of critical disability studies, my work only examines the food studies work looking at the alternative food movement. In each case I investigate the role of a particular concept relevant to that case, but I could have comparatively examined each of these concepts in each case. And, of course, these are not the only concepts from CDS

relevant to food studies work. The reality of any research project is that there are limits to what one can hope to accomplish within a reasonable time frame. The intent here is to make a strong argument for the role of CDS in deepening intersectional analysis of oppression in the food system and in food studies more broadly, in hopes of encouraging more work at this intersection.

Conclusion

Some have argued that we have plenty of empirical evidence of problems and the difficulty is one of what we now do. I am of course contributing to empirical work. However, I focus on how alternative food organizations function not only as a criticism (or lamentation) of current injustices in the food system but also to resolve or contribute to resolving problems associated with sustainability, health, and inequality. In my research, case studies provided the opportunity for me to pay close attention to specific discourses within different facets of the alternative food movement. Coding was a tool I utilized which allowed themes to emerge. Critical disability studies provided a lens through which to analyze these themes. As I note elsewhere, my goal in taking this approach was not to make definitive conclusions but to explore the consequences and the possibilities for food system change, social justice, and inclusion. The stakes are the development of our imaginative thinking within current possibilities for food activism as a means to seek broader social justice, which means constantly responding to those aspects of our own work which replicate structures of oppression and violence.

CHAPTER 5:

Interrogating Health in Healthy Foods Here

A group of eight people gathers at a conference table in a busy high-rise building in downtown Seattle at 10 AM. The Office of Economic Development, Public Health—Seattle & King County, the University of Washington, and a private food planning firm are represented. A woman calls the meeting to order, passes out agendas, and welcomes everyone. She explains that there are four items for discussion today, plus time for folks to bring up specific issues that need to be addressed. The primarily white, female, and well-educated group quietly reviews the agenda. The two white men present hold supervisory roles and there are two women of color on the team. No one has a visible disability.

The meeting begins with general project updates: scheduling, an update on a printing project, and clarifying who will represent the group at an upcoming webinar. The structure and time of the group's regular meetings are discussed, as is the agenda for a larger coalition meeting with community-based organizations. Outreach and store updates are up next. Each technical assistance (TA) provider shares details on the stores they are working with: one store is changing location, so work with them is on hold until after the move; a new application has just been turned in; and the idea of working at the district level of a drugstore chain is discussed. Decisions about tracking outreach are delegated and a timeline set.

The woman asks if there are other items that need to be addressed. A TA provider asks if there is a cash management or bookkeeping resource the program could provide for stores; someone from the Office of Economic Development agrees to look into it. A Public Health

representative relays a potential media event. If the event materializes, the communications team will be looking for a store to visit that has attractive displays of produce, a good façade, no beer or cigarette ads in windows, as well as an owner and customers who can speak to the benefits of the program. A member of the food planning firm suggests researching the potential of implementing a policy requiring stores to sell fresh produce to receive a grocery license as has been done in Minneapolis and Oklahoma. The formal meeting is brought to a close. Team members check in with each other with both personal news and professional matters as they gather their belongings and head out.

** * **

It is now 2:30 in the afternoon. In a bodega, in a town bordering South Seattle, a white man in his early forties is rearranging produce in a small refrigerated display case all the while explaining his actions to a Mexican American couple (man and woman) in their early thirties. They watch closely as he organizes boxes, creating neat rows of cilantro, chayote, and jalapeños. He moves quickly but confidently; he is clearly experienced, and the couple are clearly eager to learn from his expertise. A customer walks in and the woman in the couple excuses herself to assist them.

This couple owns the store, and the man is training them in produce management. He has been in the grocery business his entire life, as was his father. The training comes with a printed Produce Manual containing information about fifty popular fruits and vegetables, and a few accoutrements, including a spray bottle for misting produce and reusable baskets for organization and display. He wraps up the training, shares his contact information, and says goodbye. The couple express their gratitude. The white, female TA provider, who has been present but mostly observing, steps in to thank the man and check in with the couple. They agree

that she will return next week with an A-board and signage for the refrigerator. The group parts ways.

Confronting Obesity

The above is a description of an HFH team meeting and store intervention. Healthy corner store and healthy retail programs—of which HFH is one—are responding to the dramatic rise in diet-related diseases, particularly obesity, in the United States since the 1980s. These programs are founded on research linking obesity with lower levels of access to healthful foods and supermarkets and increased access to fast food and convenience stores. Bolstered by food desert statistics, this research suggests that food availability, specifically healthful food availability, is a part of the built environment that matters to community health. Such evidence has led some public health practitioners and food activists to move away from critiquing personal food choices and instead focus reform efforts on so-called obesogenic environments. This approach, as discussed in Chapter 2, has been critiqued for its reliance on the nutrition food regime for solutions and its lack of attention to foodways and foodscapes. In this chapter, I argue that this model of health intervention situates obesity as disease and normalizes a certain kind of body and definition of health that lacks acknowledgement of bodily and cultural differences. From a critical disability studies lens, health is an inherently problematic term, or at least one that requires careful interrogation. Some people with impairments consider themselves healthy; some people considered unhealthy are not considered impaired. Health often comes saddled with hegemonic narratives from medicine (in this case public health) and societal worth (consider, for example, mentions of triage during Covid that dictated offering scarce medical resources to the healthy first). In the context of this case, health was defined through weight; obesity was framed

as unhealthy, and this was the dominant ideologic discourse guiding decisions in the program. I begin by describing the HFH program, explain the public health logic behind it as well as the way obesity is presented as a stable concept, and discuss the issue of cultural competency within the program. Throughout, I pay close attention to the logic of health and the subsequent implications.

How It Works: Healthy Foods Here

In the wake of Michelle Obama's 2010 Let's Move campaign (see Chapter 2), Public Health—Seattle & King County (PHSKC) received funding specifically targeted to reduce obesity rates and increase healthy eating and active living in the county. This funding came from Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW), a national initiative sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that focused on preventing chronic disease and promoting health through policy, systems, and environment change. Itself funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the Affordable Care Act, the CPPW initiative was launched in March 2010 by the US Department of Health and Human Services to help 50 communities nationwide implement environmental-level interventions aimed at preventing and reducing obesity and tobacco use.

Many of these community-based interventions were designed to improve access to healthy foods and beverages, specifically by improving the availability, quality, and affordability of healthy foods in corner stores. Communities worked with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to enable the affordable purchase of fruits and vegetables. Success was measured by health care costs saved and deaths averted. Consistent with the Let's Move

campaign, CPPW funded preventative measures for diet-related diseases through public-private partnerships. One of the projects funded by PHSKC through the CPPW grant was Healthy Foods Here (HFH), a healthy food retail project aimed at improving access to healthy food and encouraging community economic development that was but one of many similar projects funded in communities around the country.

HFH was implemented over a period of 18 months between 2010 and 2012. It was conceived of as a pilot project to test the effectiveness of a small business development model in improving healthy food options for communities. The goal was to provide better food choices for residents who both bore a disproportionate burden of poor health and socioeconomic deprivation, and had little access to full-service grocery stores. One of the outcomes of the project was a report with lessons learned and recommendations for future such programs. The strategy pursued by HFH was to assist food retailers in successfully selling healthy food, which would in turn increase access to, and, the logic goes, over time increase consumption of healthy food. By the end of the program, HFH had provided service to 61 stores, 47 of which completed their project plans. HFH had also sponsored community events that included educational activities, giveaways, and fresh produce samples. A post-project evaluation compiled in the report *Healthy Foods Here: Recommendations for Future Programming* determined that all the stores made improvements in physical space and 80% were maintaining healthy product visibility and store attractiveness at the end of the project (Martin et al. 2012, 7).

Project Criteria

The first step in HFH's implementation was to determine the criteria for prioritizing stores that would receive funding and assistance. To establish such criteria, a baseline assessment

of the demographics of King County was conducted through a Geographic Information System (GIS) assessment, using data from the Washington State Department of Health and Department of Social and Health Services, PHSKC, the 2000 US Census, and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. In addition, a typology of stores was conducted, primarily using information from businesses certified to work with the federal food assistance programs WIC and SNAP as well as information from PHSKC inspections. This information was mapped and priority areas and stores subsequently identified. Among the key attributes mapped were chronic diseases, distance from schools, poverty, and distance from supermarkets (i.e., stores with annual food sales more than \$2 million). A one-mile buffer around supermarkets was used to identify areas of limited healthy, affordable, and nutritious foods, or food deserts. As evidence shows that food retailers located within a few blocks of schools may contribute significantly to young people's snacking habits and overall energy intake (see Borradaile et al., 2009), a half-mile buffer was used around schools to identify stores in close proximity. Combined, these factors are important because they reflect characteristics commonly associated with food insecurity according to the 2000 US Census data.

Self-identified shortcomings of this "bird's-eye" view are its lack of accounting for on-the-ground geography (i.e., hills, street/sidewalk networks, and other conditions that affect physical access to a supermarket) and its lack of consideration of current land uses and zoning, which may also influence a community's access to healthy foods. Particularly relevant to this topic is a study published in 2014 and referenced above which found that only one-third of surveyed residents of King County, Washington, used their nearest supermarket for primary food shopping and *no association was found between proximity to primary supermarket and produce consumption* (Aggarwal et al. 2014; emphasis mine). Their findings suggest that healthy food

access is more complex than was captured in the HFH project criteria. From a critical disability studies perspective, we also need to consider the different food needs of different bodies. For some bodies, chopping vegetables is not an option, for example. So, one might also ask: are these healthy foods available in a form that is useable? Asking meaningful questions about access to healthy foods from a CDS perspectives involves more in-depth knowledge of the bodies in question than census information allows.

Governance

While the team that designed and implemented the HFH project represented multiple agencies and organizations, HFH was funded through PHSKC, and PHSKC retained oversight of the project. Due to its experience with small business development and financing, the Seattle Office of Economic Development was tasked with managing the project. PHSKC contracted urban planners and food system experts from the private firm Urban Food Link and from the Northwest Center for Livable Communities at the University of Washington to be part of the team as technical assistance (TA) providers who served as program liaisons with stores. Finally, four community-based organizations (CBOs) were partially funded through the CPPW grant to support the project, mainly through outreach. These CBOs were not initially involved in project design or early implementation, and the fact that HFH began before the CBOs were brought on board meant their contribution was limited. According to the HFH final report, though, communities with strong neighborhood-based organizations were more successful at driving demand to HFH stores, whereas stores in areas with weaker connections to a community organization were less successful at reaching residents of the surrounding community.

Importantly, PHSKC retained decision-making power over policy priorities, thus greatly shaping the overall values that drove project criteria, goals, and outcomes. PHSKC also managed external communication by providing language that was to be used in messaging about HFH, and opportunities for presentations and publication were filtered through representatives of PHSKC. Though the TA providers' fieldwork experiences had a meaningful impact on program direction, especially in defining the services offered by the program, the public health priorities represented at PHSKC by fit, white men inevitably remained at the top of the hierarchy.

Despite its programmatic flexibility, a significant drawback of HFH, and one directly related to its hierarchical governance model, is that it insisted on shared values and shared views of the world firmly based in definitions of health and healthy bodies. From the specifications demanded by the CPPW grant funding to the direct oversight of PHSKC, the worldview of the program, so to speak, was pre-determined and non-negotiable. Individual and community insight was invited to shape program direction but not to reform the overriding goal: fighting obesity. The values of PHSKC prescribed a particular vision of social justice limited to a narrow distributive viewpoint; resources (fresh produce) were to be redistributed to underserved geographic areas that correlated with high rates of poverty and obesity.

In some ways, such a vision makes getting the work done easier. The goal is clear-cut and thus infinitely more achievable. The concrete actions made possible by such a programmatic perspective enable measurable outcomes and accountability. In fact, in the case of increasing opportunities for healthy, affordable food, the importance of meeting this need cannot be understated.

In addition, the program did remain attentive to the store owners' needs, in relation to carrying and successfully selling fresh fruits and vegetables in particular. However, there was no

room to ask: What does health and healthy eating mean in this community? Or, What is “good” food in this community? The problem—the confluence of obesity and poverty—was seen as static, as was the solution—affordable produce in close proximity to where low-income, obese people reside. Furthermore, affordability was addressed primarily through federal food assistance programs, namely WIC and SNAP. Due to this supply-side orientation, HFH attention was reserved for helping the participating stores apply for and offer these programs, rather than helping community members access these resources. From a CDS perspective, the “hierarchy of knowledge” (Nishida 2019) referenced in Chapter 3 is important to heed here. This public health-driven project unquestioningly adopted this inflexible definition of access. In Nishida’s view this was not a practice of holistic access because of the stagnant and top-down delivery of its definition. Taking her suggestions for critical disability praxis to heart here might mean developing a meaningful relationship between the community in question and the university researchers (including myself) to create focus groups whereupon a collective definition of “good food access” could be decided upon.

Obesity as Disease

Within the alternative food movement, health is a powerful discourse. Health foods, health food stores, and healthy eating are all commonly advocated. Within HFH, health as defined by the institution of public health drove the decision-making. A public health perspective is important here not only due to its primacy in this case study, but also because public health is tasked with addressing the impacts of the food system on human bodies. As Guthman (2011) and others have noted, and as is particularly relevant to this case, obesity is one of the most commonly identified health problems within the food system. Discourses around obesity assume

a normative thin body and quickly devolve into fat-shaming. This othering of bodies of atypical shape and size, especially through the population perspective of public health, as we see below, can pathologize entire communities as “poor and fat.”

Fat bodies have only recently been situated in a medical context whereby they are in need of cure or corrective action or, from a CDS position, normalization. The process of medicalization—whereby problems are defined as such by the medical community—of obesity was well underway by the 1980s; in 1995, the US surgeon general declared war on the “obesity epidemic.” It was not until 2013, though, that the American Medical Association (AMA) voted to recognize obesity as a disease—despite its own expert panel’s recommendations against such a label due to lack of medical evidence and concerns over stigmatization (Brown 2015; Stoll and Egner 2021). Hence, from a medical and public health perspective, fat bodies have become diseased and in need of treatment. By default, while obesity—and therefore fat bodies—was to be eliminated, thinness—and thus thin bodies—was simultaneously normalized.

It is important to note that though the body mass index (BMI) measure is often used to quantify fatness, the terms “obese,” “overweight,” and even “healthy weight” are socially constructed. In addition, research regarding obesity is inconclusive. There is, in fact, evidence that “overweight” bodies live longer than those considered “normal” weight (Flegal et al. 2004, 2005; Stoll and Egner 2021). The persistent framing of obesity as a problem not only in the medical community but in the social sciences as well has had oppressive consequences on non-thin people, poor people, and people of color. Manokaran et al. (2020) argues that such research “has (re)produced fat-hating societies in which fat people experience stigma, discrimination, and oppression” (2). For example, Stoll and Egner (2021, 6) observe in their review of recent sociological research on obesity that

because noncritical articles took for granted what constituted ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ behaviors and that ‘obesity’ was a disease and a major public health crisis, sociologists could express concern about the ‘problematic behaviors’ of immigrants, people of color, and/or people of lower socioeconomic status (SES), insinuating people in these social groups were more likely to be ‘obese’ because they did not know what was ‘good’ for them when it came to health behaviors and weight management.

Desiree Valentine’s (2021) concept of racialized disablement is instructive here. This intersectional analysis is meant to allow “us to more faithfully attend to the *meaning* of racial disparities in health” (Valentine 2021, 341, emphasis hers). She recognizes both critical disability studies and race studies as fields contesting “biological essentialism oftentimes used to justify discrimination, exclusion, and violence against marginalized populations” that emphasize social and political constructions of both disability and race (Valentine 2021, 338).

Valentine adopts Talila “TL” Lewis’s expansive definition of ableism: as a “system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normality, intelligence, excellence, desirability, and productivity” (Valentine 2021, 338). Rather than take for granted the objective neutrality of research, Valentine encourages us to hear the stories behind embodied experiences. She notes that “within current logic black individuals and populations become implicitly or explicitly identified as the locus (or at times, the more normatively laden culprit) of disparities in health” (341). Rather, she asks that we “acknowledge that such racialized markers of identity—black, brown, native, non-citizen or ‘illegal’—are in part formed through historical violences generating health disparities and forms of disablement” (342).

Her words are given credence by Stoll and Egner’s (2021) review of the sociological research on obesity where they discovered such examples as this conclusion by Miech et al. (2015): “body images among black adults have more room for obesity, and being heavy is not necessarily damaging to self-esteem or considered unattractive. *Consequently, black adults with*

a college degree have less pressure/motivation to deploy their resources to prevent obesity” (284; emphasis mine). Valentine’s argument for acknowledgement of the co-constitutive nature of ableism and racism and the latter example of racism within social science obesity research remind us that research and activism around better health outcomes within the food system are capable of advancing xenophobia, racism, and classism in the name of health.

In Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, I discuss the medical and social models of disability. As I note, there are many other ways of modeling disability including the charity model and the rights-based model. Rather than go into great detail about each of these models, I want to draw attention to the fact that how we treat impairment, disease, and bodily difference has far-reaching consequences. Critical disability studies helps us understand these consequences including normalizing some bodies and alienating others that are now non-normate. These misfit bodies are then in demand of cure or corrective action to redeem their worth. Or they remain less-valuable. As seen above, this kind of thinking is easily transferred from the medical context to a wider social context. Obese bodies were in need of corrective action within HFH, but they were not consulted regarding the relationship between body weight and health or as to what would make their particular bodies more healthy. Rather, the fact that these bodies were deemed in need of corrective medical attention also rendered them functionally invisible in other ways—intellectually, socially, politically. In the next section, I look more closely at the paternalism and power dynamics of narrating obesity as disease within public health.

Public Health Moralism and Neoliberal Bodies

Public health lies at the intersection of science, medicine, and policy. As a governmental body, the field of public health is founded on the assumption that state intervention is necessary to ensure health and well-being at the scale of the population. Public health works to achieve

health through education, promotion of healthy lifestyles, and research into disease and injury prevention. These interventions target chronic and infectious diseases as well as diet- and lifestyle-related illness. For the purposes of this argument, the focus here is on the work to prevent obesity.

As Thomas et al. (2002, 1057) state,

the mandate to ensure and protect the health of the public is an inherently moral one. It carries with it an obligation to care for the well-being of communities, and it implies the possession of an element of power to carry out that mandate.

In essence, society (through the social institution of public health in the United States and elsewhere) should ensure the highest level of health for all its members, and in turn, its members will put their trust in the policies, regulations, and standards of society (as articulated by public health). Not unexpectedly, though, as Petrini and Gainotti observe, “conflicts among values often arise in public health, especially among the needs and rights of individuals as opposed to the collective need to protect health as a public asset” (2008, 625). Due to the undeniable ethical consequences of the work of public health and the inevitable possibilities for conflicting values, the American Public Health Association (with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) outlined a code of ethics for the field in 2002 (Petrini and Gainotti 2008). The APHA Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health explicitly acknowledges the interdependence of people and the imperative to wield power without abusing it. It aims for inclusivity and encourages participation by community members. Public health, as a whole, aims to do good work that betters the lives of society as a whole. Its intentions are commendable in this sense as are the field’s reliance on evidence-based reasoning (rather than seeking a more arbitrary judge of right-action). Yet scholars have argued that the power required to achieve public health goals and the acquiescence required of individuals is a particularly corporeal form of neoliberal governance (Kirkland 2011; Guthman 2011; Shannon 2014).

To patronize carries both negative and positive connotations; it means both to be condescending and to support somebody. This double meaning takes on important relevance to the work of public health, which is, by its very nature, meant to help but to do so in a particular way that has been deemed “the right way” by a confluence of evidence-based research, health professionals, and the state. The definition of health—and obesity as examined above—is a particularly contentious point. Of course, the megalith that is “the state” does not itself set out to define this correct action, but the structure of bureaucracy determines where and how activities may take place towards public health goals.

Anna Kirkland’s (2011) feminist critique of the environmental approach to obesity is helpful in understanding this public health conundrum. Kirkland contends that the environmental account of obesity is simultaneously a form of “responsibilization”—“the notion that each individual must act to take care of herself so that she does not become a burden on society”—and “collectivism”—“the notion that our bodies, our fellow citizens’ bodies, and the environment constitute an interrelationship that is best understood as a whole if we want to create a healthier society” (Kirkland 2011, 466–7). This “micropolitics of food choice” (477) amounts to moralized interventions into people’s lives. Because public health is considered the authority on the subject, the assumptions behind obesity policy and the existence of food deserts are left unquestioned, and the obligation of public officials to act is cemented. Kirkland’s overarching concern is that “policies based on [the environmental account] will end up being punitive, ineffective, and patronizing and will entail burdensome unintended consequences” (477).

Deric Shannon (2014) takes this concern a step further. He argues that food desert interventions are a particular form of neoliberal governance that not only pathologizes certain communities but attempts to control bodies by controlling their environment. Within HFH, this

was certainly illustrated. As we saw in the opening vignette, a small group of well-educated, able-bodied, and primarily white individuals were empowered and funded to direct decision-making for low-income, culturally-diverse communities with the goal of decreasing obesity and thus improving community health. With these critiques of public health and food desert interventions in mind, the next section looks at the consequences of (almost) exclusively white, able-bodied professionals making decisions that impact a wider community.

Healthy Foods Here and Cultural Competency

Many of the HFH stores were immigrant-owned, and each of the small stores in the program had its own unique food culture. It was evident that cultural preferences and shopping norms were both strong determinants of food access. The HFH report explains, “These stores serve as important community hubs for socializing and information sharing” (Martin et al. 2012, 11). Other researchers have noted the social phenomenon and place-making capacity of small corner stores and ethnic food markets. In illustration, Anguelovski notes that “Latinos would set up milk crates in front of the store and hang out after their shopping trips” at a grocery store in Jamaica Plains, Boston, that specialized in Latin American products (2015, 184). I personally observed community interaction at many of the HFH stores with which I worked as a TA provider. At one, men gathered regularly around a small folding table to watch news in their native language. Many store owners greeted customers by name. Indeed, in many of HFH’s small stores, community-building was just as important as product placement. According to one store owner:

In the market, we are selling lot of product from Africa, especially in West Africa. And we also sell a lot of product very hard to find here. So when people come here they can feel like they are home. ... Yes I do build a community here, you know, from Africa.

—Dieynaba Kouyata, owner of Saran African Market & Beauty Supply

While there was intentionality on the part of the HFH team to be racially and culturally sensitive, in all but a few rare cases, the TA providers were not from the store's community. Only where there was an active and involved community-based organization was there a direct feedback loop from community members other than store owners. In some cases, local organizations were recruited to help with racial and cultural elements of outreach. A Korean business association, for example, was brought on board to help recruit Korean store owners.

Language barriers also proved challenging. With very few exceptions, HFH store owners were not native English speakers. Though HFH materials were translated into languages representing the diversity of King County, difficulties in communication still arose. Explaining codes and permitting, as well as PHSKC's licensing and inspection processes, proved particularly complicated. The distributors who worked with HFH found that taking orders required more time, and the TA providers found that frequent review of recommendations was needed in order for the stores to achieve program-related goals.

Store owners on the whole exhibited differences in standards of organization and product display that demonstrated a different set of priorities than generally pursued by food stores in the United States. For example, industry experts observed that some store owners were hesitant to discard spoiling or deteriorating produce. Keeping this produce on the shelf may indicate a cultural difference in expectations around wasting food. Many store owners had business experience in their country of origin, but no formal business education. HFH established a relationship with a local organization to offer store owners free access to a business training program, and industry experts offered advice on display and marketing befitting an American grocery store. The relevancy of these aesthetic elements may not have mattered to some of the

stores' current clientele, but may have made the stores more attractive to potential new customers.

It became clear during this project that shopping patterns and cultural preferences are just as important factors to consider in relation to food security and access to healthy food as is proximity to a store. The fact that this PHSKC-led program was able to identify this weakness in healthy food interventions is laudable. It is unlikely, though, that its evidence-based environmental policy approach can adequately account for the complexities of foodways, of which many exist simultaneously, particularly in diverse American cities. Though HFH primarily focused on small, immigrant-owned stores, the logic behind the program is the same logic that leads to publicly funded relationships with corporations like Walmart (Ken 2014) and could portend environmental gentrification via the Whole Foods Effect (Anguelovski 2015, 185).

Conclusion

The HFH program supported immigrant- and minority-owned businesses that provide their communities with culturally determined good food through direct financial assistance and help navigating PHSKC regulatory mechanisms. It resulted in policy recommendations with high-level bureaucratic support, thereby increasing the possibility of their adoption. These are not insignificant achievements. What HFH and other environmental policy interventions are not capable of doing is paving the way for deep transformation of the food system and the bodies implicated in it.

In other words, what is not accomplished through the environmental policy approach to systems change is a larger critique of the societal structures and ableist norms that lead to poverty and hunger in the first place. The HFH program recognized distributive injustice through

mapping exercises that revealed that people in south King County suffer from preventable health concerns correlated with their socio-economic status and where they live. This data corroborated laudable research findings that low-income and minority groups are disproportionately affected by diet-related diseases. HFH overwhelmingly operated within a classic paradigm of distributive (in)justice that accepts contemporary social values and institutions, but works to benefit the least advantaged to better thrive within established norms (e.g., free market capitalism, environmental policy approach; “health”), while leaving these norms largely unquestioned. Changes to the system are sought, but the goal is not to do away with or replace the system.

As Iris Marion Young (1990) observes, distributive justice often ossifies a certain social ontology. It reifies social relations and institutional rules, and approaches individuals as atomistic characters to whom the distributed “things” are assigned. There is little room left to conceive of a politics outside of the client-consumer relationship that Young identifies between the welfare capitalist state and its citizens. Community involvement is likened to customer service relations. Government welfare programs inadvertently highlight class by actively othering those needing help. Social groups are treated differently along familiar divides: men/women, young/old, rich/poor, professional/non-professional, healthy/obese. HFH reinforced the dichotomy of consumer able to purchase food from the free market versus client of the capitalist-welfare system; the orientation of the program reinforced the configuration of state–corporate–consumer relationships. As a state-driven intervention by the government to alleviate the distributive injustice of food deserts, HFH thus concretized certain concepts that contribute to oppressions within the food system and which categorizes bodies by zip code, income, and body mass index.

What was not feasible within a program designed by the bureaucratic body that is PHSKC was a redefinition of what needs to be addressed. Though public health approaches like

those behind HFH have moved the conversation regarding obesity away from one of individual responsibility, they continue to favor one scale of political practice: institutional policy. The logic behind PHSKC demands this scale, at least in part, due to its focus of action: the population. A direct result of its role as a PHSKC program was that HFH was incapable of broad systemic critique and deep community listening. Rather the program worked with little to no awareness of privilege. Within its supply-side, market-based intervention, there was no opportunity to question the role of the current system in creating (a) a food system whereby calorie-dense, nutrition-poor food is cheaper than fresh, nutrient-dense foods and food is treated as an everyday commodity despite its necessity for survival; (b) a society in which hunger exists alongside plenty where, from a uniquely CDS point of view, some bodies and knowledges are normalized over others. Instead, within the program, there was tacit agreement with the current political and economic system. While the program targeted those who bore a disproportionate burden of poor health and socio-economic deprivation, HFH actions pursued classic capitalistic techniques, including coupons and advertising, to help store owners succeed in selling produce. Critical analysis is entirely absent from the here-and-now perspective of the spatial-proximity logic that underlies the program's reformist goals. HFH provided no space to hear community groups define health or how to achieve it.

In order to overcome this enactment of the cultural and body politics of white privilege and power, Guthman suggests that we strive for "a politics of listening, watching and not always helping" (2008a, 443; see also Goodman et al. 2012, 247). This resonates with Valentine's encouragement to listen to the stories behind embodied experiences. As we saw above, there were elements of the program that changed midway through implementation based upon identified community need. Had the timeline of the program allowed for direct community

engagement *before* the work started it would have enabled different voices to guide program emphasis. Focus groups of individuals categorized as obese or considered high risk for obesity could have opened a productive conversation about community conceptions of healthy bodies and barriers to such.

As a public health program, the overarching logic of the kind of reformist change in the food system sought by Healthy Foods Here is an environmental policy approach. This perspective does not fall neatly into the charity model, the medical model, or the social model of disability, but does offer an opportunity to reflect on the importance of paying attention to how we are conceiving of impairment. Within HFH, obesity is the problem to be solved. Healthy foods are deemed the solution and are defined using WIC foods. Access to these foods is the barrier to overcoming obesity and was defined by geographic and affordability measures. From a critical disability studies perspective, the obesity-emphasis normalizes thin bodies and prioritizes the logic of public health. While the program does not explicitly say that people suffering from obesity deserve charity or that it is their fault that they are fat, HFH subsidizes measures to overcome obesity, thus contributing to fat-phobic mentalities and contributing to a logic that assumes an obese person is lacking in thinness. The program privileges a certain way of knowing that is bolstered by public health research but remains culturally limiting. As the experience of the project suggested, the lived reality of immigrant bodies in the United States was not reflected in initial program implementation and the kinds of foods that were deemed as healthy or not. Other research in the Seattle area contributes to a more complex understanding of how people shop and what geographic and affordability barriers look like. Over the course of the program, changes were made to accommodate unanticipated community needs such as no interest lending and policy recommendations were made to recognize a broader definition of healthy foods. The

underlying logic of solving the impairment of obesity was never questioned. The public health orientation left no room for discussion of how obesity was being defined or in what ways it was causing health or other problems in the community. Instead, it was left ideologically unquestioned that obesity itself was to be overcome and the work of programs like this was to do so. The public health orientation of this program pathologized a certain kind of body and acted on assumptions about the accommodations that would offer a cure to said bodies. From a critical disability studies perspective, the missing narrative in this case is that of the obese people themselves; deep listening practices were missing. Who were these people and what were their experiences? How would the program have changed if these voices were included?

CHAPTER 6:

Crip Time at Central Co-op

It's 5:45 PM on a Monday evening. A small group of people stand around chatting and making plates of food. "Is this goat or cow gouda?" someone asks. The response is emphatic: "Goat! It's great with these gluten-free crackers." The board assistant chimes in, "And we're celebrating fair trade month at the store, so I brought a selection of fair trade chocolate."

"The meeting starts in five minutes so please find your seat." The next few minutes are a flurry of chairs shuffling, greetings exchanged, papers arranged, computers plugged in, final plates of food and drink procured.

The meeting takes place in the newly renovated Rochdale Room, dedicated to the English cooperative pioneers, which highlights sustainable features including zero-VOC paint, reclaimed cabinetry, and LED lighting. There is a small kitchenette to one side with a fridge, sink, and dishwasher as well as a tall serving table. The room is otherwise open with moveable furniture. It was designed to be an adaptable community space. Eight board members sit at one of four tables arranged as an inward facing rectangle. A dozen or more chairs are arranged in rows behind this constructed board table. Four or five familiar faces can be found in the audience, the Marketing Director, Human Resources Director, Director of Finance and a member of the Nominating Committee. Three or four new folks attend this public meeting. The General Manager, a guest consultant, and the board assistant sit at the table with the Board of Trustees.

The Board President draws our attention. “Welcome all. As the chair, I’d like to call this meeting to order. I see we have a few new faces here so we will quickly introduce ourselves and our roles before jumping into tonight’s agenda.”

After introductions, the President hands the floor over for a report from the General Manager. They share information about the results of a study regarding growth in the neighborhood and projected grocery demand. The Board asks follow-up questions and a short discussion ensues regarding potential future scenarios whereby the Co-op expands.

The next agenda item is a report back from a national cooperative conference. Six board members attended, and each shared a few short highlights including workshops about policy governance and the opportunity to learn from cooperators around the country.

The final agenda item is a report by the Communications Committee. Board members are encouraged to sign-up for an opportunity to table in the store. A sign-up sheet has been posted in the shared file and groups of three are encouraged. The Marketing Department has provided a few talking points about the upcoming election to be used in outreach.

The Board President reviews decisions and tasks and leads a short debrief/evaluation of the meeting before bringing it to a close.

Folks gather their things, clear dishes, and chat informally about agenda items but also personal matters. Someone has lost a family member and there is the secret matter of collecting money for the baby gift basket for the expecting Board President. Eventually, conversations die down and people disperse.

A typical board meeting at this Seattle food cooperative runs for about two hours and the agenda might include topics such as committee reports, board policies, and member engagement. Meetings are not always so calm and collected; members, staff, and community

members do bring questions and criticisms to meetings. Open conflict is not uncommon if there is a divisive issue on the table and these conflicts can last months. Overall, though, meetings are professional and on-topic.

A Brief History of Central Co-op

This food cooperative, as is generally the case, is a combination of personal history and a larger story of its zeitgeist and the cooperative movement writ large. Central Co-op, as with most food cooperatives, has been through many changes. The snapshot referenced for this study is largely from 2014. At that time, the Co-op ran only one store and was a consumer cooperative, meaning it was established to meet the needs of the people who shopped there. It has since merged with the Tacoma Food Co-op, so runs two stores in different cities, and is now a multi-stakeholder or solidarity cooperative whose purpose is to meet the needs of the people who shop there *and* the people who work there. Like the Berkeley Co-op (see Chapter 2), the organizational momentum behind Central Co-op began with a buying club eventually named Capitol Hill Co-op (CHC). CHC was a particular response in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle to the post WWII aerospace decline which manifested in the loss of 60,000 jobs at the local Boeing plant between 1961 and 1971. As such, a significant economic base of the city vanished. Sixties counter-culture and other socio-political factors also contributed to the development of the idea of a democratically-run health food store. Members of the CHC initially “shunned any long-range planning” which eventually led to lack of investment from banks. The buying club finally failed in 1978. CHC, though, had organized a community with shared values through the process of its formation and members rallied around common political interests to campaign against Initiative 13, intended to repeal city ordinances protecting employment and

lesbian and gay housing rights, and dissolve the City of Seattle's Office of Women's Rights. The continued organizing effort of the community led to the creation of a new non-profit co-op with paid employees and a defined organizational structure, Central Co-op, which opened the same year CHC closed.

In 1978, the group behind CHC used funding and support from another regional food co-op, Puget Consumers Co-op or PCC, to open a storefront in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle at 12th Avenue and Denny. At that time there were around 100 owners and a three-person governance team. In 1999, the store moved a few blocks to its current location at 16th Avenue and East Madison and adopted the name Madison Market. In 2001, the Washington State Department of Agriculture certified Central as Seattle's first organic food retailer. By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Co-op decided to return to its roots and the sign on the store was changed to Central Co-op. Central Co-op provides community identity, fair working conditions, access to local, sustainable, and ethical food, education on how to run a business and what is required of business owners, a platform for political organizing, bargaining power for lower prices, and an opportunity for small producers to sell their wares. It has suffered some dire financial moments, though in its defense, most food co-ops have (see, for example, the story of People's Co-op in Portland [Brown 2011] and the story of Berkeley Co-op in Chapter 2). I distinctly remember the Annual Meeting where Central celebrated moving "out of the red, into the black." Having paid off the significant debt it took on when it moved from the 12th Ave store, Central was ready to begin a new chapter.

By 2014, Central Co-op had around 12,000 members, 120 workers, and sold products from 400-plus producers. The Co-op's sales exceeded \$10 million a year. In 2019, the Co-op was named Business of the Year by *Seattle Business Magazine* as part of their Community Impact

Awards. In this chapter, I utilize the concept of crip time (defined below) to argue that though the democratic nature of Central and other food co-operatives provides an opportunity for the inclusion of a wide swath of bodies, the ideology of good food embedded in the work of the co-operative can simultaneously be alienating to non-normate bodies.

Crip Time

Though most of us do not think of the world in horological terms, accessibility has a temporal dimension. Crip time is a term used by disability scholars and activists to temporally reorient our lives to the rhythms of our bodies. This is a radical move in a world where, at least in the West since the industrial revolution, our bodies are expected to conform to the regularities of the clock and the mechanics of the built environment. There is an oft-ignored ableism embedded in the expectation of normalcy in relation to time. The ubiquity of the 9–5 workday is evidence of this. In contrast, crip time acknowledges the verities of individual bodies. Ellen Samuels argues that it also bridges bodies and minds; Samuels observes that crip time allows our “bodyminds” to break in “new patterns of thinking and feeling and moving through the world” (2017, n.p.). Perhaps these are not so much new, but unpracticed in a world that asks us to conform to a standard rather than pay close attention to our needs.

The term “crip,” from cripple, itself is a reclamation of derogatory connotations associated with “the handicapped” (see, for example McRuer 2018). Much like cunt, queer, and the N-word, crip takes on a different meaning when repurposed by activists, advocates, and the differently abled themselves. It can, in fact be empowering in its assertion of pride in identity. The term was used by Irving Zola in 1993 and has since been elaborated on by scholars such as Margaret Price (2011), Alison Kafer (2013), and Ellen Samuels (2017).

Crip time asks us to be flexible and non-linear; Price and Kerschbaum (2016) refer to this as time's "tendency to shape-shift" (33). After all, bodies change from day to day as well as throughout a lifetime. And not all bodies experience a normative life course, whatever that is (Ljuslinder et al. 2020). This awareness captures the demand of crip time to consider cultural understandings of what constitutes disability. Importantly crip time, at minimum, positions the body as primary. That is, "rather than bend the bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds" (Kafer 2013, 27). In the same argumentative vein as the social construction of disability (see Chapter 1), crip time demands, at least, acknowledgement of "ableist barriers" (Kafer 2013, 26). Lack of accessible transportation options and consequent time costs is a commonly cited temporal barrier. The consequences of acknowledging crip time extend beyond accommodation of difference. As Alison Kafer explains, "one's assumptions about the experience of disability create one's conception of a better future" (2013, 2). Because of the organizational importance of spending significant time visioning collectively at Central Co-op, the concept of crip time helps us pay particular attention to the ideologic vision of the future promoted by Central Co-op and can help to evaluate cooperative (food) activism.

How Do Co-ops Work?

Cooperatives are businesses that are owned and governed democratically by their members. The purpose of each co-op is determined by the needs of these members. It is the ability to steer the values of the business that make this and other cooperatively-run food businesses an attempt at a more democratic, and thus more just, food system. Co-ops are legal entities and, as such, have certain obligations as established by their respective jurisdiction.

Central Co-op is incorporated in the State of Washington. As such, it is governed by its Articles of Incorporation. These can be rewritten with approval of the membership and periodically are. The articles in place in 2014 describe the purposes of the Co-op as buying and selling “wholesome food and products” “according to cooperative principles and values” and providing “educational resources.”

Legally called a “member,” an owner, according to Central Co-op, is someone who has adopted the seven cooperative principles, paid equity, and shopped within the past year (this defines an active versus inactive owner). Unlike some food cooperatives (such as Park Slope in Brooklyn) which operate as a collective, require members to work each month and/or do not let non-members shop in the store, Central Co-op is open to anyone who wants to shop there, and, though members pay a nominal fee of \$100 (\$60 in 2014), they are not required to work. Members do have certain benefits that exceed that of an ordinary shopper. The Co-op offers workshops (i.e., canning, pickling and fermentation, etc.), presentations, and movie nights, some of which are only available to members and all of which are examples of educational resources. A key power of the membership is the right to vote on matters relating to the Co-op. This includes choosing Trustees and approving or rejecting changes to the governing documents. Trustees are members themselves so another important membership right is the ability to run for the Board, and thus help govern the organization. If members want to contact the Board, input forms are available both in-store and on-line.

Members have financial benefits as well that extend beyond capitalist values. Central is legally enabled to use the untaxed profits earned from members, known as patronage dividends, as the Board chooses. In fact, these may be returned to members in proportion to their spending. For example, in 2013, the board chose to redistribute 20% of profits and keep the other 80% for

investment in the store. Members were returned 36 cents for every \$100 spent. Other financial benefits include periodic member-only discounts (5% off beer, supplements, etc.) and owner discount days. The Co-op has expectations of the members in return. The governing documents define this as “respectful” and “reasonable” behavior while acting as a member, that is, at the Co-op, at a Co-op sponsored event, or while representing the Co-op. During my tenure on the board I witnessed the termination of one member for violation of this agreement.

The structure of co-ops is key to their functioning. At Central, the Articles of Incorporation define membership and grant governing power to a Board of Trustees elected from the membership. The Board is responsible for higher level decision-making, but the day-to-day operations of the store are run by the management. A General Manager, now known at Central as CEO, is the only employee hired directly by the Board. Cooperatives, especially new wave co-ops, have a history of boards that become involved in operational decisions, oftentimes because the cooperative is in financial trouble, but best practices indicate that the business runs more smoothly when these roles are clearly differentiated.

The Board offers strategic leadership for the organization. It determines how and when voting takes place, decides on patronage distributions each year, reviews information from the management team, and engages in long-term planning. As representatives of the membership, the Board is responsible for communicating with the membership both formally (meeting minutes, notice of voting dates, etc.) and informally (board notes in *The Central Register*, in-store tabling, etc.) with the purpose of genuinely and accurately representing the wishes of the membership. It is also therefore the responsibility of the Board to provide opportunities to hear from the membership. This is enshrined to some extent in the Bylaws of the organization which

establish parameters for presenting petitions to the Board. I witnessed this in the form of a series of Community Conversations, which were half-day roundtable forums hosted by the Co-op.

These elected members are momentary stewards of the business. Because Trustees do not necessarily have experience serving on a Board, there are supports in place to help guide their work. Tiered leadership training occurs yearly, consultants are hired to lead board development and provide access to best practices, articles are shared and discussed both at meetings and informally, and Central foots the bill for all available Trustees to attend the Consumer Cooperative Management Association (CCMA) conference, a networking and learning opportunity for food co-ops across the United States.

Key components of a food cooperative's activism include educational opportunities and collective definition of values. This differs dramatically from most supermarkets where products are generally unlabeled, supply chains remain invisible, and profit motivates most decisions. Educational activities and materials in the store and on-line engage folks across the store from shoppers to members to employees on food system politics, nutrition information, and, at times, other topics (such as neighborhood development) that might interest people. As an organization empowered to make decisions about its business based on more-than-profit, defining a set of values or principles upon which to do so occupies a significant amount of organizational energy and differentiates food co-ops from the corporate grocery landscape. These values are the subject of an unending process of negotiation; values change over time, and conflicts inevitably do arise. Beyond the Rochdale seven cooperative principles that have guided decision-making at Central since at least 1996 and the influence of Mondragon's model (see Chapter 2), the exact language used is less relevant than the systems that allow a rotating cast of characters to make community-aligned, values-based decisions for the strategic future of Central Co-op. This flexibility is a

strength of the cooperative model and a keystone of the style of activism it represents: it defines the desires of a particular community and changes with that community as the community redefines itself and its needs. As the General Manager wrote in the Summer 2014 *Central Register*: “We look for a good balance of quality and price, but are following the direction provided through the governing documents of the company to make sure our social, environmental, and cooperative values are reflected in our approach.”

From a CDS perspective, it is essential to observe that none of the Rochdale cooperative principles engages overtly with questions of accessibility or ability. As a reminder from Chapter 2, these are listed below. Though “open membership” and “concern for community” gesture towards inclusivity, this, as I discuss below, has not been the reality in practice.

1. Voluntary and open membership
2. Democratic member control
3. Member economic participation
4. Autonomy and independence
5. Education, training, and information
6. Cooperation among cooperatives
7. Concern for community.

Sustainability discourse and practice is strong at Central Co-op and in the cooperative movement as a whole. In fact, the International Co-operative Alliance believes that the cooperative model can be, among other things, the acknowledged leader in economic, social and environmental sustainability, and in 2014, the International Day of Cooperatives’ theme was co-ops’ contributions to a sustainable world. My project here is to evaluate the accessibility of this activism. Kim Hall reminds us, *sustainable and accessible* foodscapes acknowledge vulnerability, instability, and dynamism and “the myriad disabling effects of the industrial food system, pharmaceutical industry, and heteronormative family” (2017, 439). In examining what this might mean in the context of the cooperative movement, I explore the concept of crip time in relation to the time-consuming activism of Central Co-op.

Accessing the Co-op

As discussed elsewhere, the food justice movement and mainstream food movement primarily engage food access concerns through affordability, proximity, and knowledge about food (Simpson 2017, 407). Affordability was not a significant discourse in Co-op materials but was represented by the Healthy Community Program that provides a 10% discount on Tuesdays and Thursdays to both owners and non-owners that are eligible for food stamps. The Co-op Basics product tags also highlight staple foods, bulk goods, dairy, and other popular items sold at affordable prices. Neither was proximity a primary concern at the Co-op, though it does identify as a neighborhood institution.

Central Co-op does overtly engage with questions of access in other ways, though, including food education materials and opportunities. First, it offers an opportunity to purchase foods that may not be available elsewhere. In the early days of food co-ops in the United States this was even more so the case. Today, natural foods like organics are more mainstream. In the 1990s, natural products retailers like Central Co-op sold two-thirds of organic foods, but by 2000 more organic food was purchased in conventional supermarkets than in any other venue. As the USDA Economic Research Service explains, “Organic products have shifted from being a lifestyle choice for a small share of consumers to being consumed at least occasionally by a majority of Americans.” According to the Organic Trade Association, organic food sales in 2020 (representing almost 6 percent of the food sold in the United States) were up 12.8% percent while the total US market for food and non-food products grew at less than half the rate, at 4.9%. That said, natural product retailers comprise only 1% of all food stores in the United States, yet sold 48% of all organic food in 2000 (Greene and Dimitri 2002). This speaks to the success of

the food co-operative movement in general but also changes the role of Central in the community from sole purveyor of hard-to-procure foods. This has meant a certain degree of soul-searching for food co-ops generally and Central Co-op in particular. One of the first lines of the governing Articles referenced in 2014 states the first Purpose of Central as providing “wholesome food and products that are produced and distributed in a manner that is respectful of the earth and its people.” This has since changed; the current Articles make no mention of food whatsoever. The emphasis now is on running a values-based cooperative business. This has not changed the products the Co-op sells but does bear witness to changes in the grocery industry.

During the era of new wave co-ops, organic, local, whole foods were not necessarily easy to find, especially at an affordable price. The post-World War introduction of synthetic, petroleum-based fertilizers and pesticides as well as pre-packaged and processed foods were beginning to take a toll on the environment and human health. Simultaneously, organic foods did not yet have an official definition and were not necessarily readily available. In today’s market, organic food sales growth is outpacing the general market. Mainstream grocery chains carry organic products and often have a natural foods section. What differentiates a cooperative from a mainstream grocer, especially in this market, is more than the food; it is democratic, values-based decision making. Central Co-op’s governing documents are evidence of this transition.

Emphasis on, to use the Co-op’s own language, “wholesome food and products that are produced and distributed in a manner respectful of the earth and its people” comes laden with its own dangers and exclusions. Andrew Zitcer’s research on cooperatives in Philadelphia reveals that, as sites of ethical consumption, food co-ops face a

paradox of exclusivity as it relates to the ‘who,’ the ‘what,’ and the ‘how’ of cooperation: who is made to feel welcome at the co-op, what the co-op sells and how items are priced, and the particular business practices these co-ops embrace that make them feel so empowering to some and so alienating to others. (Zitcer 2015, 813)

The irony is that, though cooperatives like Central follow the Rochdale cooperative principles, the first of which is voluntary and open membership (see Chapter 2), people regularly report feeling ostracized by the values of cooperatives. As I discuss below this is primarily because of two reasons: the demands of membership and the aspirational goals of sustainable food. But, while he observes the relationship between food and identity; the power to make change by taking a leadership position; and the role of race, gender, age, and economics, he fails to consider the intersection of ability (Zitcer 2015, 2017). Considering he conducted 59 interviews, one wonders if people with disabilities were represented in his sample whatsoever, speaking to the invisibility of ableism in both the movement and research on the movement.

Much as we saw with “health” and “healthy” in Chapter 4, the “wellness” or “clean eating” worlds that are embedded in food co-op ideologies can inadvertently promote an able-bodied future. This is alimentary ableism as defined by Hall (2014): certain foods are posited as desirable because they prevent or cure disability. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, a “small fat” person who lives with chronic illness, explains:

As a broke, brown, queer femme who didn’t have insurance, the way I saw it was that if eating greens and free-range meat had any chance at all of helping my pain levels, I was down to give it a try. [Yet]...in the ‘clean eating’ world, the idea that you must ‘cleanse’ a presumably ‘dirty’ body can be harmful to how we think about our bodies and food. (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018b, n.p.)

So, while there is sensitivity to dietary choices (seen, for example, in the food provided at Board meetings), there are also undeniable categories of good (those sold at the Co-op) and bad (those not sold at the Co-op) foods. This food binary easily extends to bodily judgment: those who eat good food and those who do not. Those requiring a gluten-free diet might be tolerated and even revered in this context, but those claiming affiliation with fast food are summarily dismissed. In my analysis of 2014 documents, I found no less than twenty-nine adjectives (see Table 6.1) describing the kind of food Central Co-op sells and supports. As disabled activists

such as Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018b) and crippledscholar (2017) emphasize, this typology of foods precludes food accessibility for some. “Minimally packaged,” in particular, exemplifies crippledscholar’s (2017) point that sustainability discourses pit environmentalists against people with disabilities who need easily accessible fresh foods such as pre-cut vegetables or peeled oranges in plastic containers.

Table 6.1: Food Adjectives Used at Central Co-op

Affordable	Handmade	Organically grown
Artisan	Healthy	Responsibly harvested
Authentic	Heirloom	Safe
Basic	High-quality	Salmon-Safe
Cooperatively produced	Independently produced	Seasonal
Culturally relevant	Local	Traceable
Delicious	Minimally packaged	Whole
Delicious	Natural	Wholesome
Fair trade	Non-GMO	Wild
Free-range (meats)		
Fresh		

Thus, so easily can food cooperative activism alienate certain non-normate bodies. Crip time helps us understand, as well, that these political food judgments also speak to the future as imagined by the Co-op. By advocating for a future that does not include disability, Hall (2014, 179) reminds us, disabled people are seen “as having lives not worth living, a view that contributes to rather than challenges disability discrimination” and certainly contributes to the larger cooperative “paradox of exclusion.”

One of the ways Central differentiates itself is through its role as a source of information about food and food politics; herein lies another important element of access. In addition to the educational opportunities listed above, the website boasts a series of Shopping & Food Guides

and recipes are frequently found in the Co-op's publications. Much like the Home Economists hired by the Berkeley Co-op to teach members about natural foods, Central Co-op has a Sustainable Products Advocate. The Co-op decidedly provides a space where harder-to-access foods and other products (supplements, etc.) are available and staff are likely to have knowledge about the provenance of the products. This kind of information can be particularly helpful for not only folks interested in political activism and local economies, but those with specialized diets, allergies, etc. This is a compelling feature of food co-ops that concern for and attention to bodies requires we highlight.

From another perspective, the Co-op is establishing a "correct" set of priorities to use to address food choices. The kinds of information provided by the Co-op include how and where the food was grown, who grew it and associated working conditions. Other considerations including the time certain recipes might take, the complexity of directions, dexterity required to prepare foods or open packages are absent. Crip time reminds us that the care of some bodies may require more time than others. Preparing a meal, even a "simple" one may not be a realistic expectation for all bodies. There is certainly nothing prohibiting the space of the Co-op from embracing a more inclusive palette of food issues, but broader questions of diversity are just gaining traction. In fact, one of the most common critiques of food co-ops, in the United States in particular, is their homogeneity, the stereotype being wealthy, white, and liberal. Of course, this comes as no surprise when one considers the fact that co-ops themselves are self-chosen groups based upon voluntary organization (Zitcer 2015; Barker and Cumbie 2017; Cooke 2022). But, as Andrew Zitcer points out, "the cooperative business model and its complex history do not compel whiteness or affluence from its practitioners" (2017, 185); throughout history both immigrants and African Americans have formed co-ops to ensure access to good food (Knupfer

2013; Nembhard 2014). In practice, though, Central Co-op and other contemporary US food co-ops struggle to represent diverse membership. They do offer definition as a community and empower the community to act on its principles, but this is a select community that primarily participates because it already feels aligned with similar values. Gibson-Graham (2006, 122) makes a salient point in this regard: “Having a clear sense of which community is being sustained by what economic practices inevitably involves facing up to exclusions and violences and debating their acceptability at any one moment.” There is thus opportunity in this model to widen the conversation about serving a more inclusive community, including embracing ability as a form of both understanding difference and in relationship with food choices.

Co-ops, particularly in the US, have served as a form of grassroots activism (Knupper 2013, 137). Central is no exception, and has offered opportunities for organizing around more than food. Each year Central chooses several community partners to which it formally commits to support through food, monetary donations, and volunteer hours, whereby it organizes members for community service. A roundup (to the nearest dollar) at the register campaign donated \$625 in 5 months in 2014 to local food banks, specifically citing the issue of food security. The co-op makes small donations to organizations such as to a healing center dedicated to the health and well-being of those who identify as LGBTQIA people of color. The latter connection to gay rights has been important to the identity of this Co-op in particular. Capitol Hill, the neighborhood in which the Co-op resides, has a reputation as a LGBTQIA-friendly neighborhood and the co-op has a history of celebrating Pride in the store, participating in Pride events organized by others, and in its printed and on-line materials. The folks who helped found the Co-op, as referenced above, were brought together in a campaign against Initiative 13, intended to repeal city ordinances protecting employment and lesbian and gay housing rights,

and dissolve the City of Seattle's Office of Women's Rights. Here is evidence that co-ops can be community-run institutions that provide access to intersectional activism.

Finally, the Co-op provides important access through opportunities to participate in governance by joining the Board, and voting for Board members and changes to governing documents. Hypothetically, this presents a prefigurative opening to imagine any number of futures. Diverse membership and Board representation would be evidence of inclusion, but crip time helps us also consider the responsibility of some bodies to take on this burden and thus relieve others of it. Though, as seen below, the Co-op has pursued both greater professionalization and efficiency on the Board, I have personally witnessed four hour Board meetings where store politics were hotly debated. We might acknowledge here that the process of decision-making may be as important as the decisions themselves, again recognizing the co-op advantage of defining values collectively and remaining flexible to community need. Crip time also reminds us that even if this process is slow and not always obvious in its productivity (see Baril 2016; Ljuslinder et al. 2020) does not mean it is not valuable or meaningful for those participating and those impacted. In fact, the learning through negotiation was highly valued by participants during my tenure on the Board.

Slowing Down

Crip time offers a reminder to slow down and pay attention to a set of rhythms unassociated with the capitalist grind. Perhaps the first foodie association to come to mind is Slow Food, a movement begun in Italy by Carlo Petrini that emphasizes heirloom flavors and taking time to savor the preparation and, often collective, consumption of a meal. Slow food defines itself in direct opposition to fast food, our starting point for the food of disability culture.

It has faced other criticisms of elitism, from expensive ingredients to a disregard for social justice in the food system. In its defense, it, like many organizations, has recently made a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. In relation to food activism, slowing down, though, need not be confined to the ideals and tactics of Slow Food.

The back-and-forth growth of the Co-op reflects crip sensibilities in some ways and simultaneously strives for an ideal that crip time and some food activists warn against. Though in many ways the Co-op asks us to slow down and more carefully consider our food choices as well as engage in the lengthy process of democracy, one of the critiques lauded at cooperatives is their non-confrontational style of activism. Capitalism need not bend a knee to cooperative ways; the two can peacefully coexist. This is simultaneously a strength of the cooperative movement; it is not a threat to the current system and so is left to its own devices, so to speak. For some in the food cooperative and food activism world this parallelism between cooperativism and capitalism is a failure of cooperatives because it does not force change on the current system. That said, I have seen first-hand the pressure on the Board and the business in general to competitively meet demands to be more profitable and efficient, capitalist values crip logic resists. The General Manager is now called a CEO. The Board, though still democratically elected from the membership, has become increasingly inaccessible to the membership-at-large. The Board has pursued “professionalism” and increased efficiency in meetings and decision-making. What I have witnessed is a typology of activism embedded with potential to be more inclusive, but a world that pressures it to remain competitive.

Conclusion: Crippling Co-ops

It is entirely possible to imagine a food cooperative that prioritizes inclusion. In my experience of how food cooperatives work, this could begin with the dedicated work of a few individuals elected to engage in the governing process, but would need to be institutionalized in governing documents and store policies. This might begin by expanding access concerns. As Simpson (2017) helps us understand, a greater understanding of the community's needs and challenges around food is necessary to do so including explicit recognition of the experience of those facing social isolation (a particularly salient point in the wake of a pandemic) and acknowledgement of the potential difficulties involved in transporting groceries and preparing and cooking food. In order to do so there would need to be appropriate opportunities to hear from community members facing accessibility barriers, but in a manner that does not cause undue burden to those experiencing these challenges. This demand falls at least partially on the shoulders of scholars of cooperation and food activism and partially on cooperative members. Cooperatives are ruled by democratic governance that enables an iterative process of defining 'who' the cooperative is and what it is that they collectively represent; the identity of a cooperative is not stagnant and thus an attentive process of storytelling about it must recognize this mutable meaning in the narrative. (Food) cooperatives already emphasize relationships: with producers, with local ecologies, between members, with neighbors, etc. This strength could be harnessed to encourage community listening and learning sessions that expand the characters commonly included in cooperative stories.

Cooperatives have a unique culture founded on the Rochdale principles and ideals of democracy. Food cooperatives in the United States have a rich history of engaging in food and social justice activism as well. These co-ops have emphasized access to certain unconventional

foods including sustainable, organic, and fair trade. Significantly, this same activism has caused rifts within co-ops. Operating a business with progressive values in a capitalist society requires a certain level of compromise and there is not always agreement around how this should happen. Because participation is so important in the context of cooperatives, access here can be thought of both in terms of accessing certain foods and also engaging in decision-making and other opportunities provided by cooperative membership. Emphasis on democratic governance is time consuming though. And sustainability discourses around food can be limiting for people without the time or energy to prepare these foods. Typically, and certainly in the case of Central Co-op, access discourses have not taken into account those who might not have the time–space to do this work of democratic dialogue and time-consuming food preparation. Single parents, chronically ill, or mobility-limited individuals, for example, may thus be left out of the conversation regarding what greater access to cooperative benefits might mean to them. The concept of crip time helps us understand how cooperative thinking could expand to further push for more inclusive practices. Capitalism generally asks for a certain level of efficiency which food co-ops have been pressured to meet. The unique power of cooperatives is their ability to make decisions based upon collective values rather than solely market performance. Crip time attunes us to the different cadences of human lives and asks that we work with these various rhythms. The democratic structure of cooperatives can be thus a barrier because of its time-consuming nature, but it could also be an opportunity to reconceive of how responsibility is distributed and work is shared. The cooperative world would benefit from paying attention to the rhythms of people in the community beyond those that are already at the table.

CHAPTER 7:

Interdependence within Food Not Bombs

In a small neighborhood park surrounded by multibillion dollar investment real estate, a food share event takes place for about an hour each week. A group of self-directed individuals gather from across the city to redistribute waste food from area grocery stores and food co-ops. On any given Sunday anywhere from 75 to 150 people might participate. From a distance, the activities appear official, as in organized by a non-profit. And, in fact, a Facebook page, Google spreadsheets, and face-to-face check-ins are all tools that make it happen. Technically, though, there is no leader or defined organizational structure.

Seattle's Cascade Free Market begins roughly at 1:30 PM. Participants begin to gather in the park up to an hour before the event, especially on a nice day. Small groups form around the perimeter of the basketball court. If it's not raining, though it often is in Seattle, people sit on the grass, picnic table, or large boulders. Friendly conversations can be overheard as well as small talk among strangers and the occasional divisive uproar. Daniel hands out homemade burritos; a goat is tied to the park fence; an unrelated game of kickball is underway. There is a set of usual suspects.

*Behind the scenes, so to speak, 5 to 7 people pick up mostly edibles from area grocery stores that have expired, been returned, dropped, or otherwise made unsellable. These drivers, as they are generally called at the Free Market, ensure that the event takes place by guaranteeing the *raison d'être*: free food. But, as Dillon and Alex, both regular participants, explained to me, everyone is a volunteer. Simply by taking food people are participating.*

The Free Market begins with a greeting, more often than not these days, delivered by a volunteer named Dillon who considers himself the administrative lead or, jokingly, the mayor of Food Not Bombs. People gather closer to hear a short description of the process and community announcements. Though the exact wording changes from week to week, it goes something like this:

Welcome to Food Not Bombs! Thanks for being here. If you weren't here all this food would go to waste. I am not your leader; we are a social anarchistic group and I'd be more than happy for you to take my job. People are handing me money for the volunteers. We volunteer 5-7 hours a week and usually each get \$5-7 for gas money. It's ok to be drunk or high at Food Not Bombs, just don't get into other people's face. Most food banks won't let you be drunk or high. Some require an address. Not here. You can be rich or poor. This is also an opportunity for you to talk about things that are going on. Particularly in this neighborhood. South Lake Union is changing quickly. Anybody have anything to say? Anything on your mind?

Take as much as you want but if you take a whole box of pizzas, I'm gonna give you shit. [Sometimes he says sweets or juice.] When do we go? At the same time! [He repeats this Q & A a few times and the crowd joins in.] OK, you all know what a supermarket looks like? With the aisles? Let's make the boxes look like that. We've got tons of food from 7 cars. Let's unload. Be respectful, do not touch anyone. If you don't like someone, you don't have to look at them or interact with them. Let's make it look like a supermarket; lots of room.

Daniel reminds folks of the hot dinner in Occidental Park at 4:30pm and invites people to volunteer to help make food. When everyone is done speaking, the crowd is invited to help carry boxes of food from the drivers' cars to the basketball court. After the boxes are placed, differently abled people (i.e., those in need of assistive equipment such as wheelchairs or walkers) are invited to hunt for items of interest before the crowd jumps in. Then the group shouts 'thank you!' in unison and begins. The next five or ten minutes are the most exciting as people discover entire pizzas or organic yogurt, an excess of bananas or a loaf of bread. As this 'shopping' frenzy dies down, people begin consolidating the remaining compost and breaking down empty boxes. One of the drivers brings a large push broom and someone, usually Kat, sweeps up any remaining debris. When these tasks are done, a smaller, reserved group of food

boxes are brought out for those who stayed to clean up. A smaller scale version of the earlier event occurs, the boxes are cleared away, and the sign is taken down off the fence. Dillon explained that since they introduced the extra boxes at the end people are more likely to stay regularly to finish the cleanup. Folks say their goodbyes and head home. The entire process takes about an hour and a half.

How It Works: Food Not Bombs Free Market

The above is a description of a Food Not Bombs (FNB) Free Market event. This event is remarkable not only because the food brought to the park is free (and predominantly organic), but because it is informally organized to satisfy a community need and has been so for over a decade. An example of franchise activism, there are other regular FNB events in the city of Seattle and around the world. In this chapter, I argue that this event and others like it, though imperfect, exemplify practices of interdependence and care work in food activism.

No one is technically in charge at the Free Market. There are no assigned roles or formal positions that are subsequently filled. Rather an organic process unfolds each week and over time as people find tasks that suit them, fill in where needed, or simply show up. People did “what needed to be done” (personal interview with Mark). There are, though, specific tasks that must be accomplished to ensure that the Free Market happens and people that take responsibility for these tasks regularly. There are a few crucial roles: drivers, yeller, composter(s), and cleanup crew. The drivers pick up the soon-to-be-shared food at various locations—grocery stores, co-ops, distribution centers—and deliver it to the park. They help organize the unloading of their vehicles, which is a collective effort. Whereas the event takes about an hour, the drivers can spend up to half their day involved in FNB-related efforts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, a core

group of drivers has proven to also be the “bottom-liners.” David Giles explains that this “common anarchist term” describes “people who have taken on added responsibility for simply making sure certain things get done” (Giles 2013, 217). These characters change over time, but of the three most involved at the time of my interviews, at least two had been engaged for about a decade. Their self-appointed responsibilities encompass much more than driving. Dillon, the informal mayor mentioned above, also serves, ironically, as “a kind of anarchist volunteer coordinator” (Giles 2013, 164). He hangs the FNB sign and generally acts as the yeller (see below). Jennifer is the informal treasurer. Matt brings brooms for cleanup. Matt and Dillon organize work on “box capsules” (a box sandwich of flattened boxes stacked in between two empty boxes for easy moving and storage). Matt usually takes the boxes to the recycling center. Dillon takes the sign down as things wrap up. These folks act as hosts of the event, but could at any time be replaced by others.

Importantly, these core drivers also have a history of serving as the spokespeople for the Free Market. As points of contact with the stores and distribution centers, the drivers are its external face. These personal relationships catalyze specific kinds of donations and safeguard food sources for the future. This group of bottom-liners has also formally represented the Free Market to the broader community. In one prime example, Jennifer and Dillon each described a meeting with a local cooperative. A number of different storefronts of this cooperative donate food to the Free Market on Sunday mornings and the management was concerned with liability. Dillon, Jennifer, and Matt all attended the meeting on behalf of the group. Jennifer attributes the successful outcome (specifically, food would continue to be donated to FNB from the co-op) to Dillon’s charm. Dillon suggested that a 501(c)3 started by another participant named Daniel for such scenarios lent the Free Market the sort of legitimacy sought by the cooperative’s

management. Here we see the confluence of individual strengths, shared resources, and personal relationships in combination to make the Free Market function.

Another key role is that of ‘yeller,’ as dubbed by Alex. This is the person who calls the event to order, lets the crowd know what’s going on (for example, if a driver will be late, thus delaying proceedings), reviews the rules of engagement (for example, no shopping until we say ‘thank you,’ no unrequested touching, etc.), invites announcements, and asks for gas donations and volunteers to help with compost. This master of ceremonies, of sorts, sets the pace for the event, keeps the crowd informed, and formalizes a set of rules. Though Dillon fulfills this role when present, others, such as Alex, fill in from time to time. Not everyone, though, enjoys being in the spotlight, as Dillon explained to me; such is human nature. The mutability of roles at the Free Market allows folks to participate in ways they find comfortable and fit their skill set.

The bottom-liners are certainly not the only participants nor are they the only ones with self-assigned tasks. Simply showing up is considered an important form of participation. After shopping ends, the leftover, usually inedible, produce bits are consolidated into a few boxes. When the boxes are finally packed up and the compost consolidated, someone sweeps the basketball court clean. There are days when there is very little compost and days when there are more boxes than can be transported in one car. Usually a few folks volunteer to take compost, sometimes because they have chickens at home to feed; sometimes it gets stealthily dropped in the large compost bins behind grocery stores. For a time, a compost-eating goat attended the Sunday event, disposing of a surprisingly large amount of rotting produce. The role of composters is one of the most fluid. My car once smelled of bananas for a week after I dropped a large load of the odiferous fruits in the dumpster behind a large grocery chain.

Incrementally, some people become increasingly involved in making things happen. Over time people “grow into” roles, as Alex explained to me. Jennifer echoed a similar sentiment with her observation that regular participants found roles that worked for them and “spontaneously adopted their niche.” She described her own process whereby she regularly attended the event, eventually became an alternate driver, and finally took over a regular store pick-up. In my interviews I heard folks explain that length of time involved leads to more say in group affairs due to “institutional knowledge” and experience of different problems through time.

My observations of this small group of dedicated individuals are not unique to this particular Food Not Bombs event. In Giles’ observations of FNB groups in Seattle, Melbourne, New York City, San Francisco, Davis, Boston, Buffalo, Berkeley, Worcester, New Brunswick, and Wellington, he finds bottom-liners everywhere, the “first among equals,” with keys to the kitchen and knowledge of food safety, taking “extra responsibility for making sure the food is actually worth eating” (Giles 2013, 190 & 194). Wilson reflects on her participation with the Kingston, Ontario FNB chapter, “There continued to be a core group of individuals who prepared the meals” (Wilson 2013, 734). Absent a strict hierarchical scaffold, FNB events are contingent upon the quotidian labor of a rotating few who rely on the participation of many. The assumption of this ever-shifting group is that each individual will participate to the degree that they are able and willing. The FNB model of the working poor helping each other and sharing resources is similar to disabled people caring for each other in care webs where each offers what one can. This might mean:

If I take your manual wheelchair and load it up with takeout, we’ll all have food. Can you go with me to the clinic and take notes while I talk to my doctor? Can I use your address for the Easy Does It pickup? I’m just over the border into Oakland. Let’s pass the hat so we can afford ASL for the event (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018a, 21).

Interdependence

As used by disability activists and scholars, interdependence is an anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal, and anti-individualist practice. It is associated with feminist praxis and mutual aid. A straight-forward synonym might be collective care. Interdependence insists that none of us exists in a vacuum of independence, but rather relies upon a broad network of others to meet our needs, be they physical, emotional, mental, etc. This may seem obvious to some and counterintuitive to others who find solace in individual autonomy, yet even a cursory look at our food system reveals a complex network of need that can only be met collectively, from compost to plate and back. As Mia Mingus astutely observes, “we don’t grow all our own food and spices” (2011). Her concept of access intimacy was discussed in Chapter 1 and helps to explain the depths of interdependence. She writes, “access intimacy is interdependence in action...Access intimacy is shared work by all people involved” (Mingus 2011).

Disability activist Sunaura Taylor (2019) suggests that interdependence has the capacity to connect us more fully to the consequences of our food choices on the more-than-human world. We may not all choose veganism, as she does, but we might reframe our relationship with the food system. We may have more patience with the choices of those around us, and be open to helping with potentially longer processes of food preparation that meet the ideological and dietary needs of those around us. Piepzna-Samarasinha’s words capture the essence of interdependence beautifully:

What does it mean to shift our ideas of access and care (whether it’s disability, childcare, economic access, or many more) from an individual chore, an unfortunate cost of having an unfortunate body, to a collective responsibility that’s maybe even deeply joyful? (2018a, 22)

As care that is “for us and by us,” not an act of charity, and even joyful (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018a), this Food Not Bombs Free Market is enacting interdependence and non-traditional acts of care work outside of the state and familial bonds of responsibility.

Sharing is foundational to the philosophy and practice of FNB. Each weekly event consists of a collective process of allocating free resources as determined by need, interest, and availability. McHenry’s 2015 book on FNB quotes Jo Swanson, co-founder of FNB, echoing the importance of sharing:

The simple act of sharing is a powerful force. It is the opposite of greed. It exposes the lie of scarcity and necessary deprivation. If we can do away with greed, we will do away with hunger, poverty and war. Greed will not be wished out of existence, but we can shove it out with the practice of radical, public sharing. (McHenry 2015, 11)

As this statement highlights, sharing is used by FNB as a politicized strategy to achieve radically different social relations of interdependence. By sharing waste food, FNB is emphasizing the demand for politics and social relations outside of capitalist configurations. Food is fundamental to the work of FNB at least in part because it is necessary for survival, but more than just food is shared at the Free Market. Money is shared with the drivers for gas on a completely voluntary basis. Bags and boxes for collecting food at the event are freely exchanged. There is often a box or more of non-food items. My notes include observations of clothes, diapers, and hats and scarves. A local character sometimes offers Free Hugs. In an interview Mark told me that in the early days of the market folks pooled resources to share a van and insurance. Another regular participant allows this Free Market access to the 501(c)3 status of a non-profit he established so that certain stores and church groups will continue donating food. In the work of building relationships to organize the event and unload the boxes of food, human and social capital are shared. Information is freely exchanged regarding resources, politics, and happenings. The physical space of the park is collectively used by Free Marketers and others

simultaneously. These examples are specific to this group but FNB collectives as a whole are founded on these kinds of behaviors, also referred to as mutual aid (Heynen 2010; Wilson 2013).

Consider this interaction:

“There’s chanterelles, you want these?”

“I got a huge one. I didn’t want to crush it. There were two; another guy and I saw them at the same time, reached in and took one each.”

These participants are actively negotiating fair allocation of resources among themselves. In this instance, they have peacefully decided on a 50/50 split. There are decidedly also moments of conflict which is why Dillon asks that no one take all the pizzas, juices, etc. in his announcement. That said, altercations around specific food items are not the norm. The culture of sharing extends beyond these moments of “shopping” negotiation. One week, for example, a community gardener in the park contributed a large pile of leeks he dug out of his own garden. The two moments recorded in my field notes below reveal with poignancy the generosity that this culture encourages.

A mother and her teenage daughter showed up as the very last of the compost was being consolidated. The mother asked if there was anything left. They both looked underweight. The girl (13ish) was holding a small, black duffel bag. A man answered that there wasn’t anything left unless they wanted something in the boxes of compost. They began sifting through and picked up a shriveled clementine. A young woman asked if they wanted some strawberries. They said yes and took a carton from the woman, quietly thanking her.

I took one box of compost to dispose of at home and was walking to my car with it when an elderly (60ish) Asian woman came up and put a container of strawberries in the box of compost. She said, They are good. I have three. I said, thank you, taken aback by her generosity. She said, should I give you more? I said, no! you keep them. Thank you very much!

There is an unspoken understanding that each person has different needs but there is enough for everyone. At least partially because no one had ownership of the food to begin with, there is an open atmosphere of giving. These are examples of collective care and access intimacy. I am reminded of Mia Mingus' words: "*Access intimacy is that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else 'gets' your access needs...* It is not dependent on someone having a political understanding of disability, ableism or access" (2011, n.p.).

Activism, Participation and Privilege

The Free Market is a powerful example of interdependence and stresses an often overlooked element in the alternative food movement: inclusion and difference. Giles, reflecting on his participation in FNB groups in Seattle and beyond corroborates that "many of [the volunteers] share in the economic marginality or instability of the people with whom they're sharing food" (Giles 2013, 15). The bottom-liners I interviewed all originally found their way to the Free Market because they, while housed and often employed, could not afford food. Those who drive also shop. No one fills out forms or must answer questions to participate. Certainly some people have been to the event before and know how it works while others are new and do not. Some volunteer regularly and have an understanding of what goes on behind the scenes. Others simply show up to shop and then leave. Everyone chooses their own role and level of participation. There are noticeable social differences in the group. Some people have homes; some live in their vehicles or on the street. I have witnessed people roll up to the park in BMWs and Audis and spoken with others who walk or take the bus. The drivers, by necessity, have their own cars.

At one particular Free Market event a man who appeared to be inebriated (he loudly danced around the park and mistook raw cranberries for cherries, yet delighted in them), asked if my friend and I were volunteers. He presumed that the event was run by an organization and that there was a distinction between those “in need” from “service providers.” As I was (at the time) an able-bodied, white graduate student at a top-ranked university (not all of this was outwardly visible, but my style of dress, for example, may have offered clues), it is reasonable that this stranger might associate me with a non-profit-like service role. Though none of the other bottom-liners in this group are students, and each, to Giles’ point, originally got involved because they needed food and could not afford it, they are all white and at least two now have mortgages. It is not uncommon at Food Not Bombs events that a core group of more-privileged participants puts in the work to ensure that events happen. Gelderloos (2006) observes this in Harrisonburg where a diverse group eats FNB meals together on Fridays, but “younger, whiter, wealthier, better educated, and more politically active” members take responsibility for preparing the meal (65). Wilson describes this phenomenon in her work with an FNB group in Kingston, Ontario. The group prepared hot meals to serve in a public park on Sunday afternoons. She writes, “That group included people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds but the majority were university students or middle class and white, who participated because they wanted to, not out of necessity. This suggests that it remained to some degree an exclusive space for those who had the time and social status to engage” (Wilson 2013, 734). Here Wilson references Guthman’s phrase “bringing good food to others” (Guthman 2008a, 433). This phrase comes out of Guthman’s work with undergraduate interns interested in the food system. It draws attention to the privilege and whiteness that often accompanies alternative food practice, both of which are present in Food Not Bombs spaces as seen above.

There are certainly differences in privilege among participants but the evidence does not, in my view, point to an example of Guthman's "bringing good food to others," but rather a reimagining of what collective responsibility—interdependence—might look like. Bringing good food to others assumes a hierarchy of some who are more aware of the politics and consequences of the food system and others who are educated by these enlightened few and subsequently change their eating behaviors. There is no not-good food at FNB, only free food. And the drivers, yellors, composters, etc. all take food for themselves as well.

Based upon comments by Dillon that people have varying levels of awareness and interest in FNB literature, we might differentiate between participants and activists, as Gelderloos (2006) does. Perhaps it is fitting that those with privilege offer more of their time and resources to make the Free Market happen. As critical disability studies encourages us to understand: each person has different levels of need and a different capacity to participate. Feminist, queer, and crip approaches to disability studies insist that care work must be situated within social, cultural, and historical contexts and attention must be paid to power relations (for example, see Kafer 2013; Hall 2014; Hall 2017; Piepza-Samarasinha 2018a). The free market event engages people who might not otherwise interact to work together to feed themselves and others. The result is to destigmatize hunger and get people talking. Co-founders Butler and McHenry explain, "One of our goals for doing street work is to bring people with different economic backgrounds directly into contact with each other" (2000, 11). Though those who volunteer more of their time do appear to have more resources, these are self-selected roles. Anyone is free to choose the food they would like and their level and style of participation. As Audre Lorde (1984) contends, "community must not mean shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist" (112). The Free Market and other FNB

events are imperfect but lived examples of attempting to flatten social hierarchies and narrow the divide between givers and receivers of social goods and care work in our communities.

FNB literature is explicit that its work is solidarity, not charity:

We are not a charity, we are seeking to build a movement to end the exploitation of the economic and political system. If you are not interested in changing society so no one needs to eat at a soup kitchen then you might want to volunteer with a church or government food program. We are seeking to end hunger and poverty not just feed it. When so much money is spent on the military we know it is possible to create a world where no one is required to stand in line to eat at a charity.

Critical disability studies offers a similar critique of the charity model of disability: that it provides “badly needed services without engaging the underlying causes of social exclusion” (Reaume 2014, n.p.). The charity model, then, is a way of understanding and relating to disability, as well as a disability-related industry, *and* understanding and relating to hunger, as well as a hunger-related industry. Rather than challenge the sources of inequity and recognize our mutual dependence on others, the charity model assumes (moralistically) a one-way transfer of goods and services from those better off (rich, able-bodied, well-fed, thin) to those less fortunate (poor, disabled, hungry, obese).

Public Sharing

FNB tactics extend beyond simply sharing (food and other resources), but involve doing so openly. As the website explains, “One aspect of our mission is to help make the ‘invisible poverty’ more visible.” The public nature of these events has led to confrontation including arrests at FNB events and the designation by the US government as a terrorist group, resulting in the surveillance of FNB activists (McHenry 2015). Many cities in the United States prohibit or limit public sharing of free food, some at least partially in response to FNB events. As evidence, Heynen (2010) reports that at least 22 cities passed new laws between 2003 and 2010 prohibiting

or limiting public food distribution. Additionally, a survey of North American cities in 2010 by the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty highlighted twenty-three case studies of cities with recent food sharing restrictions, varying from explicit legal limitations on parks-use permits to selective health code enforcement (Shannon 2016). Heynen (2010, 1230) cites the following examples:

Wilmington, NC, has outlawed ‘sharing’ food on public streets and sidewalks; in 2006, Las Vegas city council passed a law making it illegal to give food ‘for free or at a nominal cost’ to indigent people in the parks of the city (it was still legal to give out food to the well-off).”

In addition, regulations in Orlando, where FNB activists have faced chronic arrests, allow organizations and individuals to provide free food in parks only twice per year (Parson 2014). Heynen argues that the prefigurative vision of FNB (and resulting practices of mutual aid) “directly threatens policies of containment and makes poor people far less susceptible to regulation” (2010, 1231). By procuring waste food for free and feeding it to people at no cost, without restriction, FNB activists prove that people can act without profit motive to solve collective problems. In doing so, the work of FNB challenges the corporate model of hunger alleviation and so draws admonition from the state.

It is essential here to contextualize community need within the space of Seattle. In both my field notes and interviews, the most common theme of community concern is gentrification and announcements at FNB are focused primarily on resources for the homeless. As Jennifer described it, “the city has grown so much and there is so much need.” South Lake Union, the neighborhood where the Free Market takes place, is an example of environmental or green gentrification par excellence (Anguelovski 2015; Checker 2011). The construction is rapid, well-funded, and well-meaning. The developer leading the majority of the glossy, new condo construction is Vulcan, a pet project of Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen and his wife Judy. The

website describes Vulcan Inc. as “a nimble private company... Working to solve some of the biggest global issues... save endangered species, address climate change, improve ocean health, explore new frontiers, research how the human brain works and build sustainable communities.” With somewhere around 4500 people sleeping on the streets each night in Seattle, the lofty goals of Vulcan are meaningless to some, though. The little oasis of Cascade Park, where FNB Free Market takes place, provides a space for a different kind of constituent, one Vulcan has forgotten. Unfortunately, as Checker (2011) observes, in sustainable developments as much as elsewhere, equity takes the backseat to profit.

There is an important point to be made here about the (in)visibility of need, a political point FNB literature highlights. The presence of Cascade Park amidst a sustainability-driven building frenzy exemplifies the need for physical space to bring visibility to community need and community-driven responses to this need. As disability studies scholar Tanya Titchkosky astutely observes within university bureaucracies, “processes of inclusion, and thus access, can arise only insofar as exclusion has already become an issue and is already perceivable” (Titchkosky 2011, 9). In a neighborhood like SLU, in a growing, prosperous, progressive city like Seattle, it is easy to forget that this prosperity is not benefiting everyone equally. The presence of a public park, a concrete space in the city that is accessible to all and publicly visible is a prerequisite for the Free Market to take place. Dillon told me there “used to be a lot more people sleeping on the street, in their cars.” The fact that these folks are no longer visible in this neighborhood is not because the problem of homelessness has been solved, but because it has been relocated to more marginal spaces. As Jennifer argues, “just because this is a very affluent city doesn’t mean there isn’t need...for people to actually see this happening...I think it’s

important because they may not see it anyplace else...they're not gonna see that people need help and that it's important to share.”

(Inter)Dependency

FNB operates outside the formal economy yet depends upon the excesses and inefficiencies of the supermarket model of the food system. A relatively new model of food retailing, it was not until the 1960s that large supermarket chains appeared. In the US in 2013, four grocery firms controlled 36% of the market, a significant concentration (Clapp 2016). These corporations have spread from industrialized nations worldwide and now exert considerable influence on pricing and demand within the global food chain (Hamilton 2018). Morgan (2015), among others, suggests that this “issue of supermarket power” is often overlooked in urban food policy but must be addressed in pursuit of a more equitable food system (1388). This is a particularly salient position in the face of an increasingly institutionalized emergency food system. As Poppendieck (1998) and Fisher (2017) both observe, feeding the hungry in the United States has become big business. Originally designed to be a stopgap for those who were in immediate need, food banks have become regular sources of food for many. Fisher cites a study by the Oregon Food Bank that determined one-third of its clients received more than 12 food boxes a year; the assumption thus being that these folks are relying on the food bank as a regular, not occasional, source of food. By largely ignoring poverty and other root causes of food insecurity, food banks have become bastions of the neoliberal capture of the problem of hunger. Food bank scholar Graham Riches summarizes the problem with this quote:

Jessica Powers, the former director of Why Hunger’s Nourish Network for the Right to Food in the USA has commented: “nearly five decades of food banks have failed to solve the problem of hunger because it frames the problem as a lack of food (hunger), rather

than a lack of income (poverty) and the solution as distribution, not structural change. (Riches 2018, 20)

Interdependence & Autonomy?

The weekly practice of the Free Market provides an illustration of an autonomous group of ever-changing participants actively working to meet their needs together, outside of organized government and capitalist exchange relations. As a model of mutual aid, it is very different than the Healthy Foods Here program and more radical than a co-op model of activism. As part of the “direct action wing of the food justice movement” (Shannon 2016, 800), Food Not Bombs does not put its expectation of action on governments. FNB is concerned with a radical approach to ending hunger by framing it as a problem of neo-liberal policies and the capitalist treatment of food for profit. As an activist group and a broader social movement, FNB pushes the concept of the right to food beyond that of the “access” frame. In the policy arena, food remains a commodity which is made more financially accessible through government-sponsored subsidies. In the actions of FNB, food is no longer commodified and the actors are people working on their own behalf. FNB participants use direct action to demonstrate what Shannon (2016) refers to as a “street” definition of rights. Thus, while FNB, both historically and as a philosophical underpinning, promotes a redistribution of societal wealth away from weapons of war and a political orientation that emphasizes human fulfillment rather than profit, groups like the Seattle Free Market are acting for themselves rather than petitioning the government on their behalf. There is a philosophical divide here, though, between being part of meeting one’s needs and exercising care for others and being left without governmental and societal support. Critical disability studies asks us to again consider the question of responsibility: how do we reconcile autonomy and interdependence? One of the foundational pillars of FNB is that it operates outside

of the state but what responsibility does the state have to ensure that its inhabitants are fed? And cared for? Do we disentangle the state from any responsibility and absorb this responsibility ourselves?

In his examination of Slow Food's Carlo Petrini and his concept of "freewill giving", Myers presents FNB's use of food-as-gift as a foil and a true example of oppositional politics, solidarity-building potential, and resistance to capitalism. The premise of the Free Market is sharing waste food. Co-access to this food waste renders this group a part of the sharing economy and the free sharing earns it a place in the gift economy. Notably, the gift economy, Myers and others argue, is not charity-based. Rather it is founded on "relations of reciprocity, respect, social leveling, and solidarity" (Myers 2013, 414). Using FNB as a whole as an example, he presents a case for the gift as "a conduit for forging political alliances and countering inequality" (Myers 2013, 413).

Despite the reassurance of Myers and others that the gift economy is not charity-based, others have been clear to distinguish between the concept of a gift and a right. Heynen advocates for, "models of food decommodification that seek to be the antithesis of 'charity', where food, although shared free of charge, is not a gift but a means of asserting and fulfilling a right;" he continues, "'Food Not Bombs' (FNB) is at the forefront of such efforts" (Heynen 2010, 1227). In a similar vein, Parson (2014) observes, "Poppendieck (1999) contends that neoliberal charity shifts the debate around social services from "rights" to "gifts." Because demanding a better gift is disrespectful, the homeless are only entitled to what is gifted to them; this is not the case with a right. As disability activists remind us, every person can, and should, demand full access to meet their needs.

Critical disability studies “recognizes the expertise of disabled people in understanding their own life, while advocating for progressive societal change” (Reaume 2014, n.p.). The phrase “nothing about us without us” is instructive here. Though not limited to the disability community, this phrase has consistently been used as a motto of the movement since the 1990s and, in 2004, was the theme of the UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This slogan is a demand to involve those impacted in decision-making, and extends beyond concerns with ability. Disability studies also reminds us that autonomy is contextual. It does not mean doing everything by oneself; that is ableism at work. A more realistic reconfiguration of “autonomy” might be as a relational process of self-development that recognizes mutual dependence. This is a more accurate description of the Free Market event where some participate out of hunger and some to practice activism and some out of curiosity and others for community. Yet no one is asked to explain why they are there, many come to satisfy more than one need, and the success of the event hinges on collective participation.

Significantly, for both world governance regimes and FNB, the right to food is not simply about not going hungry, but entangled with larger questions of human dignity (Morgan 2015; Riches 2011; Ziegler et al. 2011). The opportunity to participate in feeding oneself is a key ingredient to meeting the social need for respect as well as the physical need for hunger. The Free Market encourages, but does not require, folks to participate at will and as suits them. Though some, as discussed above, inevitably have more privilege and others more need, the intent is to level social hierarchies by treating everyone equally and asking nothing of participants but mutual respect. Autonomy in the choice of foods is an element unique to FNB Free Markets (compared to hot meals which by necessity have fewer options). The concept of culturally appropriate foods is lately used to describe the demand for not only enough food but to

the kinds of food one prefers, knows how to prepare, and with which one has personal associations. The Free Market fulfills this social mandate by not specifying what or how much (other than “all of”) participants take of the available food. The work of FNB, broadly, is also meant to draw attention to the root causes that lead to people being unable to afford food and also to the excess that results from the current food system, particularly in the Global North. The public nature of the event is essential to achieving this goal which speaks to hunger as a societal, rather than personal, failure.

Conclusion: Collectively Creating More Livable Communities

The Free Market has encountered little resistance, but participants expressed concern for the future. Jennifer explains: “I feel like we’re blessed...nobody has hassled us.” She continues, we “do worry as this neighborhood is growing around us so rapidly that the community may decide we are undesirable even though typically it’s a fairly quiet group. So we try very hard to make sure that we clean up well afterwards so there is no reason for anyone to say you can’t be here.” The case of this Food Not Bombs Free Market highlights the need for concrete, specific actions that both satisfy immediate need and foster a climate where people are encouraged to act together towards change. Food is a tool but the change sought is much broader. It is not simply the provision of the food that is important, but the collective process that leads to meeting this human need, the opportunity for participation, and the lack of profit motive.

FNB Free Market is an urban food strategy to help the working poor. This is a small solution to a big problem. It fails to address the issue of supermarket power (Morgan 2015), but this weekly gathering exemplifies interdependence by creating social capital and equalizing social difference, if only for an hour or so. Participants expressed great satisfaction with their

involvement in the Free Market. The simple act of sharing not only feeds people's stomachs but also their desire to be part of collective action. The event of the Free Market provides an opening for radical democratic practice, the act of organizing together to make our cities better places to live. Might sharing food prove a radical practice that provides a template for more ethical interactions within the alternative food movement? And perhaps a template that extends beyond the food system? As Howard Zinn observed, "these Food Not Bombs folk are carrying on the long march of the American people, moving slowly but inexorably towards a livable society" (Butler and McHenry 2000, ix).

Food Not Bombs was founded on principles of gifting, collective responsibility, and inclusion as anti-war activism. Franchises exist around the world serving hot food in parks, feeding protestors of a wide variety of radical causes, and as free markets, such as the subject of this case study. As with much food activism, there is more at stake than feeding people. In the case of FNB, the organizational perspective is founded on the right to food. This is not, from FNB's perspective, a right granted or guaranteed by governmental bodies, but one fulfilled by individuals acting collectively. Access to food is a right and a shared obligation. This obligation is non-hierarchical, voluntary, and according to skill and desire. Accepting the gift of food is an important form of participation. This acknowledgement of dependence on each other is termed interdependence. It exists in direct opposition to the neoliberal belief in self-sufficiency. In disability studies this a core concept based on the reality of the spectrum of ability and disability. Different bodies have different needs, but societal interactions normalize certain behaviors that often conceal what forms of accommodations are considered acceptable. At FNB Free Market events, this is neutralized through the act of sharing together. There is no service (food) provider and recipient of services (food), but simply participants. That said, a core group of bottom-liners

does spend more time volunteering to make the Free Market and other FNB events happen. Generally, those with more privilege take more responsibility for these actions. Everyone I spoke with, though, became involved with FNB, at least initially, due to need for affordable food. Disability studies reminds us to consider the invisible efforts of others not considered bottom-liners. This might include lengthy public transportation rides or overcoming agoraphobia. Interdependence makes room for these variations of human experience as it seeks broad acknowledgement of the various ways we help and are helped. Though not a panacea to end hunger, each week the participants of the FNB Free Market practice interdependence through food sharing.

CHAPTER 8:

Nourishing (Food) Futures

As I conclude, I'd like to return to a concept introduced in Chapter 1: Tanya Titchkosky's suggestion that access itself can be a "questioning orientation" (2011, x). She not only concludes her book with wonder, but her questioning is infused with wonder throughout the text. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomas points out, "in critical disability studies, the concept of wonder follows an established critical tradition, dating from the 1990s," which she expresses pride in participating in (Garland-Thomson 2019a, 16). Here, also, is where I believe my contribution lies: wondering what a better food future looks like. It is not mine to define, but for us all to weigh in on. It is the wonder of how another lives, eats, survives, and feels; of how we achieve these things ourselves and together. It is the wonder of how we will feed ourselves in the future. In the face of climate change. Despite the vast inequities that already exist. Will farmers remain poor, and poor, urban people remain hungry and "obese"? What options have we?

Questioning the Alternative Food Movement

I am interested in the alternative food movement because I had once thought it provided an antidote to these troubling constructions. As it turns out, it does not. As a movement, it has the capacity to be just as complicit with power, privilege, and oppression as any other structure in society. It is clear from my literature review and from the case studies of these three AFOs that disability and ableism in particular remain invisible in both the movement and the research on the movement.

Yet critical disability studies has the capacity to *nourish* the alternative food movement. At the moment, reactionary responses from food movement actors has the movement feeling somewhat stagnant. Feel-good solutions such as increasing affordability at farmers markets by allowing people to double their SNAP dollars are simply not sufficient to meet the real-world problems of structural inequity and climate change. Critical disability studies offers a perspective that can deepen food systems work to be radically more inclusive and to offer creative new directions for activism.

In academia, critical disability studies opens up research to both critical theory and to emancipatory research that includes the voices of those most impacted. In my work looking at three case studies of different alternative food organizations, I focused on the context of activism and the ways in which organizational tactics were effectively inclusive (or not). This is important because just as the food movement is critiqued for its reactionism, simply reacting in turn to injustices against people with disabilities is not enough. What is needed is a greater context of inclusivity in physical, social, and political aspects of everyday life.

To *nourish*, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is “to provide with food or sustenance; (*gen.*) to maintain, support, provide for.” The sustenance that critical disability studies offers includes theoretical and methodological tools to increase food (and social) equity. This means at least engaging in questions of access, normativity, and the body. Using critical disability concepts such as interrogating health, crip time, and interdependence to deepen intersectional analyses of oppression within the food movement is a good way to enter into these questions.

I emphasized one of these key concepts in each of my case studies. I chose each concept because of its primacy to the case, but each concept is relevant to each case. For example, in

relation to Healthy Foods Here, the APHA Principles of the Ethical Practice of Public Health (Public Health Leadership Society 2002) explicitly acknowledge the interdependence of people. It is certainly worth exploring further how this translates to policy. A deeper examination of the relationship between bodily health, environmental sustainability, and product ordering guidelines at Central Co-op would be insightful. The volunteer time commitments of the bottom-liners at Food Not Bombs deserve thoughtful consideration in light of crip time. More importantly, these are all key concepts and considerations for the food movement as a whole.

Recognizing Structural Ableism & Alimentary Ableism

The intellectual nourishment offered by critical disability studies enables researchers and activists to recognize structural ableism and alimentary ableism. This means recognizing barriers in institutional and organizational contexts and identifying which accommodations are taken for granted and which are labeled as burdensome. This also means paying attention to normative ideologies and value systems, continuously asking questions about their impacts, and reevaluating these ideologies and systems as needed. This is hard work at first, but becomes easier as we learn what questions to ask in context and invite diverse conversations. Adding alimentary ableism to the lexicon of the food movement nourishes a commitment to awareness of the disabled body, and to inviting such awareness to the analytical table permanently, not as a singular event or momentary fad, but as the kind of entrenched dedication that results in profound change.

Encouraging Disabled-Led Initiatives

Critical disability studies has always demanded seeking out and listening to disabled people's perspectives. This is another way CDS nourishes the food movement—by feeding it new narratives and unheard voices. The previous erasure of disabled people from food discourse must be addressed. Barriers to participation must be identified. In research this translates to asking who is doing the research and to insisting that research about disabled bodies should involve and even be directed by disabled people themselves. This may entail new methodologies, such as “cripping the interview space itself—restructuring it and reconsidering the power dynamics that give rise to its normative structure” (Price & Kerschbaum 2016, 21).

Taking Seriously the Body and Embodied Experience

A strong commonality I saw between the three cases discussed here is a desire for a world outside of capitalist values. Even within the bureaucratic confines of the federally funded Healthy Foods Here program, team members from all three organizational backgrounds were focused on community well-being. This is part of a future that disability activism is adamant about: a future where no body is disposable, not fat people and not farm workers. Instead we see each other as bodies-in-relation, practicing flexibility, humility, and empathy for each other. Questions of access help us get there. Questions of access involve, both implicitly and explicitly, defining a desired future. Yet while I decidedly do see access playing a role in the move towards a more inclusive food movement, access is not enough; it is just the beginning. Here is where seriously considering the body—and many different bodies—in relation to food can radically expand heretofore conceived notions of inclusion in the food movement.

Providing Good Food for All

As critical disability studies nourishes the alternative food movement, I hold that the alternative food movement has a reciprocal obligation to nourish disabled bodies. As I discuss in at least Chapters 2 and 5, the alternative food movement has consistently expressed concern over the kinds of foods produced by the current food system. The food justice movement has taken up this conversation with particular interest in which kinds of foods are available in which communities, and specifically those that are marginalized. In order to nourish disabled bodies, the alternative food movement needs to add ableism to its list of “isms” that prevent access to good food. Food discourse is a means by which we celebrate certain foodways, vilify some, and fail to recognize others. Food privilege—the ability to access preferred foods freely without barriers, economic or otherwise—has been absent from the discourse surrounding good food, and this absence has obscured the quiet coercion that accompanies many well-intentioned alternative food initiatives. So another conclusion of this work is that race and class analyses are not sufficient to understand the barriers to good food.

Each of these case studies exemplifies a different way of conceptualizing how to transfer “good food,” and within each case “good food” is defined differently. These differences of strategy and definition were direct results of the ideologies guiding each AFO. In Healthy Foods Here, public health and attendant federal and state food assistance programs formed the basis of good food. A combination of concern for environmental and bodily health, including labor concerns, determined the concept of good food at Central Co-op. Individuals were able to decide their own definition of good food at Food Not Bombs—within the available options of items donated each week. All of these concepts of good food offered a certain level of choice and a certain level of constraint, but, as is the case within the movement as a whole, there was no

consensus on what foods exactly the movement should be working towards, or who should get to decide on these foods. Much of my work in this dissertation was about paying attention to the consequences of these choices, to both understand the landscape of the food movement and to identify where activists might focus future efforts.

Seeking Agency

Harlan Hahn names fast food the food of disability culture. Michael Pollan contends it's not food if it arrived through the window of your car. This dissertation argues that the tension between these two extreme positions is in need of attention. Pollan's categorical dismissal of a specific food type is an example of alimentary ableism: it dismisses the access needs of certain bodies, such as Hahn's. These needs, in turn, are made invisible by analyses that lack the tools to investigate the implications of the food system on all bodies, especially marginalized ones.

I realize now that what makes me so uncomfortable about settling on fast food as the food of disability culture—as I discuss in Chapter 1—is the lack of agency involved in that choice. It is in fact a choice *based* on lack: lack of accessible food options, whether it be due to the exhaustion entailed in leaving one's vehicle and entering a building, the inaccessibility of the building itself, the lack of availability of foods that might be easier to prepare at home for oneself, the lack of affordability of easier-to-prepare foods or takeout options, or the lack of temporal accessibility necessary to prepare food at all. Here is the crux of alimentary ableism: structural barriers in the food system that limit options for people with non-normate bodies, and imagination for all of us.

Interestingly, initial responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 momentarily increased accessible food options. Restaurants that previously did not offer takeout began to do so. Those

that had not previously offered home delivery made delivery options available on apps or began to offer their own services, as did some grocery stores and smaller vendors. Curbside delivery, whereby someone would bring your order to your vehicle, became commonplace. How easily what would have been seen as a burden became a commonplace accommodation in the face of collective demand! Yet many of these innovations are slowly disappearing now that Covid-19 has been adopted as a part of daily life. Covid's disabling impacts on the body aside, this is another example of societal dismissal of disabled need.

Responding to Calls for Justice

What I called above “a reciprocal obligation” is in other words the food movement responding to its own calls for a just and inclusive food system. Wondering what this looks like demands more than visioning bucolic hillsides planted regeneratively in diverse organic vegetables fertilized by free-range chickens, or imagining the abundance of high-end grocery aisles. It demands a certain kind of attentiveness that has been lacking from the justice, equity, and inclusion dialogues touted by the alternative food movement. Wondering what this looks like means asking why disabled people are not being nourished by our current food system. This dissertation has suggested that one of the answers to this question is that disabled people have not been able to participate in the visioning of the alternatives. That the activism itself is often inaccessible. And yet, what we have learned from disabled people's activism and critique already offers new windows into the goals, achievements, and challenges inherent in the alternative food movement.

The nourishment already on offer from critical disability studies includes, inherent in it, the question of agency. Who is defining the values of the movement? The research goals? Who

is doing the research, being researched? Who is eating good food? Who is defining good food? Who has access to good food and what are the barriers to such access? Critical disability studies insists on the visibility of the disabled body and the politics of disability in tandem with food politics. Herein lies a vision for food futures that both meet our diverse bodily needs and keep us wondering for more.

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