THE LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT AND URBAN REDEVELOPMENT IN OKLAHOMA CITY: TERRITORY, POWER, AND POSSIBILITY

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Program in Geography
Written under the direction of
Kevin St. Martin
And approved by

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New Brunswick, New Jersey
May, 2015
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

THE LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT AND URBAN REDEVELOPMENT IN OKLAHOMA CITY: TERRITORY, POWER, AND POSSIBILITY

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Dissertation Director: Kevin St. Martin

This dissertation examines the relationship between alternative food initiatives and urban processes through a case study of the statewide local food movement in Oklahoma and its cultural, political, and economic linkages with urban redevelopment in Oklahoma City. Building on literature in geography, urban studies, and food studies, the work deploys ethnographic, participatory, and archival field research to trace the development of the local food movement and redevelopment. The state’s local food movement has grown rapidly, with a number of firms demonstrating diverse operating models and relations of production, which seek to balance economic, ecological, and social goals in varying ways and to varying degrees. The movement has also benefited from increasing support from state agencies and other organizations, and from the redevelopment strategies of Oklahoma City, which focus on quality of life initiatives aimed at attracting large companies and the well-educated labor force they require. However, the study finds that benefits to local food enterprises generated by the growth of the city’s ‘creative class’ have been uneven, due in part to increased corporate interest in specialty food markets. At the same time, local and other specialty foods have played an important role in revalorizing the urban core, from which less affluent and racial minority residents of some areas have been displaced by
gentrification, raising questions about the social significance of both redevelopment and the local food movement. While these questions remain open, the study concludes by demonstrating how current efforts to create a local food hub in Oklahoma City suggest that the potential for more just and sustainable food systems and modes of urban redevelopment remains substantial.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is the result of not only my work, but that of many collaborators, beginning with my committee. As my advisor, Kevin St. Martin has provided invaluable guidance, mentorship, and support throughout the process of envisioning and executing this project. As my teacher, Kevin opened my eyes to radically different ways of thinking and expanded my intellectual horizons tremendously. The opportunity to work with Richard Schroeder on this research and beyond taught me intellectual rigor and analytical concision; Rick’s commitment to education is a continuous inspiration. Since I came to Rutgers, Bob Lake has been something of a Zen master of theory to me. Without Bob’s guidance, I would have been much more likely to fall into the traps of rigid thinking and unexamined assumptions. Sarah Whatmore has played a major part in shaping this project, first through her writings, which I think of as embodying the Nietzschean Gay Science ideals that I aspire to, and more recently through her generous participation in the ‘After 400 ppm’ workshop at Rutgers and as a committee member. My capacities as a field researcher owe much to Trevor Birkenholtz, who taught me research methods, influenced my thinking about power, and provided great encouragement alongside practical feedback as my project took shape.

In Oklahoma, a wide range of participants in this research graciously shared their time, insights, and often very personal experiences with me, and welcomed me into their homes and workplaces. I’ll refrain from listing individual names — in part because of sheer numbers, but also in deference to the sometimes sensitive positions of individuals who spoke candidly with me about a number of topics — but I would like to make clear here that this work would not have been possible without the generosity of members and personnel associated with the following groups and institutions: the Oklahoma Food Cooperative, Oklahoma Farm and Food Alliance, Oklahoma State Health Department, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry, the State Archives at the Department of
Libraries, the Oklahoma Historical Society, and a number of other individuals and enterprises. I hope that this dissertation lives up to the work that all of these folks do.

My fellow graduate students at Rutgers have been a constant source of intellectual stimulation, fellowship, and conviviality. Since my first visit to the Geography Department, Nate Gabriel has played the single most important role in the development of my thinking. Through many hours of provocative conversation, often over food and wine, Nate and I have shared ideas and thoughts about everything from social theory to the likelihood that the yeti really exists (Nate was skeptical), from pedagogy to navigating the academic job market. A true friend and ally, a great collaborator, and my fellow Okie, I would say I owe Nate the biggest debt of all, but our friendship doesn’t tend to revolve around concepts like debt. Sean Tanner has also been a stalwart companion and a source of much-needed levity and good thinking. My journey thus far through the labyrinth of academe has been enriched in many ways by a supportive and rich community of fellow students and friends including Jim Jeffers, Debby Scott, Mark Barnes, Kalpana Venkatasubramanian, Neiset Bayouth, Irene Zager, Luke Drake, John Johnson, Jr., Juan Rivero, Abidah Setyowati, Rich Nisa, Peter Vancura, Katie Grosso, Saemi Ledermann, Za Barron, and many others.

In the broader world, my friends and colleagues in the Community Economies Collective provide unwavering optimism matched with intellectual adventurousness. For this, and for the 2013 Bolsena Writing Retreat, which enabled me to work through some of the central ideas in this research, I am grateful. The Center for Cultural Analysis at Rutgers provided me with funding and much inspiration during the writing phase. Elizabeth Grosz has been an important influence on my work, setting a brilliant example of how to become an affirming, Gay Scientist. At the University of Oklahoma, I wish to thank Charlie Warnken, Karl Offen, Deborah Dalton, Bruce Hoagland, Katherine Pandora, Hunter Heyck, and John Winters, as well as my fellow students from the early days of the Interdisciplinary
Perspectives on the Environment program, each of whom played an important part in setting my course and helping me build a solid intellectual foundation. Hank and Sonya Grant have been fervent supporters and wonderful friends throughout this process, cheering me on and keeping my spirits high with amazing food and good fellowship on many occasions.

As my partner in life and in intellectual pursuits, Monica Barra has been at the heart of this dissertation. She has been deeply supportive of my work in countless ways — our ongoing discussions have been central to the development of how I understand this case (and many other things), as has her constructive feedback on my writing, talks, teaching, and many other creative efforts. Moreover, she has been a direct collaborator on this project, both ‘in the field’ — where she helped me to organize and run focus groups, went with me to field sites, took notes and made observations, and hung out with research participants — and as a co-organizer of conference sessions, co-author, and general co-facilitator of all kinds of things. Her contributions to this project are inestimable, not least of all her ability to help me remember there is more to life beyond academe, and to live in that beyond.

My family has been a huge help throughout this long process as well. My brother and longtime musical collaborator Adam and I have been thinking and talking about stuff like this for literally as long as I can remember. My sister Patia inspires me with her work ethic and tenacity in her own academic pursuits, and my older brother Rob turned me on to many important ideas and cultural influences when we were kids, from punk rock to the Beat Generation. My paternal grandparents, Hazel and Roberto Sarmiento, were a unique couple who together created a milieu that included geology, Spanish, opera, Lawrence Durrell and Ferdinand Braudel on Roberto’s side, and animal rights, German, ESP, health food, and aliens on Hazel’s side. Growing up around that milieu broadened my horizons considerably. My dad, Rob Sarmiento, was an intellectual, in the best sense of the word — he loved to
muse and talk about things, to read and to write, and he was full of interesting and far-reaching ideas. His deeply optimistic and loving conception of the World as a vast co-production, perpetually moving towards what he called the Alpha Future, was fundamental to how I thought about things as a kid, and remains so. I wish he were still around to read this work.

Finally, my mom, Lynne Sarmiento Shell, and my step-dad Matt Shell graciously hosted me during fieldwork (and many other stays in Oklahoma over the years); sharing great food and lively conversation on a daily basis with them was a great part of this experience. My mom and her parents, Ruby and Ray Hornbuckle, have always given me a strong foundation of love, support, and encouragement. Ray and Ruby’s lives span virtually the entire history of Oklahoma as a state; good, honest, hard-working but life affirming folks, they embody the best aspects of the place. Which makes sense because their labors played a part in building it. Fortunately for me, they also played a huge part in making me who I am. For that I’m grateful. But the biggest part in that process was played by my mom, who has always been indefatigable, courageous, and optimistic, teaching me those qualities by example, and instilling in me a love of reading, learning, and Life. This work is dedicated to Lynne, Ray, and Ruby, and to the many Oklahomans who generously participated in the research.
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Reflecting on both the importance and the limitations of critical interrogations of scientific knowledge in the late 1980s, feminist theorist Donna Haraway wrote, “We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life” (Haraway 1988, p. 580). Moving beyond a simple rejection of scientific objectivity and empiricism on strict social constructionist grounds, Haraway called for a form of embodied objectivity, an understanding of knowledge as always linked to bodies situated somewhere and somewhen. “Objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision of promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility,” she went on to say, adding, “The moral is simple; only partial perspective promises objective vision.” While the case study presented in this dissertation is, as the title suggests, ‘about’ the connections between local food and urban redevelopment, it is also very much concerned to put into practice Haraway’s call, alongside that of many other thinkers, for a situated, partial, and embodied approach to knowledge production. Thus, the first step is to offer a few words about the vantage point from which I approach this case.

Oklahoma was the most suitable site for investigating the research questions that guide this project, but it is also a place that I have long thought of as home. My roots in the state are pretty deep (at least by modern standards), going back to a decade or so after statehood, when the families of my maternal grandparents moved into the area around the Ouachita Mountains of eastern Oklahoma and built towns from the ground up. Oil played a big part in bringing the Colombian side of my family to Tulsa, where my parents met. I spent most of my childhood in Houston (another place shaped profoundly by oil), but the summers my siblings and I spent at our grandparents’ house on Grand Lake, in northeastern
Oklahoma, were a major part of my life from a young age. Our grandparents shaped that piece of land over about fifteen years, planting dozens of pines, thinning out Blackjack oaks, building a house, a vegetable garden, a dock, and a motorized trolley that traversed the bluff between the house and the lake. This process of landscape transformation was a microcosm of the crafting of the lake itself, which had been engineered only a few decades prior and was itself something of a microcosm of the larger socioecological transformation of the state since Indian Territory was opened to Euro-American settlement in 1889. I didn’t see it in these terms as a kid, of course, but watching and participating in these processes throughout my childhood helped me to begin thinking about the relationships between nature and society, people and things. More fundamentally, I can now see how those experiences wove together my own body and particular spaces on a very visceral, more-than-conscious level: the abundant sunshine on skin soaked with lake water, which had a very particular scent, fecund and slightly algal; the flavor of fried okra or ripe tomatoes, the scent of tomato plants in the garden, where one would often come across a box turtle or a rabbit under the enormous leaves of yellow squash plants; the sound and feel of car wheels on a gravel road; the lilt of voices in the shrinking towns around the lake, faded grave markers in Indian cemeteries, and crumbling old one-room schoolhouses; the smell of new 2’x4’s and sheet rock as my grandparents’ house took shape. These and many other sensations created the powerful weave that connects me to the place called Oklahoma.

These connections were broadened and strengthened when I moved to Norman, just south of Oklahoma City. During my first stint at the University of Oklahoma, I played in a band, which led me deep into the cultural networks of the state and eventually took me to New York and Tokyo. Throughout more than a decade of working and traveling as a musician (often alongside other jobs), Oklahoma was the place I returned to. This process of tacking back and forth between Oklahoma and a range of quite different types of places
provided the opportunity to think about the connections between the state and the wider world, and more broadly about the links between culture and environment, the meaning of the power of humans to transform spaces, how that power inflected with power relations in society, and so on. When I returned to the University of Oklahoma to finish my degree, I discovered that there was a discipline of study devoted to such interests — geography.

I offer this biographical sketch as a way of situating my vantage point in the present case study, and to underscore that this research emerged from a deep affinity with Oklahoma and a great respect for Oklahomans, to use an overly general term. Compared to New York City, where I sit as I write this foreword, the built environment of Oklahoma feels quite tenuously imposed on the land, recently carved out and in some cases already fading away. There is something quite compelling, in an existential way, about this dynamic to me and to many Oklahomans, who often talk about how living there fosters a kind of resilient scrappiness and resourcefulness. The state is economically marginalized, a perennial underdog in American culture, a place where most Americans have never been and hope to never find themselves. This marginality is created in part by popular representations of Oklahoma, which are scarce and almost always negative. I never planned to do research there, but when I stumbled into this project and realized how ideal it was for pursuing my research interests, I was thrilled to be able to present a more nuanced, and I hope positive depiction of Oklahoma. The critical elements of this study are offered in a purely constructive spirit. My primary commitment is to the goal of improving people’s lives and building a better socioecological and economic future in Oklahoma, even as I recognize that the definitions of ‘better’ and ‘improvement’ look quite different depending on one’s perspective. With that in mind, I want to clearly state that I offer my perspective in the following chapters to provoke thought, not to impose my way of thinking or stand outside the fray and judge. Any feedback on this work that I’m lucky enough to receive from the
participants in the research — who are not subjects but collaborators — will be tremendously valuable, and the most important barometer of the project’s quality.

One final note needs to be added here, at risk of stating the obvious: this study of the local food movement and its connections to urban redevelopment is partially retrospective in nature, despite describing relatively recent events. The pace of change in food systems and urban spaces in Oklahoma has been brisk, as I hope to show in the following pages, and reflects transformations that are fundamentally reworking large swaths of space and wide-ranging social, economic, and ecological relationships in and beyond the state. As I complete this work in the summer of 2014, I am painfully aware that in some ways the findings I present are already in need of being updated to reflect the further changes of the past year or two, during which I have shifted my attention away from data collection and towards analysis and writing. I mention this for two reasons. First, to acknowledge the shortcomings of my work to those still actively engaged in struggles over food systems and urban space in Oklahoma. To those readers, these pages probably seem woefully behind the times, given all that has transpired in the interim. Secondly, highlighting the retrospective nature of the work also reminds us that the limits of knowledge are in part temporal: by the time we have gone through the lengthy process of processing, analyzing, and writing up field data, not to mention publishing it and disseminating it, the world has long since moved on and to a large extent become something else.

This is not to imply of course that formal knowledge is always already obsolete or lacks validity or objectivity per se. To the contrary, a key to what makes formal knowledge useful and potent is precisely the streamlining and intensifying of the world in our accounts that is aided so much by the passage of time and the distance it gives us from the chaos of the present, as any historian or philosopher of science knows. These workings of time and distance give me hope that, though the world has moved on from the findings I present, this
account is all the more salient and of use, especially to those who appear in it. It is this hope about the potential for this work to help ‘build bodies and meanings that have a chance for life,’ as Haraway so felicitously put it, that takes the retrospective qualities of this research and turns them towards the future.
“Politics is an art, and an art has no ground to demand compliance from what it deals with. It has to create the manners that will enable it to become able to deal with what it has to deal with.”

-Isabelle Stengers, “The Cosmopolitical Proposal”

“Free from what? What does Zarathustra care! But brightly your eyes should signal to me: free for what?”

-Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
Chapter 1

Introduction

Urban spaces are not predictable machines for reproducing bounded and controlled relations. Rather they are engaged in a struggle with an often unknown end-point, in which corporations and other assemblages constantly try to modulate the environment in order to realize gain. But they do not necessarily succeed.


Agriculture has presented the principal obstacle to the imposition of a unified capitalist production process in the agro-food system, and hence to the capacity to revolutionize the means of production.


1. ‘The Whole Foods Effect’ in Oklahoma City

In 2011, Chesapeake Energy, the third-largest natural gas company in the United States, took a central role in enticing Whole Foods Market, the leading national grocery chain for healthy, ‘green’ foods, to open a location in Oklahoma City, its first in the state. Chesapeake’s outspoken and high-profile CEO Aubrey McClendon was considered by many to be personally responsible for Whole Foods’ decision to open a store in Oklahoma City, providing them with a favorable offer on rental property directly across the street from Chesapeake’s expansive “campus” on the north side of the city, and wining and dining Whole Foods corporate executives on visits to the city. The store’s grand opening was greeted enthusiastically by Oklahoma Citians, and commentators from the local press and the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce for the most part celebrated the arrival of Whole Foods, which coincided with that of several other national grocery chains specializing in ‘green’ offerings, as evidence of a fundamental change, indeed a renaissance, seen to be occurring in the food culture of the city. Most of these analyses focused on the increased food choices brought to the city by these enterprises, noting that even in the months preceding the arrival of the newcomers, the primary players in the existing retail grocery
market had begun offering high end cheeses, more organic and ‘local’ options, and other
gourmet foods. One journalist dubbed this expansion of the city’s foodscapes “the Whole
Foods effect,” noting, “Local, organic and high quality foods never had it so good in these
parts” (Cathey 2011). This perception of Oklahoma City as more-than-ready for a shift in
food values was underscored on Whole Foods’ opening weekend, when customers formed a
queue outside the store “in Black Friday-esque” manner (Palmer 2011a), and sales surpassed
the company’s projections (Wilkerson 2011). Company spokespersons for Whole Foods also
noted that, compared to customers in other cities, shoppers in Oklahoma City were
particularly polite and patient during the frantic rush of opening weekend. This point
seemed to provide further indication of how grateful and appreciative Oklahoma City
residents were to finally have ‘their own’ Whole Foods Market.

But the arrival to the city of Whole Foods and several other national ‘green’ chains
was met with some ambivalence by a number of small- to mid-sized farmers and other
enterprises who had worked to construct a locally-based food system in Oklahoma over the
previous decade. On the one hand, the arrival of the corporate ‘green’ grocers suggested a
mainstreaming of local food that implied an increased demand for Oklahoma products, and
potentially connected local producers with the much broader distribution networks of the
chain supermarkets. On the other hand, it was clear that ‘local foods’ came to mean
something quite different upon entering the chain stores: foods grown and produced in
Oklahoma were only a sidelight there, a niche in a broader universe of products that could
come from anywhere; the business models and production systems developed by most
farmers producing for local markets didn’t fit with the high volume, low margin
arrangements required by the chain stores; and the distribution and retail enterprises dealing
primarily in Oklahoma products immediately felt the effects of a suddenly-expanded field of
competition. Some local food proponents felt that articulation with these distanciated,
hierarchical corporate networks threatened to undermine the ecological and social values that had initially set the local food movement apart; others focused their attention on seeking to take advantage of the opportunities that seemed to be presented by the expanding market for local foods, sometimes leaving social and ecological concerns languishing.

The arrival of the corporate ‘green’ grocers to Oklahoma City, fraught as it is with both opportunities and tensions, is emblematic of the relationship between two distinct but deeply intertwined processes: urban redevelopment in Oklahoma City, and the emergence and transformation of the local food movement that spans the state of Oklahoma. In the present study, I trace the development of these two phenomena and their connections in space and time, focusing on how each of these processes affects the other and how the interplay of the two shapes protracted struggles over food systems and urban and rural space in Oklahoma. As with the growth of the local food movement, urban redevelopment in Oklahoma City has unfolded dramatically since the mid-1990s, leading city officials, journalists, everyday people, and boosters to speak of the city in terms of ‘renaissance,’ and to comment on the national stage about the city’s resilience during the international economic recession of recent years. In the broadest sense, this dissertation is about the extent to which the local food movement is tied up in these cultural and political economic fortunes of Oklahoma City in this period of renaissance. As we shall see, however, redevelopment projects have transformed the city, but in highly uneven ways. The urban core has received substantial investment, but the outlying areas that make up the bulk of the city have not, particularly the eastern and southern portions of the city, which have long been characterized by high concentrations of lower-income and minority groups. As this spatial pattern of investment suggests, redevelopment in Oklahoma City has rested in no small part on gentrification of inner city areas. Nevertheless, these twin processes of food relocalization and urban redevelopment are part of a particular era in the state, and especially
in Oklahoma City, marked by a sea change in how many Oklahomans feel about themselves and where they live. The significance of this sea change for struggles over food systems as well as urban redevelopment is one of the central objects of this study.

Examining the intersection of redevelopment in the city and the rise of the local food movement, where lines of force converge that often undergird but sometimes overturn shifting relations of movement and rest, flow and fixity, reveals a series of contests or struggles between a number of actors. Analyzing these struggles in turn sheds important light on some of the problems and limitations of not only the current mode of redevelopment in the city or the current hegemony of conventional food systems in the state, but also on the way these phenomena are understood, both popularly and critically. More broadly, the relations between Oklahoma City’s redevelopment trajectory and the state’s local food movement serve as an opening through which to examine the nature of power and explore the possibility that both cities and food systems might be organized more justly and sustainably.¹

In this opening chapter, I pursue several preliminary aims. First, I situate the case study among two bodies of scholarly literature: studies of socially- and ecologically-oriented food initiatives on the one hand, and critical research on urban redevelopment and the key roles played by cultural actors and milieus in gentrification processes on the other hand. I then turn to a small but growing number of studies that explicitly focuses on the relationship between redevelopment and alternative food initiatives, demonstrating the importance of studying these interconnected realms, and raising key questions about each of them. These questions, I go on to argue, call for an approach to understanding the

¹ At this point in the argument, I leave the terms ‘justice’ and ‘sustainability’ to stand as relatively open signifiers, as the multiple and shifting meanings of these terms as deployed by differently situated actors in Oklahoma is indeed one of the central objects to be scrutinized in the following chapters. However, as I consider the present work itself to be one of those actors and not simply the observations of a disinterested observer, I do offer in the concluding chapter some suggestions for how these ideals might be tentatively pursued.
intersection of alternative food initiatives and urban redevelopment that draws on several strands of social theory and philosophy concerned with power, agency, embodiment, affect, and politics. I then draw on these literatures to explain the basic design of my research, including the research questions that guide the project, the methods I deploy in the work, and the theoretical framework that I assemble to avoid certain pitfalls (while undoubtedly producing others, of course) and enable certain vistas. Finally, I conclude by offering a conceptual and empirical ‘map’ of the dissertation, in which I discuss briefly each of the chapters and make some preliminary points about the significance of the findings of the study.

2. Why study the intersection of gentrification and alternative food networks?

Scholarly literatures on alternative food networks (AFNs) and gentrification, respectively, are expansive and well-established. Gentrification has received abundant scholarly attention since the 1970s (e.g. Smith 1979; Ley 1978), and while various ecologically- and socially-oriented approaches to food provisioning first drew scholarly attention in the ’70s and ’80s (e.g. Cotterill 1981, 1983), studies of AFNs have flourished alongside their objects of study particularly since the 1990s (e.g. Arce and Marsden 1993; Murdoch 1994; Whatmore and Thorne 1997). These voluminous literatures are quite internally varied, and have reflected and in some cases shaped broader debates in social theory over the past several decades. I discuss each of these bodies of work individually in later chapters, but for the purpose of situating the case of Oklahoma City and the local food movement in Oklahoma in this introductory chapter, I begin to explore the intersection of

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2 The term ‘alternative food network’ is commonly used in critical food studies as an umbrella term denoting a wide range of disparate approaches to food production, distribution, and/or consumption, loosely grouped under this term due to various social and/or ecological rationales and goals. Examples include community supported agriculture and fisheries, Fair Trade certification, and Farm-to-School programs, as well as food relocalization. A number of scholars have called into question the ‘alterity’ of these socioecological experiments, from several different perspectives (e.g. Whatmore et al. 2003; McCarthy 2006). I discuss this issue further in chapter two.
gentrification and alternative food networks through the interrelated scholarly literatures on these two phenomena. In doing so, I highlight some fundamental issues that are in some ways shared by gentrification and the emergence of AFNs, particularly with respect to questions of how these processes relate to broader dynamics in urban spaces and food systems. The section concludes by considering different theoretical frameworks within the literatures on gentrification and AFNs, underscoring the contributions and limitations therein.

Gentrification, broadly defined, is a process whereby inner city neighborhoods undergo major demographic change, typically shifting from primarily lower-income, often racial and ethnic minority populations to primarily higher-earning and predominantly white populations. While neoclassical economic understandings of gentrification tend to treat it as the natural outcome of demand preferences of middle-class consumers, critical scholars have long documented how gentrification is but one stage in longterm cycles of investment and disinvestment in (urban) space (e.g. Smith 1979, 1987; Lees et al. 2008; Wilder 2000). This research reveals specific actors and mechanisms through which particular neighborhoods are actively devalued alongside migration patterns of different groups to and within cities: blockbusting realtors, redlining banks, public policies on home financing and economic development, and racial covenants have all played historical roles in ghettoizing inner city areas across the US and beyond, alongside consumer demand and the ‘rational’ calculations of investors seeking to maximize returns (Smith 1979; Sugrue 2005; Wilder 2000). Together, these mechanisms can work with processes of material decomposition in the built environment to produce a ‘rent gap,’ the difference in potential value and actual value captured by a piece of property, at which point gentrification can begin through opening an area to reinvestment (Smith 1979). This brings material improvements to housing and

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3 Gentrification occurs primarily in the inner city, but not always; see Walker (2003) for a discussion of rural gentrification.
infrastructure, attracting higher-income residents, which in turn raises demand and thus property values and rents, and tends to price out (often with the aid of coercive tactics by landlords) communities who lived in the area during its period of devaluation. In short, critical scholarship on gentrification has demonstrated that this type of neighborhood change produces benefits for wealthier and primarily white urban dwellers, banks, and property owners at the expense of lower-income and darker-skinned urbanites, thus excluding and further marginalizing these social groups in a continuation of long-term processes of systematic or structural disadvantaging.

While critical scholars of gentrification largely approached their object of study skeptically from the outset in the 1970s, researchers of AFNs initially approached their subject in a slightly more sanguine vein. Several early studies argued, for example, that the profusion of AFNs in the 1990s was an almost inevitable result of the largely successful expansion of industrial food systems across much of the planet, in which case globalized industrial agribusiness seemed to be producing the conditions of its own potential undoing (Murdoch and Miele 1999; Arce and Mardsden 1993; Marsden and Arce 1995). By the turn of the millennium, however, food scholars had begun to identify a range of problems with AFNs. Summarized briefly, studies undertaken in sites ranging from California to Latin America, Western Europe to Australia, documented the tendency of AFNs towards exclusivity, in terms of class (Hinrichs and Kremer 2002; Alkon 2008a) and race (Slocum 2007), and demonstrated that AFNs are typically vulnerable to co-optation and convergence with conventional food systems (Guthman 2004; Jaffee 2007). From these studies emerged deep skepticism about the potential for AFNs to ‘scale up’ beyond niche market status; far from representing a threat to conventional food systems, AFNs were identified by some critics as in some respects complicit with, if not inherent to, neoliberal capitalism itself (Watts et al. 2005; Dupuis and Goodman 2005; Allen and Guthman 2006).
Here we can begin to note a broadly shared resonance between literatures concerned with gentrification and AFNs in that both of these phenomena are often understood by critical scholars as linked to the economic restructuring of the ‘post-Fordist’ era (Harvey 1990), during which a new middle class of white collar service workers proliferated in the US and Europe alongside a concomitant deindustrialization process, and began moving in to long-neglected urban spaces and adopting new food habits as part of a notably class-based mode of consumption. This process was historically and geographically specific, occurring first in particular places – the San Francisco Bay area, for example, spurred by the tech industry, was a key site for the emergence of the new middle class, a new sensibility with respect to foodways (Guthman 2003), and some of the earliest signs of gentrification in the US. This connection between elite foodways and gentrification has drawn the attention of gentrification scholars as part of a broader interest in the importance of cultural actors and milieus in shaping gentrification processes and location. David Ley’s early research (Ley 1980, 1981) was seminal in this respect, focusing on demand from a new middle class of service sector workers emerging in restructuring ‘post-industrial’ cities. Ley argued early on that this emerging middle class, despite pursuing a new “ideology of livability in urban development” based on progressive values melded with an acute aesthetic sensibility, ultimately tended towards elitism and perpetuating social inequalities in the city (Ley 1980). Sharon Zukin’s *Loft Living* (1981), another influential early work on the cultural aspects of gentrification, traced “the reconquest of the downtown by high-rent, high-class uses, the recreation of an urban middle class, and the use of art and culture to further these ends,” all of which was understood as fitted tightly within “the general patterns of contemporary capitalism” (Zukin 1981, p. x; see also Deutsch and Ryan 1984).

Since these important early studies, scholarship on the cultural forces at work in gentrification has taken a number of turns, bringing feminist approaches to bear on
gendered aspects of gentrification and economic restructuring (e.g. Rose 1984; Bondi 1991) and using psychoanalytic (e.g. Caulfield 1989) and post-structuralist (e.g. Lees 1996) frameworks to explore the roles of desire, meaning-making, and collective fantasies in constituting middle-class gentrifiers. However, a consistent theme of these varied approaches has been the argument that cultural actors such as artists, musicians, and chefs play a central role in gentrification by identifying and venturing into devalued neighborhoods in search of affordable rents, more space, and urban milieus that resonate with countercultural values (cf. Zukin 2008 on authenticity). Once ensconced, these ‘pioneers’ establish cultural spaces such as art galleries, cafes, and trendy boutiques, thus signaling to middle-class consumers and investors that an area is now hip and up-and-coming. David Ley (2003), drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), summarized this aspect of gentrification by dubbing cultural actors and milieus as the “colonizing arm” of elites, and arguing that because artists tend to be among the subservient fraction of the dominant class, the countercultural and aesthetic values they bring to devalued neighborhoods are doomed to be commodified and appropriated by the more powerful actors that follow in their wake, from increasingly wealthy home-buyers to corporate developers, restaurant groups, and Wall Street investment firms.

Concern with the colonizing role of cultural actors in gentrification is echoed and refracted in some AFN research. An early example is Guthman’s study (2003) of changes in the organic food sector in California over the course of the 1980s and ‘90s, in which economic restructuring in northern California and gentrification in the San Francisco Bay area serve as an explanatory backdrop for the transformation of “counter(-cultural) cuisine” into “yuppie chow,” as some organic salad mix growers put it. Jarosz’s work (2008) on AFNs and regional restructuring in the Seattle area is a particularly important contribution to

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4 Walker’s analysis (2003) of rural gentrification in the American West extends this analysis to the urban-rural linkage at a larger regional scale.
the literature on the interface between AFNs and gentrification, as it explores this linkage in further detail, concluding that it brings both constraints and opportunities to AFN producers in the Seattle area. The opportunities here include increased demand for value-added specialty foods from a growing population of upwardly-mobile consumers, and in some cases connections with NGOs and non-profits pursuing food-related ecological and social goals such as farmland preservation and food security. These benefits are often counterbalanced by increased fuel costs and time demands required by direct-marketing to farmers’ markets and community supported agriculture, and an accompanying tendency towards producer ‘burnout’ as labor needs increase without a concomitant rise in income. If growers seek to expand beyond their local markets, they face increased competition from larger, non-local agribusiness firms (e.g. ‘corporate organic’).

Taken together, the work of Jarosz (2008) and Guthman (2003), along with that of scholars of gentrification’s cultural actors discussed above, suggest that the AFN-gentrification interface may benefit some producers, but these benefits are tenuous due largely to two factors: the broader structure of agribusiness-dominated conventional food systems, with which small- to mid-sized producers must ultimately contend, and the larger political economic shifts within which gentrification has occurred, specifically the transition to post-Fordism, in which the food-conscious consumers colonizing gentrifying areas are destined to represent only a small privileged fraction of the population at large. Put a bit differently, these bodies of research make a strong case that the AFN-gentrification interface is a dubious mechanism by which socially- and ecologically-oriented alternatives to conventional food may grow, for two reasons: first, this mechanism, because it targets elite consumers who in many cases play a part in displacing lower-income and minority residents, tends to perpetuate and deepen the well-documented tendency of AFNs towards exclusivity. From the perspective of critical gentrification scholarship, AFNs only contribute to the
problem of elite colonization of neglected urban spaces. Secondly, looking to gentrification as a means of ‘scaling up’ AFNs fails to take into account the broader forces that structure food systems, from federal subsidies for commodity crops (Whatmore and Clark 2008; Goodman and Redclift 1991) to the exploitative labor practices that undergird industrial agribusiness (Guthman 2004). These and many other factors influence food systems in ways that far exceed ‘purely’ market-based mechanisms such as the operation of consumer demand and the benefits of economies of scale (Goodman et al. 1987).

In short, as this brief sketch of the overlaps and synergies between research on AFNs and gentrification suggests, there is widespread agreement among critical scholars that gentrification and AFNs share a tendency towards exclusivity, and that while the AFN-gentrification interface offers opportunities for AFNs, an awareness of the broader political economic forces articulated with this interface calls for deep skepticism about its potential to mount serious challenges to the hegemony of industrial food systems. These critical research findings provide an absolutely necessary rebuke to uncritical appraisals of AFNs in scholarly and popular accounts and overly celebratory understandings of gentrification (e.g. Duany 2001; Byrne 2003) and the continued rollout in cities around the planet of ‘entrepreneurial’ or ‘creative city’ development agendas (Florida 2014). Such critical academic analyses can support more inclusive policy agendas and provide a counterweight to uncritical research that legitimates further neoliberal urban redevelopment interventions and food initiatives. These empirically robust critical appraisals make fundamental contributions to understanding the dynamics of urban development and food systems, not least of all because they call attention to the continued necessity of rethinking and reworking dominant modes of urban development and food production, distribution, and consumption.

Many existing theoretical frameworks deployed by both AFN and gentrification scholars, however, are arguably not designed to imagine alternate worlds of food and urban
development, or even to recognize possibilities for producing more just, sustainable, and inclusive food systems and urban development that may already exist in the AFN-gentrification interface. In the following section, I explore the idea that there remains considerable space for approaching gentrification and AFNs from theoretical perspectives that are geared towards recognizing and constructively engaging with the diverse publics and novel associations that emerge in gentrifying spaces (e.g. Rosenberg 2014) and alternative food networks (Latham 2003), both of which continue to proliferate despite ever-mounting scholarly dismissals of their political potential, indicating potential ways forward for food systems and urban development.

2.1 Theoretical currents in scholarship on AFNs and gentrification

Distinctions within critical scholarship on gentrification and AFNs revolve not around the empirical evidence in support of the arguments that these phenomena tend to be exclusive and shaped by far-reaching political economic forces. As noted, there is widespread agreement on these central issues. Instead, critical scholars diverge on how to theorize exclusivity and the nature of the broader forces with which AFNs and gentrification are linked. It's important to note that both of these scholarly fields emerged initially from Marxian political economic research on food systems and urbanization, respectively: AFN studies from analyses of the articulation of industrialized food systems with the global geopolitical imperatives of agribusiness corporations and dominant nation-states (cf. Friedmann 1982; Goodman et al. 1987), and gentrification research from work on the spatial movements of capital in the context of macro-scale economic restructuring (Smith 1979, 1987). From these beginnings, theoretical orientations in both fields have diversified considerably, reflecting and shaping broader changes in social theory and its various ‘turns,’ from the cultural turn of the 1980s and ‘90s, with its emphasis on discourse, representation,
and meaning-making, to the ontological or material turn of more recent years, which highlights the roles of nonhuman actors and the inextricability of matter and meaning. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, however, perhaps the most prominent strands of research in both fields, particularly in US scholarship, drew on variants of Marxist thought that have been critiqued on several points that are salient to understanding the opportunities and constraints presented by the AFN-gentrification interface. I discuss some of these points at greater length in later chapters, but here I will summarize some important issues.

First, political economy analyses have been criticized for focusing excessively on macro-scale or structural processes and forces, thus eliding human agency and downplaying the varying ways in which even global processes are modulated and transformed as they ‘touch down’ in specific historical-geographic contexts and are taken up, resisted, and appropriated in divergent ways (in food research, see Arce and Marsden 1993; Murdoch 1994; in gentrification studies, see Bondi 1991; Rose 1984; Hamnett 1991). This critique cautions against a tendency towards economistic analysis in which worldly phenomena are understood as determined in the final instance by economic imperatives, particularly those associated with capitalism, and instead suggests that we interrogate the mutually constitutive relationship between structures and agents, and attend to the interplay of multiple structures of social differentiation, including not only class but also race, gender, sexuality, and so on.

From this point follows a second critique made by some scholars in both AFN and gentrification camps drawing on feminist (e.g. Rose 1984) and critical race theory (e.g. Slocum 2007) and post-structural economic geography (e.g. Harris 2008), who point out the extent to which political economic analyses tend to rest on essentialist and reductionist assumptions about power, subjectivity, and identity. Power is often deployed in critical gentrification and AFN research as an explanatory variable; particular actors, that is, are assumed a priori to hold power or simply be powerful by virtue of their position in economic and social
structures, and as such determine the outcome of struggles over food systems and/or urban space. This tendency is exemplified by the deployment of Bourdieu’s work by both AFN (cf. Guthman 2002; Johnston 2008) and gentrification (cf. Ley 2003; Bridge and Dowling 2001) scholars, in which inherently ‘elite’ actors — be they artists, foodies, or investment firms — colonize social space through the appropriation and use of culture. In most of these Bourdieuan studies, class is enshrined as the locus of power and agency. Neoliberalism, or capitalism broadly, serves not only as a backdrop, but as the driving force or causal agent of observed processes. Power, it should be noted here, is reduced to what is understood by some thinkers as but one form of power — *potesta*, or ‘power over’ (Lukes 2005/1974). This notion of *potesta*-as-explanatory variable is often buttressed by unitary conceptions of the subject and identity, in which subjects are seen as monolithic and singular (cf. work on neoliberal subjectivity in AFNs by Guthman 2003; Allen and Guthman 2006), thus obviating analysis of the contingencies that emerge from the often messy articulation of various facets of identity (such as class, sexuality, race, and gender) with the far-reaching forces constituting capitalism, urban political economy, or conventional food systems.

A final critique comes from neomaterialist and ‘assemblage’ thinkers who call into question political economic understandings of the nature of those far-reaching forces that are agreed by most critical scholars to shape both AFNs and gentrification. In the realm of AFNs, many critics, in their commitment to avoiding ‘the local trap’ of assuming that local food is inherently more ecologically friendly or socially just (Born and Purcell 2006), slip into what might be called the global trap of assuming that any localized form of alterity or socioeconomic difference, *because* it is local, is inherently weaker than national or global structures. The problematic notions of power just discussed are typically tied to such understandings of geographical scale, which have been critiqued by geographers (Marston 2000; Gibson-Graham 2002; Marston *et al.* 2005) for essentializing and reifying scalar
processes and relationships in an imaginary of hierarchical scales — ‘the’ local, regional, national, and global — in which each step up the scalar ladder is assumed to be inherently more powerful and therefore determinative of the scales ‘below’ it. Such assumptions about scale, whether invoked explicitly are not, are arguably present in much AFN and gentrification scholarship.\(^5\)

In response to these criticisms and concerns, in the present study I employ an analytical and methodological framework informed by three theoretical sources: post-structural feminist research on economic diversity (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006), work on embodiment (Grosz 1994; Haraway 1991; Thrift 2008; Latour 2004b), and philosophy and theory of ‘assemblage’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/1980; Callon 1986). Each of these sources provides specific concepts and methods, and focuses attention on particular matters of concern relevant to the intersection of food relocalization and urban redevelopment in Oklahoma, as follows.

2.2 Economic diversity, embodiment, and the assemblage

First, the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham and other scholarship produced by the Community Economies Collective \(^6\) enables an understanding of AFNs not as isolated aberrations, non-capitalist islands in a sea of ‘the economy’ viewed as monolithically capitalist, but as ongoing experiments in (potentially) ethical economic relations scattered across a landscape that is already economically heterogeneous. Central to Gibson-Graham’s

\(^5\) This understanding of the power of the ‘macro-scale,’ coupled with the tendencies towards economism noted above, reveal shades of what might be called an ‘anti-humanist’ stance among some AFN and gentrification scholars. I point this out not because I am concerned to categorize those scholars and their work but rather to highlight that many criticisms of this work seek to incorporate a more humanistic sensibility, in which agentic capacities are analytically restored to individual human actors, often via a structure/agency dialectic emphasizing daily rhythms and spatial practices (Ahearn 2000). This approach, it's important to note, imagines a different ontology for 'structures,' but leaves them intact. As such, empirical investigation and analysis of AFNs and gentrification remains limited to scrutiny of how individual agents seek to transform the structures with which they share a mutually constitutive and dialectical relationship. These structures, it is typically assumed, are situated within — if not viewed as synonymous with — larger, more powerful spatiotemporal scales, leaving little leeway for transformation by individual human agents.

\(^6\) See [http://www.communityeconomies.org](http://www.communityeconomies.org)
goal of destabilizing the dominant framing of a hegemonic capitalism is Marx’s typology of varied class processes: feudal, slave, independent, communal and capitalist, which the diverse economies framework brings to the foreground, reminding us that all of these processes are co-existent today. Here, among many forms of non-capitalist exchange explored in Gibson-Graham’s work, she cites for example feminist economic research (Ironmonger 1996) detailing the striking fact that 30-50% of economic activity in both rich and poor countries is made up of non-market transactions and unpaid household work. Seeing capitalism as one form existing among many makes it easier to recognize it as not systemic but “as a set of practices scattered over a landscape – in families, neighborhoods, households, organizations, states, and private, public and social enterprises. Its dominance in any time or place (becomes) an open question rather than an initial presumption” (Gibson-Graham 2008).

Gibson-Graham argues that the successful reproduction of capitalist relations depends in part on representing capitalism as unitary, hegemonic, and inexorably expanding while simultaneously casting other economic relations as fragmented, marginal, and doomed; from this perspective, many critical assessments of capitalism and its alternatives, in reiterating the dominance of capitalism and the futility of any efforts to produce non-capitalist forms that fall short of systemic or revolutionary change, actually contribute to the durability and resilience of the very object of their critique. To remedy this problem of “capitalocentrism,” Gibson-Graham draw attention to the vast array of currently existing non-capitalist practices and relationships, from unpaid household labor to workers’ cooperatives, gift giving to volunteerism.

Making non-capitalisms visible in this way is aligned with the analytical technique of ‘reading for difference instead of dominance,’ a deconstructive technique developed by Gibson-Graham in economic geography from Eve Sedgwick’s “queer reading of sexuality and gender that appreciates the wide diversity of biological, emotional, social and cultural
manifestations of sexuality and gender without subordinating them to the binary hierarchies of heterosexual and homosexual, male and female” (Gibson-Graham 2008, p. 623). It is on this point that diverse economies research overlaps with theorizations of embodiment in various scholarly fields, including cultural geography (Thrift 2008; Whatmore 2002) as well as feminist philosophy (Grosz 1994; Probyn 2000), science and technology studies (Latour 2004), and political science (Bennett 2010). A common thread among these disparate disciplinary explorations is an interest in the pre-cognitive, affective, and material properties and propensities of bodies, an emphasis on which is thought to counter the tendency of much critical theory to view bodies as simply the effects of social power structures; this work seeks to understand bodies as volatile phenomena, then, whose volatility is produced in part by the convergence of a wide diversity of forces upon the body, including social structures as well as material forces such as microorganisms, architecture, or gravity. It’s here where the constitutive power of economic discourse highlighted by Gibson-Graham, particularly with respect to the production and potential transformation of economic subjectivities, is shown to be powerfully mediated by human bodies and their relationships to forces that far exceed the discursive.

This is particularly evident in food studies, where scholars of embodiment explore how the unpredictability of bodies that taste, feel hunger and disgust, experience shifts in mood, and so on, shape food economies, disrupt hegemonic norms, and produce openings for the cultivation of more ethical foodways (e.g. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008; Carolan 2011; DuPuis 2000). However, as embodiment research focuses more on the articulation of bodies/subjects with expansive conventional food networks and broader social structures, this research tends to imagine AFN practices against a backdrop of expansive power structures that pose limits to the ethical cultivation of the self (Hayes-

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7 See Gibson-Graham 2006, p. xix-xxxvii, for discussion of this and other analytical strategies and research methods.
Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2013). This emphasis is perhaps an important one, as the Gibson-Grahamian technique of ‘reading for difference’ is by design not focused on what is a key interest of many critical food scholars: the dominance of powerful actors and their unequal capacities to shape social relations.

For this reason, food and embodiment research offers something of a middle ground between diverse economies-inspired work and political economy analyses of AFNs; in this middle ground, socially- and ecologically-oriented food practices appear as active forms of resisting dominant food norms and relations, the work of bodies that are volatile, not docile, and whose volatility is in part produced by the dominance and widespread ubiquity of industrial foods and the socially- and ecologically-destructive practices and relations undergirding them. That is, knowledge about the negative effects of industrial food systems on human, social, and ecological health – media coverage of food scares, marketing pushes by organic and ‘green’ food enterprises – is mediated by the embodied nature of foodways, which for most inhabitants of the so-called developed world is thoroughly intertwined with industrial systems. As the successful expansion of industrial foodways incorporates more bodies, it meets ever more resistance and the stage is set for more people to be drawn into food networks that are set apart not only by different values, but by different embodied practices.8

However, research on food and embodiment does not typically theorize ‘economy,’ and this is an area where embodiment scholars might fruitfully draw on diverse economies research and its robust theorization of economy. Understanding AFNs as part of a differentiated rather than monolithic economic landscape strengthens the argument that the embodied experience of eating and its role in producing/transforming subjects potentially

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8 This framing follows from early work on AFNs by Marsden and Arce (1995), Murdoch and Miele (1999), and others, in effect arguing that the dominance of conventional food networks produces the conditions of its own undermining (see also Cook and Harrison 2003).
signals expansive, far-reaching changes for food systems. This perspective introduces a subtle but important shift in how we might understand the contradictions of capitalist food systems: from the contradictions of capitalism to the volatile tensions of capitalist practices and relations. In both cases, the destructive impacts of capitalist food systems on human, social, and ecological health remain a focus, but in the former frame, these destructive forces are inherent to a system that is coterminous with social space, is everywhere, even and especially in the most intimate spaces of foodways; in the latter frame, these forces are widespread and part of an expansive, durable construction, but one that depends on continual re-enactment by each and every body and set of relations that constitutes it. In the former frame, the subject is the effect of power relations, which are more or less viewed as synonymous with unitary economic positionality, thus the AFN subject is assumed from the beginning to be an expression of neoliberal capitalism. In the latter frame, neoliberal capitalism is the result of innumerable performances by subjects that are unpredictable, contingent phenomena, not least of all because they occupy multiple economic subject positions; as constituent parts of neoliberal capitalism, they expose its contingent nature and multifarious relationship to a range of other economic forms. Rather than a site of fetishization that demands unmasking by the analyst to reveal the completed neoliberal nature of the subject, food practices become a front line in an ongoing struggle to produce more just and ecologically oriented food systems.

A major part of the analyst’s role in this struggle, as embodiment theorists frequently argue (cf. Hayes-Conroy 2010), is to explore with research subjects the blind-spots and inconsistencies of AFN practices with respect to power, which clearly render AFNs susceptible to co-optation and convergence with conventional food networks. As with diverse economies scholars, food and embodiment research typically approaches this challenge with the assumption that individual and collective political action are not mutually
exclusive. Where for many critical food scholars, food politics depends on organized collective action as an avenue of political change, for embodiment and diverse economies food scholars, political change depends in part on self-cultivation as it unfolds in conjunction with larger collectives that may be more or less distributed or formally organized. It is on this question of larger collectivities, however, where both embodiment and diverse economies approaches to food research could be pushed further.

That is, while embodiment research foregrounds the materiality of the body as an interface between the subject and conventional food systems, what makes these systems or their alternatives durable and expansive is not closely scrutinized. For diverse economies researchers, economies are understood as ontologically diverse, performative phenomena, but the material collectivities that give economies shape and form have not been extensively considered. This leaves open the question: if economic formations require constant performance by subjects in order to remain expansive and durable, what shapes the performances of individuals, beyond myriad representations and practices of ‘the economy’?

To be clear, Gibson-Graham’s emphasis on performativity (cf. Gibson-Graham 2008) is not concerned with analytically resolving structure/agency dualisms through theorizing a dialectic of practice; she has always, it seems to me, sought to understand economy as more contingent and multiple than any formulation relying on ‘structures’ allows, and recent work from the Community Economies Collective has explicitly sought to engage with posthumanist and assemblage theories that cast agency as a collective, not individual, phenomena (cf. St. Martin et al. forthcoming; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010; Morrow 2011). However, food research drawing on diverse economies and embodiment approaches has yet to fully explore, empirically or theoretically, the full range of forces that constitute both alternative food networks and the conventional food networks that clearly play fundamental roles in shaping foodways for most people on the planet. Put a bit differently,
subjects/bodies may be a front line in the struggle over food systems, but embodiment and diverse economies approaches could go farther in scrutinizing the forces converging on that line. It is here where the explorations of assemblage thinkers can provide crucial insights.

For the past decade or more, both urban scholars (e.g. Amin and Thrift 2002; McFarlane 2011a, 2011b; Lees 2002; Swyngedouw 1996) and food scholars (e.g. Whatmore 2002; Bennet 2010; Roe 2006a, 2006b; Goodman 2001) have been centrally implicated in broad efforts across disciplines to develop frameworks more sensitive to questions of materiality, ontology, and the mediating roles of myriad non-human actors in society. While sometimes couched as a corrective to perceived logocentric excesses of the cultural turn of the 1980s and 1990s, at its best such work focuses on the inextricable relations between matter and meaning, the material grounding of discourse, and the ways in which social power traverses heterogeneous fields that cannot be reduced to neat separations of nature/society, object/subject, or nonhuman/human. Such work eschews the notion of ‘things-in-themselves’ and focuses instead on the relationships between things; the ‘in-between’ becomes the object of critical analysis here, allowing for investigation of the immanent and emergent aspects of the urban (Amin and Thrift 2002; Latham and McCormack 2004). From this perspective, agency tends to be understood as distributed through the relations between heterogeneous things (Bennett 2005) and power is cast as an animating force that assumes a multiplicity of forms (Deleuze 1962/2006; Allen 2003), which may congeal or sediment in particular ‘assemblages’ of matter and energy (Amin and Thrift 2002; Callon 1986; Robbins and Marks 2010).

While the following chapters are a deployment of ‘assemblage thinking,’ for the sake of clarity it is necessary to elaborate briefly here on the term ‘assemblage’ and some related concepts as I utilize them in this work. In this dissertation, I focus on the work that has been done in Oklahoma to unite, more or less hermetically, a host of distinct types of materials and
particular sets of values or *senses* that can be made of those materials. This union is accomplished, I demonstrate, through the intensification of particular qualities that materials or objects accrue in their relations with other materials. The result of this process of imbricating various bits of matter and meaning is the object known as an ‘assemblage’: matter becomes expressive through the assemblage, and the assemblage lives and dies through expressiveness. For an assemblage to expand requires the harmonization of an increasing number of different elements in this way. To understand the local food movement’s prospects for expansion in Oklahoma — and the significance of that expansion — we must look closely at the disparate elements that have come into contact with the local food movement, including a number of ‘things’ or objects, but also a series of *forces*. Interpreting the nature of such forces is one of the principal tasks of the analyst of the assemblage.

Often characterized by a focus on materiality, research drawing on assemblage thinking, particularly in the urban context, explores the ways in which the material fabric of the city both expresses the interplay of power relations — thus to some extent reflecting and consolidating existing sedimentations of power — but also shapes the future contours of those relations, often in unpredictable ways (Gabriel 2013; Mitchell 2002; Gieryn 2003). To investigate this potential for unruliness or volatility, as Latham and McCormack (2004, p. 704-705) argue, requires not just a renewed attention to matter, understood as “a realm of

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9 This involves *naming* qualities, making them objects of knowledge, to be sure, but such epistemological processes are not necessarily primary to the coherence of an assemblage. Knowledge and its many apparatuses are both a cause and an effect of assemblages, but the place of knowledge in a given assemblage is a question to be explored, rather than a given starting point or foundation.

10 Robbins and Marks (2010) offer one of the clearest discussions of assemblage thinking in geographical research, highlighting four basic variants thereof: 1) a Latourian approach that emphasizes an analytical “symmetry” between categorically distinct entities such as nature/society, human/non-human, etc.; 2) an approach that follows Donna Haraway’s work in emphasizing the “intimate,” mutually constitutive relations through which humans and non-humans emerge together; 3) a Marxian derived “metabolic” approach focused on tracing flows of labor through heterogeneous types of associations; and 4) a “genealogical” approach focused on epistemological concerns while highlighting that knowledge is shaped by the things it describes, even as it shapes them. While I foreground the concept of “genealogy” (see below), I use this term in its Nietzschean sense, which, as I hope to illustrate throughout the present work, might be best described as uniting the four variants of assemblage thinking so clearly elucidated by Robbins and Marks.
reassuringly tangible or graspable objects defined against a category of events and processes that apparently lack ‘concreteness,’” but rather a more conceptually robust engagement with the relations between materiality and the immaterial: “we only begin to properly grasp the complex realities of apparently stable objects by taking seriously the fact that these realities are always held together and animated by processes excessive of form and position.” The analytical pursuit of these excesses foregrounds concepts of multiplicity, affect, and emergence, and draws attention to transversal connections between seemingly different types or orders of things. It’s important to note here that an emphasis on excess and unpredictability should not overshadow critical attention to the effects of unequal power relations, but rather must be paired with a skeptical stance towards power and a commitment to asking how particular assemblages become more stable, coherent, and expansive and gain the capacity to take possession of others.

Such processes of assemblage are explicitly territorial, in the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari, who use the term to evoke the ethological meaning — an area that is marked by a particular animal or group of animals and defended against competitors — while elaborating on this sense of territory in important ways. For Deleuze and Guattari, territory is the contingent result of producing order and stability from ‘chaos,’ which Elizabeth Grosz (2008, p. 26) defines as “not the absence of order but rather the fullness or plethora that, depending on its uneven speed, force, and intensity, is the condition both for any model or activity and for the undoing and transformation of such models or activities.” Or, from Deleuze and Guattari themselves (1987/1980, p. 118), “Chaos is defined not so much by its disorder as by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape vanishes. It is a void that is not a nothingness but a virtual, containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms, which spring up only to disappear immediately without consistency or reference, without consequence.” Things that we recognize as the actual world, in other
words, are the open-ended, more or less fleeting products of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a territorialization of chaos, a process through which the virtual is framed, organized, and specified, thus coming to express particular meanings, senses, or values. Thus the territory can be seen as a temporary fixing of chaos, an imposition of order, even if only a provisional order, accomplished through making chaos expressive, endowing it with meaning through a careful articulation of elements.

Returning to the ethological notion of an animal’s territory, it’s easy to grasp how a bear, for example, establishes its territory by leaving its scent in particular places, scratching tree bark as high as possible to demonstrate its stature, and so on. Through these actions, the bear seeks to make the space expressive in ways that are legible to other bears as already-claimed territory. This Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of territory is the one I invoke in the title of this dissertation and throughout its length as a way of signaling first, that both food relocalization and urban redevelopment are phenomena borne of struggle — territorial contests — and second, at the heart of these struggles lies efforts to align meanings and materials in ways that serve some interests at the expense of others.

Intriguingly, while conceptions of territory, materiality, and the assemblage have been picked up by many urban scholars, they have not been often deployed in analyses of gentrification. Jeremy Bryson (2013) and Alan Latham (2003) offer two notable exceptions, which provide some insight into how nonhuman actors can play important roles in producing more inclusive effects even amidst less socially-desirable impacts. Bryson (2013) has argued that while “powerful groups can use the natural environment as a tool in the gentrification process,” (p. 579-580), the “patterns, processes, situations, and elements of nature” in cities also constrain even the most powerful actors, sometimes “confounding” their strategies (p. 583). Latham expands on such notions (2003, p. 1712), arguing that while gentrification and displacement of low income residents have occurred in Auckland, the
“ambience” of gentrified spaces there “can be read as a kind of sexual polymorphisation of public space […] that affords both women and men to experiment with and forge identities outside the confines of established gender norms. And, in doing so, it is generating something that is genuinely radical.” Moreover, Latham insists that the queering of (some) public spaces in Auckland

has—in part at least—been organised around the consumption of a range of goods—coffee, beer, wine, food, spirits, soft drinks, spirulinas and, yes, the spaces of the restaurants, bars and cafes, to name a few that are central. These materials are not passive. They are key mediators and conduits of the sociality through which the new public culture is enacted. (p. 1713).

Latham’s study is particularly important to my research in Oklahoma in that, like Jarosz’s (2007) work in Seattle, it focuses explicitly on the AFN-gentrification interface, but does so through a neomaterialist framework, drawing attention to actors whose mediating capacities are unaccounted for by Jarosz, including foodstuffs and the cultural spaces of gentrification. This emphasis on the transformative ‘agency of the assemblage,’ as Bennett (2005) puts it, has gained considerable momentum in AFN research. Some of this research has focused on the agentic or mediating capacities of particular foodstuffs, or with respect to embodied food experiences (e.g. Bennett 2010 on dietary fats; Colls 2007 on body fat), but typically such studies situate more-than-human actors as constituent parts of expansive assemblages. Early work here focused on the articulation of the biological components of food systems (plants, micro-organisms, the bodies of human and non-human animals, etc.) with food technologies, expert knowledges, and the profit-motives of corporate agribusiness (cf. Whatmore 2002; Carolan 2005; Probyn 2000). Such analyses often foreground how the strivings and affective capacities of the many heterogeneous components of food assemblages produce high degrees of contingency, and often undermine the goals of even the most hegemonic-seeming actors (Sarmiento 2013).
More recently, this work has expanded to include a broader range of forces contributing to the process of ‘things becoming food,’ as Emma Roe (2008) puts it. Of particular relevance to my study of Oklahoma, as we shall see, is work that focuses on the mediating roles in food systems and urban life of infrastructure (Beckie et al. 2012; Blundel and Tregear 2006; Larkin 2013; Mount 2011; Blay-Palmer et al. 2013, Qazi and Selfa 2005; Bloom 2009; Amin and Thrift 2002; Gandy 2003) and architecture (MacDonald 2013; Lees 2003; Gieryn 2003; Garcia-Parpet 2007). By focusing on the material roles, as well as the poetic and affective registers, of infrastructures and architecture, this work offers much to the need to move beyond theorizing the limits to AFNs’ capacity to ‘scale up,’ exploring instead the practical and politically charged terrain of how AFNs are confronting those limits and working to surpass them. While not all of the research on AFNs and infrastructures is theorized in terms of assemblages, most of this work does resonate with assemblage thinking, as it typically casts efforts to shape and harness infrastructures as one imperative among many facing both AFNs and conventional food systems as they go about the daily work of painstakingly assembling and maintaining more or less expansive and durable networks. As Whatmore and Thorne (1997, p. 289) put it, “That some markets have global reach is not in dispute. What we want to emphasize is that this reach makes the corporations and bureaucracies that fashion such markets both powerful and vulnerable, being woven of the same substances as the more humble everyday forms of social life so often consigned to the ‘local’ and rendered puny in comparison.” Both ‘global’ and ‘local’ food enterprises and institutions in the food system, in other words, confront on a minute-to-minute basis the need to negotiate with and enroll (Callon 1986) actors that may include not only cattle, wheat, nitrogen-fixing bacteria, or choosy consumers, but also highways, the internet,

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11 As Bruno Latour (2005) points out, using Cronon’s (1992) Nature’s Metropolis as an example, one needn’t categorize railroads, hybrid seeds, and agricultural futures as ‘nonhuman actors’ per se to grant them agentic capacities in the writing of an account.
buildings, and river systems. Assemblage thinking, in other words, provides a conceptual and methodological framework through which to avoid the pitfalls of hierarchical notions of geographical scale, suggesting that we explore the question of how AFNs might expand beyond niche market status in terms of becoming more expansive, durable, and far-reaching in space and time.

In summary, each the three approaches I’ve discussed does a different kind of work in approaching the AFN-gentrification interface. First, assemblage thinking does not tend to explicitly recognize the diversity of economy highlighted by Gibson-Graham. Highlighting this diversity allows us to recognize each manifestation of AFNs as one among many kinds of economic relationships and practices, which helps us to research their connections with redevelopment and gentrification without prematurely dismissing them as the quixotic Other to a monolithic and omnipresent capitalism or neoliberalism.

Second, assemblage research typically does not foreground questions of the embodied subject, as flagged by diverse economies and embodiment research. There is, however, no inherent contradiction between this emphasis and assemblage approaches. Indeed, more recent research on diverse economies (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010; Cameron et. al 2014) and embodiment (Probyn 2000; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008) explicitly views bodies and economies as enmeshed with assemblages of humans and more-than-humans. And the heterogeneity and contingency of economies as understood by Gibson-Graham certainly resonates with the ontological, epistemological, and methodological commitments of most assemblage thinkers.

Nevertheless, within the diverse economies and embodiment frameworks as I noted above, the more expansive assemblages that bear on particular bodies and specific economic subjects have yet to be traced in their specificity or far-reaching spatiotemporal extent, beyond the realm of economic discourse, in the case of diverse economies research, and
vaguely outlined invocations of agribusiness or conventional food systems in food and embodiment research. Providing theoretical and methodological tools for tracing the processes and dynamics of far-reaching forces is where assemblage thinking becomes critical in exploring the AFN-gentrification interface. Taken together, in other words, these three approaches enable research that can read for difference and dominance, thus recognizing that the interplay between the two is central to the ongoing emergence of the world. In the following section, I detail how I put these approaches to work in researching Oklahoma’s local food movement and its connections with redevelopment and gentrification in Oklahoma City.

3. Researching food relocalization and urban redevelopment in Oklahoma

This project initially began with several broad concerns drawn from critical scholarship on AFNs: What types of challenges do AFNs actually pose to conventional food systems? How do they move beyond the narrow niche markets they seemingly occupy to meet the needs of a broader set of consumers? How can they ward off the prospects of corporate co-optation? In short, how might AFNs become expansive and durable enough to transcend niche market status? To pursue these questions, I chose to focus on a single case study, relying on a broadly ethnographic approach, augmented by archival research, and other qualitative methods, as I will detail below. Following Small (2009), the extended case study approach provides findings based on empirical evidence that can be extrapolated from to better understand processes underlying issues common to many AFNs. As argued by Flyvbjerg (2006), when research aims to produce the greatest amount of information about a phenomenon, “atypical or extreme cases often reveal more [than representative or typical cases]. . . . because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied.”
My search for the most productive site through which to explore the concerns identified above led me to conduct exploratory research on two cases: the ‘traditional’ food markets in Valencia, Spain, and Oklahoma’s local food movement, centered around a unique food enterprise called the Oklahoma Food Cooperative. In contrast to my early research in Valencia, it became immediately clear to me in Oklahoma that the local food movement there presented a compelling and important case through which to explore questions of ‘scaling up’ — or, better put, becoming expansive and durable — and exclusivity in AFNs.

First, the Oklahoma Food Cooperative (OFC) presents a model that is unique among AFNs, in terms of its ownership structure, spatiality, and function. I elaborate on these attributes — and further discuss the significance of food relocalization vis à vis AFNs — in Chapter Two, but here I’ll briefly note that the OFC is owned by both producer- and customer-members, an arrangement that has, since the group’s inception in 2003, led them to emphasize economic and social differences as resources in their individual and collective “evolution,” as members commonly put it. This dynamic makes the OFC an ideal group with which to explore questions of subjectivity and the prospects for expanding ecologically- and socially-oriented food initiatives, as members are constantly pulled between their positions as producer and/or consumer, on the one hand, and cooperative member/owner, on the other. This multiplicity of subjectivities is further complicated by a series of other distinct positions and forces impinging on subjective identity formation, such as urban/rural,

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12 My preliminary fieldwork in Valencia echoed the findings of other critical food research in European settings (e.g. Freidberg 2004), in which narratives of tradition, rather than acting as a bulwark against industrial agribusiness, as popular imaginaries (particularly among US ‘foodies’) would have it (e.g. Mayes 2007; Pollan 2007), are shown to often obscure the extent to which European foodways are for the most part deeply industrialized and of course have been for some time. Given their generally tight relationship to globalized food networks, Valencia’s traditional food markets appeared as less-than-ideal sites for studying AFNs _per se_. My work in Valencia, however, did encourage me to explore two paths that would be very important to my dissertation research, as we will see: First, the articulation of specific kinds of markets with the spatiotemporal fabric of the city’s built environment suggested the analytical potential of a genealogy of urban space and food systems, with an eye towards how that relationship mediates foodways today. Secondly, there appeared to be potential synergies in Valencia between local agricultural producers fighting urban sprawl in the city’s hinterlands and marginalized neighborhoods struggling against gentrification and urban renewal-type efforts in the city. While the synergy between these movements did not seem, at the time of my preliminary fieldwork there, to have borne fruit in terms of political outcomes, the impression stuck with me.

13 Except to the extent that it has served as a model for more than a dozen cooperatives across the US and abroad.
liberal/conservative, heterosexual/queer, and so on, which are often invoked by OFC members as they work out what they are doing and where the cooperative is heading as it seeks to follow its stated core values of social justice, environmental stewardship, and economic sustainability.

Moreover, the OFC expanded rapidly in its early years, from an initial few dozen members, generating some $5000 in monthly sales, to more than 3000 members and $60,000-70,000 in monthly sales at the time of my first research trip. This rapid expansion was enabled in part by a series of direct encounters with state agencies such as the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry and the Oklahoma State Department of Health. In this respect, the OFC was like most AFNs, in that it had to eventually articulate with state actors (Morgan et. al 2006), but perhaps differed from many AFNs in that it often seemed to come out ahead in those encounters. The OFC was at the time of my preliminary research also connecting with and serving as a catalyst for a range of other actors involved with Oklahoma-grown food, including farmers’ markets reappearing around the state, farm-to-fork restaurants, independent retailers, and a small wholesale operation focused on linking Oklahoma producers to restauranteurs who were then adding local food to their menus. In short, it was evident to me that the OFC was at the heart of a rapidly growing network of enterprises, institutions, and consumers interested for a variety of reasons in locally-produced food.

Even as this nascent movement promised to provide insights into questions of AFNs’ prospects for expansion, it’s clear that the OFC and other local food enterprises have largely struggled to make their food accessible and affordable to lower-income and racial and ethnic minority groups in the state. In this respect, the state’s local food movement has been all too similar to the broader universe of AFNs, a glaring issue thus far in a state with the highest rate of hunger in the US, where the occurrence of diet-related illnesses and the rates
of poverty and household food insecurity are significantly higher than the national averages (McDermott 2006). The exclusive nature of local food in Oklahoma has been a frequent topic of debate within the OFC in particular, as members negotiate various interpretations of their stated core value of social justice. Moreover, while we shall see that the state’s population of specialty food consumers has clearly grown, local food proponents recognize that as long as their products remain substantially more expensive than industrial foods, any efforts to fundamentally transform food systems will remain limited. Despite these limitations, it’s important to underscore here that the local food movement in Oklahoma is a highly nuanced and diverse phenomenon, a fact that I hope becomes apparent throughout this dissertation. Nevertheless, as many local food proponents in the state readily acknowledge, the movement has not managed to make themselves accessible and affordable to low-income and racial and ethnic minority groups in Oklahoma on a meaningful level. This remains among the principle obstacles to becoming expansive and durable.

Because the proponents of local food in Oklahoma have struggled to overcome this barrier to their expansion while managing to contend with so many other challenges, this movement presents an important case through which to explore the relationship between the two broad issues identified by critical AFN scholars: ‘scaling up’ and exclusivity. The OFC in particular served as the focal point around which my study of the local food movement began. Because of its role as a catalyst in a rapidly growing and differentiating network of local food producers, distributors, and consumers; its internal diversity and commitment to difference and transformation, counterbalanced by the group’s struggles towards greater inclusion; their history of successful but ongoing interactions with state actors; as well as their innovative organizational structure, entangled as it is with localized power struggles, this organization provided a particularly information-rich, paradigmatic case in which to explore key concerns raised by AFN scholars, and better understand the
mechanisms underlying the expansion of AFNs and the forces that constrain and shape that expansion.

3.1 Research questions and methods

As such, my field research was initially structured around a set of research questions that began with the OFC and traced the development of the local food network increasingly outwards in terms of spatial and temporal extent. Broadly speaking, the primary method I deployed to answer these questions was genealogical, (Nietzsche 2006/1887; Foucault 1980; Deleuze 2006/1962; Elden 2003), which is to say that I systematically examined relations of force as they converged in space and time in the phenomenon called by myself and others ‘Oklahoma’s local food movement.’ As this invocation of the importance of naming a given phenomenon suggests, a genealogical approach is particularly attentive to the relationship between knowledge and power, or the ways in which material forces share a mutually constitutive relationship with the meanings that humans attribute to ‘the world’ or ‘chaos’ (Grosz 2008). Following from this, genealogy, in the full Nietzschean sense of the term, is in no way logocentric and is not concerned primarily with discourse per se. Instead, all forms of knowledge are conceived of as emerging from relationships between things, though not Kantian ‘things-in-themselves’; as feminist philosopher Babette Babich (1994) puts it, the grounds of knowledge, far from being limited to the human mind, are ‘ecophysiological.’ Genealogy is in short a search for the values — or interplay of forces — upon which valorization occurs, undertaken in full recognition that the searcher is also enmeshed with the phenomena under scrutiny. Put differently, a genealogy traces an assemblage, of which it is a constituent part.

To execute this genealogy, I spent more than ten months in Oklahoma, from the fall of 2011 to the summer of 2012, before and after which I made several shorter research
trips. I have relied on a range of qualitative field research methods, as follows. A key method was semi-structured interviews with OFC members, small-business owners, non-OFC producers, and personnel of several state agencies, non-profits, and other organizations. Interviews are a key genealogical method in that they allow for analysis of how particular actors are mobilized in the verbal accounts of participants, present insight into the significance of phenomena, and can help the analyst better understand the affective and emotional elements of events. In addition to interviews, I relied on participant observation as a customer-member and volunteer on OFC delivery days, a member of the Farm Labor Working Group of the Oklahoma Food Policy Council, a regular shopper at several food retail stores, a diner at farm-to-fork restaurants, and attendee at events ranging from a local food fair at the State Capitol building to street fairs, from food industry shows to redevelopment initiatives in Oklahoma City. Participant observation allows the researcher to experience the bodily sensations associated with particular practices, encounters, and milieus, and can to some extent allow the researcher to become part of the groups being studied. I also held two focus groups, which I detail below.

Beyond these ethnographic methods, I also conducted textual analysis of documents and images in the state archives at the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, the archives of the Oklahoma Historical Society, and the OFC’s expansive archives, as well as press coverage, reports by non-profit organizations, and other publications. In addition to allowing the analyst to observe which mediators are included in accounts and how they are discussed, such textual and visual analysis provides insight into how phenomena are framed or given meaning in particular contexts. Finally, through a series of spatial practices including what I call ‘annotated driving,’ which I discuss below, I conducted visual and spatial analysis of numerous sites linked to the local food movement, redevelopment, and gentrification, including retail stores, the OFC’s Operations Center, farms, kitchens, farmers’ markets,
highway and river infrastructures, gentrified neighborhoods, and areas of Oklahoma City that have seen decades of neglect and disinvestment.

For interviews, initial respondents were identified and contacted during preliminary research trips. Following a ‘snowball’ sampling method, I selected additional respondents based on suggestions of initial interviewees, as well as the matters of concern that arose in interviews. All interviews — which varied in length from one to three hours — were recorded on a digital device, and results were logged and/or transcribed, organized, and analyzed with the online software Dedoose, employing codes that follow the specific orientation of the concerns of the research, emphasizing, for example, emotional and affective aspects of participation in or interaction with the OFC, confrontations with state officials, internal tensions and debates in the OFC, and codes for specific non-human actors that emerge as related to specific matters of concern. The total tally of my interviews included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OFC producer-members</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFC customer-members</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFC management/workers/board of directors</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-OFC producers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State agency personnel</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail and restaurant owners/workers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other related organizations/enterprise personnel or proprietors</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My use of these methods, all deployed in service of the genealogical/‘assemblage’ approach described above, was guided by four specific questions designed to investigate the broad concerns identified previously: how might AFNs expand beyond their niche market status, becoming more inclusive and posing a major threat to conventional food systems? Each of the following questions focuses on key actors, processes, and conceptual concerns
highlighted in the previous discussion of research on AFNs and gentrification, approached through a theoretical framework drawing on assemblage thinking, embodiment, and diverse economies research.

1) What actors contributed to the creation and development of the Oklahoma Food Cooperative (OFC), and to the terms of its rules of operation?

As noted above, the OFC lies at the heart of my claim that Oklahoma’s local food movement presents a paradigmatic case through which to study AFNs’ prospects for becoming more expansive and durable. This question situates the OFC’s emergence and development at the center of my inquiry, serving as something of an anchor or analytical entry point from which to begin tracing relationships ‘outward’ in space and time. Bruno Latour’s (2005) “five sources of uncertainty,” which I discuss further in Chapter Two, were of central importance in guiding my efforts to trace the development of the OFC, during which I focused on the interplay of forces, broadly conceived, and the work required to successfully imbricate matter and meaning in more or less durable relationships. This involved, in Michel Callon’s terms (1986), an exploration of the “enrollment” of actors, human and more-than-human. Ultimately, to understand the OFC’s prospects for expanding beyond niche market status while retaining the social and ecological features that initially distinguished the enterprise from conventional food networks, it is necessary to closely examine the ‘internal’ dynamics of this unique cooperative as its territory was consolidating and growing, including power struggles between members themselves.

OFC Members report that the OFC emerged through a negotiated collaboration between a small handful of farmers and several urban residents who found common ground in their dissatisfaction with existing avenues for marketing and purchasing safe, healthy, and local food. This seemingly straightforward explanation only hints at the range of
heterogeneous actors that were enrolled in assembling this now complex network. The OFC has undergone several shifts in management and key players, and discussions with members illustrated that each of these shifts accompanied changes in scale and interpretation of what the group’s core values might mean, and how they should best be implemented. Throughout my research, I traced these shifts through several methods: interviews with producer- and customer-members, workers, board members, and management; participant observation as volunteer and shopper on at least 10 monthly delivery days at the OFC’s Operations Center and several pick-up locations around the Oklahoma City metropolitan area, observer at numerous meetings of the board-of-directors and management teams, attendee of annual meetings, promotional events, and other relevant events; a focus group on the issue of exclusivity and social justice with OFC members; and textual and visual analysis of documents in the OFC’s extensive archives (e.g. producer and customer recruitment fliers, the Articles of Incorporation, monthly ‘Producers’ Notes,’ several e-mail listservs, etc.) and in the local press, government reports, and other publications.

2) How does the OFC, and the local food movement more broadly, negotiate its growth with state regulators and other actors at varying levels?

Understanding the articulation of the OFC with a growing network of institutions, individuals, and other actors that might be thought of as ‘external’ to the cooperative is clearly essential to understanding the forces that shape this AFN’s efforts to expand. Put a bit differently, this question asks what happens when the OFC’s growing territory begins to encounter other established territories? As noted above and explored in further detail in Chapter Two, the OFC has gradually become increasingly connected to state actors, particularly regulatory agencies such as the state’s health and agriculture departments, as well as statewide and county food policy councils. Much of the work I undertook in pursuit of
question 1) also provided insight into the OFC’s articulation with state actors and how those connections fit with the broader growth of the local food movement. While I recognized during preliminary research that retail grocery stores were an important actor shaping foodways in Oklahoma, the arrival of Whole Foods Market (WFM) and several other corporate ‘green’ grocers just as I was beginning my extended fieldwork made it readily apparent that the retail foodscape in Oklahoma City would play a role that was much more influential than I initially expected. To explore the importance of these retail actors, I interviewed personnel from WFM and several small retailers specializing in Oklahoma-produced food, and held a focus group with OFC members and WFM personnel.

These and other engagements with the growing local food movement and a range of other actors alerted me to the importance of urban redevelopment processes in Oklahoma City to the local food movement. To understand the significance of the connections between these phenomena, I analyzed government documents and reports and press coverage pertaining to redevelopment, focusing particularly on the Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPs) initiatives that have unfolded in the city over the past two decades. As I detail in later chapters, a number of factors pointed towards the significance of the Farmers Public Market building, just outside of the redeveloped and increasingly gentrified urban core of Oklahoma City, as a pivotal site for understanding the expansion of the local food movement and what its entanglements with redevelopment mean for its hopes of becoming more inclusive. To explore this site, I analyzed documents in the John J. Harden Collection of the Oklahoma Historical Society; interviewed several business owners in and around the Market; attended a performative redevelopment event (the Better Block Oklahoma City event described in Chapter Six); and dedicated several days to extensive walks that radiated out from the Market to the surrounding areas, many of which are currently being radically
transformed as part of the most recent MAPs initiative, which I discuss in Chapters Five and Six.

In addition to these more conventional research methods, I developed an approach to spatial analysis over the course of my field research that I call ‘annotated driving’, which was instrumental in developing my thinking about the case. Given that my research in Oklahoma required me to regularly traverse much of the state visiting farms and pick-up sites and attending various events, and noting the dearth of public transit options even in urban areas, I relied entirely on a car for my transportation needs. Because my lodging for most of my fieldwork was in the Oklahoma City area, near the geographical center of the state, I was quite often passing through the city on my way to and from visits to sites further afield, in addition to spending considerable time conducting research and otherwise living in the city. During these constant movements by car to, from, and within the city, I often took advantage of the time behind the wheel by recording oral field notes about the day’s events on a portable recording device. As the importance of the connections between local food and redevelopment became clear to me, I began to more consciously weave these driving and dictation habits into my analysis of the case, particularly as I started to note patterns in my movements around the state and within Oklahoma City itself. Within those regular patterns, I developed the habit of taking different routes so as to focus on the connections and discontinuities between areas of the city or particular sites within and beyond the city, and I also made a point of making several extended drives that left the patterned areas of my fieldwork in order to explore what was being obscured or left out of my account. Frequent visits to the former location of the OFC’s Operations Center in the predominantly Latino area of Capital Hill, for example, led me to take a number of ‘annotated drives’ connecting this area in various ways to the redeveloped urban core, but I also made several drives to and from Capital Hill and more marginalized swaths of the city to the east and
south. These drives drew my attention to the material processes of development and neglect, investment and disinvestment, from the iconic architectures and massive infrastructural works galvanizing some areas to the empty lots, crumbling houses, and profuse vegetation and forest cover colonizing others.

3) In the genesis and development of Oklahoma’s local food movement, what mediating roles are played by the multiple affects and drives of particular bodies?

This question was designed to augment the concerns of assemblage approaches (including actor-network theory, an important source for my project), which do not tend to emphasize subjectivity and embodiment beyond an interest in trans-personal affects and precognitive drives. However, in my preliminary work with the OFC it was abundantly clear that the visceral and embodied aspects of eating, diet, and health played a major role in the emergence and development of the local food movement in Oklahoma. A number of key figures in the OFC, for example, discovered the cooperative after a serious illness had upended their relationship to food. This goes some but not all of the way towards explaining the striking degree of intense emotion that traverses relationships in the local food movement, not least of all the often very contentious struggles within the movement itself. Given the scarcity of work in food studies on the micropolitics of interpersonal relations within AFNs, it was important to pay close attention to these powerful currents as they animated and were intensified in particular bodies. Moreover, as Sarah Whatmore (2002), Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (2002), and others have demonstrated, the coherence and resilience of a given assemblage (or at least one that involves humans) typically requires the harmonization of material qualities and human bodies. This is no less true for already-expansive conventional food networks than it is for expanding AFNs.

14 But see Latour (2004b) for an important exception.
Understanding the harmonization (or lack thereof) of bodies and diverse ‘things’
required paying careful attention in all of the research methods already discussed to what
bodies do, including patterns of movement and rest, speech and silence, in addition to what
they say about themselves and one another. ‘Body talk’ plays important roles in mediating
relationships within the local food movement, from sexual innuendos to critical commentary
of personal hygiene. As I discuss in several chapters, many of the same affective-emotional
currents and ways of talking about and otherwise representing human bodies flow between
local food and urban redevelopment.

4) What are the key relationships between the constituent components of the
assemblage(s) of local food in Oklahoma, and what are the effects of these
relationships on ‘local food’?

Finally, this question was designed to operate on two levels: First, as already noted,
one of the distinguishing features of assemblage theory is its emphasis on the relations
between things rather than things themselves. In terms of method, exploring the ‘in-
between’ (Amin and Thrift 2002) informs analysis of virtually all of the data I’ve collected.
More specifically, the ‘annotated driving’ method that I developed was an attempt to focus
on the in-between, contrasting the different sensory textures and dynamics of diverse urban
spaces through movement between them, while also highlighting the infrastructures that are
themselves in between sites, sometimes connecting them, other times bifurcating them. This
led me to more specific questions, such as ‘how do sites such as a freeway viaduct or an
abandoned meat packing plant mediate the assemblage of local food’?

Secondly, this question highlights the analytical imperative for assemblage researchers
to make constant decisions about which ‘matters of concern’ (Latour 2004) to pursue
immediately, which to keep on the sidelines, and which to exclude. Failing to follow this
imperative produces accounts that are often critiqued by critics of assemblage approaches for incoherence or sloppiness (Robbins and Marks 2010) and/or casting all actors as equally powerful (Castree 2002). While I believe, for example, that the statewide food policy council in Oklahoma is important, and could become increasingly so, I came to realize that the actions of seemingly more distant actors such as Chesapeake Energy, real estate developers, and architects have done more to shape the contours and significance of the local food movement in recent years. As such, while I spent time working with the food policy council (and continue to serve on one of its working groups), my account in this dissertation focuses primarily on the connections between local food and redevelopment, and on the relations between the many different types or orders of things involved in the articulation of these two territories.

4. Organization and significance of the work

As should by now be evident, this project was not initially designed to focus on the intersection of AFNs and gentrification per se, but rather pursued the more laborious and often frustrating task of patiently tracing connections between the OFC and a growing list of additional actors that mediate the cooperative, from tribal governments to ‘Dust Bowl’-era conservation initiatives, and from university researchers to farm-to-fork restaurants. The basic goal was to approach the OFC as constituted by relations with actors operating at a range of spatio-temporal extents, as opposed to an enterprise existing at ‘the local scale,’ which is assumed to be at the bottom of a nested hierarchy of ontologically-given scales. This task was initially oriented, as already indicated, by a particular interest in state actors and other key political economic players, such as food retailers. It must be emphasized here that additions to the list of relevant actors were not generated at random, but emerged through the tracing of forces that revealed themselves as key mediators of the territory of local food,
or what Latour (2005) refers to as “matters of concern.” It is, after all, through the interaction of such specific forces that assemblages cohere, or fail to do so.\textsuperscript{15} As I describe further in subsequent chapters, however, I increasingly became aware that many of the various kinds of actors and issues that I encountered were related in one or more ways to the profoundly rigorous redevelopment processes that have been unfolding in Oklahoma City for the past two decades. A more astute researcher, during preliminary fieldwork, may have discerned the importance of these processes to the local food movement’s expansion and designed the project around this intersection. On the other hand, it must be reiterated here that there is to date a paucity of in-depth case studies of the intersection of AFNs and redevelopment, and aside from Alan Latham’s work, there is to my knowledge no additional research that explores this topic with an explicit commitment to understanding both its limitations and generative capacities, in social, ecological, and economic terms. Drawing on existing literature while preparing my project, in other words, gave me little indication of the potential salience of this intersection.

That I eventually came to focus on this aspect of the case of local food in Oklahoma thus allows me to suggest right away two contributions made by this dissertation. First, it fills a relative gap in existing literatures, which point to the importance of the intersection of AFNs and gentrification, but have yet to thoroughly explore its impacts on proponents of and participants in AFNs, or its generative capacities for potentially producing more just and sustainable food systems and modes of urban development. As already noted, moreover, plenty of research does indeed consider the wider forces shaping this intersection — post-Fordist economic restructuring, the spatial patterns of property investment, and so on —

\textsuperscript{15}This is precisely why effective assemblage analysis can’t offer a ‘grab bag’ of random actors, and why simply including non-human actors as actors in social science accounts is not a productive goal in and of itself. As unfortunate as it is that actor-network theory in particular is often reduced to this banal task by its critics, it’s equally lamentable that many accounts drawing on ANT focus on non-human actors to no apparent analytical benefit, to say nothing of social or political ends. The goal of assemblage analysis is, or should be, to focus on relationships that matter to the questions at hand.
but the theoretical and methodological framework I bring to bear on questions of such larger forces impinging on AFNs and gentrification is also largely novel. Secondly, this project demonstrates the analytical capacities of a genealogical or ‘assemblage’ approach, which can be nimble enough to lead the researcher to recognize connections and insights well-beyond the initial purview of a project’s framing. This may not be effective or appropriate for all research topics, of course, but in cases where research findings in an area of study have started to become repetitive, demonstrating a growing consensus, it is potentially helpful to have at one’s disposal an approach that can escape dominant paradigms.

The reader will of course judge for themselves the efficacy of my efforts on this and other fronts. In Chapter Eight, I offer my own interpretation of the further significance of the work, alongside a number of suggestions for those involved in this case — suggestions that I believe also have considerable purchase for the larger universe of cases of AFNs, gentrification, and redevelopment. For now, I will close this introductory chapter by briefly describing the layout of the dissertation and summarizing the arc of the contents of the following chapters. The remainder of the work is divided into three parts, followed by a concluding chapter (Chapter Eight). Part One, encompassing Chapters Two and Three, focuses on the OFC and the development of the local food movement in Oklahoma. Here, I examine some of the diverse elements brought together in constituting the territory of the local food movement, and illustrate the significance of this territory by situating it relative to the status quo of food systems in the state, which have long been dominated by industrial agribusiness actors. Drawing on concepts from the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Nietzsche, I argue that the early OFC, in breaking from conventional economic and social wisdom as it rushed towards the goal of creating a more just and sustainable food system, expressed particularly active or ‘noble’ forces, and as such was a formidable entity. Tracing
the path from the OFC to the broader local food movement, we shall see that these active forces were attenuated alongside a series of value shifts in the growing territory of local food.

Part Two begins to interrogate the many connections between local food and urban redevelopment in Oklahoma City. In Chapter Four, we see that local food, in addition to attracting the covetous attention of corporate food actors, is one of several cultural milieus that has become entangled with the imperatives and desires of fossil fuel companies, urban developers, and elected officials in the city, where an ‘entrepreneurial’ approach to development has taken hold and radically transformed parts of the city. I describe some of the effects on local food actors of being increasingly drawn into this territory, effects which are notably mixed. Chapter Five is in many respects the theoretical heart of the dissertation, as it elaborates on the foundational necessity to the existence of the assemblage linking local food and redevelopment of carefully imbricating matter and meaning across a wide range of actors. Analysis of this process takes us into close scrutiny of architectural innovations in the city, alongside the harnessing of particular senses of movement, particularly in sports milieus. Of central importance here is the intensification and harnessing of particular passions in conjunction with the materials and forces that constitute the rapidly changing city. Food and foodways, we shall see, while integral to the coherence of the weave of disparate materials in this process, are one actor among several; in the relations between these actors, each actor gains added resonance and force. Only through placing foodways alongside architecture and sport in the city can we understand how the broader assemblage in question — and thus power relations in Oklahoma — coheres, and how it might be otherwise.

While the assemblage that joins the territories of redevelopment and local food is to a large degree remarkably coherent and durable, it remains shot through with tensions,
fugitive energies, and untapped virtualities, many of which are linked to foodways. Part Three explores these contingencies and lines of flight as they manifest in and around the Farmers Public Market, an early 20th century structure that, after a long period of decline and decay, has fallen into the hands of the local food movement and now serves as a catalyst for that movement. In Chapter Six, I present a series of ethnographic sketches highlighting tensions that emerge as a series of forces associated with redevelopment and local food converge on this site in a struggle over the spatial distribution of property values and social values in the city. While the final outcome of these struggles remains unknown, these ethnographic sketches strongly suggest that we resist the urge to prematurely conclude that the territory of redevelopment will inevitably overcome the ‘nobler’ elements of the local food movement. Chapter Seven ‘pans out’ analytically to offer an historical account of the Farmers Public Market drawn primarily from archival research I conducted at the Oklahoma Historical Society. I include this account not as simply historical background, but to situate the Farmers Public Market in the larger history of the fabric of the city. As such, the chapter represents the farthest-reaching spatiotemporal extent of my analysis, the terminus of the lines of connection that I trace outwards from the OFC. This is partially why I place the historical account near the end of my analysis, as counterintuitive as that may seem from the perspective of other analytical frameworks. Equally importantly, however, the history of the Farmers Public Market and its place in the broader fabric of the city also underscores the capricious and contingent nature of power. Recognizing this nature casts a different light on the significance of the lines of flight opening up from the territories of local food and redevelopment identified throughout the dissertation. As such, Chapter Seven is essential to understanding the potential for more just and sustainable foodworlds and more democratically shaped modes of urban development to emerge.
In Chapter Eight, I discuss how this potential might be further actualized. Focusing on the OFC, I begin by offering several concrete suggestions that I believe will enable the further expansion of the territory of local food while also reinvigorating its ‘nobler’ and more reflexive elements. Following from these suggestions, I discuss the contributions of the present study to larger discussions of power, politics, and the production of formal knowledges.
Part One
Emergence: Difference, Evolution, and Becoming-businesslike in the Oklahoma Food Cooperative

Sometimes chaos is an immense black hole in which one endeavors to fix a fragile point as a center. Sometimes one organizes around that point a calm and stable "pace" (rather than a form): the black hole has become a home.

Sometimes one grafts onto that pace a breakaway from the black hole.


∞. Introduction

In November 2003, a handful of farmers and ranchers convened in a large, florescent-lit meeting hall at Epiphany of the Lord Catholic Church, in the bucolic suburbs of northwest Oklahoma City, to meet several dozen customers eager to purchase what was at that time an unusual assortment of items: grass-fed beef from the state's panhandle, free range chickens and eggs from just outside of Tulsa, peanuts grown near the small town of Snyder in the southwest part of the state, and a host of other foods that were beginning to distinguish themselves from those found on the shelves of supermarkets in various ways, not least of which was an increasingly articulated link with specific places in Oklahoma. The connections between particular foods, places, and people were central to this November event, the inaugural delivery day of the Oklahoma Food Cooperative (OFC). As customers began to arrive, chaos promptly ensued, and it rapidly became clear that the logistics of connecting consumers with their desired products were more complicated than anyone had expected. Products were packed in boxes, bags, crates, and – in the case of perishable items – in an array of brightly colored ice chests. Each product had been tenuously attached to an individual customer by a series of e-mail messages, each of which had flowed through the personal e-mail account of Bob Waldrop, the man standing at the center of the scene, gesturing this way and that, with a lengthy gray beard and tufts of long hair flowing out from
around a bald pate. In the weeks preceding delivery day, Waldrop, the music director at the church, had corresponded electronically with each producer, compiled a list of products on offer, and sent that list via e-mail to customer-members. In turn, each customer replied to Waldrop, listing the products they wished to purchase. Waldrop then collated this list and sent out individual messages to each producer, notifying them how many of each product they had sold. As delivery day approached, with producers scrambling to harvest their crops and process customer orders, and Waldrop fielding a flurry of e-mails, no one worked out precisely how customers and producers would connect in the meeting hall that first delivery day. A recent OFC president described the anarchic scene that day, saying, “They got there and somebody said, ‘what are we gonna’ do, how are we gonna’ set this up?’ and [someone replied,] ‘I thought you knew!’ and you know, [the general sentiment was] ‘well, let’s do this!'”

This headlong-racing, forward-looking enthusiasm was, by all accounts and indications, characteristic of the nascent OFC as it emerged in the early years of the new millennium, carrying the enterprise through its first phase of existence. In the present chapter, I focus on this initial stage in the cooperative’s development, which involved a steep learning curve for members as they worked out, largely through trial and error, the logistics of their operation, and navigated a series of challenges that would range from internal conflicts to logistical issues and encounters with state agencies. The central objectives of the chapter are as follows. First, in section one, I situate Oklahoma’s local food movement within broader scholarly and popular discussions of food relocalization; here I highlight several concerns of theoretical and practical salience for understanding the relationship between food relocalization in Oklahoma and redevelopment in Oklahoma City, including questions of scale, hybridity, and infrastructure.

Then, in section two, I describe the emergence of the OFC and discuss a number of important factors that contributed to or influenced this novel enterprise, including but going
well beyond many of the negative social, ecological, and economic impacts of industrialized food. To better understand how a wide range of elements came together in the OFC, and to begin assessing the significance of this convergence, I also explore two theoretical constructs: the Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of ‘the refrain,’ and the figure of ‘the higher type’ in Nietzsche’s writings. We shall see how the tripartite movement of the refrain provides a conceptual vocabulary through which to approach the process of territorialization, and the figure of the higher type allows us to interpret the links between particular qualities or values and corresponding forces. These ideas inform the rest of the chapter and the remainder of the dissertation.

In section three, I describe the OFC’s continued development, characterized by rapid growth and increasing organizational complexity. Examining this phase also demonstrates several important features of the cooperative, including an emphasis on using diversity as a resource, and a shifting balance between internal competition and cooperation between members. In section four, I focus on a major turning point for the OFC — a transition in leadership that carried important implications for the group’s identity and future trajectory. Close scrutiny of some of the actors involved in this shift reveals on the one hand how the cooperative began to embrace a more narrowly instrumentalist vision of ‘local food’; on the other hand, it also enables us to recognize the multiple forces shaping the group’s transformations, including such unlikely actors as the ice chest. In the concluding section, I underscore the importance of this multiplicity of influences for our understanding of the remaining chapters in this work.

1. What is ‘local food’?

To better grasp the dynamics of the emergence and early development of the OFC, we must first consider the cooperative as part of a larger trend in the US and Western
Europe towards food relocalization, itself part of a growing public interest in the relationship between the far-reaching processes shaping a world that seemed to be rapidly ‘globalizing’ and particular sites, places, or locales. As an indicator of the significance of this trend, it’s worth noting that while the USDA estimates that in 2008 only about 1.6% of the US agricultural market consisted of locally-produced food, even this small percentage amounted to roughly $4.8 billion in farm-level revenues distributed over about 107,000 farms, or 5% of US farms (Johnson et al. 2013). While this may be viewed as a proverbial drop in the bucket, local food sales generate significant economic multiplier effects in rural economies (McDermott 2006), and perhaps more importantly, policy makers and the general public have taken a keen interest in this rapidly growing sector. Recent years have seen an outpouring of publications and discussion in the popular media about local foodways, from Coming Home to Eat (Nabhan 2002) to The 100-Mile Diet (Smith and MacKinnon 2007) to The Town That Food Saved (Hewitt 2011); in 2007, the New Oxford American Dictionary’s ‘word of the year’ was the neologism locavore. These currents in popular thought and practice exhibit varied emphases and stake out a range of political positions, but as a whole tend to primarily celebrate some combination of the ecological, economic, and cultural virtues of eating locally-produced food. Stated broadly, eating locally-produced food is understood in these accounts as ecologically beneficial because it reduces the distance food travels from farm to plate, thus reducing greenhouse gas emission and fuel consumption; as economically beneficial to small farmers and rural economies because it keeps capital circulating within those communities, rather than in the hands of distant and large industrial farms; and as

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16 This report and the sources from which it is derived acknowledge that there is no legal or standardized definition of the designation ‘local.’ Strangely, however, none of the publications associated with this report seem to clearly specify which definition informs these data points, beyond mentioning direct-to-consumer sales and “intermediated marketing channels” including grocers, restaurants, and regional distributors. Nevertheless, this uncertainty does not substantially affect my point in citing these data: by most definitions, local food represents a growing agricultural sector, and is attracting considerable interest from various quarters.

culturally beneficial in that it reconnects consumers with the seasonal rhythms and biological
dynamics of their ecological surroundings, thus pushing back against the alienation and
placelessness often thought to be brought on by globalization. It should be noted here that
definitions of ‘local’ vary considerably, depending on who is defining it. This is no
small matter, particularly in political ecological terms, as the measure by which something is
dubbed local can demarcate whose values and practices are valorized and who is included in
this substantial new ‘value-added’ market (DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Hinrichs 2002). We
shall see that the OFC has long struggled with this issue as well.

The surge of popular interest in food localization has been nearly matched by
vigorous scholarly output on the topic. While there is certainly no shortage of research that
shares the celebratory emphasis of popular appraisals of localism (e.g. Brown and Miller
2008), research in geography and cognate fields has tended to approach food relocalization
in a more measured way. Several key concerns emerge from what is now a substantial body
of work on this topic. First, a number of studies caution against a common tendency to
romanticize localism and simply assume that if a food is ‘local’ it is automatically ‘good’ in
terms of ecological or social concerns (see DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Guthman 2007).
Such ‘unreflexive’ localism can obscure classed, racialized, and gendered inequalities and
power struggles in place (Slocum 2007; Hinrichs and Kremer 2002; Alkon 2008a), and foster
nativist and defensive postures towards ‘outsiders’ and the many distant others — broccoli
growers in Central America, for example, or exploited tomato pickers in Florida — with
whom most people on the planet are connected by industrialized, globalized foods
Moreover, critical scholars have demonstrated a tendency among some proponents of local
food, fueled by romantic imaginaries of the ‘small family farm,’ to ignore issues surrounding
agricultural labor, a major omission given that all but the very smallest farms tend to rely heavily on seasonal labor forces\(^\text{18}\) (Alkon 2013, 2008a).

1.1 Scale, hybridity, and local food

More broadly, Branden Born and Mark Purcell (2006) argue cogently that the shortcomings of romanticized or unreflexive accounts of food relocalization stem largely from problematic assumptions about scale, in which ‘the local scale’ itself is cast as ecologically and socially favorable in direct opposition to ‘the global scale,’ which is viewed as undesirable because of the global scale upon which it operates. Such scalar assumptions play into a series of binaries related to food — global/local, conventional/alternative, fast/slow, etc. — that not only obscures localized power struggles and distracts attention from the ways in which far-reaching forces such as corporate influence on regulatory regimes impinge on foodways in particular places, but also fails to take into account the profound interconnections between ‘alternative’ and ‘conventional’ food systems. First of all, as many scholars in the 1990s observed (Arce and Marsden 1993; Murdoch and Miele 1999), the proliferation of alternative food networks (AFNs) in general, of which local food enterprises and initiatives can be considered one expression, emerged partially in response to the social and ecological problems associated with conventional food systems. As such, AFNs are in some sense existentially related to conventional food systems. This relationship has in many cases become problematic for proponents of AFNs, however, to the extent that the alterity of specific foods — local, organic, etc. — is based on fetishized or romanticized conceptions of qualities such as ‘localness,’ as discussed above. Stated a bit differently, when being ‘alternative’ to industrial foods becomes nothing more than a source of ‘value added’ to local foods, the possibility of co-optation by corporate actors in the food system becomes

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\(^{18}\) See McDermott (2006) for a discussion of the importance of seasonal labor on Oklahoma farms.
more likely. More fundamentally, if localness is oriented primarily towards capturing premium prices, this appears to generate an inherent barrier to transcending niche market status, as it is their perceived quality of being ‘alternative’ that adds value to local and other specialty foods (Alkon 2013; Mount 2012).

Food scholars such as Patricia Allen (2008) and Laura DeLind (2011), however, highlight the potential contribution of research to move beyond critique and actively work to foster more reflexive and critical engagements with the complex politics of AFNs in popular discussions and in practice. I situate my work in Oklahoma at this intersection of critique and the collaborative production of more socially just and ecological friendly foodways. To this end, I'll point out two additional pertinent insights from critical food studies, which complicate the foregoing discussion of scale and hybridity.

First, following from my comments on scale in Chapter One, it’s important to note that some of the most trenchant critiques of local food rest on what is essentially a reversal of the ‘local trap’ outlined by Born and Purcell (2006). Despite cogent deployments of dialectical thinking, Giddensian structuration theory, or Bourdieuan understandings of identity formation, many scholarly appraisals of AFNs slip into reifying the power of conventional food systems, perhaps exaggerating their coherence and their reach across the planet. The allure of this ‘global trap’ is suggested by the tendency to view industrialized foods as a ‘system,’ while relegating alternative foods to the status of ‘networks,’ ‘initiatives,’ or ‘enterprises.’ To avoid this pitfall, and to signal the extent to which both AFNs and industrialized foods are historically and geographically contingent phenomena in a constant state of flux, I deploy the term ‘conventional food networks’ (or CFNs) throughout the remainder of this work. As Sarah Whatmore and Lorraine Thorne put it (1997), “That some markets have global reach is not in dispute. What we want to emphasize is that this reach makes the corporations and bureaucracies that fashion such markets both powerful and
vulnerable, being woven of the same substances as the more humble everyday forms of social life so often consigned to the ‘local’ and rendered puny in comparison.” Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour and John Law, Whatmore and Thorne sought to “elaborate an understanding of global networks as performative orderings (always in the making), rather than as systemic entities (always already constituted).” This approach transforms the “key question” from one of “scale, encoded in a categorical distinction between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’” to one of connectivity and potential discontinuities, “marking lines of flow of varying lengths and which transgress these categories” (Whatmore and Thorne 1997, p. 289-290). As such, it eschews scalar thinking and the dangers of the global trap, in other words, while avoiding the local trap by relying instead on actor-network or assemblage thinking. An assemblage-based approach, as I discussed at some length in Chapter One, steers analysis away from inherent logics and teleologies and towards the multifarious relations between heterogeneous, often seemingly distant types of actors, processes, and forces. This focus on the dynamics of the ‘in-between’ (Amin and Thrift 2002) highlights the continuous negotiation inherent to the emergence and maintenance of any phenomenon, an attentiveness that responds directly to scholarly calls for more nuanced explorations of the situated dynamics of foodways in place (DeLind 2011; Feagan 2007). Foregrounding, however, the cautionary notes sounded by critical food scholars with respect to unreflexive and defensive localisms as discussed above demands that we keep a critical focus on power in (re)emerging local food systems, including the operation of power ‘at a distance’ (Latour 2005), taking into account distanciated as well as localized power relations.

This need to distribute analytical attention between the proximate and the distanciated, coupled with an emphasis on continuously negotiated relationships between heterogeneous actors, brings me to the final insight I’d like to highlight from critical food studies, related to the notion of hybridity. I described above how viewing all foodways as
hybrids of ‘conventionality’ and ‘alterity’ helps us avoid obfuscating binaries and romanticization. Just as importantly, this perspective brings into view the pragmatic or functional links between AFNs and CFNs. Given that food systems infrastructures, including transportation, processing, wholesaling, and retailing, have developed in accord with the widespread rollout of CFNs over the past century or more, there is a notable lack of infrastructure designed to function with AFN production, distribution, and consumption models, particularly with respect to “mid-scale, aggregation and distribution systems that move local food into mainstream markets in a cost-effective manner” (Martinez et al. 2010; see also Day-Farnsworth et al. 2009; Mount 2012; Matteson and Heuer 2008). This problem is often compounded by the parallel issue of a lack of regulatory frameworks for ensuring food safety, monitoring environmental impacts, and protecting the welfare of human and non-human laborers in food systems (Ostrom 2006). In response to these issues, researchers have begun to focus on how AFNs are deploying CFN infrastructures such as wholesale distribution firms and ‘scaled-up’ box schemes (Bloom 2009; Andrée 2009) and institutional procurement policies (Day-Farnsworth et al. 2009), including farm-to-school programs, in which more than 40,000 schools participated in 2011-2012.19

Such efforts to harness the capacities of CFN infrastructures are in turn part of a larger emphasis in recent local food activism and research on solving logistical problems that constrain the growth of local food movements, marking a shift away from the tendency to “carve out utopian niches,” as Alison Alkon puts it (2013, p. 676), and towards an “alternative strategy that might emphasize continuities between industrial and alternative food systems in order to think about large-scale transformation.” Farmers’ markets have received considerable scrutiny here, as these sites, in bringing together local knowledges, capacities, and social networks, are thought by some observers to function as potential

19 National Farm to School Network website: http://www.farmtoschool.org/about/what-is-farm-to-school
“keystones” to more expansive local food systems (Gillespie et al. 2007; Beckie et al. 2012; Kirwan 2007). Shifting attention to the food processing sector, Alison Blay-Palmer and Betsy Donald (2006) demonstrate that in Toronto, while Fordist-style large manufacturers such as Campbell’s Soup remain dominant, the most dynamic and innovative firms in the region are post-Fordist, niche-oriented processors that have begun to make substantial contributions to regional economic growth by responding to consumer demands for “high quality, local, fresh ethnic and fusion cuisine” (p. 383). Blay-Palmer and Donald acknowledge that “the new food economy” is not “necessarily […] inherently more progressive and socially inclusive.” But they follow David Goodman’s assertion (2004) that AFNs should not be viewed as merely a form of elite class consumption, and argue that these growing markets “still provide opportunities for social inclusion and opportunities for a more viable local economy” (Blay-Palmer and Donald 2006, p. 384, original emphasis). Much of the critical scholarship on unreflexive localism — and more broadly, the great many studies that demonstrate AFNs’ tendency towards exclusivity and vulnerability to co-optation by CFNs — of course demand that we ask how such opportunities are realized and seized, and by whom. These, however, are specific questions that can be answered empirically without recourse to assumptions about the inherent logics of capital or the hegemony of neoliberalism. This is precisely a point at which Gibson-Graham’s diverse economies framework, outlined in Chapter One, is helpful, as it allows us to recognize farmers’ markets and the internally-differentiated food processing sector in Toronto as parts of economies that are heterogeneous and contingent, rather than operating according to inevitable and intrinsic logics and thus doomed to converge with or be annihilated by capitalist firms.

Still, while avoiding a capitalocentric approach may open up analytical and political possibilities for AFNs and local food movements in particular, it should not blind us to the forces that shape the prospects of local food proponents and the obstacles they face as they
seek to transcend niche market status. Instead, I suggest that infrastructural studies such as these make a strong case that the intersections of AFNs and CFNs are neither cause for unreflexive celebration nor simply sites of co-optation and convergence, but must be viewed as grounds of ongoing struggles on the interrelated terrains of value generation and maintenance and material, functional capacities. Put differently, the choice here is not between diversity for its own sake and the inevitability of dominance; instead, we should focus on the interplay of differentiation and ongoing efforts to achieve dominance in food systems. Again, seeing this in terms of assemblages rather than inherent logics is helpful: this is a question of struggles over territory, in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense I outlined in Chapter One. Territory, in this sense, is order produced from chaos through the becoming-rhythmic of matter and energy. This requires enrolling a range of actors, which may or may not be amenable to being enrolled, and harnessing and intensifying particular qualities produced by the relationships between these actors. In other words, if we’re going to explore the question of how AFNs might become more expansive and durable, shedding their ‘alternative’ skin so to speak, we need to examine the way that particular values or ‘senses’ — and here I mean a more inclusive, reflexive form of food systems, based on the networks of relationships and the democratic procedures that provide a ‘thicker’ social and ecological basis for AFNs, rather than a fetishized or defensive ‘localism’ — articulate with material forms that allow these values to come to the fore, give these values solidity, and increase their reach and power. This means investigating the interface of matter and values in AFNs, including but also going beyond their points of articulation with CFNs. What shapes AFNs, and what might allow them to reshape food systems writ large? To explore these concerns further, I now turn to the local food movement in Oklahoma, focusing first on the emergence of the OFC, a catalyst for this movement.
2. Territorializing Oklahoma food: establishing a point

During my fieldwork in Oklahoma, I sporadically encountered echoes and traces of antecedents to what today might accurately be described as a local food movement in the state. Several people involved in local food systems in eastern Oklahoma, for example, mentioned to me a well-known retail cooperative grocery that existed for years in Tahlequah, the capital of the Cherokee Nation. In the university town of Norman, small ‘health food’ enterprises with roots in the countercultural movements of the 1960s and ‘70s such as The Earth Natural Foods and The Lovelight Restaurant emphasized the health benefits and ecological qualities of non-industrial foods throughout the ‘80s and ‘90s. A 1983 article from Oklahoma City’s daily newspaper estimates that there were at that time twenty-five food cooperatives in the metropolitan area consisting of 12-50 members each (Hogan 1983).

Even at the time that article was published, however, there seemed to be a backward-looking, nostalgic affect among members of these small cooperatives: “No history has been kept of the various co-ops’ early days, although members say their beginnings reflected the ideological, communal spirit of the times,” Hogan writes, adding “The times have changed, and the people have moved into other areas and interests.” One member is quoted as saying, “I don’t even know who the original members were,” and another notes that her cooperative was no longer seeking new members. By the time the Oklahoma Food Cooperative was formed in 2003, its countercultural antecedents had largely vanished or become deeply muted.

Which should not be taken to signify, however, that all elements of local food production and distribution had disappeared from the state. Farmers’ markets continued to operate throughout the 1980s and ‘90s in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Norman, and a number of smaller towns around the state, many of which included vendors that produced their wares on small farms in Oklahoma, alongside the ubiquitous resellers of products purchased from
regional wholesale operations. In rural areas and on the fringes of cities, moreover, one could still buy fresh watermelons or peaches from the back of a truck parked on the roadside, and most Oklahomans knew that the best watermelons and peaches were grown near the small towns of Rush Springs and Stratford, respectively. Such remnants of localized food knowledges, production systems, and culture were also interspersed with a still-widespread practice of backyard gardening. More formally, data from the USDA demonstrates that between 1992 and 2002, the total number of farms in the state increased by nearly 25%, from about 67,000 to 83,300, and most of these farms were of less than 180 acres (McDermott 2006). This represented a notable reversal of the trend towards farm consolidation characterizing the previous half-century in Oklahoma and the US more broadly, during which farm sizes increased and the total number of farms decreased. This shift offers further evidence that small-scale food production for local consumption, commodified or otherwise, continued unabated in Oklahoma up to and through the turn of the millennium, even if in a more scattered and marginal fashion, and despite the fact that the more explicitly countercultural or ‘alternative’ food ventures mentioned previously had mostly fallen by the wayside.

It was precisely these persistent elements of locally-based Oklahoma foodways that Bob Waldrop, the music director at Epiphany Catholic church in Oklahoma City, sought to weave together in the early years of the new millennium in a project that would come to

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20 Most of the residential backyards in the older neighborhoods in the towns and cities around the state are still fenced with chain link fencing, making them easily visible from the street. In my memories of being a kid riding around in a car with my grandparents in Tulsa or any number of little towns in northeastern Oklahoma, there was never a time when I didn’t see numerous yards with rows of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, squash, or okra growing.

21 Throughout this period, it should also be noted, rural producers’ cooperatives persisted throughout the state, as throughout much of the rural US. While these cooperatives in some ways sprang from different cultural and historical currents than the often-more explicitly countercultural urban buyers’ co-ops, their links to agrarian populist movements in the early 20th century and their foregrounding of mutual gain for members makes these ubiquitous enterprises exemplars of what J.K. Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006) have long-theorized as ‘diverse economies.'
serve as the basis of today’s local food movement. Raised in the cotton- and wheat-growing community of Frederick, in the far southwestern corner of the state, Waldrop was by middle-age one of a number of rural Oklahomans transplanted to cities who longed for the fresh produce, dairy, and meats he recalled from his youth. In 2001, he began searching for local producers from whom he eventually hoped to be able to purchase as much of his household’s food supply as possible. As he accumulated knowledge of and connections with local producers, he started a website to share his experiences and connect with other Oklahomans interested in direct-purchasing from farmers and ranchers. In December of 2002, he posted a message titled “My Christmas Gift” to several e-mail listservs, most notably the discussion group affiliated with the Oklahoma Sustainability Network — a nascent organization of individuals, academics, and professionals interested in environmental issues in the state, which would grow rapidly over the next few years. Waldrop’s message described some of the basic principles and observations that ultimately went into formulating the Oklahoma Food Cooperative. First, based on his travels around the state and interactions with producers and consumers, Waldrop asserted that there was a considerable unmet demand for locally-grown foods and a growing number of producers in the state seeking to make direct sales to customers. This observation was echoed in subsequent years by formal studies that noted the lack of sufficient infrastructural and

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22 E-mail message, Robert Waldrop to [ok-sus] listserv, 26 Dec 2002.
political economic structures — including regulatory frameworks, distribution and retail models, and state support — through which the growing number of small- to mid-sized producers interested in direct or localized sales might meet burgeoning consumer demand (Diamond and Barham 2012; Day-Farnsworth et al. 2009; Zajfen 2008). Secondly, Waldrop pointed out that the primary mechanism connecting local producers and consumers at that time was farmers’ markets, a model which demands that each producer staff her/his individual stall, requiring producers to either spend time away from their farms or hire staff members.

From these points, and drawing a comparison to cooperatively owned ‘antique malls,’ Waldrop argued that an efficient way to overcome these limits to the growth of the market for locally grown foods was to form a cooperative retail store based in Oklahoma City, selling primarily products grown or made in Oklahoma. Demarcating thus the sourcing region of this proposed venture was only one of the elements that distinguished Waldrop’s ideas from standard buyers’ clubs or retail cooperatives: additionally, this store would be owned by both producers and consumers; it might have a health department-approved kitchen where producers could make processed foods; customer-members might even “develop a line of Oklahoma food products using ingredients they are buying from farmers, and market them through the cooperative” or market Oklahoma-made non-food items such as recycled paper products; the store might operate a small mill to process locally-raised grains; and the cooperative might entice a local credit union to open a counter at the store for banking services for members.

While the cooperative that eventually emerged from this idea was quite different from the retail storefront-based model described here, it is striking to note the degree to which Waldrop’s ‘Christmas gift’ of an idea brings together in one spatial node key elements of a regional food system, including production, processing, finance, and retail. Such
infrastructural nodes have come to be called ‘regional food hubs’ and have attracted considerable attention from state agencies, food activists and entrepreneurs, and academics (e.g. Barham et al. 2012; Mount 2012; Blay-Palmer et al. 2013). A recent USDA report notes that (Matson et al. 2013), while a number of food hubs that have appeared in the past 5-10 years are structured as cooperatives, several of these have been modeled specifically on the Oklahoma Food Cooperative that emerged from Waldrop’s early idea, which envisioned a cooperative with far-reaching potential: “So that’s the concept,” Waldrop wrote. “If it sounds crazy, consider what Wal-Mart has done with Sam’s [Club].”

That such a concept may have emerged in part from Oklahoma, and as we shall see caught on and expanded rapidly there, might tempt readers to imagine this case as an aberration, an anomaly, or a contradiction in what is often portrayed as monolithically conservative ‘red state America.’ Waldrop, however, contextualizes the co-op within the history of radicalism in the state, mentioning the Green Corn Rebellion of 1917; the first state flag of Oklahoma — a white star against a red field, about which Waldrop notes, “And that was in 1907, when a red flag meant something!”; the state’s official motto, Labor Omnia Vincit, or ‘labor conquers all’; and a grave marker in Frederick that reads, below the name of the interred, “Buried here, in fervent hope of the resurrection of the dead and the collapse of the capitalist system.” For Waldrop, moreover, the cooperative foundations he envisioned in his early sketch of a local food enterprise are linked tightly to his longterm interest in Liberation Theology and radical Catholicism. His commitments to social justice, particularly with respect to poverty and food security, led him to found the Oscar Romero Catholic Worker House in Oklahoma City in the 1990s, a loosely organized group focused

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23 Baird and Goble (2008) offer a brief account of this rural uprising; for a lengthier, more thoughtful and critical account, see Sellars (2010).

24 Interview, 7/15/2009.
on distributing food to low-income Oklahoma Citians. As Waldrop began holding meetings with small groups throughout the state in 2003 interested in his local food retail enterprise idea, he turned for inspiration to the Basque industrial cooperative Mondragón and the ideals of its founder, Padre José María Arizmendiarrrieta Madariaga. As we shall see, the motivations for participation in the OFC vary significantly among members, and have done so since the inception of the cooperative. However, Waldrop’s passionate social, political, and religious convictions, alongside his abundant enthusiasm and remarkable charisma, undoubtedly played a central role in not only establishing the cooperative foundations of the local food movement, but also in orienting those foundations around the group’s three stated core values of social justice, environmental stewardship, and economic sustainability.

2.1 The territory of industrialized food in Oklahoma

The convergence of Waldrop’s travels around the state in search of food sources, his experiences growing up in rural Oklahoma and becoming involved in radical politics, and his ‘Christmas gift’ letter to (at least somewhat) like-minded individuals and groups in the state, was a seminal moment in disrupting the well-established territory of industrial agricultural in Oklahoma. To understand the significance of this moment, we must briefly consider the nature of that territory. In many respects, the development of the state’s food systems mirrors that of the US broadly: farms have become more consolidated, more capital-intensive, and more oriented towards commodity crop production (McDermott 2006). Animal production, by far the largest agricultural sector in the state, generating market value of over $5.25 billion in 2012, or about 74% of total agricultural sales, is dominated by confined animal feeding operations (National Agricultural Statistics Service 2014). Hog and chicken operations in particular have generated considerable conflict over ecological impacts,

http://www.justpeace.org/
particularly around waste disposal and water contamination (cf. Hines 2010). As the majority of cattle and wheat operations are located in the more arid western half of the state, depletion of groundwater is a major concern alongside political struggles over surface water resources (cf. Malewitz 2013). The shift towards concentrated commodity production has also entailed a loss of crop diversity: in 1940, twenty different kinds of crops and livestock were produced on at least 10% of Oklahoma farms, but by 2002 that figure had dropped to just four, including cattle, hay, horses, and wheat (McDermott 2006).

If poverty rates in rural counties are any indication, the current structure of agriculture in the state is not a viable basis for rural economies: in 2010, while the state’s average poverty rate was 17% (compared to 15.1% nationally), rates were much higher in rural areas, exceeding 23% in eleven rural counties (Wertz 2011). It seems clear that the majority of farmers in the state are struggling to survive in a top-heavy agricultural economy: while sales in 2012 for the state’s largest 3500 farms — about 4.4% of all Oklahoma farms — averaged over $800,000, roughly 46,000 farms, or about 57%, generated less than $10,000 in sales that year (National Agricultural Statistics Service 2014). Ninety-seven farms generated $5 million or more in sales, together representing at least 66% of all agricultural sales in 2012. Moreover, while direct sales — an important source of revenue for small farms — increased in the US overall in the early years of the millennium as noted above, they have recently declined precipitously in Oklahoma, from $11.5 million in 2007 to $7.6 million in 2012.26

In short, in a state where conventional production dominates agriculture, and cattle and wheat operations generate billions of dollars worth of products, most of which is

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26 Intriguingly, this picture is complicated by the fact that, following a relatively stable period between 1982-2002, direct sales in Oklahoma rose markedly from 2002 to 2007, jumping from about $2 million to $11.5 million. Thus, while direct sales remained significantly higher in 2012 compared to the previous thirty year average, they have clearly fallen from a notable peak that occurred at some point between 2002 and 2012, a period that roughly corresponds to the lifespan of the OFC to date.
exported from the state, small- to mid-sized farmers struggle along with rural economies in general. In a darkly ironic twist, nearly half of the state’s seventy-seven counties — most of which are rural and agricultural — are classified as food deserts (McDermott 2006). The state’s health department links this food system structure to abysmal public health in Oklahoma, particularly with respect to obesity and diabetes, the rates for both of which doubled in the 1990s (ibid.). Given these negative implications of Oklahoma’s industrially-dominated food systems, it seems hardly surprising that, following the argument of early AFN scholars discussed above, the territorialization of food systems by industrial agribusiness in some respects produced a backlash, which eventually took the form of the OFC. We can now go on to consider how the OFC, once established, began to draw together a series of disparate elements, to form its own territory. This in turn demands that we also examine the nature of this nascent territory.

2.2 Territory, the refrain, and the ‘noble nature’ of the early OFC

To better understand this opening of the territory of industrial food to the deterritorializing force of what would become the local food movement, I draw on Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘the refrain,’ their term for the tripartite process through which territory is produced, stabilized, and eventually overcome or transformed. The first of these three steps involves the emplacement or marking of a point, a punctuation mark amidst the constitutive flows of the world (or ‘chaos’), which Deleuze and Guattari describe with this example (1987/1980, p. 311): “A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost, he takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as best he can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos.” Around this initial point, a territory can begin to emerge as various components become organized, rhythmic,
expressive. This second movement of the refrain, the emergence of a ‘home’ or ‘abode,’ Deleuze and Guattari liken to drawing a circle around the initial point; here, we might imagine the first weedy vegetation growing in a crack in an abandoned road, which attracts various insects and other organisms, eventually forming a layer of soil, in which small saplings begin to take root as the beginnings of a forest. Central to this second movement is that various components of the territorial assemblage begin to harness and intensify particular qualities as they are articulated with other components; the territory is becoming expressive. The refrain’s third movement occurs once a territory has become expressive and stable enough to open a crack or a ‘line of flight’ to its outside, a deterritorializing passage towards unknown futures, “not on the side where the old forces press against [the circle] but in another region, one created by the circle itself” (ibid).

There is no doubt that the dominance of CFNs and the widespread perception that this territory was linked to pervasive health problems and negative ecological and economic impacts in rural Oklahoma in some respects produced the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the OFC and the local food movement more broadly. A number of OFC members that I spoke with explicitly cited major health problems, for example, such as battles with cancer or diabetes, which they saw as directly linked to industrial foods, as the primary reason for their initial involvement with the cooperative. Similarly, the state health department’s interest in food relocalization, which dates back at least as far as the early 2000s, when the first statewide food policy council was active, stemmed from growing concern about the Oklahoma’s pitiful public health record. Ecological concerns were also central to the support of many early OFC members in particular, as attested to by the fact that a number of founding members were involved in the Oklahoma Sustainability Network, whose e-mail listserv has long been cited by Waldrop as the most important recipient of his ‘Christmas gift’ message. Such concerns for the health of people, ecologies, and rural
economies in Oklahoma merged at the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, a non-profit organization that generates research, offers various grants to producers, and serves pedagogical functions throughout the state. A report generated by the Kerr Center in the early years of the new millennium (McDermott 2006) offered a comprehensive assessment of the state’s food systems that, while careful not to criticize dominant agribusiness actors in Oklahoma, fervently promoted local food systems as integral to improving the ecological, economic, and social well-being of the state.

Nevertheless, the early years of the OFC suggest that in analyzing this enterprise we do not view it as a primarily reactive entity, as defining itself, in other words, against or as an alternative to something else per se. While many members frequently criticize large-scale or conventional agriculture and situate their involvement with the OFC in this critical context, motivations for participation vary widely among members. Most of the producers that I spoke with typically identified a mixture of market opportunity and ecological and social benefits as important motivators, while customer members tended to foreground health and taste concerns. I delve further into the nuances of member positionalities below, but for now I’d like to emphasize again that in the midst of these diverse motivations, a forward-rushing, improvisational attitude towards the nascent project of relocalizing food was a prominent characteristic of the OFC in its first several years of existence, as suggested by the comments of a former president quoted in this chapter’s opening vignette. Several founding members echoed these sentiments, casting a general impression that the early OFC, with no pre-existing model around which to structure the enterprise and very little collective experience running a business, overcame these apparent shortcomings by harnessing an abundance of positively-charged energy and a broadly-shared passion and enthusiasm for what the OFC materialized: an opening towards food systems explicitly understood in terms of balancing social, ecological, and economic goals.
The figure of ‘noble natures’ (or sometimes ‘the higher type’) from Nietzsche’s writings perhaps best describes such early energies of the OFC:

Compared to [the common type] the higher type is more unreasonable, for those who are noble, magnanimous, and self-sacrificial do succumb to their instincts, and when they are at their best, their reason pauses. An animal that protects its young at the risk of its life, or that during the mating period follows the female even into death, does not think of danger and death; its reason also pauses, because the pleasure in its young or in the female and the fear of being deprived of this pleasure dominate it totally: the animal becomes more stupid than usual — just like those who are noble and magnanimous (Nietzsche 1974/1887, p. 77).

In typical Nietzschean fashion, this labyrinthine passage inverts the standard Western valorizations of key concepts and values: instinct, pleasure, and desire are elevated above reason, and linked to self in a way that defies any simple distinction between self-serving and self-sacrificing behavior. As such, stupidity becomes a positive attribute associated with nobility and magnanimous action. The figure of noble, higher types portrayed here — or ‘active forces’ as Deleuze later interpreted this figure (Deleuze 2006/1962) — is appropriate for the early OFC in that founding members, in valorizing both economic and non-economic factors, clearly flouted the ‘rational,’ utility maximizing calculus typically assumed (by neoclassical economics and to a large extent by modern popular imaginaries) to serve as the basis of ‘economy.’ More specifically, they rejected prevailing economic wisdom and expert advice that held that customers and producers cannot be owners of one enterprise because they occupy positions of inherently conflicting interests: the producers were expected to seek the highest price possible while the consumers could be counted on to seek the lowest price. The founders ignored this advice, shifting instead to a discourse based on mutual well-being, as embodied in the three core values and expressed explicitly in the OFC Articles of Incorporation, which state: “The purpose of this cooperative is to provide retail marketplaces that sell Oklahoma grown and/or Oklahoma processed foods and non-food items, for the mutual benefit of its producer and customer members.”
It’s important to note here a point not often foregrounded by members’ thinking about the cooperative’s structure: producer-members are co-owners of the OFC, but as — or better also as — owners of their own separate businesses. Most producers, in other words, sell their products through a number of outlets, including the OFC. For this reason and many others, the rejection of prevailing economic orthodoxy was to have lasting import as the OFC developed, as we shall see.

The potential complications of the ownership structure in any case did not deter founders. Such heedlessness of common thinking, whether borne of progressive principles, health or taste concerns, the pursuit of more lucrative markets for small producers, or some combination of these and other factors, infused the spirit of the early OFC. This was made clear to me in numerous interviews that I conducted with founding and longterm members, and remnants of this attitude were still readily visible when I began my research with the cooperative and to a lesser extent remain discernible today. Rushing headlong towards the object of their desires for better food — defined in terms of taste but also ecological, economic, and personal health — members exhibited little fear of failure or anxiety about the unconventional structure of the enterprise or their lack of practical knowledge about running a business. This abundance of forward-rushing energy represents what might be called an affective surplus, a force that was crucial to the emergence and transformation of the OFC over time. While this asset cannot be quantified, it can certainly be registered and identified in the practices of OFC members and their accounts of involvement in the group. I will continue to refer to this force in the remainder of my account. For the moment, having traced some of the diverse elements that converged in the first movement of establishing the territory of ‘local food’ in Oklahoma, I now turn towards exploring how the OFC’s territory expanded into the second movement of the refrain, which Deleuze and
Guattari conceptualize as drawing a circle around the initial established point by way of rhythm.

3. The territory of the Oklahoma Food Cooperative: establishing rhythms

Following the joyous chaos of the first delivery day in November 2003 that I described in the opening vignette of this chapter, OFC members learned quickly through an ongoing process of trial-and-error, and the enterprise soon took on more structure. At first this structure emerged tentatively in very rudimentary forms: in one producer’s account of the first delivery day, for example, no one thought to bring a supply of pens, a calculator, or paper to write on; a supply of these and other basic materials for accounting and managing transactions was brought to the second delivery day. Around such humble technologies, the OFC became a bit more stable. Within the first year of operations, customer orders began to be coordinated through a website developed by a member who was an undergraduate student at the University of Oklahoma and dabbled in web design. At that point the designer and other members involved in the web design project felt strongly that the software be open-source, so as to enable its free use and further development by other organizations. This programming ethic fit well with the social justice commitments of some early members, but just as importantly, the OFC’s website is crucial to the functioning of the network. In addition to serving as the primary interface between producer- and customer-members and as a public face for the cooperative, it calculates and tracks sales by each producer and performs related tasks essential to the functioning of what became an accounting office, staffed by several paid employees, when the OFC began leasing a defunct meat processing facility in southwest Oklahoma City as a longer-term base for their Operations Center in 2007. Finally, the website also enables producers to print product labels

See http://www.oklahomafood.coop.
standardized in accordance with the sorting systems that guide the flow of items at the Operations Center and pick-up sites.

Needless to say, in organizational terms the website represented a major step forward from the initial practice of coordinating sales via e-mail, enabling the OFC to handle an increasingly complex spatiotemporal network directing a steadily growing volume of sales. While still a work in progress, the system has been considered innovative enough to attract the attention of more than a dozen other cooperatives across the US and abroad, many of which have sent representatives to study the OFC’s functional model and ownership structure. As I explained in Chapter One, the OFC does not operate a storefront, like a conventional grocery buyers’ co-op, but instead facilitates the exchange of goods through a website in a monthly ordering cycle, where producer-members located across the state list the items they have available for purchase in a given month. OFC customer-members, also located across the state, have two weeks each month to peruse the several thousand products on offer, ranging from grass-fed beef to artisanal soaps, and select their desired purchases. On the third Thursday of each month, producers converge on Oklahoma City to deliver customers’ orders to the Operations Center, where dozens of ‘crediteers’ receive and sort items according to categories of perishability and destination. Once all products have been checked-in, they are again loaded up and driven to several dozen pick-up sites in cities and towns spanning much of the state (see fig. 2 below).

28 Included in this list are the Nebraska Food Cooperative, Ottawa Valley Food Coop, Massachusetts Local Food, Idaho’s Bounty Cooperative, Lake County Community Coop in CA, and at least ten other enterprises.

29 This term was coined by an OFC member to denote a member who exchanges their labor for work credits that can be spent on any item sold through the OFC. The cooperative’s monthly delivery days require a significant expansion in labor compared to the labor needs of the rest of each month, thus volunteers’ active participation at the Operations Center and pick-up sites, as well as in driving delivery routes to pick-up sites, is absolutely critical. The term ‘crediteer’ was initially suggested by OFC management as a way of emphasizing the importance of this contribution to producers, some of whom resisted attempts to raise compensation rates for volunteers, and as a way of showing appreciation to the volunteer laborers themselves by signifying a distinction between their work and that of unpaid volunteers. I further discuss some of these issues later in this and the subsequent chapters.
A sampling of these sites provides a sense of the spatial and material heterogeneity of the OFC. Here we find, in addition to several sites located in the homes of OFC members: In Norman, ABLE (Able Bodies Learning to Excel) Community Based Services, a United Way agency. In Ponca City, the Standing Bear Memorial. In Seminole, the city Chamber of Commerce. In Weatherford, Lucille’s Roadhouse. And in Muskogee, “NE corner of York St. and Shawnee Ave. Large empty parking lot where Wal-Mart used to be.” These and other semi-public places are transformed for one evening each month by a flurry of activity on delivery day: local members, both crediteers and volunteers, arrive to set up tables, unpack and sort products, and greet customers, who move around the site, searching ice chests for their purchases, chatting with other customers and volunteers, and so on. By
late evening, the OFC has packed up and dispersed, leaving the sites to revert to their habitual configurations. The ephemeral nature of these pick-up sites is important to the cooperative in that they represent little to no investment of fixed capital, thus minimizing path-dependency and facilitating a more modular distribution network that can be shifted in accord with changing membership participation and market conditions. As such, the number and location of sites has ebbed and flowed to some extent over time.

During the cooperative’s early years, the number of producer-members grew alongside a steady growth in customer-membership. Most of this growth came from word of mouth, augmented by favorable coverage in the local press and Waldrop’s continual fervent recruitment of producers and consumers. While customer-members were then and remain now primarily concentrated in the state’s largest cities, there have always been a substantial number of customers in smaller cities and towns across the state as well. Producers are also widely dispersed, which is significant in part because growing conditions vary tremendously in Oklahoma, a state with an inordinately high diversity of eco-regions (Woods et al. 2005), making the OFC as a whole relatively resilient and flexible in terms of confronting the vagaries and extremes of Oklahoma’s climate.³⁰

The spatial heterogeneity represented by production, consumption, and distribution sites brought together in the OFC was matched by a wide range of social milieus, each situated within specific historical-geographical trajectories, that were also drawn into the territory of local food. A variety of religions and churches, for example, have played key roles in the OFC since its inception. Of the thirty-nine current pick-up sites, churches host

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³⁰A typical year in Oklahoma includes drought, tornadoes, ice, hail, and snow storms, wildfires, intense thunderstorms, and temperatures ranging from the single digits to 120 degrees Fahrenheit over the course of the year and often fluctuating wildly in a single day. Such extremes appear to be increasing alongside global climate change. A number of producers mention climate as one of the biggest challenges they face in their operations. Intriguingly, several OFC members have speculated that, as extensive as the grip of conventional agribusiness on the state may currently be, it would likely be even more complete if certain parts of the state weren't so unfavorable to conventional methods. This suggestion resonates with Buck et al.’s (1997) findings that organic farms located on more marginal land in California were typically annexed by agribusiness later than those in prime production areas.
fourteen, the significance of which for the OFC cannot be overstated. First, they provide essential infrastructure for the OFC, free of charge, in the form of shelter, heat and air-conditioning, tables, chairs, phone lines, parking lots, lights, electricity, internet service, restrooms, meeting rooms, and kitchens. No less important for being obvious, it is difficult to imagine the OFC without these sites and the array of non-human actors they marshal in its service. Additionally, churches are often a source of new members, as word of the co-op travels through these tightly knit social networks. In these cases, members who first hear of the OFC through church connections may decide to join for any number of reasons, but several members explicitly contextualize their reasons for participation in terms of religious or moral positions. This highlights the capacity of churches to produce and disseminate particular ideals. Several examples suffice to suggest how these ideals inform the dynamics of the OFC. As outlined above, founder Bob Waldrop was inspired by Liberation Theology and radical Catholicism. Similarly, two producer-members whom I will call Melanie and Steve Monett described themselves, when they initially contacted me in response to a request for interviews and site visits, as “traditional Catholics who are interested in the teachings of Father McNabb and other writers of distributionist movement,” a strand of religious philosophy focused on social justice as achieved through a broad distribution of ownership of the means of production (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. 224). Drawing on these teachings in discussions within the OFC and in regional and statewide food policy councils, the Monetts frequently bring up issues relating to labor justice and unequal access to healthy food in the state.

Waldrop and the Monetts are but two examples among many of OFC members and others involved with food networks in the state whose practices and participation are

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31 As many of the topics discussed in interviews for this research sometimes required respondents to share quite personal perspectives and politically sensitive information, I use pseudonyms for most research participants, with the exception of elected officials in the cooperative in contexts that I am confident are reasonably uncontroversial.
informed directly by their religious or spiritual beliefs. The Monetts identify with a larger
group of Catholics, for instance, who have relocated from various locations to the Ouachita
Mountains in eastern Oklahoma following the construction of a Benedictine Abbey, Our
Lady of Clear Creek Monastery, in a remote area near the small town of Hulbert. The
Abbey itself is a producer-member of the OFC, raising lamb following “management
practices…derive(d) from the rural French peasant shepherd tradition,” that has received no
artificial hormones or antibiotics, and is fed and ‘finished’ on grass that is not treated with
herbicides or pesticides. These practices, like those of the Monetts and several other OFC
producer-members, are understood as an expression of proper stewardship of God’s
creation.

Two additional points must be offered here in regard to churches as actors in the
OFC. First, it is not a conceptual mistake to assert that ideals emanate from churches, as
opposed to ‘religion’ per se. Religious ideals become durable and expansive in space and time
through the action of not only missionaries, messiahs, and charismatic leaders, but also
sanctuaries, temples, hymnals, organs, incense burners, robes, icons, and so on. To the extent
that particular expressions of religious ideals such as social justice and environmental
stewardship are important to the OFC, the effectiveness of these ideals can’t be understood
apart from churches and the myriad actors assembled in and around these ‘congregations.’

Indeed, while describing the production methods practiced by the monks of Clear
Creek as following in “the rural French peasant shepherd tradition” may appear to be simply
a marketing strategy employed to appeal to Francophile Oklahoma ‘foodies,’ these methods
and the religious ideals that accompany them arrived in the Ouachita Mountains from
France through a network that cannot easily be reduced to a particular ideology or series of
representations. Russell Hittinger (1999) traces this flow of knowledge, ideals, practices, and

http://oklahomafood.coop/Producer_Info.aspx?Producer_ID=52
materials to The Pearson College Integrated Humanities Program at the University of Kansas, whose federally funded “experimental program in ‘Tradition’…had just enough countercultural edge to attract a surprising number of students.” For several years beginning in 1970, dozens of students in the program traveled to Europe “to study rural life,” two of whom pursued a desire to hear Gregorian chants performed to the French village of Fontgombault. More than 100 KU students followed the initial two, and several of these immigrants took monastic vows or became priests. While internal conflicts at KU, including “allegations of religious proselytizing and brainwashing…brought against the faculty” (ibid.), soon brought about the dissolution of the program, some of the Americans remained in Fontgombault, learning and practicing Gregorian chant, the spiritual teachings of the Benedictine tradition, and the farming and animal husbandry methods of central France. When, for reasons that vary in different accounts, the Benedictines sought a site for a new American monastery, the archdiocese of Tulsa suggested a plot of land in Cherokee County. Several of the monks sent to found the monastery at Clear Creek were among the original group of emigrants from KU in the 1970s.

The second point to be made about churches as active in the assembly of the OFC is that in addition to the Catholic faith, a range of protestant denominations is represented in this list, including Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, and ‘evangelical,’ as well as two Unitarian Universalist Fellowships. While representing only a small portion of the world’s religious diversity, this variety of faiths does imply a range of philosophical positions and stances on social and political issues. The capacities of churches as transmitters of ideals are not confined, of course, to the support of any one understanding of the co-op’s core values, or of a host of other concepts and issues. To the contrary, not only a diversity of religious faiths but also a wide range of political, social, and philosophical positions are drawn together in the weave of social milieus constituting the OFC.
3.1 Difference as an evolutionary resource

This brings us to another distinguishing feature of the cooperative that was influential in shaping the relational dynamics of the expanding territory of local food: an explicit commitment to focusing exclusively in the OFC on “food politics” and leaving other political and social positions outside of co-op discussion. Many members emphasized to me that this stance was both a prerequisite for and by-product of the basic structure of the enterprise since the beginning, bringing together as it does rural producers, who tend to (or at least are often perceived to) embrace more conservative political and social perspectives, and mostly urban consumers, who tend to (or are often thought to) lean in more progressive directions. Quoting from the OFC website, “Among our producer and customer members we find a diversity of lifestyles, beliefs, cultures and religions. Even so, we find common ground based on our mutual need for a marketplace where we can find good, healthy, nutritious local foods.” As Waldrop puts it, many of the “urban liberals” involved are surprised that the co-op doesn’t take a position on “the whole laundry list” of issues, but he insists that this focus on “food politics” allows for the widest possible range of inclusion, making a space in which members with a diversity of positions can find common ground upon which to build. In Waldrop’s words, the OFC has learned that “the conservative fundamentalist Baptist would actually be willing to shake hands with the lesbian Wiccan, as long as it was over a bag of locally grown carrots.”

Some members acknowledge that as a result of being drawn into regular contact on common ground with a diverse range of others, participation tends to have deeply transformative effects on their perspectives and practices with respect to food in particular.

33 These generalizations are of course simplistic and problematic to the extent that they assume a natural and unchanging correlation between urbanity/rurality and progressivism/conservatism. The point is that many OFC members recognize the problems with such essentializing assumptions and indeed often invoke these categories specifically to highlight the cooperative’s commitment to viewing diversity as a resource in the ongoing development of the OFC.

34 Interview with Bob Waldrop, 7/15/2009.
This was particularly true of the early years of the cooperative, when the membership was small enough to facilitate more direct interactions between members. One longtime customer-member, for example, describes how her practices have changed “pretty radically” as a result of being involved in the OFC, noting that her family now buys 50% of their food and other products through the co-op, and attempts to supplement that as much as possible with food from farmers’ markets or locally owned businesses. She also sees changes in “simple things, like I won't buy anything from KFC anymore, because I took the time to do some research and find out how the chickens are raised…I’m not going to support that in any way, shape or form. If we need milk or butter, we buy it from Braum’s because again I’ve done the research and I know that they treat their animals in an ethical way.⁵⁵ Plus, it's closer to being a local business than[...]the others. So it's made us much more conscious of what we’re buying and who we’re buying it from. And that's directly related to the co-op.”

This statement underscores claims made by Waldrop and other members that producers and customers alike might embrace a variety of positions on economic and ecological issues when they join the OFC, but can generally be seen to undergo a process of “evolution,” to use a commonly-deployed term in the OFC, as they practice membership, often moving increasingly towards an understanding of economy and ecology that more explicitly brings ethical considerations with respect to ecological or social issues into play alongside individual utility maximization. To cite another example, early on in the co-op’s development several members pushed to make organic certification mandatory. This idea was resisted on the grounds that the amount of money and time required for certification would present barriers for many smaller producers. Also, some members understood that organic production alone does not necessarily address social justice issues. Such concerns

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⁵⁵ Braum's is an Oklahoma-based regional chain of fast food restaurants, most of which feature small grocery stores. The company maintains their own herd of cattle for dairy and meat products, and while beef cattle are "finished" in feedlots, Braum's purportedly eschews added growth hormones. Food-conscious Oklahomans tend to view Braum's as less unsavory than global fast food chains.
were balanced alongside a general trend noted by many members that saw producer-
members adopting increasingly ecologically-oriented production methods as a result of
participation in the cooperative. Based on comments from a number of members, my
impression is that by and large, members had more faith in this pedagogic capacity of the
OFC than formal certification by external bodies. I will return to the topic of certification,
but for now I’ll note that producers are vetted by the OFC as part of a membership
application process, which includes a site visit to confirm that they meet a baseline of
ecological production standards.

In the early years of the OFC in particular, many members recognized in themselves
and their fellow members these processes of transformation or “evolution,” and saw this
capacity as essential to the group’s ability to grow and adapt to changing conditions in a
challenging market. Moreover, a number of members spoke to me about the importance of
allowing the process of transformation to unfold in an open manner, without being too
yoked to a particular understanding of what the three core values, or the OFC more broadly,
signified. In this sense, the early OFC was arguably characterized by two important
distinguishing features. First, members tended to strike what might be called an anti-
essentialist stance towards the cooperative, in that they understood the identity of the
enterprise in terms that were relatively flexible, multiple, and contingent, rather than rigidly
attached to an unchanging, internal essence. Secondly, this stance was often accompanied by
a commitment to democratic participation and harnessing difference as a resource in shaping
the flexible identity of the enterprise alongside the perpetual process of personal and
collective “evolution” described above. A detailed discussion of the precise nature and
mechanics of this democratic ideal exceeds the ambit of this dissertation, but I will return to
consider this topic further in Chapter Eight.
For the moment, suffice it to say that the early OFC’s stance towards its internal politics lay somewhere near the intersection of ‘deliberative democratic’ (Young 1997; Elster 1998) and ‘agonistic democratic’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Fraser 1996) ideals, coupled with the notion that spatial propinquity and interaction with diverse others can foster a progressive democratic spirit (e.g. Tajbakhsh 2001; Sennett 1999). These ideals emphasize notions of democracy that foreground, to varying degrees, processes of negotiation and contestation, aspects that have certainly been prominent in the OFC since very early on. By no means do I wish to imply here that such negotiations or processes of personal transformation are always harmonious or trouble-free. Indeed, we shall see that tensions between members have at times run very high, not least of all around the OFC’s core value of social justice.

3.2 Difference, social justice, and inclusivity

Unsurprisingly perhaps, given the well-documented tendency of AFNs towards exclusivity and the often elite subject positions of AFN participants, social justice is the most contentious of the OFC’s three core values and has been since the early years. As questions about its precise meaning and the best ways to put it into practice are often the source of debate in the OFC, this topic deserves close attention in any consideration of how difference functions in the cooperative. This is a complex issue, and one that has reverberated in different ways as the local food movement has expanded, so I return to it throughout the remainder of the dissertation. For the moment, it’s sufficient to point out that the most consistent understandings of social justice expressed by OFC members in my interactions with them — including a series of interview questions related to this topic — focused on ensuring that producers were able to practice small-scale, ecologically-friendly production methods in a way that was economically feasible. In material terms, this is
accomplished in part by the fact that the OFC only appropriates a small percentage of each sale — 10% from the customer and 10% from the producer — compared to the cut taken by most retail operations, which varies by product but often exceeds 50% of the sale price. Given the structure of the agricultural industry in Oklahoma and in more industrialized countries more broadly, as discussed above, the OFC’s commitment to social justice as expressed through this particular facet of appropriating only 10% of sales from producers as an avenue through which to make unconventional agricultural livelihoods more viable is a highly significant goal.

To a lesser extent, concerns with producer viability were sometimes linked to ensuring that consumers had the choice to purchase healthy and nutritious foods, which some but certainly not all members acknowledge is problematic to the extent that purchasing power and thus consumer choice is not equal among all Oklahomans. As one OFC manager put it in response to a question about how the cooperative practices the core value of social justice, “We’re trying to make it to where we’re making local food available to anyone in the state who wants[…] to purchase it regardless of any demographic, you know. And hopefully we don’t price people [out].”36 Continuing to muse on this question, he reflected that local food is by and large more expensive, and locally made products carry [a premium]…you know, you’re getting the actual cost, because […] most of our producers don’t have the economies of scale on their side. They’re small scale producers. A cattle rancher who has fifty or a hundred head of cattle is not going to be able to buy as much grain at a time as a confined animal feeding operation who has thousands and thousands of animals. So, you know they’re not getting some of the some of the scale benefits, so the food’s gonna be more expensive. We like to think that we can sell local food to anyone, regardless of how much money they have but, you know… One of the things we could do to make that better would be to figure out a way — and I think we sporadically have people trying to figure out — how to take EBT cards and food stamps and things like that.

This member’s comments well represent a general stance struck by members when discussing social justice: the OFC does not and should not actively discriminate against

36 Interview, 10/27/2011.
people based on race, income, or other markers of difference, but the cooperative's capacity to make their foods accessible to all Oklahomans is limited by wide ranging forces. In the preceding quote, these forces are cast primarily in terms that are easy to read as basic neoclassical economic understandings of the benefits of economies of scale. However, this particular OFC member and most others that I spoke with also noted the extent to which other structural factors disadvantage small-scale producers, including regulatory frameworks designed for large-scale conventional operations; purchasing agreements with retailers and wholesalers, which are typically based on high-volume, low-margin production systems; and the loss of particular knowledges and cultural understandings such as how to prepare and appreciate a wide range of fresh, unprocessed foods. Additionally, most producers that I interacted with commented on the reliance of large-scale farms on exploitative labor practices. As this list of concerns suggests, many actively-involved OFC members do take a nuanced and critical view of the structure of food systems. But by and large, these interpretations, particularly in terms of conceptualizing social justice, tend to steer primarily towards the negative effects of structural problems on producers rather than consumers, i.e. the ability for producers to operate in a market that is systematically stacked against them rather than the ability for consumers to access foods in a market that systematically disadvantages some more than others.

This is not universally true among members, some of whom do critically evaluate structural impacts on both producers and consumers. When pressed, moreover — and my interviews did include several follow-up questions that explicitly addressed issues of consumer access and its relationship to axes of difference such as race and class — most members that I spoke with did agree that consumer access is central to the OFC's core value of social justice. This is also reflected by repeated efforts to enable the cooperative to accept various forms of publicly supported food assistance, as mentioned by the OFC member
quoted above, such as WIC and SNAP.\(^{37}\) Also of note here is the OFC’s long-standing policy of offering low income memberships, in which the initial membership fee of $51.75 is paid for by member donations. OFC leaders often note that members can earn work credits towards food purchases, and there is virtually always a need for more laborers. However, it’s not evident, of course, whether low-income Oklahomans would typically decide that earning work credits towards high-priced foods was the best usage of their labor. It must be stated clearly here that nearly all of the members that I talked with recognized that these efforts to increase access and become more broadly inclusive were insufficient. Just as frequently however, members expressed that they did not know how to combat the larger conditions shaping the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion, not least of all because most OFC producers are themselves struggling small- to mid-sized farmers and the OFC itself has never been a profitable venture, despite its rapid growth.\(^{38}\)

Under these challenging conditions, questions of inclusivity are frequently accompanied by heated debates among OFC leadership, which can expose some of the starker political divides between members. At the first board meeting I attended in 2009, for instance, held in the stifling heat of the Operations Center, discussion about accepting food stamps revealed broadly divergent imaginaries of poverty and the forces that shape it. These understandings reflected the general contours of broader national discussions about poverty in the US. Some members argued forcefully that the OFC should not be in the business of

\(^{37}\) Neither a retail outlet nor a wholesaler, the OFC is legally classified under the obscure category of ‘cross-docking operation.’ Evidently it is uncommon for these operations to seek to participate in public assistance programs. As of April, 2014, after expending considerable labor time navigating state bureaucracies and being rejected numerous times due to the basic fact that state agencies had no idea how to articulate the unique legal status and structure of the OFC with existing guidelines for public assistance programs, the cooperative was still unable to accept EBT and other forms of public assistance.

\(^{38}\) The reader should bear in mind here that while a number of individual producer-members do earn profits through their OFC sales, and several run businesses that are successful by many measures, the 20% of sales appropriated by the cooperative typically does not cover operations costs. Waldrop has long considered taking the advice of a past president of the Cooperative Grocers Association, who suggested that the OFC would eventually be forced to increase the share of sales appropriated, in accord with most retail cooperatives. Thus far, this idea has been nearly universally resisted by board-members. Needless to say, the lack of profitability has long been a major concern for the OFC, which has remained afloat to a large degree because of a constant stream of new members, whose initial membership fees provide a source of additional operating revenue. I discuss some of the problems associated with this dynamic in Chapter Three.
giving “handouts” and fostering dependence, while others argued just as fervently that poverty cannot be understood as the product of individual actions and that the OFC should not contribute to ongoing cycles of marginalization and exclusion. As we will see in subsequent chapters, such tensions have shaped the ongoing development of the local food movement, and questions of social justice have taken some perhaps surprising and certainly far-reaching turns, even as efforts to make the OFC more broadly-inclusive have generally been pushed to the background by the daily pressures to keep the enterprise afloat on a shoestring budget.

The issue of justice illustrates that the notion of difference as an evolutionary resource is by no means always a harmonious process. As we shall see, the internal struggles of the OFC have taken serious tolls on many of the most active members and have shaped the subsequent development of the local food movement in significant ways. However, an agonistic or deliberative approach to democratic processes should not be thought of as easy or smooth, and on a fundamental level, what’s important here is that the OFC, particularly in its early years, foregrounded the importance of negotiating differences as a key to the group’s development. As a result, for several years the group managed to allow divergent positions to unfold in nuanced and often unpredictable ways, rather than operating as monolithic fault-lines along which unbridgeable ruptures were bound to develop. Like the forward-rushing attitude of the early OFC, this stance towards difference as a resource in self-overcoming was very much of a piece with the ‘noble nature’ of the cooperative in its early years, which also found expression in the shifting balance between competition and cooperation in the enterprise.
3.3 Competition/cooperation

As already mentioned above, the concept of mutual well-being was central to the vision of founders. Numerous examples of mutual well-being as a major factor in decision-making were provided by the practices of producers, which I observed personally in many cases, and learned about through the accounts of others in many other instances. For example, a number of producers told me that they consider potential impacts on other members when making pricing decisions. Several producers emphasized their commitment to sourcing materials within the coop whenever possible, and producers frequently buy inputs and materials together in bulk, in the style of traditional producers’ cooperatives. Producers often carpool to delivery day, or pool funds to allow one producer from their part of the state to drive products to Oklahoma City and back on delivery day, and many share techniques and innovations. Innumerable examples of pulling together under trying circumstances could be named: in one case, when a mushroom producer had to leave the state for a family emergency, another nearby producer harvested her crop, posted her producer notes on the website for the month, and transported her product on delivery day. Alongside ‘barn raisings’ and events such as moving the central Operations Center to a new location, following extreme weather events it is common for the OFC listservs to be filled with messages coordinating members in efforts to help repair farm infrastructures or salvage crops.

In these and many other ways, the OFC actively facilitates the emergence of member subject positions that eschew the narrow self-interested calculations imagined (and in part constructed) by dominant discourses of economy, formal and popular. These observations, however, are not offered to suggest that competitive drives are absent in the OFC. Instead, and much more interestingly, forces that may be recognized as cooperative and competitive intermingle in the enterprise. As one producer put it, cooperation and “good, friendly
competition” coexist in the OFC. This coexistence is sometimes complicated by the already-noted fact that the vast majority of producer-members also market their products in a number of outlets beyond the cooperative, including farmers’ markets, restaurants, and grocery stores. That is, each of the dozens of producer-members is part owner of the cooperative while at the same time proprietor of their own production business. Needless to say, the interests of the cooperative do not always correspond, in the eyes of members, with those of each individual enterprise that is partially linked to the cooperative.

Several examples of conflict between producer-members suffice to begin sketching some of the internal challenges to the OFC’s capacity to actualize its core values. One of the original premises of the cooperative was to sell only products grown or made within the state’s borders. Founders recognized the arbitrariness of those boundaries, but as they grappled with how to set a limit on the distance that food might travel without compromising the core value of environmental stewardship, they decided that the legal and regulatory challenges that came with interstate commerce made the state’s borders a practical line of demarcation in determining what could be sold in the OFC. Fixing the meaning of the ‘local’ has proved to be a moving target, however, and debates about what constitutes a ‘local’ product have emerged on several occasions, particularly in regard to prepared foods such as frozen pizzas, burritos, spice mixtures, and sauces, and products that have significant value added in the state. In other cases, producer-members allege that some of the larger volume producers in the co-op actually ship product in from states as distant as Montana to be sold in the OFC as ‘local food.’ Early on, the cooperative established a Standards Committee to debate, set, and enforce standards for these and other issues. As noted above, production sites are vetted by the OFC before new producer-members are allowed to join, but there is no formal process whereby standards are verified over time. The primary mechanism of ensuring compliance with standards is trust, fostered by interpersonal
interactions, monthly Producers Notes offered by producers, and the ever-present possibility of customer-members contacting producers directly or visiting production sites. A system of more rigorous and regular inspections has been proposed multiple times, but has thus far been rejected.

To cite another example of internal conflicts, several interviewees asserted that producer-members have occasionally contacted state regulatory agencies to report health violations allegedly committed by other individual producers, or in at least one case, by volunteers at the Operations Center itself on delivery day. Also, as perhaps with any organization, struggles to gain control of the OFC’s development through occupying influential positions such as board member, Standards Committee member, or elected official are not uncommon. Indeed, while the OFC’s embrace of improvisation and constant tweaking of policies and organizational structure lends the group remarkable flexibility in adapting to rapidly changing conditions, it also provides opportunities for members to attempt to direct organizational changes to their own individual benefit.

The nuanced relationship between competition and cooperation in the OFC is illustrated by an additional important example: Producers have called several times for restrictions on the number of producers of particular items that could be allowed to join the cooperative. This is a complex issue, and one that merits further study, but for the moment I’ll summarize the results by noting that each time, the board of directors has rejected this motion largely on the grounds that it would decrease effects of competition deemed desirable by board members, such as price control, innovation, and increased efficiency. As Waldrop frequently puts it, the cooperative should not “pick winners and losers” among the producers. This example suggests an understanding of markets as actively constructed, shaped, and operating according to the rules and requirements of the actors engaged in that construction, rather than universal or inherent logics. Such an understanding once again
reflects what I referred to earlier as the anti-essentialist stance of the OFC, particularly in its early years.

Similarly, the key point to highlight here is that, following the assertions of a number of members, there is no essential relationship between competition and cooperation in the OFC, either between producers and customers, management and board members, or between producers themselves, each of whom operates their own individually-owned businesses. This is not to say that the balance of this relationship is random, or does not merit critical scrutiny. Quite to the contrary, it is because the balance is nuanced, shifting, and shaped by many different forces that we must carefully analyze those forces over space and time, ultimately pursuing their interrelated threads to sometimes surprising locales.

4. A line of flight — Becoming businesslike

Indeed, by 2009, things were changing in important ways for the OFC: membership had grown to roughly 2,500, monthly sales were averaging $60,000, and there were now more than 40 pick-up sites across the state. Though still not an economic powerhouse, the stakes were increasing for producer-members. As we have glimpsed, this shift in scale had also brought a concomitant increase in organizational and functional complexity, including an open source-based website; a large fleet of ice chests owned and maintained by the co-op; substantial quantities of data, documentation, meeting minutes, and other materials related to the enterprise that had accumulated in several sites, virtual and physical, each of which was maintained in varying degrees of disorder; and an operations center in an old meatpacking plant leased by the OFC on the south side of Oklahoma City.

Amidst these changes, a major shift was underway among the co-op’s leadership and some of the most involved members. Several members who were rapidly becoming some of the more successful producers in the OFC had taken on considerable responsibility, and
were performing much of the labor required for the co-op to function, especially on delivery day itself. These newly central figures were increasingly frustrated with the improvised, informal approach that had characterized the OFC’s operations since the beginning, and they soon began to argue for and implement measures to increase efficiency and accountability. This dynamic lay at the heart of what in retrospect a number of OFC members recognized as a shift from the “first generation” of leadership to a largely distinct “second generation.”

During this phase, the co-op’s original treasurer died suddenly, and it quickly came to light that the OFC’s accounting records, to the extent that they had ever been formalized and recorded, were largely lost. What little remained of that data was in complete disarray. One of the producer-members rapidly rising in the OFC at the time, despite having little to no expertise in accounting, stepped in to attempt to reconstruct several years’ worth of record-keeping. Many centrally-involved members have from that period to the present related that confronting this accounting morass was a fundamental turning point for the cooperative. For one thing, it was decided that the new treasurer should be paid an hourly wage for her work in that capacity, and this marked the beginning of a growing trend in which managers and other non-delivery day positions were remunerated in wages rather than work credits.

But a broader shift was underway as well. It was during this period that I first did preliminary fieldwork with the OFC, and at one lengthy board meeting in the summer of 2009, much discussion centered around the idea that, while the homespun approach of the early days might have worked when they were a smaller operation, it was now time to start running things “like a business.” Indeed the OFC is a business, and an increasingly important one for a number of producers and for many of the customers who were now accustomed to relying on the co-op as a source of food and products that were not readily available in Oklahoma at that time. As various ideas and interpretations of becoming-businesslike wove their way through the interviews I conducted with members, through board and
management meetings, and through discussions on OFC listservs, it became apparent that this motif was a central discursive node, through which many struggles over values gained expression and played out. The accompanying figures that are invoked may change, but the necessity of becoming-businesslike has remained a key motif and site of negotiation since at least as early as 2009. To illustrate the dynamics of this motif in action, I will turn to a humble actor that has long played a central role in the cooperative: the ice chest, or cooler, as some call this device.

4.1 The ice chest

Throughout the early debates about becoming-businesslike, ice chests were often invoked in the passionate comments of board members, in ways that both reflected and shaped the flow of ideas: In the remainder of this section, I focus on ice chests in order to better understand the generational shift among OFC leadership.

As mentioned previously, the OFC does not operate a storefront, and as such is designed to be able to coalesce and dissipate flexibly according to changing needs and circumstances. This malleability is facilitated in no small measure by ice chests. Beginning
their journey at production sites, all perishable items travel in ice chests, and/or refrigerated trailers, in the case of some larger producers. Once at the Operations Center, an array of chests waits in each section to receive, organize, and preserve products. When all items have arrived and been sorted, the full chests are loaded into vehicles and driven to pick-up sites, where they are placed in numerical order. As customers come in, they follow the numbers listed on their invoices to pick out their items from rows of ice chests around the site.

How do these ice chests act as mediators, transforming the OFC and its constituent parts? One of their primary roles is obvious, and already stated: they keep perishable items cold, slowing decomposition processes. They also work to organize items within the different sections of the distribution center according to their ultimate destination, and provide customers with a system for locating their items at pickup sites. Less obviously, they require a great deal of personal interaction between members at every step along the way (see fig. 4 below). Many of them are too large to lift individually, and require coordinated efforts between members to be moved. This often happens in a chain-like fashion, as chests are passed from person to person, from loading dock to van, trunk, or trailer. Among the many rhythms that develop during distribution day, the movement of ice chests is implicated in quite a few. Children ride on them as they’re being wheeled along. Customers chat over them as they help each other locate their respective items. Bearing in mind this list of functions, we can ask how different the OFC might be if they opted to, say, contract with a trucking company to gather items from producers and deliver to pickup sites. While this might or might not be more efficient or cost-effective, it would undoubtedly change the social dynamics of delivery day substantially.
Looking at the ice chest in this way gives us a first glimpse into how the social dynamics of the OFC and the meanings attributed to its products are shaped not only by the direct sale of products to customer-members, or by stories about cows and chickens told on the coop’s website, but also by hundreds of ice chests that make their way around the state on delivery day. To the extent that OFC members evolve or become different kinds of economic and/or ecological subjects through their participation in the OFC, we can note then that their subjectivation is achieved in part through their relations to something no more grand than insulated plastic boxes.

I’d like to pause here and note that this vignette of ice chests and the co-op of course illustrates a key aspect of assemblage thinking, the idea that for any relationship between actors – say, for example, a locally grown tomato and an elite consumer – to cohere and become durable in space and time requires the enlistment – or enrollment, as Michel Callon puts it – of a range of other actors. In the example of the local tomato and the elite consumer, for this relationship to hold requires much more than simply eliteness and localness, understood as pre-existing categories or states of being. To exist, eliteness and localness must be continually made and remade which requires the alignment of many different types of mediators. This is of course precisely the argument made by several food scholars interested in terroir and issues of quality in foods, including Becky Mansfield (2003), Elizabeth Barham (2003), and others (Blundel and Tregear 2006; MacDonald 2013). Latour's
work (2005) is helpful here, particularly his methodological injunction to trace controversies regarding several ‘sources of uncertainty about what the world is made of.’ While Latour is not specifically interested in questions of the subject, actor-network theory as a method nevertheless helps us understand how subjectivation and valorization share a mutually constitutive relationship with assemblages.

First, Latour argues that social groups cannot be assumed to exist prior to or outside the constant force required to make them cohere. This is summed up in Latour’s pithy way as “no work, no group.” We have already seen the ways in which the social grouping called the OFC is assembled and maintained in part by ice chests. Again, it’s not just that the ice chests keep food cold that is important to the OFC, but also that this capacity resides in and can’t be easily separated from other properties of the ice chest, such as their low cost and their relative portability, in which they are small and light enough to fit into many spaces and to move around relatively easily but not so easily that individuals can typically move them about on their own.

This emphasis on the ice chest also illustrates another of Latour’s sources of uncertainty, the notion that agency is not an exclusively human realm but emerges in assemblages of humans and a range of non-humans acting together. The ice chest, from this perspective, is indeed an agent, but only in conjunction with OFC members, trucks, ice, food, and so on. Seen in this way, it makes little sense to assert, as critics of assemblage approaches often do, that the ice chest is equally as powerful as the president of the OFC, or for that matter the CEO of Monsanto; instead, I would argue that the OFC president’s power rests in part on the ice chests, and vice versa. Together, the ice chests, the OFC president, and many other actors mount their challenge to agribusiness. Far from making all actors equal, however, this insight draws our attention to and demands that we closely scrutinize what the ice chests do in the assemblage of the OFC. We have seen how they
function as a kind of glue for the group’s sociality, forming part of what makes OFC members into cooperative subjects. But as it turns out, the mobility of ice chests also points us back towards an important source of tension in the OFC.

Yet another role played by the ice chests is their symbolic value in discussions of the identity of the organization itself. In addition to everything else they can do, ice chests have a capacity to disappear quite frequently. Perhaps due to their everydayness, ice chests frequently disappear over the course of a month; from a fleet numbering in the hundreds, it is not unusual for 60 or 70 ice chests to be missing at a given time. This is a matter of concern for the OFC, and in 2009 was often linked in discussions to the need for the co-op to become more “businesslike.” What exactly did this term mean? It seemed to mean different things to different members, amongst whom it could be said that a struggle to define the meaning of “businesslike” was underway. For some, it meant becoming more “organized,” adopting more complicated and formalized accounting methods and tracking systems. The haphazard, improvised, or informal methods of organization of the OFC’s early years are often referred to in the context of “how we can’t do things anymore if we want to survive.” Increasing efficiency, cutting costs, relying more on expertise – these were all tied to notions of becoming more “businesslike.”

In the case of ice chests, these interpretations of the proper way to manage a business may or may not make a significant difference. But they also related to other matters
of concern that have arisen alongside the more accurate systems of accounting that have been inspired in part by errant ice chests, for example: the number of volunteer hours being compensated by the OFC each month as compared to the size of that month’s order. From these comparisons arise questions such as, “How did we need the same number of volunteer hours in January, when orders are typically small, and in June, when orders are huge? What are these volunteers doing? Do we really need that many volunteers every delivery day?”

Given the lean financial conditions under which the OFC operates, the questions that started to be asked in 2009 about efficiency and volunteer hours are clearly important. But these questions provoked others, such as ‘might limiting work hours on delivery days, for which volunteers receive credits that can be used to purchase food, impact some members’ ability to access the benefits of the OFC?’ As noted above, the opportunity to earn work credits is one way that the often-higher priced products of the OFC are made accessible to lower-income members. Some members have argued over the years that increased vigilance of how the labor budget is spent may undermine this attempt to enact the core value of social justice in the form of accessibility.

This more businesslike OFC that began to emerge in 2009 points us to a third of Latour’s sources of uncertainty, namely the relationship between what he calls ‘matters of fact’ and ‘matters of concern.’ Calling our attention to issues of knowledge and power, Latour argues that facts are made by classifying, organizing, and fixing tensions, ruptures, and frictions that emerge in the relations between things constituting a given assemblage. This process of fact-making is of course political at every step of the way, as various actors struggle to fix the unruly phenomena of the world in ways that accord with their particular values, desires, needs, and goals. This is clearly visible in the OFC’s efforts to become more businesslike, at the center of which are accounting technologies that seek to identify specific inefficiencies in the way the business operates. Food stamps and low-income memberships,
for example, often figure into debates among board members, as I described above, in which some members highlight how efforts to include low income Oklahomans in the OFC, while perhaps laudable, are counter the imperatives of running the OFC “like a business.” Such arguments first gained force and momentum alongside and through the fact-making or fixing capacities of accounting technologies, practices, and expertise by the OFC, which initially gained traction among the group in part because of the errant tendencies of ice chests. Put in terms of subjectivity, the ice chests not only contribute to the sociality of the OFC, the making of cooperative subjects, but have also played a part in cultivating subjects of more instrumentalist visions of business.

To reiterate an earlier point, I am not arguing that ice chests are the most important actor in shaping the subjectivities of OFC members, or that they are as powerful as any other actor. Rather, I highlight their story in the OFC’s development as one illustration of how power congeals in the relationships between various kinds of actors. In tracing those relationships, the contours of power emerge. Among the second generation of OFC leadership were several individuals who by most standards possess great personal power: they are charismatic, intelligent, passionate, and hard-working. These qualities certainly contributed to the gradual assumption by these individuals of leadership of the cooperative, but they are not sufficient to explain that transition. Only by harnessing and directing the tendencies and capacities of ice chests, accounting technologies, and other actors was the

By ‘instrumental,’ I mean here something close to the way in which this term has been developed in economic sociology, particularly the work of Karl Polanyi (2001), and applied to AFN studies (e.g. Hinrichs 2000; Alkon 2008b). There, instrumentalism is understood to signify an emphasis towards profit above other considerations. This emphasis is thought to exist on a continuum, along which particular decisions can be placed depending on whether they are characterized by ‘high’ or ‘low’ degrees of instrumentalism. Instrumentalism is complicated by the continuum of ‘marketness,’ cast as the degree to which decisions are motivated by an emphasis on economy as ‘disembedded’ from society. It is on the point of embeddedness in society where my understanding of instrumentalism diverges from the sense invoked by economic sociologists, which tends to rely on a reified understanding of society as a pre-existing entity. From an assemblage or ANT perspective, ‘society’ represents not a fixed entity, or some non-economic thing, but the sum of relationships of all kinds that constitute whatever phenomena is being designated as ‘society’ or ‘social.’ Economic practices and markets are not opposed to society, from this perspective, but are among the actors that shape myriad ‘non-economic’ relationships and vice versa. With this distinction in mind, the term ‘instrumental’ should be taken here to denote the more limited meaning of an emphasis on profit over other considerations, and an effort to enroll actors as primarily instruments dedicated to profit maximization.
second generation able to open a line of flight from the increasingly organized territory of the OFC, and begin pulling that territory in a new direction, in conjunction with much wider-reaching assemblages. It should be noted here that this new tack was linked to a shift in attitude among leadership away from the active, headlong-rushing early days and towards a more defensive or reactive mode, characterized by a gathering in of resources, a drive to consolidate existing territory. In Nietzschean terms, this stance is like that of the “reasonable” animal, the one that seeks to preserve itself, that aligns with the common rather than rejecting it. This will have implications for the ongoing development of the cooperative.

5. Conclusion

We have now observed some of the diverse actors and forces that converged in the first movement of territorialization by local food in Oklahoma, and considered how these and other actors enrolled in this territory took on particular meanings and came to express certain qualities during the second movement. Through this tracing, we have begun to gain an understanding of the variable balance between competition and cooperation in the OFC, which emerges through encounters between differently situated members and a host of other actors, from mushrooms to spice mixes that may or may not be ‘local,’ and not least of all the humble figure of the ice chest. The cooperative’s active deployment of difference as a resource in self-overcoming, commitment to an anti-essentialist understanding of identity, and disdain for conventional economic wisdom, alongside an affirming, forward-rushing attitude among members, was characteristic of what I have called the ‘noble nature’ of the early OFC. This noble nature should by no means be confused with a utopian vision of the cooperative, as I demonstrated in discussions of the contested meanings of social justice for the group and the often contentious tilt of the competition/cooperation balance.
Similarly, the line of flight into new territories opened by the second generation should not be viewed as singularly linked to instrumental visions of business or the self-interested rationales of particular producer-members, or in any other unitary terms.

Remaining with the example of the ice chest for a moment allows us to see, in the multiple capacities of this actor and the various negotiations in which it plays a part, several dynamics unfolding simultaneously in and through the OFC. While ice chests were clearly implicated in the shift from the first to second generation of co-op leadership, and while a more narrowly instrumental notion of becoming-businesslike may have gained considerable traction during this shift due in part to the errant tendencies of ice chests, the ice chest also continued to do its work as a form of social glue in the OFC, bringing members together on delivery day, forcing them to interact and work together.

The significance of this observation increases when we expand this kind of analysis to the wide range of actors I’ve touched on in this chapter who have played parts in the territorialization of Oklahoma’s foodways by ‘local food’: rural food deserts and industrial agribusiness, progressive Catholics and a medieval-style monastery in 21st century Oklahoma, urban dwellers and the ecologies from which local foods emerge, open source web design and highway infrastructures, and many others. I have touched on these actors in this chapter not in a vain hope of capturing the complexity of the phenomena under consideration in all its fullness, like the Borgesian cartographers who ultimately produce a 1:1 scale map of the territory. Instead, I have sought to highlight the heterogeneous nature of the things that have constituted this territory so that as I continue in subsequent chapters to trace how power traverses specific relationships linked to the assemblage of local food, we might understand how difference proliferates even as a sense of coherence grows through the account. There are many actors pulling in many directions. We will see that this multitude becomes increasingly yoked to particular values, some of which depart from the OFC’s core
values in ways that are increasingly coherent. But the yoke itself is made from equally diverse materials and thus is highly contingent.
3
Movement: Partition, expansion, virtualities

An alternative identity must go beyond brand loyalty and product quality. It must stake out territory, spaces and bonds that cannot be replicated through conventional food chains.
-Phil Mount (2011)

1. Introduction

In July of 2012, the board of directors of the OFC convened a special session to mediate a dispute between upper level management and the organization’s president, Eric Lyons. Late in the afternoon on a Sunday, more than a dozen members gathered around a cluster of tables in a chilly air-conditioned room at Epiphany Church, the site of the cooperative’s first delivery day nearly nine years prior. Over the course of an evening of often intensely emotional and personal dialogue, it became clear to all present that current internal conflicts among leadership represented but one issue among several others that, taken together, cast serious doubts about the enterprise’s future.

New memberships were coming more slowly, a trend that was particularly worrying when considered against a longstanding concern for the OFC: even during the years of remarkable growth, for each new member that bought into the cooperative, at least one existing member became inactive or stopped ordering products altogether. As such, despite approaching the 5,000 member mark, there had never been a month in which 1,000 or more customers placed orders. Leadership often attributed much of the stagnation of recent years to the general economic malaise gripping the country, augmented in 2012 by the intense drought and heat punishing the central United States; indeed, temperatures were well into the triple digits every day for weeks surrounding that special session of the board, and many producer-members were struggling to keep crops and livestock alive and healthy. However,
Oklahoma’s economy had not been hit nearly as hard as that of many other states in the recession, and despite the drought, the past couple of years had witnessed a shift in food options for many Oklahomans that was by some accounts nothing short of a ‘renaissance,’ as we shall see. Why was the OFC, arguably a major driving force in bringing about substantial shifts in the state’s foodways, struggling so markedly?

In this chapter, I explore this question by tracing the continued development of the OFC alongside the emergence of what came to called the local food movement in Oklahoma. In pursuit of this aim, I first follow the trajectory of two important dynamics in the OFC, linked to notions of becoming ‘businesslike’ introduced in Chapter Two – increased professionalization, and a growing embrace of instrumentalist economic rationales for the OFC. These two threads, we shall see, helped draw to the center of the OFC a younger, more professional and largely urban-based cohort of leaders, a shift which also brought to a head longstanding conflicts over labor in the cooperative. These developments and tensions were part of the broader dynamics of the OFC’s rapid growth, which created growing gulfs between leadership, producers, and the vast bulk of customer-members. To begin examining the significance of these developments, I then expand the analytical lens ‘outwards’ from the OFC itself to a series of enterprises, institutions, and sites that together constituted the local food movement, including several businesses that splintered off from the OFC, a local food lobbying firm, and several other actors. It is in this transition from the OFC as “the only game in town” when it came to local food, as one member put it, to the local food movement that the links between local food and Oklahoma City begin to loom large on the analytical horizon in our quest to explore the local food movement’s prospects for becoming more expansive, durable, and inclusive, or ‘scaling up,’ as some would have it. Against this backdrop, the chapter concludes by considering further the tensions that came to a head in OFC’s July 2012 board meeting.
2. The fruits of instrumentalism

In the previous chapter, we explored how notions of becoming-businesslike played an important role in the transition from the first to second generations of OFC leadership. At the heart of often-heated discussions about running the cooperative “more like a business” lay factors ranging from debates about food stamps to accounting for volunteer labor budgets and ice chests. I argued in the chapter’s conclusion that while these debates produced a broad shift towards more narrowly instrumental notions of ‘becoming businesslike,’ this shift was contingent and pulled in multiple directions by the many different actors involved, from producer-members fighting to keep their small businesses afloat to the socializing capacities of the ice chests and the social justice commitments of members like Waldrop and the Monetts. There is of course nothing un-businesslike about cooperative business models, as some members well understood. As the internal struggles of the OFC played out, however, the core value of economic sustainability became increasingly aligned with instrumentalism at the expense of both cooperative principles and the core values of social justice and environmental stewardship.

Some members would surely dispute the assertion that an increased emphasis on instrumentalism signified a movement away from social justice, on the grounds discussed in Chapter Two: for many members, social justice is primarily about augmenting producer capacities to operate small-scale, ecologically-oriented businesses. There is little doubt that the OFC has continued to put into practice this notion of justice. This important element of the OFC, which we must be careful not to downplay, is underscored by the fact that the cooperative has never increased the 10% cut appropriated from producers on each sale. However, viewing this arrangement in light of the OFC’s financial health raises some questions about why it has remained in place and to whose benefit and whose detriment. As I noted briefly in Chapter Two, the OFC has never been a profitable business and indeed has
remained afloat in no small part because of the financial cushion provided by a constant stream of new memberships. Virtually all OFC leaders have recognized the precariousness of this situation, and Waldrop has on several occasions attempted to increase the proportion of value appropriated by the OFC to levels that would be more sustainable for the cooperative but still lower than the typical cut taken by conventional retailers. Each time, this has been rejected by membership, particularly by some of the most active and influential producer-members.

On the flip side of this issue is a longterm struggle over labor costs and the remuneration of volunteers in the OFC. The trajectory of this issue over time is complex, but for the purposes of my present argument, the general trend in the OFC has been a gradual shift towards reliance on formally defined management positions compensated by wages rather than work credits. It is highly significant that this shift has been consistently opposed, sometimes fervently, by some members, again primarily producer-members. Ironically, however, the gradual formalization and professionalization of OFC labor is due in part to the strength of the discourse of becoming-businesslike advanced initially by producers, primarily. As the scale and complexity of the OFC’s operations grew, it became readily apparent that volunteer labor was not sufficiently consistent or knowledgable to maintain a relatively smooth and efficient operation of the OFC’s baroque functional model. Moreover, it became clear over time that the most active members, whether delivery day volunteers, the president, or board members, suffered from ‘burnout.’ Members attribute this tendency to various issues, including lack of or insufficient compensation, lack of organization, interpersonal conflicts, and struggles to control the group’s future. In a darkly ironic twist, given that health issues in many cases led people to the OFC, several members attributed serious health issues to the stresses of OFC-induced burnout. The most prominent example of this occurred in 2010 when Bob Waldrop required heart surgery and
had to step down as president and step back almost entirely from his involvement with the OFC.

It seems clear that Waldrop’s departure contributed to a second major shift in OFC leadership, led by a group of mostly younger members, based largely in Oklahoma City, whose training and background was in some cases more professionally specific to the positions they came to occupy, as compared to the more ad hoc assumption of professional duties in previous generations of leaders. In addition to the treasurer position, formal positions were eventually created for delivery route manager, delivery day manager, producer-care and customer-care managers, and eventually a full-time general manager. As the third generation of OFC leaders emerged, most of these positions were filled by people with formal training and experience in fields such as accounting, communications, and non-profit management.

To be clear, this shift toward professionalization did not entail an apotheosis of instrumentalism in any unitary sense. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, a central struggle between second and third generation leaders related to the remuneration of labor, with some producers pushing for greater reliance on volunteer labor compensated at lower rates of work credits, while the new management cohort steered towards more reliance on paid labor and higher rates of work-credit compensation for volunteers. This was particularly important to Kara Joy McKee, who was hired in 2010 as the OFC’s first full time general manager. To highlight the importance of the contribution of volunteer labor to the function of the enterprise, McKee coined the term ‘crediteer.’ This move seems a clear and conscious effort to reframe the discursive terrain of debates about labor, and reflects the extent to which the specific meanings and practices of social justice and cooperative principles remained nuanced and contested.
Nevertheless, struggles over labor compensation shared a mutually constitutive relation with broader shifts in the OFC that were in turn linked to the emergence of what would soon come to be called a ‘local food movement,’ which in many ways reflected and continued the ongoing drift towards instrumentalism and a lack of emphasis on – and in some cases even a lack of basic understanding of or engagement with – the OFC’s core value of social justice, or cooperative principles.

2.1 Partitioning the OFC

Among the broader shifts occurring alongside the OFC’s growth was a marked increase in the spatiotemporal separation between producer-members, customer-members, and leadership. The OFC’s operating model, it must be said, was never premised on robust and frequent direct encounters between producers and consumers. The cooperative has always done some things to foster direct encounters, such as “meet, greet, and eat” events held around the state, and annual membership meetings, at which elections and voting on changes to the articles of incorporation occur. Also, for a time in 2011-2012, leadership attempted to hold board and management meetings around the state, rather than in Oklahoma City, in theory so as to increase the opportunities for participation in governance. Beyond these occasional events, the consumer-producer
connection – which indeed has always been foregrounded by the OFC as one of the primary features that distinguishes OFC foods from conventional foods – has been chiefly facilitated through the website and monthly “Producers Notes” e-mails sent to all members. Additionally, OFC leaders frequently point out that the potential for consumers to interact directly with producers is an important aspect of this distinction. A number of customers that I spoke with confirmed the importance of this potential connection. Indeed, it is not uncommon for customers to contact producers in the event of problems with an order, and occasionally customers do visit farms for customer appreciation days and such.

Based on my discussions with customers, and on comments from OFC staff regarding data from their e-mail tracking software, producers notes e-mails do appear to provide an important semiotic link for those customers who order regularly. These monthly notes, as exemplified in the figure at left, foreground particular relationships that underlie the local foods offered by the OFC – primarily ecological and familial relations on the farm, which to some extent continue to be explicitly linked in e-mail narratives to specific places in Oklahoma. At the same time, however, these notes very rarely touch on the political ecological relationships that play such large roles in shaping the livelihoods and possibilities of small- to mid-sized farmers. I refer here to a range of relations, from the internal struggles of the OFC surrounding labor issues to regulatory regimes stacked against small producers, and many other issues.
As this specific topic is one I did not broach with producers, it’s not clear to me why producers choose to represent their experiences and practices in this way. Such de-politicized, ‘feel good’ representations of farm life may be viewed by producers as better for marketing purposes than potentially disturbing and difficult associations with politics and economy. Two studies of the OFC, one undertaken by faculty associated with the Food and Agricultural Products Center (FAPC) at Oklahoma State University (Holcomb et al. 2012) and one (unpublished) by MBA students at Oklahoma City University, conducted during the period of 2008-2010 certainly lent weight to the idea that meeting consumer demand for fresh, healthy, and high quality foods should be the primary goal as the OFC sought to continue expanding. It’s not clear how much these studies impacted the way OFC members thought about their enterprise, but many producers, in the OFC and beyond, mentioned direct links with FAPC, which has been a highly influential actor in shaping the landscape of local food systems in Oklahoma, through regular training seminars and conducting research on local markets and specific firms. In any case, whatever the motivations might be for representing local foods in particular ways, the general trend among producers has been to foreground the ecological, familial, and place-based relationships surrounding production, rather than the messier and more contentious political ecological elements.

Following recent research by Mount (2011) and DeLind (2006), a more rigorous engagement with such political ecological issues in local food discourse, while perhaps less pleasant for consumers to contemplate, may be central to establishing local food systems that can move beyond unreflexive visions of local foods based on romantic notions of reconnecting farmers and consumers. In a passage worth quoting at length, Mount offers a forceful argument for why simply physically reconnecting farmers and consumers may be an insufficient goal for expanding local food systems (Mount 2011, p. 109):
The notion of return implicit (and often explicit) in [...] tales of reconnection is problematic not only because it suggests a straightforward return to an historical (implicitly simpler, more authentic and fulfilling) food system based on direct relationships, but also because it minimizes the recent fundamental transformations of the participants and sites of such reunions. [...] Conventional food systems have failed farmers and consumers in different ways, produced divergent priorities, and influenced how they might reconnect in an alternative platform. For small and mid-scale farmers, the declining share of the consumer food dollar and the resulting cost-price squeeze of commodity production have increased reliance on off-farm income for survival. For these family farms, any viable alternative must necessarily address this shortfall, and offer significant incentives as well as reassurances. For consumers, the problems of conventional food systems have fostered concerns over the source and content of their food, environmental impacts of production, food scares, food miles, and declining food nutrition and taste. It is clear that, in the abstract, the theoretical value attached to local food comprehensively maps these consumer concerns, reflecting the broader public and scientific discourse, and increasing the likelihood that perceptions of safety, authenticity, trust, transparency, sustainability, confidence and risk become a part of the prioritization process governing consumer food choices. [...] At the same time, it must also be recognized that the benefits of conventional food systems—including variety, low prices and convenience—have had a fundamental impact on consumer priorities. [...] Any notion of reconnection must acknowledge and problematize the influence—on both consumers and producers—of their (historic and on-going) engagement with conventional and alternative food systems, and the hybridity exhibited by both systems as a result.

Moving beyond problematization, Mount argues that for local food to retain its value as it seeks to expand beyond niche market status, it is crucial that the divergent situatedness of producers and consumers—and not only the ecological and social but also political economic relations underlying producer and consumer situatedness—be put at the foreground of efforts to construct local food systems. Needless to say, this would not automatically produce harmonious outcomes or maximize well-being for all involved. For this reason, Mount insists that local food enterprises and institutions must be built on models that maximize stakeholder participation in decision-making processes—beyond individual consumption choices—and ongoing negotiation. It is in the potential for such deliberative democratic models, in which all (or at least more) of the cards of power are on
the table, so to speak, that local food systems carry the promise of being and remaining meaningfully distinct from conventional food networks (CFNs).40

As I explained in Chapter Two, the OFC’s model was initially founded on just such goals, as illustrated by the “hybrid cooperative” ownership structure and the “unwritten rule” of relying on difference as a resource in “evolution.” With respect to these features, however, the example of Producers Notes illustrates some troubling elements of the OFC’s development. As OFC membership rapidly expanded, and the proportion of members who regularly attended annual meetings, regular “meet, greet, and eat” events, and so on, dropped substantially, these romanticized Producers Notes became increasingly the primary basis of the producer-customer relationship. This increasing separation in space and time between differently situated groups within the OFC was reflected in several additional ways which, when taken together, suggest a concomitant retreat from cooperativism, deliberative democratic practices, and more inclusive notions of social justice.

First, the professionally-oriented OFC management team that I discussed above has shared a complex and often contentious relationship with the board of directors. A close examination of the intricacies of this relationship far exceeds the scope of this dissertation, but for present purposes it’s sufficient to note that, with the exception of the producer-care manager, the management team has by and large tended to focus on the logistics of the operation of the OFC as a distribution network, which often entails valorizing delivery day crediteer labor, as discussed previously, as well as the immense amount of labor performed by managers themselves. The board, by contrast, is required to have a more balanced make-up, with producers and customers represented. The precise function and jurisdiction of these two bodies – the board and the management team – are two arenas where the OFC’s

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40 As noted in Chapter Two, the notion of hybridity rather than complete separation from CFNs allows for more critical assessments of the implications of both AFNs and CFNs, and the potential values and uses of elements of both. Foregrounding difference and negotiation, as Mount suggests, would seem to offer one of several potential rubrics by which to guide such assessments.
internal power struggles have increasingly played out as the management team became more autonomous in recent years. In and of itself, this dynamic is not necessarily problematic in terms of democratic processes or thicker notions of social justice. However, the vast bulk of customer-members have had virtually no involvement with such internal struggles, with the result that governance has fallen almost entirely to small cabals that develop among the two primary spheres of leadership. This was made pointedly clear in resistance from some board members to the idea of opening to all members the board’s private e-mail listserv, where often the majority of the board’s deliberations take place. Here again, in other words, customer-members tend to play the role of distant, faceless consumers of products that are differentiated on the grounds of taste, healthiness, and perhaps romanticized notions of ecology and place, rather than on the grounds of participatory governance and an explicit recognition of having “skin in the game,” to use a term that became popular among OFC leadership during a particularly fractious time in the cooperative in 2012.

Secondly, this growing silo-ization of differently situated groups within the OFC both contributed to and was intensified by the splintering off of several businesses led by key producer-members associated with the second generation of leadership. I will return presently to a more detailed discussion of these businesses, which include several alternative distribution and retail strategies. For the moment I’ll note that these producers did not leave the OFC entirely, as the cooperative remained an attractive sales outlet. But they did drastically reduce their involvement in the operation and decision-making processes of the OFC. As such, these splinter groups represent another way in which the cooperative became less a democratically governed entity constituted by thick relationships between differently situated members. In the process, the local foods offered by the OFC arguably became less differentiated from the various specialty foods offered at supermarkets, particularly those of the high end variety.
While the sheer force of numbers and increasing complexity of the OFC’s operations were surely factors in these interrelated processes of silo-ization and de-democratization in the OFC, these processes cannot be attributed to growth alone. The businesses that splintered off from the cooperative provide us with a point of passage from the OFC to the development of the local food movement, which in turn begins to direct our attention to connections between this movement and Oklahoma City.

3. Local food as movement

The enterprises that have grown from or splintered off from the OFC are diverse in terms of form, function, and specialization, and each of these enterprises stakes out its own swath of and contributes to the growing territory of local food in Oklahoma. Alongside a series of institutional and state actors, they together constitute a relatively far-reaching assemblage that, while still perhaps minuscule in comparison to the territory of CFNs in the state, is growing in size, durability, and coherence. The significance, or value, as Nietzsche might put it, of this growth should not be taken as unequivocally desirable in social or ecological terms, any more than it should be viewed as a failure in these terms; its social and ecological ramifications are instead multivalent. That said, there are identifiable and recurrent themes and trends in this period of growth and becoming-movement, which should become evident as I sketch the diverse range of actors who have become enrolled in ‘local foods.’

Consider, for instance, an enterprise called Earth to Urban, which is a hybrid of several businesses that have been closely tied to the OFC, most prominently Earth Elements Market and Bakery (hereafter, ‘Earth Elements’), and Urban Agrarian. Earth Elements, and its proprietor April Harrington, have played important roles in developing and expanding the territory of local food in Oklahoma. Earth Elements has long been one of the most successful producer-member businesses in the OFC, and Harrington was the OFC treasurer
I mentioned in Chapter Two who took on the daunting task of putting the cooperative’s finances in order after the first several years of more haphazard accounting practices. The business model she developed for Earth Elements, moreover, has begun the work of filling some important infrastructural gaps in local food systems in central Oklahoma. The key to this model, as Harrington has described it to me, is purchasing, processing, and preserving local produce, particularly the surplus and cosmetically imperfect ‘seconds’ that farmers can’t easily sell in retail settings, whether farmers’ markets or supermarkets. Beginning in the late 1990s, Harrington and her small staff developed dozens of products ranging from pickled and canned items to frozen pizzas and burritos, which by Harrington’s reckoning use an average of 44% Oklahoma-grown ingredients. Such processing and preparation techniques have of course long been at the core of CFNs’ capacities to maximize value capture from the relatively volatile – from an industrial standpoint – raw materials that constitute foods. By applying this approach to the growing networks of local food in Oklahoma, however, Harrington created a niche for herself that cannot easily be replicated by large-scale industrial processors, whose profitability relies not on the value added by localness but rather on economies of scale (including labor exploitation on a large scale) and the flexibility generated by expansive sourcing and distribution networks. While it’s not clear to me whether or not selling their surplus produce to Earth Elements represents any direct advantage to small-scale growers in the area, it has clearly benefited Earth Elements, which has grown steadily as a businesses, and to a lesser extent the OFC, given that a substantial portion of Earth Elements’ sales has flowed through the cooperative. As such, Earth Elements has drawn considerable value into the circuits of local food that may have either been wasted or drawn into the more expansive territory of CFNs. Given the concerns about unreflexive localism raised by critical scholars, as discussed in Chapter Two, we should of

41 See http://www.earthelementsfarm.com/advocacy.html
course inquire about the social and ecological implications of this shift in value flows; we have already spent considerable time examining the nuanced social and ecological terrains upon which the OFC operates, but what of Earth Elements? We shall return to this question presently.

Urban Agrarian, another of the principal businesses involved in Earth to Urban, is a business created by Matt Burch, another longtime OFC member who has contributed substantial labor to the cooperative, particularly during the second generation period of OFC leadership. Expanding on a model that he originally developed through trial and error in the southeastern US, Burch parlayed the connections he developed through the OFC with local producers in Oklahoma into two primary elements of his business model: a small-scale distribution operation that sells locally-grown foods to restaurants in Oklahoma City, and a “mobile farmers’ market” that operates in a cargo van. These two outlets complement one another logistically, as the van is used to pick up foods from farmers and deliver them to restaurants, and products can be diverted into either the wholesale or retail aspect of the operation as needed. This flexibility in directing flows of foodstuffs is complemented by the spatial flexibility provided by the mobile farmers’ market, which can be parked either along a busy street or in the parking lot of hospital complexes, with whom Burch struck an agreement several years ago. Like Earth Elements, Urban Agrarian adds important components to local food infrastructures in the form of a wholesale distribution network and additional retail outlets.

In 2011, Harrington and Burch decided to unite their businesses in an effort to maximize the logistical synergies and benefits of their combined knowledge and networks of connections. This move was also fueled by a drawn-out confrontation over eminent domain between Harrington and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, through which

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42 Early on in the life of the business, the van was also useful for the moving company that Burch ran during the winter months, the slow season for local foods.
Harrington received a settlement for her land and facilities that, while much lower than the value of her business as she saw it, was sufficient to allow her to seek a new property and continue her work as a local food entrepreneur. This provided the opportunity to join forces with Burch in a new enterprise that added a start-up kitchen for aspiring businesses, a small retail market offering organic and otherwise ecologically-friendly foods, and a gourmet food truck, all relying largely on products grown or processed by small- to mid-sized enterprises located in the state.

3.1 Ecological and social concerns in the growing territory of local food

These businesses and a growing number of similar enterprises in the state demonstrate an increase in the material capabilities and reach of the territory of local foods, but what are the social and ecological ramifications of this growing territory? To begin answering this question, we can note that in ecological terms, there is no obvious significant distinction between the OFC and the broader local food movement. As we saw in Chapter Two, production standards have been a contentious issue in the OFC, and there is significant reason to question the efficacy of what is basically a trust-based system facilitated by the potential for customers to “know your farmer, know your food,” as the OFC often puts it. Among the many more recent entrants to the local food market in Oklahoma, there is no more robust system of standards certification in place. A passage from Urban Agrarian’s website, titled “What are your standards? Is everything organic?”, neatly sums up the reigning approach to the issue of standards:

By Harrington’s account and that of several other OFC members, the outcome of this case was shaped significantly by the actions of OFC members. Membership was mobilized by direct appeals from Harrington, Waldrop, and others, who explained that Harrington was being driven from her original location in a rural area south of Oklahoma City and was offered an unfair settlement from the Department of Transportation. Members reportedly responded in large numbers, calling elected officials. When Harrington met with officials at the Department of Transportation, they signaled to her that their offer had been changed in her favor in part because of public input. This is one example among several in which the OFC has achieved relatively positive outcomes in encounters with state actors.

See http://www.urbanagrarian.com/FAQ
We believe in buying local, knowing your farmer and supporting sustainability. Everything we sell is made or grown in Oklahoma. Always. We also believe in food that is whole and natural—you won't find any high fructose corn syrup around these parts! Not everything we sell is certified organic, but we can always tell you where it came from and how it was grown. There are USDA Certified Organic producers in Oklahoma, but they are a minority. Many times a grower will raise food in a way consistent with natural growing methods without being inspected by a licensing authority. At UA we place emphasis on procuring Organic, Certified Naturally Grown, meat raised the right way on grass with no chemicals, and other responsibly produced foods.

A cynical parsing of this passage would surely find fault with what are clearly a number of what might be called glittering generalities. However, based on my experience talking with and observing Harrington, Burch, and many other producers and local food entrepreneurs, I strongly believe that to a large extent, the faith these entrepreneurs place in personal relationships and trust over private certification organizations, state sanctioned or otherwise, is well founded. The majority of the producers and food activists that I interacted with opine that certification is better viewed as one of the realms of contestation over food systems than as a foolproof guarantor of particular qualities (see also Guthman 1998). From this perspective, the realm of trust—which must be earned and can be damaged—serves as a more solid foundation for standards assessment than formal certification networks.

Nevertheless, this approach seems problematic on two counts. First, if the allegations leveled by some OFC producers of false claims of product origin as discussed in Chapter Two are at all valid, there are reasons to doubt the overall efficacy of trust-based standards even within the OFC. Given the extremely challenging markets within which small-scale producers operate, it's not difficult to imagine how even the most scrupled producers, under relentless market pressures, might be tempted to buffer their operations in an effort to stay afloat via any number of ‘shortcuts,’ from applying chemical inputs to reselling items under false pretenses. This concern points to the second problem, which is that a trust-based discourse of standards often appears to rest on a romanticized notion of ‘local foods’ as
diametrically opposed to and hermetically sealed off from conventional foods. Following
from literatures discussed above in this chapter and the previous one, this is problematic not
only because it is an inaccurate representation of the hybrid nature of both ‘alternative’ and
‘conventional’ foods, but also because this misrepresentation misses the opportunity to
discursively foreground the real challenges facing small- and mid-sized non-conventional
producers. This is certainly a messier approach, and less of a ‘feel good’ marketing strategy,
but that’s precisely the point: it’s not a marketing strategy per se, unless by that we mean a
strategy that remakes the terms of the market itself around a much broader set of not only
ecological but also social and political economic terms.

Moving on to the topic of social concerns, to the best of my knowledge, none of
the many local food enterprises that have emerged in the wake of the OFC are cooperatively
owned. Given the attenuated practice of cooperative principles and the longtime reliance on
crediteers in the OFC, this may or may not be a significant departure from the OFC in terms
of the actual distribution of value produced through labor in these enterprises. This is an
empirical question that is beyond the scope of this inquiry. But however attenuated the
practice of cooperativism may be at present in the OFC, the structure of the OFC does
require broader input on major decisions, and this structural capacity could be increased. As
such, the potential to be a very different kind of enterprise from all other local food
enterprises in Oklahoma is built-in to the OFC. If one’s conception of social justice includes
the notion that people should have a direct say in the fate of the value produced by their
labor, then the territorial expansion of local foods in Oklahoma has entailed a shift away
from this notion and thus away from social justice, broadly conceived.

This observation, however, needs to be interrogated a bit further in light of a
recurrent theme that emerged in my discussions with some of the owners of these local
food enterprises, which focused considerably on why, after their close involvement for years
with the OFC, they had abandoned cooperative ownership and governance structures. In conversations that were often long and deeply reflective, each of the several local food entrepreneurs that I spoke with explained their decisions in terms of having grown intensely tired of the often extreme contentiousness of the OFC, and a concomitant anxiety about not having control of their own businesses despite putting so much of their own labor into building up these enterprises. From virtually any critical perspective on labor relations, it seems readily apparent that the second issue highlighted here is problematic in that it elides the labor done by others in building up these businesses. This is a major concern. But rather than concluding at this point that cooperative principles have failed in Oklahoma’s local food movement and that capitalist subject positions have once again emerged as triumphant, it may be more productive to simply take note of this shift in values within the territory of local food, and continue in our broader analysis while keeping the basic concerns of this enquiry alive and at play: how can more just and sustainable food systems become more durable and expansive? In particular, we would do well to bear in mind that these individuals devoted significant portions of their lives to an experiment in cooperative approaches to food systems, and emerged from this experience with deeply felt doubts. What forces produced this outcome?

Beyond concerns about cooperativism itself, we might also briefly consider the broader social justice implications of these enterprises. It should be noted that these businesses do offer some echoes of the OFC’s emphasis on producer-centered notions of what might be thought of as ethical motivations for purchasing products there. Among several reasons offered on Urban Agrarian’s website for “why [one should] eat local,” for example, the last on the list is “You’re supporting local businesses in a local economy!”45 With respect to consumer access, it should be noted that in February 2013 Urban Agrarian

45 See http://www.urbanagrarian.com/FAQ
began participating in Oklahoma’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a form of publicly-supported food assistance. A press release issued by Urban Agrarian asserted that “Through the use of mobile markets located throughout the Oklahoma City metro area, UA helps to give consumers many options to support Oklahoma farmers and ranchers by bringing local foods from rural areas into urban areas where it would otherwise not be available.”46 Further research might explore the extent to which participation in the SNAP program has enabled the company to reach a broader customer base, an enquiry which would also raise questions about what kinds of foods members of low-income communities in Oklahoma City actually want (Guthman 2008). For present purposes, I’ll note that when I asked business owners about issues of access and exclusivity, responses tended to echo those offered in the context of the OFC, which might be paraphrased as follows: ‘In our customer base, there is some diversity in terms of race, class, sexuality, and other axes of difference, but white and wealthier customers are disproportionately represented. This is disappointing, and not something we agree with, but this is caused by structure of the market for local food, in the context of the dominance of conventional food, and there’s little we can do about it. We are growing the market for local food, so our ultimate hope is that as supply grows, prices will drop.’

The many different types of local food enterprises that have emerged as part of the local food movement in Oklahoma do not specifically claim to be oriented around social justice concerns per se, unlike the OFC. Nevertheless, when asked directly, local food entrepreneurs do express concern about lack of access, and tend to frame their businesses in terms of ‘providing healthy foods for Oklahoma.’ As Earth Elements’ website puts it, “Earth Elements Mission is to provide our community with healthier, local food

46 Available: http://www.uaoklahoma.com/_blog/Urban_Agrarian_Blog/post/Now_Accepting_SNAP_at_Urban_Agrarian/
alternatives. Elsewhere the site states that Earth Element’s “mission is to aid in the establishment of an alternative “LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM”.

Such goals and concerns however are rarely considered in light of the contradiction suggested by fetishized niche marketing strategies, in which the value added to local foods hinges primarily on their alterity. From this perspective, in other words, if local foods were no longer ‘alternative’ or specialty foods, their capacity to fetch premium prices would seem to be in doubt. This is not an essential relationship, however. One can imagine a scenario in which the local foods produced by ecologically- and socially-oriented small- to mid-sized producers become the primary basis of food systems in the industrialized world, and value is distributed in such a way that premium prices are not necessary for producers to operate economically viable farms. Many local food producers, entrepreneurs, and activists in Oklahoma of course realize this, and would likely identify with this goal on some level. Nevertheless, for the moment, most of the small businesses associated with local foods are relying on and pursuing the premium prices that these specialty items now command. This entails focusing primarily on differentiating these products on the grounds of ‘food miles,’ health, and taste, and to a lesser extent ecologically-friendly production methods, and general invocations of ‘community.’

Based on this brief sketch of some of the enterprises that have grown from the OFC to form part of a larger local food movement, we can conclude that while the territory of local foods has gained some important capacities in terms of infrastructure, diversity, resilience, and flexibility, it has at the same time experienced a shift in values, in which cooperative governance and ownership has fallen by the wayside, and social justice has been further backgrounded. While in preceding portions of this study we have seen that even in

47 See http://www.earthelementsfarm.com/index.html

48 See http://www.earthelementsfarm.com/advocacy.html
the OFC these concerns have always been contentious and have increasingly taken a back
seat in favor of more narrowly instrumental approaches to economic relations and practices,
the OFC nevertheless remains a cooperatively owned firm that explicitly names social justice
as one of its core values. As such, the OFC represents substantial potential for expanding
the value of local food in Oklahoma beyond the more fetishized realms of taste, quality, and
food miles. In the following section, I return to the OFC itself to consider how the
cooperative has articulated with the development of the broader local food movement.

3.2 The place of the OFC in the local food movement: “Real food, real local”

What was happening within the OFC during the emergence of the broader local
food movement in Oklahoma? We saw earlier that a third generation of leadership had
moved to the center of the cooperative’s management and operations, and that producers,
customers, and leadership had become increasingly partitioned off from one another. I
argued that this produced a less democratically shaped cooperative, which is also reflected in
the enterprises constituting part of the broader food movement, which have abandoned
cooperative ownership structures and further relegated more inclusive notions of social
justice to the background. While the third generation of OFC leaders in some ways pushed
back against these trends, favoring increased recognition and compensation of crediteers,
continuing to search for a way to participate in food stamp programs, and so on, the value
shifts within the larger local food movement ultimately became increasingly reflected in the
OFC as well. Several key members have observed this trend, expressing this directly to me in
interviews or private conversations, as well as in board meetings. In considering a wealth of
field notes from board meetings, delivery days, food policy council meetings; interviews
conducted in 2009 and 2011-12; and a sizable archive of e-mail accumulated in the OFC’s
various list-serves, I concur that this trend is broadly observable. Three specific examples may serve to illustrate the broader trend.

First, as noted previously, the OFC's website was originally developed as open source software, with the explicit intention of enabling its free use and further development by other organizations. Over the course of the cooperative's early years, a number of members contributed their efforts to various updates and modifications of the site, while the software was indeed picked up and tweaked by some of the 'sister co-ops' following the OFC model. By 2009, this piecemeal design approach and the problems and limitations it engendered were among the primary targets of those members most concerned with correcting the informal, un-businesslike nature of the enterprise. At that time, Waldrop and several other founders continued to insist that the site remain open source, a position they explicitly linked to cooperative ideals, if not also to a critical stance towards the concept of intellectual property itself. In 2012, however, the OFC contracted a professional design firm to custom-build a proprietary software package, with the explicit goal of revenue generation through licensing. When I asked current leaders about the decision to abandon the open source philosophy, some did express regret about the decision. But in the deliberations leading up to this decision, the question was not considered in any substantive way, and several current leaders seemed to be entirely unaware that this had ever been an issue. While this may reflect that second and third generation members simply aren't interested in the politics of software design and intellectual property, the broad trajectory of this issue over time does appear to follow the larger trend towards increased instrumentalism I have observed in the OFC.

Second, the orientation and education required of new customer- and producer-members have increasingly de-emphasized the meaning and practice of core values and cooperative principles. This is evidenced in the training materials themselves, including several documents distributed to new members and, in more recent years, videos posted on
YouTube. This observation is given further weight by a clear lack of understanding of some of the fundamentals of cooperative principles demonstrated by two then-relatively new producers in a focus group with personnel from Whole Foods Market, and the failed development of a thus far almost entirely ineffective and inactive committee created in early 2012 with the express purposes of deliberating on the meaning and practice of core values and educating membership. This shift in new member training and orientation is in part due to the fact that the process of enrolling members has simply become less personal as the OFC has grown; in the early years, most members were brought in by existing members, if not by Waldrop himself, and the importance of the core values and cooperative principles to many of those early members was conveyed directly to new members in persuading them to join. As with the website, however, this change both seems to reflect and contribute to the larger drift away from these principles and practices.

A third example is offered by a striking initiative advanced in 2011 by Waldrop, who had gradually moved back towards the center of OFC leadership in the years following his heart surgery, first as a board member and at the time of this writing as president. For several years, Waldrop had contemplated other ideas for cooperatives in Oklahoma, and in 2011 he and several others created a new organization called the Oklahoma Worker Cooperative Network (OWCN). As with the genesis of the OFC, Waldrop held a series of meetings around the state, with the number of attendees ranging from four, at the meeting I attended in the town of El Reno, to two dozen, by Waldrop’s count. While intriguing in its own right, Waldrop’s work with the OWCN also corresponded with a campaign he waged within the OFC to formally change the cooperative structure to include a new ownership category of worker-members. This idea, which would have mandated official representation on the board for workers, was an extension of the broader effort by the third generation of leaders to recognize and better remunerate those members who held formal, salaried
positions as well as those who worked as crediteers. After months of campaigning, the motion was rejected by the membership at the annual meeting in early 2012. Not long before this, Waldrop had ruefully confided during a long conversation with me that he believed the OFC had finally reached the limits to the mobilization of difference as a resource in evolution.

Moreover, the contentious board meeting in July 2012 with which I began this chapter signaled the dissolution of the third generation of OFC leaders, most of whom backed away from active leadership roles in the following months. Their support for more direct engagement with labor issues – and thus questions of value generation and appropriation – largely went with them. One of their final contributions was a marketing campaign organized around the slogan “Real food, real local.” This marketing campaign bears some scrutiny as a final indicator of the significance assumed by local food in the OFC in the past couple of years. The campaign was shaped in response to the increasingly dire financial situation of the cooperative, which members attributed to a number of factors, including the still sluggish national economy, the proliferation of other enterprises specializing in local food, and, more ominously, the sudden arrival in Oklahoma City in 2011 of several corporate chain supermarkets with ‘green’ images and national presence. We will focus on the arrival of those green supermarkets in Chapter Four, but for now I’ll point out that the “Real food, real local” campaign was explicitly designed to distinguish the OFC from other enterprises – particularly the corporate chains – who, in the eyes of some longtime local food proponents, claim local food credentials but only as a thin veneer created by a token percentage of products. As we will see in Chapter Four, the definition of ‘local’ advanced by a number of new entrants to the market indeed became vastly looser on a number of fronts, from ecological concerns to labor issues. The OFC, however, chose to assert their distinctiveness through the “Real food, real local” campaign not in terms of the
structure of their business and what this meant for social, economic, and ecological considerations, but rather almost exclusively in terms of selling only food produced in the state of Oklahoma. The OFC’s territory, in other words, had become synonymous with the formal territorial boundaries of the state, and resonated less than ever with the values of cooperativism, difference as an evolutionary resource, or social justice — qualities associated with what I have called the ‘noble nature’ of the early OFC. Indeed, at the time of this writing, some of the most vocal and active OFC leaders have explicitly admitted to a lack of knowledge of cooperative principles, and a concomitant lack of interest.

4. Virtualities in the local food movement

And yet, there is considerable cause to forestall the conclusion that this case is closed and can be filed away as yet another study demonstrating the futility of AFNs. As I’ve noted above, the structure of the OFC contains the basic framework through which cooperative business principles might be strengthened, and within the membership there are still a number of individuals who are committed to more inclusive notions of social justice and who insist that the other two core values of environmental stewardship and economic sustainability cannot be practiced effectively without achieving an equal balance between all three values. Even among OFC members and other individuals involved with the broader local food movement, the drift away from more reflexive engagements with questions of value, inclusivity, and justice is neither complete nor free of ambivalence.

This becomes more evident when we expand our analytical focus to encompass a greater range of the entities involved with local foods in Oklahoma. During my fieldwork in Oklahoma, I explored a number of milieus associated in various ways with the growing local food movement, including but not limited to state agencies, food policy councils, the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, and quasi-governmental bodies such as the Oklahoma
Wheat Commission. These and other actors impinge in various ways upon the development of the territory of local food, and while a single dissertation does not provide scope to treat each of these actors in depth, I will briefly touch on two examples that further demonstrate the possibilities for alternate futures in Oklahoma’s food systems.

First, a local food lobbying firm began to operate in the state in 2011. The Oklahoma Farm and Food Alliance (OFFA) is principally the creation of Bud Scott, an attorney with a background in tribal law and advocacy, and a longtime OFC member from a family that has been centrally involved in the local food movement for years. Scott’s grasp of the challenges facing local food as an industry is both deep and wide, and matched only by the expansiveness of his vision for this industry. In addition to lobbying state officials on behalf of local food enterprises through OFFA, his efforts to actualize that vision range from active participation on the statewide food policy council to working with tribal governments interested in making local foods central to their procurement policies. Thus far, Scott’s work has primarily been oriented towards enabling the expansion of local food industries writ large, and he has not specifically focused on questions of inclusivity or broader notions of social justice within the nascent local food movement. The potential for such concerns to overlap with his industry advocacy are however suggested by discussions he has had with personnel at a second food system actor that I will briefly discuss, the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma (RFBO).

RFBO is a non-profit food bank operating a 150,000 sq. foot facility that distributes about 90,000 pounds of food each day to shelters, soup kitchens, community pantries, and schools. This organization plays a (if not the) central role in meeting the daily challenges facing the hundreds of thousands of food insecure Oklahomans. The links between the local food movement and RFBO have not thus far been robust, but the food bank has for

49 Accessed: http://www.regionalfoodbank.org/About-Food-Bank/History
some time emphasized the ecological and health benefits of locally grown foods. For more than a decade, the organization has operated a largely self-sustaining garden, housed at RFBO’s headquarters in Oklahoma City, that includes hoophouses, a composting operation, and an ‘aquaponic’ system that cycles water through aquaculture tanks and growing beds for produce (Cathey 2010). Despite these commitments, the imperatives of high volume and low cost have limited the capacities of the food bank to make local food a more central component of their operation. Discussions between RFBO personnel and Scott, however, have broached the idea of sourcing from small- to mid-sized local growers. As part of broader initiatives by OFFA and others to orient a range of institutional procurement policies around local foods, as mentioned above, the hope here is that the stability offered by such large institutional contracts might enable local producers to begin achieving greater economies of scale and thus shift away from the current reliance on the premium prices associated with romanticized notions of alterity. Social justice advocates in the local food movement see here the opportunity to not only include some of the poorest Oklahomans in the local food system through the RFBO, but also to lower the barrier of premium prices more generally as both political economic structures and infrastructural capacities favoring local foods increase.

It must be noted that this possibility remains mostly virtual, and even if such institutional partnerships could be expanded, it’s not clear that the benefits of these developments would be widely distributed or long-lived. The example of the state’s Farm-to-School program offers grounds for both optimism and caution here. This program, established in 2006, contains two elements: a “statewide program” that relies on conventional food distribution networks, and a “direct program” through which producers sell directly to schools (Thornburg 2013). Gina Thornburg (2013) finds that while the statewide program eventually came to provide roughly 60 of the state’s 540 school districts
with fruits and vegetables grown in Oklahoma, this produce comes from only two large-scale farms. One of these two farmers told me that her operation benefited greatly from participation in the program, which played a considerable part in helping her to establish her product line as one of the dominant local food brands in a number of regional supermarket chains. As Thornburg points out, price and volume are fundamental barriers to participation in the program for small-scale growers, very few of whom have attempted to sell through the direct sales leg of the program. Thus in the name of helping local farmers and bringing healthy foods to schoolchildren, public and private forces have been enrolled to substantially empower a very narrow portion of the state’s local farmers. Moreover, at the close of my fieldwork, several local food advocates indicated that the program was under fire from the state legislature, which had shifted notably away from many forms of state intervention in social life in the years since the program was created in 2006 with the support of a Democratic governor.

With this brief history of the Farm-to-School program in mind, there is clearly cause for caution with respect to OFFA’s efforts to link local foods to institutional procurement policies. However, other outcomes for institutional procurement are possible. In the case of RFBO, for example, one idea that was discussed was for the contract to be not with a specific grower, but with the OFC itself, who could work out internal arrangements with a number of smaller producer-members to provide the necessary volume at a price that might be lowered by the stability offered by the contract and by the fact that the OFC demands

50 The case of Oklahoma’s Farm-to-School program also provides further insight into the complex politics of the OFC, as one of the two main growers is a longtime OFC producer-member who has had a particularly contentious relationship with a number of members. The relations of production on this farm have also been controversial. On the one hand, the farm is one of the more successful certified organic operations in the state. On the other hand, the farmer told me that she has faced numerous lawsuits filed by former workers she employed through a US-Mexico farm labor exchange program. The outcome of those cases was not determined at the close of my fieldwork.

51 More specifically, the current administration has attacked forms of state intervention that may slow or reverse wealth concentration, such as labor health and safety regulations and health care reform. For example, Oklahoma was among the states that refused federal funding to aid in the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, signaling the administration’s unwillingness to cooperate with this federal legislation. Under these conditions, it is hardly surprising that the Farm-to-School program may be threatened.
only a 10% cut from producers. Moreover, the shortcomings of Farm-to-School are particularly pronounced when we evaluate the program as a single approach to expanding the assemblage of local food. Alone, this program is bound to have limited reach. As part of a series of institutional procurement programs around the state, the picture could change. Here again a key determinant of the outcome of such a scenario would seem to rest on whether ‘local foods’ are understood in fetishized, romanticized terms, or are linked more explicitly to political ecological concerns. That is, if questions of value distribution, democratic governance, and inclusivity – i.e. the political ecological relationships underlying food systems – are not made an explicit part of the discourse surrounding local food procurement policies and built into the structure of those policies, it’s not clear what would prevent a repetition of the highly inequitable outcome that has thus far occurred with the Farm-to-School program.

4.1 The persistence of the higher type

In any case, I offer the examples of OFFA and RFBO as components of the local food movement not because I believe these entities or institutional procurement policies in particular will provide a ‘silver bullet’ solution for expanding local food systems. Instead, these examples suggest two salient points to consider: First, as I noted earlier, OFFA and RFBO represent two among several actors whose vision for local foods continues to push beyond the more narrowly instrumentalist values that have gained dominance in the OFC and other private local food enterprises. The longterm ability of these actors to shape the broader local food movement remains to be seen. Indeed, in the following chapters, we shall see that public discourse surrounding local food contains very few traces of the more reflexive elements constituting the territory of local food, which calls into question the significance of actors such as OFFA and RFBO.
That such actors continue to exist, however – and this is my second point – sprinkled throughout the growing territory of local food, eschewing the more ‘rational’ tendency to embrace instrumentalist notions of local food, carrying on with their daily work of painstakingly attempting to construct a more reflexive territory for this movement, brings us back to the Nietzschean figure of the higher type or ‘nobler nature.’ I suggested in Chapter Two that the early OFC was dominated by active forces that disdained common economic wisdom, and rushed heedlessly towards an unlikely vision of food systems based on mutual well-being, mobilizing difference as a resource, and foregrounding negotiation between actors whose “skin in the game” was made explicit. The continuing work of actors such as OFFA, RFBO, and others would seem to indicate that the higher type has not entirely lost possession of the territory of local food in Oklahoma. Following Nietzsche’s philosophy a bit further, I would argue that even where local food seems to have become more instrumentally-bound and reactive, elements of the higher type remain. For Nietzsche, his series of categorical distinctions – the higher and the lower, the noble and the common, the master and the slave – are used not to categorize particular social groups or individuals per se, but rather as analytics through which to trace the operation of power. In Nietzsche’s work, the will to power constantly expands and differentiates, ‘biting into itself’ and overcoming itself; it is multiple and constantly shifting. This is why power does not tend to remain in stable configurations. Moreover, this is why it is only in extreme cases – and only temporarily – that a particular type of force might take complete possession of a given group or individual, or any other type of assemblage. From this perspective, even those elements of the territory of local food that seem most removed from the nobler origins of the OFC should be viewed as sites of ongoing contestation and becoming: utility maximizing tendencies jostle with social and ecological concerns amongst the many forces
that converge on all of the players involved in the unfolding story of the local food movement.

5. Conclusion

Elizabeth Grosz writes (2005, p. 76-77, original emphasis), “(W)e need to look more carefully at the *virtuality* laden within the present, its possibilities for being otherwise, in other words, the unactualized latencies in any situation which could be, may have been, instrumental in the generation of the new or the unforeseen. This is the very condition of [...] any politics that seeks transformation.” Drawing on this line of thinking, the contingencies and qualifications presented so far take on added resonance, highlighting the unknown futures that may yet emerge from the local food movement’s past and continuing struggles to create more just and sustainable food systems.

The questions we must continue to pursue from here then are, what shapes these contests, and how might the latent elements that together represent a still-present more active and reflexive local food movement be further activated, strengthened, and woven more tightly into the territories of Oklahoma’s food systems? We have thus far seen how the territory of local food in Oklahoma grew from an original point laid down by the Oklahoma Food Cooperative into what many participants came to call a ‘local food movement.’ I have argued that this expansion increased the material capacities of local food by enrolling a widening cast of actors, from a growing number of food consumers to infrastructural components such as distribution networks and retail outlets. At the same time, I demonstrated some of the ways in which this period of growth also intensified some qualities or senses of ‘local food’ – e.g. its capacity to fetch premium prices by virtue of its alterity, linked tightly to instrumental notions of economy and reactive modes of being – at the expense of others, such as the more active mode of being that characterized the early
OFCC in conjunction with more reflexive understandings of the political ecological significance of local food. However, while these value shifts reached far and wide in the local food movement, pervading even the OFC itself, we also saw that active and reflexive forces persist in the local food movement, and alongside the more common elements continue to go about their daily work of assembling the territory of local food. There is clearly a struggle underway to shape the meaning of this growing territory, and my hope is that the genealogy I have thus far traced highlights the contours of this struggle and elaborates multiple sites of further intervention, potential lines of flight.

From here, we will continue to keep a critical but hopeful eye on the local food movement, while expanding the field of our analysis to examine the connections between this movement and a series of far-reaching actors and processes that have played key roles in shaping the growing territory of local food in Oklahoma. As my research pursued a relatively open-ended and grounded methodology, I explored to varying degrees a wide range of actors impinging on the expansion of the local food movement, including the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry, the state’s Health Department, the history of agricultural conservation science and other cultural representations of the ‘Dust Bowl,’ food policy councils, tribal governments, the state’s sizable contingent of Black farmers, and others. One actor in particular, however, seemed to cast a long shadow over many of these diverse terrains: Oklahoma City. More specifically, it became clear to me that the dynamism of the local food movement was entangled in multiple ways with urban redevelopment in the state’s capital, a process that has unfolded over the past several decades, but has notably intensified since the mid-1990s, reaching something of a crescendo just as the local food movement became, in the eyes of its proponents, a “revolution.”
Part Two
4
Movement and the city, part I: Revolutionary food and urban renaissance

We will never find the sense of something (of a human, a biological or even a physical phenomenon) if we do not know the force which appropriates the thing, which exploits it, which takes possession of it or is expressed in it. [...] All force is appropriation, domination, exploitation of a quantity of reality. The history of a thing, in general, is the succession of forces which take possession of it and the co-existence of the forces which struggle for possession. The same object, the same phenomenon, changes sense depending on the force which appropriates it. Sense is therefore a complex notion; there is always a plurality of senses, a constellation, a complex of successions but also of coexistences which make interpretation an art.


1. Introduction

In mid-June of 2012, a large portion of the ceiling of the OFC’s Operations Center collapsed. No one was present at the time of the mishap, no one was injured, and no major property or equipment belonging to the cooperative was damaged. However, the part of the ceiling that collapsed was just above the primary entrance to the building, filling the main staging area with debris. This created both a logistical issue and a safety hazard for the workers and producer-members who would be streaming in and out of the building on delivery day, which was coming up only two or three days after the collapse was discovered. A call for assistance went out to OFC e-mail lists and traveled through personal social networks. Thanks to the efforts of paid employees, crediteers, and
volunteers, the main staging area was cleaned up, the remains of the ceiling were deemed acceptably safe, and delivery day went off with no more than the usual number of small glitches.

Nevertheless, the ceiling collapse served as something of a final straw in a longstanding discussion surrounding the need for a new location for the Operations Center. The building housing the Center at that time had been a meat processing facility and then sat empty for years until the OFC relocated there in 2007. The site offered several advantages including relatively low rent; a loading dock and large parking area; plenty of space in which to build tables and shelves, and through which to move racks and carts laden with ice chests, boxes, and cartons; and several rooms that could serve as offices for accounting and other business functions, meeting rooms, a kitchen, and a dining room for serving food for workers on delivery day. Initially, these advantages greatly outweighed the drawbacks of the building, which included an irregular configuration of interior rooms and spaces, provoking months of experimentation on delivery days before the hectic flow of people and products reached a relatively stable and smoothly functioning arrangement. The building was also quite dilapidated from years of disuse. Portions of the roof above the loading dock were disintegrating, providing nesting spaces for grackles, who constantly flew in and out of their homes a few feet above the bustle of delivery day. Substantial portions of the walls inside the building similarly revealed rot, decay, and the movement and labor of microflora and
insects. The main loading dock and parking areas immediately in front of the building were paved with cratered and broken asphalt and gravel, and the main parking area, if it was ever paved at all, had become just a grassy field, ringed by scrubby oaks and acacias.

For the most part, the building was only used intensively by the OFC for two or three days per month — delivery day and the days immediately before and after it. Moreover, the vast majority of customer-members interfaced with the OFC at the multiple delivery sites around the state, not at the Operations Center. Together, these factors meant that leadership never saw much reason to spend scarce resources on maintenance beyond the bare minimum required for operations, as well as health and safety regulations. Thus, the Operations Center often conveyed the impression of a space only tentatively carved out and maintained against rapidly encroaching biological, chemical, and physical processes occurring amid the growing entropy of a structure losing its previous form. Just beyond the cracked cement slabs and walkways immediately in front of and abutting the loading dock area, where colonizing vegetation grew tall in the summer months, an abandoned machine sat, grasses growing out of its rusted-out openings. Beside it, an old toilet served as an informal planter, filled with soil and grasses. A decommissioned ice chest reposed back in the corner. The only signage on the chain-link fence surrounding the property was a temporary vinyl or canvas banner that read, “Oklahoma Food Cooperative.” For all but a few days a month, the building likely appeared to any passerby to be abandoned.

Fig. 10 Grasses and obsolete infrastructure at the Operations Center
When the ceiling of the staging area collapsed in summer of 2012, it seemed clear that the balance between maintenance and entropy had shifted against the cooperative. Beyond concerns with the dilapidated state of the building itself, some members had long objected to the fact that the Operations Center was located in a relatively low-income neighborhood in the south-central part of the city. To my knowledge, there were no incidents of crime or harassment involving OFC members or property during the several years that the Operations Center was housed in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, several members of the management and finance teams expressed concern about coming to the “scary” building for meetings after dark, and some linked those safety concerns with questions about the image the OFC might convey by having an Operations Center in such a neighborhood.

The area immediately surrounding the Operations Center was largely though not entirely vacant, and much of it looked similar to the property on which the Center sat: open lots where houses likely once stood, now covered in vegetation and trees; remnants of wood and metal fences and outbuildings; empty storefronts; and auto mechanic shops that now seemed to be functioning more as storage lots for decaying vehicles; and just to the east and north of the Operations Center, the now defunct Oklahoma City Downtown Airpark. Beyond this immediate quarter-mile or so radius, however, is a residential area that is part of the Capital Hill neighborhood, which has been somewhat revitalized in the past decade or so, though in a notably uneven and tentative fashion, in tandem with a large influx of Latino immigrants to the area. The old main street of Capital Hill, which had experienced serious disinvestment in the 1980s, is now home to a number of brightly painted *carnicerías, estéticas, mercados, taquerías*, and western wear shops, interwoven with small used car dealerships and repair shops, vacant storefronts, and the remnants of previous eras: diners and
establishments advertising such offerings as “Coney Islands and BEER, since 1924,” and an old theater that, until recently, housed the Oklahoma Opry, a country music venue.

The uneven development of Capital Hill was implicated with two forces that, alongside the roof collapse and the dubious regard in which some OFC members held the building and its environs, contributed to the OFC’s decision to relocate the Operations Center. For one, several key OFC leaders had long been interested in opening a retail storefront for the cooperative, the most recent proposal for which included a restaurant featuring only local foods. The decrepit old meat processing plant clearly was not a viable option for a retail extension of the OFC, in terms of the building itself, and with respect to its location in an out of the way pocket of a neighborhood that, while experiencing some degree of dynamism, is still far from being a place that members could imagine as an ideal site for a local food cooperative store and restaurant.

Secondly, the owners of the building had made it clear for some time that the OFC’s occupancy could only be temporary, as the site has for several years been slated for a remarkable transformation. The building and the land on which it sits are the property of the Humphreys Company, a self-described “boutique real estate development firm” that also purchased the adjacent defunct Downtown Airpark for $7.2 million in 2006 (Lackmeyer 2013). The Airpark site is between the former meat processing facility and the Oklahoma River, which cuts a parabolic arc through the city south of the central business district (CBD). As we shall see, this waterway has since the city’s abrupt founding in April 1889 both shaped and been shaped by urban development processes. A recent example of this connection is one of the Humphreys Company’s ongoing projects, ‘The Waterfront,’ described on their website as “a mixed-use walkable urban village including office, retail and urban residential product on the south bank of the Oklahoma River.”

portion of the development is slated to feature entertainment facilities including a ferris wheel purchased from California’s Santa Monica Pier (Lackmeyer 2009), while the southern portion, where the OFC’s Operations Center was located, “will be a walkable neighborhood characterized by attached and detached single family residential with narrow lots and alley access.” Though plans for this project go back at least as far as 2009, when I last visited the site in May 2013, I saw no visible evidence that construction on the project had commenced.

One might well wonder if this is too grandiose a vision of development for sites currently returning to forest land and prairie, but consider briefly that the Humphreys Company is chaired by Kirk Humphreys, mayor of Oklahoma City from 1998-2003, and is currently developing a planned community on a grand scale, Carlton Landing, at Lake Eufala in rural eastern Oklahoma, which is to feature an 11-acre organic farm, a boat club, a performance venue, a church, a “public magnet classical school,” and a nature preserve and educational center developed in partnership with the Nature Conservancy.53

With such factors at play, the ceiling collapse in the OFC’s Operations Center served as the beginning of the end of the cooperative’s tenure in the old meat processing plant. No sooner had the dust settled from the June 2012 delivery day than OFC leadership redoubled their efforts to locate and move to a new site for the Operations Center, a process that would take some three months to complete.

This vignette about the former Operations Center, Capitol Hill, and the Waterfront development nods towards some of the many entanglements between the OFC and Oklahoma City. We have already glimpsed some of the importance of the city to the local food movement. Most obviously, Oklahoma City has always been the primary geographic market for local foods sold through the OFC and its offshoots. Since the cooperative was founded, its Operations Centers have been in the city, at the heart of Oklahoma’s highway

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infrastructure, which plays a central role in the OFC’s distribution model. Also, as already noted, the OFC emerged from the desires of a small handful of city dwellers, living mostly in Oklahoma City and its suburb to the south, Norman, who grew up on and around farms and longed for fresh, non-industrialized foods, and several farmers and ranchers seeking sales outlets for ecologically-produced and artisanal foods.

In the eyes of founder Bob Waldrop, the often contentious but productive ferment produced through the entanglements of “urban liberals” and “rural conservatives” within OFC membership is mirrored by and literally materialized in and through the particular cultural ecologies of Oklahoma City itself. “Oklahoma City is where […] two ecosystems intersect, the Eastern Cross Timbers, and the Great Plains,” he points out, adding “In permaculture we would call it the edge effect. The place where you have two ecosystems coming together like that is always going to be a very fertile and diverse place. That’s true in the natural ecosystem and it’s also true in an organizational ecosystem or invisible structure.”

For Waldrop, the city itself emerges from a particularly fertile eco-cultural zone that occurs along the line where two ecosystems meet, and the structure of the OFC took shape in part from the same ferment of heterogeneous spaces and diverse physical and biological relationships. Historically, radical populist and anti-corporate spirit in Oklahoma tended to take root in rural areas among disaffected farmers and laborers, but more recently the state’s largest urban areas — Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Norman — have for decades been home to various anarchist, neo-hippie, feminist, and environmentalist networks. These networks have contributed substantially to the crediteer base of the OFC that is so crucial to the function of the enterprise, and several key OFC leaders have held close ties to these cultural and political milieus.

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54 Interview, 11/1/2011
Moreover, given Oklahoma City’s role as the state capital, the central bureaus of most state agencies are based in the city, including the state Health Department and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry. These agencies have interfaced with the cooperative in many ways, and the close proximity of OFC leadership to state actors in the city has on occasion been an important factor in shaping those relations. But the development of this growing network and its articulations with Oklahoma City are not organized solely or even primarily around state actors. In this chapter, I focus on changes in the broader foodscapes of the city to explore profound connections between these marked shifts and the local food movement, which in turn bring us to further consider processes of urban redevelopment in the city in the past several decades, processes that have intensified notably in conjunction with the emergence and growth of the territory of local food in the new millennium.

2. The changing foodscapes of Oklahoma City: a food revolution

A snapshot of Oklahoma City in the early 1990s: Still struggling to shake off the malaise of the 1980s oil bust and the spectacular failure of Penn Square Bank, the city has a generally moribund and gritty feel to it. But life continues in the wake of recession, and the city’s food landscape, in places at least, is perhaps more varied and vibrant than we might expect. In addition to old-fashioned diners, steak houses, and chicken-fried steak, barbecue, and burger joints, a variety of cuisines from around the world feature in Oklahoma City’s restaurant scene, from Italian, Mexican, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Vietnamese to the more recent arrivals of Ethiopian, Japanese, Brazilian, and Thai. Alongside these restaurants,

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In the mid-1970s, Penn Square Bank began to finance oil and gas exploration, selling shares in these loans to other banks, and ultimately originating over $2 billion worth of such investments. The bank was overextended when oil prices dropped in 1981, and was declared insolvent following a $50 million ‘bank run’ in spring 1982 (Doti, no date). Harrell (2002, p. 945) summarizes the effects thusly: “Over 100 Oklahoma banks failed. Virtually all of the major banks in Texas and Oklahoma failed. The ripple effects reached to Seattle, Chicago, and New York, affecting major national institutions. In the aftermath, the number of independent community banks in the United States declined by the thousands.” See also Zweig (1985).
a number of so-called ‘ethnic’ and specialty markets dot the city, where one can find anything from artisanal Basque cheese to durian fruit. It helps if one has a car, and can afford things like Basque cheese, two qualifications that do not apply to many Oklahoma Citians, but such things are available, if perhaps not on every corner or in every neighborhood. Moreover, a few relics of bygone days persist here and there in the retail scene in the form of butcher shops, family-owned neighborhood grocers, and a handful of small farmers’ markets. The bulk of food passing through retail markets, however, traverses several regional and local supermarket chains, whose offerings are largely the mass-produced stuff of conventional agribusiness and industrial manufacture. Indeed, most of what is bought and sold even in the specialty and ethnic markets is thoroughly intertwined with international networks of conventional production and distribution. By the late 1990s, Wal-Mart commands the lion’s share of the city’s grocery business, and the regional chains and few remaining smaller grocers struggle to hold their ground (Springer 2010).

But in the early years of the new millennium, a new type of food offering began to appear in and around the city: ‘local food’ (see fig. 11 below). As I noted in Chapter Two, locally grown produce had long been available at farmers’ markets, which had never completely disappeared from the urban and suburban landscape. But as we saw in Part One, in the past decade or so in Oklahoma, a new significance for ‘local’ food proliferated; that is to say that a new series of values or possible senses one could make of food became increasingly widespread. Particular qualities and meanings of certain foods and the practices of their production, distribution, and consumption were intensified and foregrounded. In the emergence of these phenomena, the health of human bodies, local environments, and local economies have been laboriously attached to locally produced food. As we have seen with the OFC, questions of social justice and food systems have at times been voiced in
conjunction with these developments, sometimes stridently, more often as a kind of background murmur.

In 2012, Earth to Urban – the hybrid enterprise composed of several offshoots of the OFC, as described in Chapter Three – used the term “local food revolution” on its website. The image of a food ‘revolution’ may strike readers as overly sanguine, given the qualifications I offered in previous chapters with respect to the local food movement’s niche market status to date. But Earth to Urban is far from alone in advancing the idea that profound shifts have been underway in Oklahoma City. As I noted in the vignette that opened Chapter One, the autumn of 2011 saw the arrival of several national supermarket chains with ‘green’ images, most prominently Whole Foods Market (WFM) and Sunflower Farmers Market, a fast-growing chain headquartered in Colorado. For the most part, commentators from the local press and the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce celebrated the arrival of these stores as further evidence of a fundamental change in the food culture of Oklahoma City. During the past three years, the motif of a food ‘revolution’ has become common in the local press: one journalist, for example, writes that a local food truck’s victorious appearance on the Food Network’s “Great Food Truck Race” contributed to a burgeoning gourmet food truck industry in the city, “and paved the way for a delicious revolution in the city’s food consciousness” (Hardy 2014). Another asserts that “Many local chefs believe the state is experiencing a food revolution, one that is luring more foodie pilgrims from around the US

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56 Sunflower Farmers Market is now ‘Sprouts Farmers Market,’ as of a recent acquisition/merger.
in search of the next holy edible grail,” and quotes a local chef as saying, “Oklahoma City is going through a culinary awakening” (Golden 2013; see also Burch 2014; Green 2013; No Author 2013). Most of these analyses focus on the increased food choices brought to the city by enterprises ranging from Earth to Urban and other OFC offshoots to the corporate ‘green’ supermarkets. Several comment on how the primary players in the retail grocery market had begun offering high end cheeses, increased organic and “local” options, and so on, in anticipation of heightened competition from the newcomers months before WFM opened its doors. One journalist dubbed this expansion of food options “the Whole Foods effect,” noting, “Local, organic and high quality foods never had it so good in these parts” (Cathey 2011). “Black Friday-esque” queues and unusually polite throngs of customers on WFM’s opening weekend seemed to provide further evidence of just how excited Oklahoma Citians were to embrace this food revolution in the city (Palmer 2011).

2.1 A vanishing line?

But here we would be wise, drawing on critical perspectives from AFN scholarship discussed in the preceding chapters, to scrutinize more closely the significance of this food revolution. I argued in Part One that as the local food movement’s territory expanded, the values associated with local food drifted away from more reflexive engagements with social concerns, embracing instead a narrower emphasis on taste, health, and quality; local food became more of a niche product for consumers of speciality items than a platform through which fundamental changes to food systems might be realized. Again, it’s important to note that this process was never complete, and likely never could be. To paraphrase Michel Callon, all frames are subject to overflowing. Nevertheless, a close examination of the local food movement’s entanglements with Oklahoma City’s food revolution suggests that the line separating the territories of local food as conceived by the early OFC and the much more
expansive territory of local food in Oklahoma a decade later was significantly thinner and more porous: it had become much easier for all comers to take possession of parts of the territory of local food.

A heuristic example is offered by the fact that by 2011 even McDonald’s was getting in on the ‘local food’ act, implementing an ad campaign featuring the tagline, “Oklahoma bred, Oklahoma fed.” This couplet, an allusion to the fight song of the University of Oklahoma,\textsuperscript{57} is set against the brilliant red background McDonald’s has employed in their advertising scheme for several years, beside an image of a sausage patty in a biscuit, accompanied by the “MIO” logo signifying the Made in Oklahoma Coalition, a recently created consortium of food processors. The McDonald’s campaign was developed by the advertising agency Moroch, a conglomerate of companies with dozens of offices across the US and in Mexico, which has designed advertising and marketing campaigns for a range of mega-corporations, including Coca-Cola, Disney, and Universal Studios. On Moroch’s website, the rationale behind the campaign is explained as follows: “Specifically, we’re talking about food growers and suppliers for McDonald’s restaurants in Oklahoma — a state where ‘made in America’ is very important to consumers. Insight told us that ‘made in Oklahoma’

\textsuperscript{57} The lyric alluded to here is “I’m Sooner born and sooner bred/and when I’m gone I’ll be Sooner dead.” Linking in song the local college football team to the entire life cycle in this way may strike the reader as no less hyperbolic than the term ‘local food revolution,’ but Oklahoma is one of the US states where college football is a major part of life and team loyalties are indeed often instilled from the beginnings of childhood. Given this profound resonance, the allusion seems to have been designed to reach deep into the lifeworlds of Oklahomans, as advertisers are wont to do.
meant even more. So, our PR team set out to show the people there that eating at their local McDonald’s was a great way to help the economy of their own state.\footnote{Accessed 28 June 2013. Available: http://www.moroch.com/work/mcdonalds-made-in-ok-need-this/}

The two ‘local’ food processing firms involved with the campaign were The Bama Companies, Inc., based in Tulsa, and Lopez Foods, based in Oklahoma City. According to Lopez Foods’ website, the company “originated as a spinoff of Wilson Foods, a major force in the meat packing industry until the 1980s,” it has been producing “fresh, frozen beef patties for McDonald’s since 1968,” and it “is now recognized among the top meat companies in the United States and is an industry leader in supplying a variety of protein products to the largest restaurant chains and retailers in the world.”\footnote{Accessed 28 June 2013. Available: http://lopezfoods.com/history/} The company’s links to McDonald’s are, in a word, foundational: John Lopez, who bought controlling interest in Lopez Foods is “a successful McDonald’s owner/operator in Southern California,” and the company’s current CEO, Ed Sanchez, was President of McDonald’s operations in Latin America and Canada before moving to Lopez Foods (ibid.). As for The Bama Companies, a story posted on a Tulsa news program’s website, entitled “McDonald’s Locally Made?”, reports that the firm supplies “every McDonald’s west of the Mississippi (with sausage), and all of the companies (sic) apple pies sold world wide” (no author 2011).

In this particular attempt to take possession of the sense or value of ‘local food,’ we see that the world’s largest fast food corporation, broadly characterized by extremely hierarchical production relations based on the exploitation of a largely part-time and contingent labor force and heavy reliance on so-called factory farms, hires a multinational advertising giant to promote highly processed sausage, biscuits, and apple pies produced by two gargantuan Oklahoma-based industrial food processors as ‘local food.’ Note that ‘production’ here, despite Moroch’s reference to “food growers,” leaves opaque the farms

and ranches where the animals and grains that, alongside human laborers and a host of other non-human actors, form the basis of these sausage biscuits. This example clearly illustrates the argument made by several scholars who have critiqued a reified notion of the ‘local’ as automatically ‘good’ or desirable in terms of social or environmental goals (e.g. Depuis and Goodman 2005). But rather than simply reiterating this observation, I offer this example to underscore that this advertising campaign, like the arrival of national chain ‘green’ grocers to Oklahoma City, makes clear that the meanings, practices, and imperatives entangled with ‘local food’ in Oklahoma have undergone a profound shift.

Additional evidence of a sedimentation of values related to taste, quality, and personal and environmental health around ‘local food’ can be found in several mobile farmers’ markets that have developed territories around hospitals in the metro area, selling Oklahoma-grown foods to the employees of several hospitals, banks, and even the state’s Department of Agriculture. As I noted in Chapter Three, the two most prominent of these mobile markets, Farm to Fork and Urban Agrarian, are owned and operated by OFC members who were once centrally involved with the daily operations of the cooperative but have in the past several years distanced themselves considerably and shifted their efforts to focus primarily on their own local food enterprises. When I spoke with a human resources director at an Oklahoma City hospital on board the Farm to Fork bus one afternoon in Fall 2012, she told me that hospital management saw the market as a way of encouraging healthy eating among staff members, the need for which arose directly from rising health insurance costs. Local food, for hospital management at least, is primarily about fostering cost-saving

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60 Close scrutiny of even these large-scale corporate enterprises might well reveal a number of ways in which various forms of ethical considerations overpower utility maximization, domination, and exploitation. Ignoring these potential differences within nominally ‘capitalist’ firms serves the dubious purpose of further consolidating the discursive hegemony of capitalism (Gibson-Graham 1996). Such an empirical exploration is beyond the scope of this inquiry, but in any case, even if such differences were brought to light, they would not alter the basic argument I’m making here about the multiplication of senses taken on by ‘local food.’
individual dietary choices, and has little or nothing to do with addressing the political ecological relations of food systems.

Another milieu where taste, quality, and freshness are the qualities most emphasized in local food is a series of new upscale restaurants specializing in ‘local food’ that have opened in the metro area in the past two to three years, each of which is to varying degrees linked to some of the producers of the OFC and its splinter groups. Most prominent among these are Ludivine, in downtown Oklahoma City, and Local, in Norman. Ludivine in particular aligns with the practices and concepts underlying ‘farm-to-fork’-type restaurants around the US, serving food prepared primarily with Oklahoma-grown, seasonal ingredients, and foregrounding connections with local producers in interviews with local media, through text, images, and video on their websites, and in their menus, which constantly change in accord with the variability of local production networks, whose offerings at any given time are highly contingent on seasonality, weather conditions, pests, diseases, and other vagaries of farming and ranching. The kitchens of both Ludivine and Local are open to the dining areas, making prominently visible the labors of chefs, who have achieved something of celebrity status within particular cultural milieus in the city.

In these farm to fork restaurants it is clear that an aesthetic understanding of local food reaches its apogee (fig. 13). Here, taste-related qualities such as freshness and flavor are entwined with and intensified by the visual elements of local foods. This is evident in the presentation of the dishes themselves, artfully arranged with an eye for form and color palettes set against gleaming white plates in the style
of haute cuisine. Such attention to detail echoes throughout the spaces of these restaurants as well, which lean towards a stark minimalism augmented by rustic undertones conveyed by repurposed wood and metals used for the bars, counters, tables, and so on. In the following chapter, I will return to consider further such articulation of materials and qualities or values, but for now I’ll briefly suggest that the metro area’s farm-to-fork restaurants have as a group also perhaps shown themselves to be vulnerable to co-optation by and convergence with CFNs. They have recently been joined by an aspiring regional chain of farm to fork restaurants called Whiskey Cake, owned in part by a restauranteur whose brands include Twin Peaks, a rapidly growing nationwide chain of “foodie ‘breastaurants’” (Alexander 2014; Heid 2010). A local food writer summed up the significance of this restaurant’s arrival to Oklahoma City as follows (Cathey 2014): “Locavores, corporate America has heard your cry: Local is good.” Whiskey Cake purports to source its ingredients from local producers, but offers little specific information about its sourcing practices on its menu, website, or in press coverage. Its current menu at the time of this writing, for example, lists goat cheese from one Oklahoma-based farm as the only geographically specific item. The sourcing practices of Local are also not made explicit, beyond vague references such as “Our local focus brings a fresh and exciting menu with an eye toward local, sustainable food products.” By contrast, Ludivine lists several dozen Oklahoma producers as sources on their website, and as I noted above, features an extensive series of videos documenting many of these producers’ operations. I consider this video series further in Chapter Five.

With Local offering entrees ranging from $10-$18 on their current spring menu, and Ludivine’s entrees ranging from $22-39, we might note that, while accessibility in terms of

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61 The term ‘breastaurant,’ I learned, denotes a dining establishment whose servers are scantily-clad women.

62 See http://eatatlocal.com/about/. Intriguingly, this is a departure from the restaurant’s marketing practices surrounding their opening in 2012, at which time several specific producers were listed on the menu. Urban Agrarian owner Matt Burch has recently noted that his company continues to make weekly deliveries to Local, suggesting that some Oklahoma products are still used, but it would seem that if this is more than a token amount, the restaurant would continue to foreground its sourcing practices.
price covers a somewhat broad spectrum between the two enterprises, neither is particularly affordable on a regular basis for low-income individuals or families. These spaces may be seen as exclusive in other terms, as well. Most obviously, on the perhaps half-dozen or so occasions when I dined in these two restaurants, dark-skinned diners were notably few. The predominance of light skin among the clientele and staff of these enterprises is only part of what creates what Rachel Slocum (2007) has described as the mutually constitutive nature of whiteness and the spaces of alternative food practice. A critical reflexive stance suggests that we seek to become aware of the tendencies of such sites to produce insularity through a range of dynamics and processes more subtle than genetic phenotype alone: particular modes of comportment — how to carry oneself through the spaces of the restaurant, for example, or the appropriate tones and rhythms employed in addressing servers and staff or a fellow patron waiting in line for the restroom — and specific forms of knowledge — what to do with the wine cork placed on the table by the server, how to properly appreciate and talk about a whole host of ingredients and preparations, from sunchokes to Mangalitsa lardo, remoulade to confit — are important factors to consider. But a range of non-human actors are also clearly at work in this process: specific hairstyles or articles of clothing worn by staff and customers, the music playing, the stark decor of repurposed materials and exposed air ducts, and of course the tastes and textures of those sunchokes and remoulades. Together, these embodied practices and assorted materials work in many ‘alternative’ food spaces, including Oklahoma City’s local food restaurants, to inscribe a more or less porous line demarcating inside from outside.

And not solely in terms of race, of course, but also encompassing what might be thought of as class distinctions. A scene from television series *The Wire* (Simon 2002) provides a compelling dramatization of the dynamics of marking inside from outside in cultural spaces such as gourmet restaurants: D’Angelo, a young Black man who is a mid-level
member of a growing drug cartel in Baltimore, takes his girlfriend Donette to an elite restaurant near the thoroughly gentrified harbor area of the city. After the two have finished eating, while a pianist plays in the background, D’Angelo tries to explain to Donette a sense of unease that has clearly beset him throughout the dinner. Looking around at the other guests, who seem quite naturally at ease in the restaurant, he asks, “Do you think they know? […] You know, what I’m about? […] You know, it’s like, we get all dressed up, right? Come all the way across town, a fancy place like this. After we finish we’re gonna’ go down to the harbor, walk around a little bit, you know? Acting like we belong down here, you know what I’m sayin’?” Donette, who seems to be much less attuned to the sense of being ‘out of place’ so keenly felt by D’Angelo, replies, “So? Your money good, right? D., we ain’t the only black people in here.” D’Angelo says, “It ain’t about that, that ain’t what I’m sayin’,” but struggles to express what he is getting at, adding, “You know, I feel like...some shit just stay with you. […] Like, as hard as you try, you still can’t go nowhere.” Donette looks dubious and annoyed, and tells him, “Nobody give a damn about you or your story. You got money, you get to be whatever you say you are. That’s the way it is.” D’Angelo is clearly unconvinced, and indeed, when the waiter appears at just that moment with a cart displaying the dessert offerings, and D’Angelo confidently picks up a piece of chocolate cake and starts to hand it to Donette, the waiter interjects, chuckling awkwardly, “Oh! Sir, I’m sorry, these are the samples.” As the server takes the sample slice of cake back from Donette, giving her another slice from beneath the cart, D’Angelo reflects briefly, sits back in his chair in resignation and directs a look at Donette that is both pointed and haunted. The waiter asks, “And for you, sir?” , but D’Angelo, whose point has just been demonstrated, only lifts his open palm and slightly shakes his head, never taking his gaze from Donette.

Such forms of exclusivity, particularly with respect to race and class, appear to be consonant with the general timbre of value shifts in the growing assemblage of local food in
Oklahoma. Indeed, these exclusive tendencies are in part enabled by the retreat from social justice concerns in the local food movement, a retreat which elides questions of who is able to be included among those reaping the benefits of local food, whether in terms of individual health, aesthetics, or otherwise. This is primarily an unintentional form of exclusion, and indeed most of the individuals that I interviewed or interacted with expressed what would generally be thought of as progressive values with respect to race in particular, and seemed genuinely rueful about the fact that local foods are now primarily the purview of mostly white, relatively affluent consumers. Unintentional or not, however, these forms of exclusivity in the city’s farm-to-fork restaurants seem to represent a consolidation of the idea of local foods as niche market commodity rather than a step along the way towards a fundamental reworking of food systems. Moreover, as with the arrival of WFM and other corporate ‘green’ supermarkets, the appearance of Whiskey Cake on the scene suggests a potentially ominous future for the locally-owned farm-to-fork restaurants. If aesthetics are the primary distinguishing feature — or source of value — of such restaurants, there is little to prevent larger, more ‘efficient’ enterprises from dominating the market by offering similarly aestheticized dining experiences at lower costs.

2.2 The price of progress, part I

Indeed, in discussions among OFC members and other groups and individuals who had worked for years to construct local food networks, the recent expansion of markets for local food was troubling, as it seemed linked to the fact that 2011 was the first year in which the OFC saw a decline in revenue. This dynamic was complicated further by the appearance of several new enterprises focusing explicitly on local food, most of which were linked in one way or another to the OFC and were now struggling to find footing just as the influx of corporate actors appeared in the city. The OFC, once “the only game in town,” as one
longtime member put it, found that the market that it played a significant hand in creating had suddenly become much more competitive. Indeed, despite the fact that the new corporate green grocers offered only a smattering of products grown or made in Oklahoma, they actively worked to recruit local producers as suppliers. WFM in particular engaged with the local press to construct a narrative linking their company to ‘local food.’ Several articles in local papers (e.g. Wilkerson 2010) describe the work of WFM’s “forager,” a term used by the company to denote the position of the personnel member who seeks out and builds relationships with local producers. The importance of constructing such connections – and making them public – is suggested by the fact that the company made arrangements with a farm in western Oklahoma to produce a 10-acre corn maze that reads, “Whole Foods Know your farmer, know your food” (Staff reports 2011). Photos of the advertisement written in corn appeared in local papers and on a number of websites. One blogger who writes about search engine marketing muses about whether or not the image will become “temporarily immortalized” in satellite photos on Google Maps (Smith 2011).63

This growing entanglement between the new corporate green grocers and local producers soon directly touched the OFC. In the words of one OFC leader, they were “going after our producers,” and indeed several OFC producers began selling through WFM right away. While it wasn’t clear if these new relationships with corporate buyers would impact the relationships between those producers and the OFC, the presence of those respected local producers in WFM lent credibility to WFM’s claims of commitment to local communities and producers. On the company’s website, for example, on a page titled “Our Core Values,” two of the values listed include “caring about our communities and our environment” and “creating ongoing win-win partnerships with our suppliers.”64

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63 At the time of this writing, the Whole Foods slogan has been replaced in the satellite imagery of the corn maze on Google Maps by “Thunder OKC,” in reference to the city’s recently acquired NBA franchise.

64 See www.wholefoodsmarket.com/mission-values/core-values
additional points should be noted here. First, as WFM personnel freely acknowledge, the Oklahoma City store, like all other WFM locations, stocks only a small percentage of locally-sourced products. Second, according to a WFM manager who participated in a focus group I convened with several OFC members, the markup for products sold varies by item, but in general it reaches 60% or higher. For this and other reasons (insurance requirements, paperwork, etc.), several smaller producers in Oklahoma told me that selling through WFM is not a viable option. Conversely, at least two of the larger OFC producer-members reported that their relationships with WFM have been favorable; one of these is also among the few producers who have participated in the statewide Farm-to-School program, discussed in the previous chapter. Broadly, then, one of the effects of WFM’s engagement with local food has thus far been to concentrate whatever benefits might accrue to Oklahoma producers in the hands of a few well-situated enterprises.

However one views the relations between WFM and local producers, to some OFC leaders and other local food enterprises, these growing relations seemed to be an effort to co-opt the networks and meanings that they had worked for years to construct, laboring for little or no money, building businesses that were for many of those involved just beginning to provide them with relatively stable if not particularly substantial incomes. Given the context of the changing foodworlds of Oklahoma City, it’s not surprising perhaps that part of the retreat from social concerns in the local food movement can be traced to the efforts of the OFC and other small enterprises to adapt to changes in the market. In the OFC, for example, as sales fell and new corporate green grocers opened shop, even those members who are the staunchest advocates of social justice began to think in terms of harnessing the remarkable rise in market value of local food through opening a storefront in a relatively affluent area of the city. As Waldrop, speaking as OFC president, put it in a recent e-mail

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65 WFM’s definition of ‘local’ varies somewhat at each store, but in general the company has shifted towards state boundaries as the point of demarcation.
following news that the co-op had failed to receive a marketing grant, “I think we should concentrate on the ‘educated, high discretionary income, environmentally aware’ market segment and leave the EBT and FSMFP programs until we are in better shape with staff and volunteers.”66 To be clear, a range of strategies was discussed, from partnering with WFM in creating a local food market in the store’s parking lot, to “poaching” some of WFM’s local producers previously unknown to the OFC, or alternatively, shifting the emphasis of operations from the metro areas to smaller towns where WFM and its corporate peers could not venture but the OFC’s more flexible, low cost distribution network could be viable. Nevertheless, in all of these discussions, the net effect was to focus energy on how to adapt, recover even a modest profitability for the OFC itself, and move even further from considerations of a broader notion of social justice.

We have now seen a number of examples of how the growth of the territory of local food by way of its connections with Oklahoma City, while clearly entailing an expansion of food options for many Oklahoma Citians and concrete benefits for at least a small number of Oklahoma food producers, also both reflected and reinforced the less reflexive elements of that territory. These examples raise grave concerns about the potential for Oklahoma’s local food movement to expand beyond niche market status, to ‘scale up,’ as some would have it. And yet we have only begun to scratch the surface of the entanglements between local food and Oklahoma City. To delve deeper, we will now turn to a final example of the impacts of the food revolution, focusing again on WFM’s much-heralded arrival, which provides a clue into the much more expansive assemblages that have sought to take possession of local food.

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66 E-mail message, Robert Waldrop to [okcftgovern] listserv, 26 April 2014.
2.3 Resurgent fossil fuels and ‘the Whole Foods effect’

The broader influx of corporate grocers to the metro area came as something of a surprise to the OFC and other local food advocates, but the arrival of WFM itself had actually been anticipated for some time, and was the end result of a courtship between WFM and Oklahoma City-based Chesapeake Energy, the second largest natural gas company (in terms of production) in the US (Kusnetz 2011). More specifically, Chesapeake’s outspoken and high-profile CEO Aubrey McClendon was considered by many to be personally responsible for Whole Foods’ decision to open a store in Oklahoma City (cf. Bustillo 2012), not only providing them with a favorable offer on rental property directly across the street from Chesapeake’s expansive “campus” on the north side of the metro area, but also wining and dining WF’s corporate executives on visits to the city.67

Chesapeake’s key role in enticing WFM to the city perhaps encourages us to consider the significance of ‘the Whole Foods effect’ in OKC. First, we might note that not far beneath the surface of ebullient media coverage and comments from Chamber of Commerce spokespersons, other troubling perspectives were brought to light. A potentially instructive example is the fate of Crescent Market, a small grocery that had existed since statehood, located in the affluent Nichols Hills area, only a block from the new WFM store, in a building also owned by Chesapeake. In the months leading up to the opening of WFM, Chesapeake raised the rent substantially for Crescent, and despite Chesapeake’s insistence that this was simply long overdue and had nothing to do with their arrangements with WFM, the rent increase was a factor cited by the family that owned the store as a major part of their decision to close their doors for the final time just before WFM opened (Lackmeyer 2012). Despite its upscale location, Crescent Market was locally-owned, offered charge

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67 McClendon also reportedly idolizes WFM CEO John Mackey, particularly as an outspoken advocate of “conscious capitalism” (Palmer 2011b).
accounts, gathered grocery orders for elderly customers who phoned ahead and came into pick up their orders, and was regarded by many in the neighborhood — particularly longtime local residents — as an integral part of their sense of community in the area (Cathey 2011a, 2011b; Lackmeyer 2011). Other small grocers in the metro area specializing in organic and natural products were similarly hard-hit by the arrival of the national chain ‘green’ grocers, a fact made clear to me in conversations with the owners of one longstanding natural food store in the metro area.

Media coverage of these less-desirable implications of ‘the Whole Foods effect’ in the city, particularly the closing of Crescent Market, tended towards the elegiac, conveying the sense that these outcomes were simply the inevitable costs of progress. “It’s a joyous day to be a foodie in Oklahoma City,” one journalist wrote. “Enjoy it. But be aware: This giant leap for foodkind comes at a cost, as progress always does. While the coming of Whole Foods was the worst-kept secret in the local food industry, the doom of Crescent Market might’ve been the second worst” (Cathey 2011a). Moreover, the idea that local stores like Crescent and Pratt’s Wellmarket had played a considerable role in creating a market for ‘specialty’ groceries in the city was explicitly voiced by at least one local journalist: “Did Crescent Market pave the way for Whole Foods? Absolutely. Did Whole Foods repay that debt by causing Crescent Market to close? Absolutely not. That’s just progress. And just as we pay homage to the vintage devices and locales that first showed the way to today’s conveniences, we all owe the Pemberton family [Crescent’s owners] thanks for their many years of service to the community” (ibid.). Following from this anecdote, the reader might reasonably ask why a massive energy corporation would be involved in the affairs of grocers, and what this involvement might mean for widespread narratives of ‘progress.’ To answer that, I now turn to consider a broader trajectory that has unfolded in Oklahoma City in
recent years, a period of robust redevelopment heralded by many commentators as a “renaissance.”

3. Urban redevelopment in Oklahoma City

‘Progress’ in this case must be understood in relation to the city’s entrepreneurial development strategy, itself entangled with the drives and needs of firms like Chesapeake and Devon Energy, another fossil fuel company based in Oklahoma City and among the top five natural gas producers in the US, whose labor demands require a city that is hip, sexy, and livable in terms understandable by young, educated, and upwardly-mobile professionals emerging from universities around the world. Since the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in 1993 left a substantial rent in Oklahoma City’s CBD, the city has embarked on a series of ambitious development initiatives, at the center of which is the multi-stage Metropolitan Area Projects Plan (MAPs), through which more than a billion dollars has already been funneled, with nearly $800 million in additional costs projected for the current phase. This plan, aimed at luring members of ‘the creative class’ to the city through ‘quality of life’ improvements (Florida 2014/2002), will be familiar to observers of urban development strategies of recent decades, with its focus on sports and entertainment venues alongside an artificially constructed downtown canal, modeled after San Antonio’s Riverwalk; the transformation, through the construction of several dams, of the North Canadian River – recently rechristened the ‘Oklahoma River’ – into a landscaped park and
kayaking facility; a new downtown public library; an additional 70-acre park designed to link downtown and the Oklahoma River; and a trolley system.\textsuperscript{68}

While city officials emphasize that MAPs has been publicly funded through a one-cent sales tax, the direct and indirect linkages between these projects and fossil fuel giants such as Chesapeake and Devon are numerous. To name one example among many, Chesapeake donated the $7 million Finish Line Tower that presides over the kayaking venue on the Oklahoma River, joining the Chesapeake and Devon “community boathouses,” a high-tech ropes course, and a series of small, landscaped canals to constitute the newly dubbed “Boathouse District.” Another recent development initiative, Project 180, a nearly $200 million plan currently underway to substantially rework downtown streets and parks in the city’s 8th District, was funded through a tax increment financing plan that relies on bonds issued to pay back a $95 million loan from Devon Energy, whose newly-constructed World Headquarters Tower now dominates the city’s skyline, sitting in the center of the 8th District (Adcock 2012). It also needs to be briefly noted here that these companies are themselves recently revitalized through 2005 federal deregulation of hydraulic fracturing or ‘fracking’. The controversies surrounding fracking exceed the scope of this inquiry, but I

\footnote{The second phase of MAPs, dubbed “MAPs for kids,” took a slightly different tack, directing more than $500 million to rebuilding public schools and containing provisions intended to improve students’ experiences in the classroom, “with action steps that ranged from expanding early childhood programs to fixing badly broken middle schools to better support and pay for teachers,” (Editorial Board 2010). However, a report issued by the Foundation For Oklahoma City Public Schools in 2010 assessing the outcomes of MAPs2 tells “a story filled with half-met promises,” noting that while school buildings themselves had benefited from the initiative, what goes on inside the classroom had not (ibid).}
offer this observation as an indicator of the spatial and temporal extent of the networks that have participated in Oklahoma City’s recent redevelopment boom.\textsuperscript{69}

The changes in Oklahoma City wrought by this rush of development are indeed striking. Visually, large swaths of the city have been worked over, particularly the downtown core and a broad corridor stretching from the Chesapeake campus and its environs in the north to the Devon Tower in the south. The process of reinvestment along this north-south axis has unfolded over two decades now, and certain areas in this swath of the city, particularly the further north one went, remained well maintained even through the recession of the 1980s. But in the downtown and “Midtown” areas, there were quite a few segments full of sights familiar to residents and visitors of many cities in the midwest and the so-called Rust Belt: semi-dilapidated abandoned buildings and storefronts, beat hotels and brownfields, soup kitchens and shelters. Many of the structures in this area have been

\textsuperscript{69} As I argued in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, however, events occurring in the milieus of national or international political economy should not be viewed as operating at a ‘scale’ deemed \textit{a priori} as the cause in the final instance of events ‘on the ground’ in Oklahoma. Instead, from the perspective of this study, the analyst interested in understanding the role of fracking deregulation would be required to trace the myriad interactions and milieus contingently drawn together in the assemblage(s) of natural gas industries, and the specific effects of that conjuncture. Again, the reader should not take this to mean that the natural gas industry is no more powerful than any of the actors I focus on here. To the contrary, it is obviously perhaps the most powerful player shaping Oklahoma City at present. However, its power comes not from within, but from an array of relationships. My concern is to excavate some of those constitutive relations.
restored or refurbished, vacant lots have been built on, and a number of expensive residential units have gone up.

3.1 Gentrification: The price of progress, part II

These transformations have not necessarily signified development for everyone in the city, as large swaths of areas outside the downtown are not seeing much investment, and many of the former inhabitants – read lower-income and darker-skinned – of the zones that have been substantially reworked have been displaced (Petty 2011). In this respect, Oklahoma City’s experience of the uneven impacts of redevelopment resonates with that of many other ‘postindustrial’ cities, following major shifts over the middle to late decades of the 20th century: a massive influx of population and built environment — and of course capital — in the peripheral areas of the city occurred as many middle-class Oklahoma Citians moved ever further from the urban core, particularly to the north and west of the CBD. During this phase, much of the inner core and the districts surrounding it, as well as some of the more outlying neighborhoods to the south and east of downtown, experienced profound disinvestment and neglect, producing large areas of decaying housing and crumbling infrastructure. As in many cities, these spatial shifts correlated to a large extent with race and ethnicity, as well as class: inner city neighborhoods, as well as more outlying districts to the east and south of the CBD, saw an increasing concentration of African American and Latino residents; the most dilapidated and underinvested areas of the city were those with the highest density of racial and ethnic minority residents, and were on the bottom end of income distributions (Petty 2011).

This historical marginalization of particular spaces and groups in the city produced a classic ‘rent gap’ (Smith 1979), which has in the past two decades been more or less successfully closed as middle-class residents have flocked to inner city neighborhoods. Clint
Petty (2011) uses census and other data to confirm what seems readily obvious to anyone who has spent time in the city in recent decades: gentrification has indeed occurred in the inner city and adjacent districts, with the notable exception of areas to the south and east of downtown. Relative to the rest of the city, many census tracts in central Oklahoma City have seen dramatic increases in home and property values and education attainment, and decreases in household size, which by and large correlate to decreasing populations of African American residents in these tracts, which as already noted were once areas of particularly dense minority residence. One gentrified neighborhood, ‘Deep Deuce,’ even celebrates its history as a formerly African American neighborhood with plaques placed around the now relatively wealthy and predominantly white ‘new urbanist’ development (see Smith 2002 for a critical consideration of ‘new urbanism’). Anita Arnold (2010, p. 125), a popular historian of this neighborhood poignantly describes the moment when its turnover was complete:

The change was complete for Deep Deuce [in 2003]. As the Deep Deuce Apartments at Bricktown began to line the streets of Second Street, articles ran in local newspapers about the cash engine that helped the struggling Bricktown merchants. People drove through Second Street to see the remake of the historic street, occasionally dropping in to look at the hanging pictures of jazz legends at the welcome center. Someone else’s dream was taking place, and the realization of that sank deeply into the hearts and minds of those who remembered a different Second Street.

Thus while previously marginalized spaces are being brought back into the fold of capital investment and material renovation, members of the groups that have for some time inhabited these spaces continue to be marginalized through displacement. An impact summary of MAPs commissioned by the city discusses such gentrification in frank terms, unabashedly asserting that “the natural tendency [is for] this group to be crowded out of the area as new or remodeled housing is substituted for low-value units” (Warner 2003). Despite noting that “This process of gentrification may only displace a problem population to other neighborhoods within the city,” the study concludes that “MAPs and other major
investments in [...] Oklahoma City are having a profound and favorable impact on the urban core’s environment” (ibid.). The parallels between this report and media discussions of ‘the Whole Foods effect’ are notable. The eulogies may be gone, but the idea that progress has its natural, inevitable costs remains clear.

3.2 Renaissance and revolution: redevelopment and local food

As revealed by a plethora of studies by critical urban scholars (e.g. Bridge and Dowling 2001; Cameron and Coaffee 2005; Deutsch and Ryan 1984; Harvey 1990, 2001; Ley 2003; Luckins 2009; Zukin 1981, 2008), the modes of urban redevelopment that have dominated postindustrial cities in recent decades have relied heavily on the production and capture of value through the deployment of cultural milieus, from shopping malls, art galleries, and trendy boutiques to gourmet restaurants and specialty food shops. Gentrification in particular typically includes elite cultural milieus as a centrally-important actor in changing the character and composition of a neighborhood. This has undoubtedly been the case in Oklahoma City. As I noted previously, recreational and leisure facilities such as sports arenas, an artificial ‘riverwalk,’ a new downtown public library, and a modern art museum have been central to the MAPs programs as well as public/private initiative such as Project 180 and the development of the Boathouse District. Corporate actors have attended carefully to such cultural concerns. Much was made, for example, of former Chesapeake CEO Aubrey McClendon’s key role in acquiring the city’s first NBA franchise, the Oklahoma
City Thunder. This team, formerly of Seattle, now plays in the recently renamed Chesapeake Energy Arena, located in the redeveloped CBD.  

In the context of such cultural interventions by corporate actors, it is hardly surprising that the motif of an urban ‘renaissance’ is tightly bound up with narratives of the city’s food revolution. Chesapeake’s central role in convincing WFM to open a location in the city, for example, was widely discussed in the local press and is common knowledge for many Oklahoma Citians. McClendon himself asserted that WFM’s arrival “validates the revitalization we have experienced in Oklahoma City in the past 10 years” (Bustillo 2012). When Chesapeake confirmed the closing of its deal with WFM, McClendon said, “The addition of a Whole Foods Market[…] contiguous to our corporate headquarters campus signifies a major step forward in our vision to create the most vibrant and dynamic urban environment for our employees and neighbors to live, work and play in Oklahoma.[…] We are taking the retail, entertainment and business environment to a new level in Oklahoma City while simultaneously furthering a mission of sustainability and

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70 Acquisition of the team was controversial. In many accounts, team executives and Sonics fans were assured by Oklahoma City-based buyers that the team would remain in Seattle after the purchase. One journalist relates that, after the deal was finalized, Clay Bennet — one of the team’s new owners — treated team executives to a dinner in Oklahoma City that featured heaping plates of fried lamb testicles as a symbol of his contempt for the initial promise to keep the team in Seattle (Zirin 2012). “Lamb fries” are not in fact uncommon in Oklahoma and across the American West, so it’s not entirely clear if this was quite as intentional of a symbolic gesture as the Seattle executives took it to be. Nevertheless, the circulation of this story suggests both the fervor of the popular debate surrounding the purchase of the team and the ways in which representations of Oklahoma on the national stage tend to fall back on tropes of backwardness that have held since at least the 1930s, when emigrants from the ‘Dust Bowl’ were commonly derided as ‘Okies.’

71 McClendon is clearly the most visible public face of corporate involvement in redevelopment. As one journalist put it, “Chesapeake’s flamboyant chief executive […] has pushed to turn Oklahoma City into a metropolis, showering arts groups and schools with millions in donations and sparking a building boom with an ever-expanding corporate campus of Georgian-style buildings” (Bustillo 2012). Or, in the words of the Tax Assessor for Oklahoma County, “Everything good that has happened in Oklahoma City in the past decade, he’s had a hand in it” (ibid). McClendon is often referred to in conversation by both supporters and detractors, whether they know him personally or not, simply as “Aubrey.”
healthy living with the addition of a Whole Foods Market” (quoted in Lackmeyer 2010). Narratives such as this, linking consumption and cultural milieus — particularly food culture — to development and environmental, community, and individual well-being have been common as redevelopment in the city has boomed, with the benevolent hand of corporations narratively positioned as the key mediator.

Such connections should not be thought of as primarily discursive or narrative-based, however. As noted above, the OFC’s busiest pick-up sites, as well as the majority of businesses specializing in Oklahoma-grown food more broadly, are located in the city’s wealthier areas. In some cases, such as the popular farm-to-fork restaurant Ludivine and a small high-end grocer called Native Roots, these enterprises act as important cultural nodes in gentrified areas. At Chesapeake’s sprawling corporate campus, food is foregrounded in a range of gourmet restaurants employees can choose from, and which prospective employees can tour virtually on the company’s website. Until 2013, in an immaculately-landscaped “employee garden” occupying an entire city block and overseen by two full time gardeners, Chesapeake personnel could plant and maintain garden plots and help with composting, beekeeping, and other gardening activities. Through these activities, as well as practices such as working out, keeping track of their diets, and so on, employees could earn credits towards regular bonuses designed to encourage good health and well-being. In other words, through food practices, corporate actors have taken an increasingly active role in shaping the embodied, experiential foundations of the lives of employees and urban Oklahomans.

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72 Several sources told me that the developers of a new urbanist project in Deep Deuce offered some kind of deal on a residential unit in the development to the couple that owns Native Roots to relocate from Norman to Deep Deuce. Whether this is true or not, the circulation of such stories indicates that people involved with local food grasp the significance of their growing territory to redevelopment processes.

73 In 2013, the garden was closed and the two full-time gardeners laid off as part of Chesapeake’s restructuring in the aftermath of financial scandals that led to McClendon stepping down from his position at CEO. By the close of my primary period of fieldwork, a cloud of gloom hung over many Oklahoma Citians who worried about the potentially devastating effects of yet another energy bust if Chesapeake crumbled. Some handled their anxieties with good humor: at a trivia night I attended with local food proponents at a local bar, the winning team, composed of Chesapeake engineers, wryly called themselves ‘Chesapeaked.’
4. Conclusion: Governmentality, renaissance, and revolution

It is precisely such phenomenological interventions that critical food scholars, drawing on Foucault’s work, have highlighted as forms of neoliberal governmentality (e.g. Allen and Guthman 2006; Guthman and Dupuis 2006). This concept is derived from Foucault’s argument that 19th century liberalism’s enshrinement of the autonomous individual entailed a political shift in which subjects came to monitor and govern their own behavior in (greater or lesser) accord with expansive networks of power and control (see Burchell et al. 1991). For Allen and Guthman (2006), as “activists and advocates rightfully attempt to fill in the growing gaps in state regulation and entitlement [produced by neoliberal policies, they] almost inevitably” reproduce neoliberal forms and subject positions: “(N) neoliberalization is not only a political economic project, but also one that instills particular ideas about citizenship and subjectivity to produce hegemony for the political economic project […] Discourses of personal responsibility and individual success, consumerism, and choice all figure in the production of neoliberal subjectivity” (p. 410).

From this perspective, farm-to-school programs, for example, which often explicitly seek to develop children as consumers of particular foods perceived to be healthier and more ecologically friendly, are shown to also elide “the distinction between consumers as purchasers and consumers as eaters, [which] conflates citizenship and consumerism – a key neoliberal conceit” (Allen and Guthman 2006, p. 411).

With this perspective in mind, there is little doubt that through careful attention to the embodied practices and intimate lifeworlds of Oklahoma Citians — particularly the expanding ‘creative class’ in the city — corporate actors, along with developers and city officials, have sought to direct the affective flows of city dwellers in accord with particular configurations of power. These power relations are in turn linked to a vision for the city that harmonizes with particular modes of value distribution and accumulation. In this chapter,
we have begun to see how this nexus of power, affect, meaning, and food practices both fed and fed upon the growing territory of the local food movement. In the process, particular values associated with local food were intensified and heightened: freshness, taste, individual health benefits, and to a more muted degree, local ecologies and economies. Other values were relegated further to the background, hushed, and constrained: more expansive and critical understandings of social justice, the notion of difference as a resource in self-overcoming, and democratic participation in decision-making and identity formation. In exchange for these value shifts, it might be said, the local food movement gained a larger customer base and an increasingly robust infrastructure through which their products move at an increasing rate and volume of flow.

From the perspective of assemblage thinking, however, it is crucial to emphasize here that this process has not been determined by actors operating at a more powerful scale per se, or who are inherently more powerful. The reader should not, in other words, assume that dominant actors in redevelopment were able to take possession, to some extent, of the territory of local food simply because they are more powerful than the OFC or the local food movement more broadly. As Latour might put it, the power of Chesapeake does not explain the genealogy I have traced thus far; rather the genealogy in part explains the power of Chesapeake. To the extent that dominant actors in Oklahoma City’s redevelopment boom have succeeded in deploying foods and foodways as agents of a particularly neoliberal governmentality, this is not because neoliberalism simply floats in the ether and expresses itself as it will. It is because dominant actors have carefully attended to creating a range of very specific sites, crafting them with precise attention to detail, pinpointing particular qualities, drawing them out and intensifying them in ways that quite literally resonate with human bodies across space and time. In the present chapter, we have seen a hint of the wide
range of such sites, from farm-to-fork restaurants to a corporate employee garden, but also a basketball arena, a river, and gentrified neighborhoods.

Assemblage thinking directs our attention not just to these sites as discrete entities, but to the relationships between them, the ‘in-between’ in Amin and Thrift’s terms. It is here where we can further interrogate the assemblage that draws together the territories of local food and urban redevelopment, of revolution and renaissance. This is what we must do if we wish to understand how power has operated in Oklahoma City, and to grasp the prospects for a more reflexive, just, and sustainable food system in Oklahoma and a more inclusive and democratically shaped mode of development for the city. If we wish to understand and facilitate, in other words, the virtualities that in Part One I insisted still exist in the local food movement.

To these ends, in the next chapter I dig deeper into the twin booms of local food and redevelopment, focusing on how the assemblage that unites a food revolution and an urban renaissance has depended on the articulation of matter and meaning in a number of key sites. We shall see that through the careful layering of materials, qualities, and signification in these sites, value is produced and distributed in particular ways. In the process, just as importantly, passions are awakened and harnessed, adding coherence to the assemblage but also bringing into view the potential for volatility, unexpected shifts, and perhaps very different futures for food systems and the city.
5
Movement and the city, part II: Architectures, properties, and passions

All passions are generally useful, some directly, others indirectly; in regard to utility it is absolutely impossible to fix upon any gradation of values, —- however certainly the forces of nature in general may be regarded as good (i.e. useful), from an economic point of view, they are still the sources of much that is terrible and much that is fatally irrevocable. The most one might say would be, that the mightiest passions are the most valuable: seeing that no stronger sources of power exist.

-Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power (2010/1901)

The territorializing factor must be sought[… ]precisely in the becoming-expressive of rhythm or melody, in other words, in the emergence of proper qualities (color, odor, sound, silhouette…). [… ]The expressive is primary in relation to the possessive; expressive qualities, or matters of expression, are necessarily appropriative and constitute a having more profound than being.


1. Introduction

Traveling by car through Oklahoma City on Interstate-40, one passes underneath a remarkable structure spanning the width of the road just as the highway viaduct moves alongside the central business district: a pedestrian bridge straddled by an immense angular form that lunges forward horizontally while sending a series of vertical lines racing towards the expansive prairie skies (see fig. 16 below). This piece, a hybrid of sculpture, architecture, and infrastructure called SkyDance Bridge, resulted from a 2008 design competition for a work of “iconic status,” as the city’s website puts it, that reflects the cosmopolitan and vibrant qualities of Oklahoma City and serves as a symbol for the City. The winning design was inspired by the state’s official bird, the scissor-tailed flycatcher, and when the piece was completed in 2012, it was included among Americans for the Arts’ “50 best public arts projects” in the US (Ingle 2012). Nearly 200 feet tall and 380 feet in length, the bridge is illuminated by an LED array that is controlled remotely in accord with holidays and special

74 Available: http://www.okc.gov/skybridge/
events. The stretch of highway that this structure presides over was recently constructed as part of a large-scale project to shift the route of the interstate some two-thirds of a mile southward, towards the Oklahoma River and away from the CBD.

About 140 miles northwest of the SkyDance Bridge, outside the small town of Woodward, Oklahoma, sits the Anichini-Moore Ranch and Farm, a mid-sized operation focused on rebuilding depleted soils and ecologically-oriented production of heritage animals such as Finn, Lincoln, and Shetland cattle and heirloom fruits and vegetables (see fig. 17 below). Several massive wind turbines positioned in neighboring lands loom over the farm. At night in this part of the state, the only artificial light one sees for miles emanates from the oil and gas wells that dot the horizon at frequent intervals. The brilliant luminescence of these sites in the vast darkness is unearthly, far outshining the humbler lights of the occasional ranches that appear faintly here and there. Dying towns and the remnants of towns, ghosts of wood and stone, flash by as you speed along the two-lane highways. The owner-operator of the Anichini-Moore Ranch, Kathy Moore, is a producer-member of the OFC, and currently sits on the board of directors. When I visited the farm in Fall 2011, she told me that several of her cattle were recently stolen by rustlers. She
showed me the skull of one of her bison, which was shot for no apparent reason from a vehicle out on the dirt road.

As remote as the Anichini-Moore Ranch and Farm may look and feel from the SkyDance Bridge, I demonstrate in this chapter that these two sites are intimately linked as constituent parts of an expansive assemblage that shapes much of the state’s built environment and its ecologies, and concomitantly the lived experiences and life prospects of many Oklahomans. A number of disparate phenomena converge in this assemblage, including processes of redevelopment and gentrification in Oklahoma City, the labor needs of large fossil fuel corporations, the aesthetic sensibilities and technical expertise of architects and engineers, and the social and ecological goals of Oklahoma’s dynamic statewide food relocalization movement. The assemblage constituted by the meeting of these forces and many others is not however strictly coterminous with the territory of the local food movement that I have traced through the previous three chapters. Instead it should be thought of as conjoining that growing territory at a number of specific points. Moreover, it should not be thought of as merely the aggregate of the local food movement and the many other diverse actors and processes listed above; it is first and foremost rather the relationships between these phenomena. In the analysis that follows, I trace some of the disparate connections that bind together the SkyDance Bridge and the Anichini-Moore Ranch and Farm and many other sites, as a further step in the genealogical approach to understanding the local food movement's
prospects for becoming more durable and expansive, for escaping the narrow confines of niche market status.

In this chapter I focus on the work that has been done in Oklahoma to unite, more or less hermetically, a host of distinct types of materials and particular sets of values or senses that can be made of those materials. This union is accomplished, I demonstrate, through the naming and intensification of particular qualities that materials or objects accrue in their relations with other materials. The result of this process of imbricating various bits of matter and meaning is the object known as an ‘assemblage’: matter becomes expressive through the assemblage, and the assemblage lives and dies through expressiveness. For an assemblage to expand requires the harmonization of an increasing number of different elements in this way. To understand the local food movement’s prospects for expansion in Oklahoma — and the significance of that expansion — we must look closely at the disparate elements that have come into contact with the local food movement, including a number of ‘things’ or objects, but also a series of forces.

More specifically, we will examine how the SkyDance Bridge and the Anichini-Moore Ranch and Farm are bound together by a series of multi-layered passions: the desire to be a part of the larger, modern world while also being comforted by the familiar; the thrill that often pervades bodies confronted with a mastery over gravity, entropy, and the forces of nature; and a basic sense of pride and self-worth. These passions are fundamental to the organization of power and space in Oklahoma City, as elsewhere, and to the distribution of the flows of matter and energy that constitute the city in all of its sociomaterial complexity. Focusing on three milieus that are centrally implicated in urban redevelopment — foodways, architecture, and sport — we will see that such passions traverse iconic structures such as the SkyDance Bridge as well as the crumbling shell that housed the former OFC Operations Center, but also organic materials such as the fatty acids in grass-fed beef and the bodies of
basketball players in motion. Throughout these disparate materials and the links between them, there is a constant interplay of movement and stasis, speed and slowness, growth and decay. From this interplay, passions emerge and give force to power, which in turn mediates the further development of the balance of forces such as movement/stasis. The stakes at play here are nothing more or less than ‘progress’ itself.

As abstract as this description may sound, the objects of inquiry in this chapter are quite concrete. Beginning with architecture, a fundamental element of Oklahoma City’s urban renaissance, I describe a series of structures that serve not only as icons of the city’s redevelopment boom, but as affective machines, or instruments that create or perhaps extract certain qualities that resonate with bodies in carefully designed ways. In exploring such capacities of buildings, I don’t claim to be discovering something new about architecture — concentrating on the links between space and bodily affects is of course a basic element of architectural theory and practice. My goal is rather to examine the qualities sought by architects in Oklahoma City, and the reasons given by these architects for pursuing those qualities, so as to better understand the sense taken on by redevelopment in the city. This goal requires us to consider not only contemporary architectural interventions, but also take a brief look at how these interventions do and do not break from redevelopment during the urban renewal era of the 1960s-70s.

The built environment may structure movement in the city, but it is also produced, maintained, or transformed by the movement of materials and energy in and through the city. It is here where the role of sport — a particularly affect-laden form of movement that is important to redevelopment strategies in many cities — is critical in mediating Oklahoma City’s transformations. A focus on sporting illuminates the potency of passions in effecting a major shift in how Oklahoma Citians feel about and experience their city. Sporting — in this case professional basketball in particular — can intensify bodily energies in spectators (to say
nothing of players, of course), generating an affective surplus of its own. We shall see that this surplus has been for many Oklahoma Citians fused with the desire to be part of (or rejoin) the broader, modern world; as such, this fusion plays an important part in *making sense* of redevelopment. If, as Nietzsche argues, passion is a potent form of power, then the ability to harness the passions is a key to power in the city. The passions generated by sport in Oklahoma City, however, do not act alone in shaping power relations. Instead, it is the meticulous articulation of sport, architecture, and, as we shall see, foodways in the city that intensifies and directs the passions of many Oklahoma Citians in ways that create particular configurations of power. Allow me to state this again as clearly as possible: *power relations in Oklahoma City depend on the enrollment of food and foodways, architecture, and sport, but also on the successful harmonization of these interlinked milieus.* This requires the articulation of many diverse kinds of actors. In the penultimate section of the chapter, I trace that process of articulation through the materiality and meanings associated with food in several key sites. Taken together, the fine-grained analyses of architecture, sport, and foodways offered in this chapter reveal the complexity of relations that enable the assemblage linking the SkyDance Bridge and the Anichini-Moore Ranch and Farm to cohere. Understanding these relations is necessary for grasping the ongoing struggles over food and urban space in Oklahoma, particularly as these struggles converge in a site that will be the focus of Chapters Six and Seven: the Farmers Public Market, a long neglected building that has catalyzed the local food movement’s efforts to expand, in part by attempting to latch on to the prodigious energies of redevelopment.
2. Material properties I: Architecture

In Chapter Four, I demonstrated some of the ways in which careful attention to food and foodways has been a key tactic used by powerful actors in the city such as fossil fuel corporations as they seek to maintain their dominant positions. Such tactics are commonly deployed, as much critical urban research demonstrates (e.g. Deutsch and Ryan 1984; Harvey 1990, 2001; Ley 2003; Zukin 1981, 2008), as part of a larger strategy by elites to use cultural forms to consolidate social power (see Chapters One and Four). However, food and its associated milieus — restaurants, gardens, markets, and so on — do not act alone in Oklahoma, but are rather one of a series of cultural interventions made by dominant actors in Oklahoma City’s redevelopment, interventions that we will presently see are interlinked. Prominent among these interventions is architecture. In this and the following sections, I examine recent architectural interventions in Oklahoma City, and situate them within the historical trajectory of urban redevelopment in the city. In doing so, I draw on architectural research in geography and cognate fields, particularly two interpretative models: a ‘political semiotic’ approach (cf. Domosh 1989; Goss 1988), which focuses on buildings as ‘signs’ reflecting the imperatives of given political economic conjunctures, and a neomaterialist approach that concentrates on what buildings do (Lees 2001; Gieryn 2002).

Beginning with Hans and Torrey Butzer’s widely-lauded design for the Oklahoma City National Memorial in the mid-1990s (fig. 18), an emphasis on forward-looking and innovative architecture and design has taken hold in discourses and popular imaginaries of
Oklahoma City. Hans Butzer, now a professor at the University of Oklahoma, has played an important role in promoting particular architectural values in the city, from the memorial to his recently designed SkyDance Bridge, the pedestrian bridge and public art installation discussed above. Another central figure in the city’s renaissance is Rand Elliot, whose firm has designed more than a dozen buildings for Chesapeake Energy and a number of other buildings in the city and state (see fig. 19). As with Butzer’s work, many of Elliot’s designs tend towards the strikingly postmodern, composed largely of steel and glass arranged in stark angles, emphasizing the play of light and evoking a sense of dynamic movement. Elliot’s work is centered on the Chesapeake campus, but notably also includes buildings in the Boathouse District along the redeveloped Canadian River. Completing the trio of iconic architectural firms recently working in the city is Pickard Chilton, a firm that has designed corporate headquarters for energy, finance, and banking companies from Houston to Riyadh. The Devon Energy tower that they designed in Oklahoma City dwarfs all previously existing structures in the city (fig. 20), and is situated as a lynchpin in the north-south axis of the ‘Core to Shore’ plan, the latest phase in the city’s redevelopment initiatives, which targets an area.
south of the CBD as part of an effort to link the redeveloped core to the Canadian River a mile or so south of downtown. We will have cause to consider this plan in greater detail in Chapter Six.

2.1 Architecture and movement/stasis

The contrast between the past two decades of construction in Oklahoma City and the built environment of the city as it appeared previously is remarkable. In the early 1990s, much of central Oklahoma City had recently seen little new construction aside from the boxy office buildings in vogue in the '70s and '80s, conveying the feeling of a time capsule from the days when oil was flowing voluminously in the state. Architect Rand Elliot has stridently demarcated recent architectural developments from the structures built during the last oil boom:

The early ‘80s brought to Oklahoma City those seeking fame and fortune. They saw us as a class C city, and they gave us what they felt we should have. We were an easy mark. Oil-boom boxes sprang up everywhere. It happened so quickly we hardly stopped to question the long-term impact. [...] In the 1980s, a small group of influential people were in charge. Now leadership is much broader. The ‘80s was about personal gain. Today is more about collective benefit (quoted in Lackmeyer 2012b).

This quote from an interview with Elliot conducted by a local journalist intriguingly links recent development to both a heightened aesthetic sensibility – couched in contrast to the “oil boom boxes” of the evidently artless 1980s – and the notion of “collective benefit.” We’ll return to the question of collective benefit, but here I’d like to focus on the idea that dominant actors in redevelopment in Oklahoma City have mastered the art of fusing materials, affects, and meanings in an affirming, positively charged nexus that is key to the capacity of these actors to maintain their dominant position in the city. The buildings of Elliot, Butzer, and Pickard Chilton make dramatic statements about the city’s past and future, and form a potent link to the desires of Oklahoma Citians to become part of – or rejoin –
the modern world. These structures, in their skyward racing lines and strident articulation of motion make palpable a sense of a city ‘on the move,’ a striking contrast to the sensation of stagnation, immobility, and decay that permeated the city in the 1980s and early 1990s. A brief excursion into the history in Oklahoma City of this sense of movement and its position relative to stasis and decay will, however, help us to recognize certain continuities alongside the discontinuities between the eras demarcated by Butzer.

The trope of a city on the move is of course not unique to Oklahoma City, nor is it new there: a promotional video commissioned by the city’s Chamber of Commerce in the late 1950s asks, “What better way to describe Oklahoma City than a city on the march, people on the move?” (Runkle 1950s). This theme was then picked up and counterposed against invocations of “a disease called urban blight” in a film produced in 1964 by the Urban Action Foundation, an organization created by local business elites who championed urban renewal programs in the 1960s (Urban Action Foundation 1964). This group contracted the services of architect I.M. Pei, who had gained national prominence for his central role in the fundamental reworking of the downtown area of Cleveland, Ohio (Lackmeyer and Money 2006). What became known as the Pei Plan envisioned a radical reconfiguration of central Oklahoma City, including the demolition of thousands of homes and businesses across 1,350 acres to make way for modernist high-rises, parking garages, a grand shopping mall, an expanded university medical center, and so on (Wallach 2014). Pei claimed that his was the first plan that called for an almost complete clearance of a city’s core and replacement with an all-encompassing vision that unified functional, spatial, and aesthetic elements (Lackmeyer and Money 2006).

This vision of wholesale demolition of much of the inner city gained legitimacy at the time in part through a repetitive discursive invocation of senses of forward movement in space and time, guided by expert knowledge and technological allusions, juxtaposed against
senses of stagnation, decay, and disease. The heading of a report from the late 1960s, for example, on the city’s urban renewal plans read “3...2...1...Ignition” (Lackmeyer and Money 2006), linking renewal to the space exploration flights that would have been a prominent public topic at that time. The Urban Action Foundation’s 1964 promotional film, titled “A Tale of Two Cities,” takes such tropes of forward movement further, highlighting a sense of motion and technological prowess by deploying a special cinematographic technique reportedly developed for the film, which enables a camera to travel through the intricate model that Pei created to capture his vision for the city. The film’s narrator takes a moment to emphasize this innovative technology:

Let’s move ahead ten years from today and see what the plan to revitalize Oklahoma City will be like. During this visit you will notice a rather course, grainy quality to the film. This is due to the unusual lens requirements necessary to capture our city of the future on film. For we are making our visit via an exciting new parascopic camera trick. […] We’ll ride our camera into a dream, a dream that will soon move from the drawing boards and planning sessions and emerge as the second great era of Oklahoma City (Urban Action Foundation 1964).

As the narrator describes the sites portrayed on film, the camera advances through the model, hovering well above street level while remaining immersed among the built environment, creating the impression for the viewer of flying through the city. The camera never ceases its movements, restlessly casting about the city of the future while the narrator’s voice, set against orchestral music, supplies meaning for the shots, describing the ease with which city dwellers will be able to move through the city. One can easily imagine that in its
time, this film might have made quite an impression on viewers as it virtually transported them through the imagined city seen through an otherworldly “grainy” visual filter.

The film appears to be designed, moreover, to heighten the effects of motion by juxtaposing them against a lengthy opening sequence featuring scenes from the city’s downtown as it looked at the time, which is framed by the narrator in terms of stasis, decay, and social baseness. After describing many of the virtues of Oklahoma City — “a proud heritage in art and music,” “the financial headquarters of the state,” and a “vital economy [including] growing industry, fine residential sections” — the narrator goes on to warn the viewer that the city “also contains the scenes you are looking at. These are the scenes of a disease called blight, which like a deadly mold has settled on our downtown and is killing it. The symptoms are obsolete structures, congested traffic, too little parking, worn-out hotels and low-grade businesses.” The narrator’s spoken emphasis on insufficient parking and the quality of existing businesses seems designed to resonate with the embodied experiences associated with being downtown, such as the frustration of searching for a place to park, and to link those experiences with particular moral valuations that place business enterprises on a hierarchy. The accompanying images depict a typical midwestern downtown in the 1960s: sidewalks busy with people — most of whom appear to be Black, it should be noted — a plethora of signage of all shapes and colors, set against mostly two- or three-story brick buildings, with small businesses on the street level and perhaps residential space in the upper floors. It is this “blighted” city, the narrator however insists, that must be “reborn” by way of urban renewal. The structure of the fourteen-minute film revolves around this juxtaposition of the titular ‘two cities’ — the actual city, which is physically and morally

75 The city, in other words, now treasured and sought after by ‘new urbanists.’ Indeed, online comments offered by viewers of another film made by the Urban Action Foundation, containing footage of the demolition of a number of structures in downtown Oklahoma City, suggest the dubious regard in which some Oklahoma Citians today hold for the master planners of yesteryear, and demonstrate the emotional connections residents can have with the city. One example: “This film is heartbreaking. Looking at all that destruction where renovation should have been implemented.” See “Growing with Pride,” available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhXaPSz8Ss0&index=1&list=PL8f4D6483B5DC6BF
decrepit, diseased, a confused “jumble” of traffic and “obsolete” structures and, we might add, obsolete people; and the virtual city, which is clean, rationally ordered, and characterized by the fluid movement of automobile traffic.

Such tropes were of course common to urban renewal discourses around the US and abroad in the mid-20th century (Caro 1975). This film is significant not because it is unique (although its cinematographic elements may have been innovative, as the narrator claims), but because it crystallizes a theme that remained constant in Oklahoma City throughout the urban renewal era of the 1960s-70s — the contrast between movement and stasis, growth and decay, disease and health, and the importance of this contrast for the city’s prospects of rebirth and a return to greatness. This theme gained resonance not just through the discursive interventions of films and other representational forms, but also because it latched onto and instilled meaning into the physical decline actively produced by disinvestment in inner city properties, a process that was occurring in the mid-20th century in cities across the US. It’s not entirely clear how many people might have viewed these films or what their reactions might have been, and there is no doubt that the “blight” and decay of the inner city had different meanings for different groups within the city. As noted above, however, the Urban Action Foundation was comprised of many of the city’s leading businessmen, including the publisher of the state’s largest newspapers, the presidents of the city’s two largest banks, and the executive director of the city’s Chamber of Commerce. Given the influence of this group, it’s likely that the film and several other similar productions were widely seen on television and perhaps in local cinemas. As such, the framing of the inner city around counterpoised senses of movement/stasis, growth/decay, health/disease, and so on would have reached a broad audience. In any case, the vision for the city, and the rationales for that vision, captured in the film and in Pei’s plan were at the center of an urban renewal institution in the city that over the subsequent ten to fifteen years grew rapidly in decision-
making power and influence, bolstered by massive federal funding. As a result, by 1980, large swaths of the inner city had been demolished.

Fig. 22 Oklahoma City post-urban renewal. Image courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society

However, as urban renewal encountered obstacles at federal, state, and local levels throughout the late ‘70s and eventually stalled, many of the constructive aspects of Pei’s vision of urban renewal in Oklahoma City were never fully realized, leaving a number of marginalized spaces throughout the inner city. These conditions were exacerbated by the oil bust and the city’s economic stagnation in the 1980s, against which narratives of motion, progress, and the technological prowess of modernity gained further resonance as they were reactivated and transmuted along with elements of the Pei Plan in the form of the MAPS initiatives beginning in the 1990s. Among the many commentators who have drawn a direct

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76 More specifically, the city’s Urban Renewal Authority suffered political defeats in the latter 1970s, during which time a decade or more of inner city demolition came largely to an end (Lackmeyer and Money 2006). During the oil boom of the late 1970s-early 1980s, the ‘superblocks’ cleared by urban renewal began to be populated with new office space, much of which fell into the category of “oil boom boxes” that would later be critiqued by a new generation of architects such as Butzer and Elliot. This burst of constructive oil-boom energy was short-lived, however, and came to halt with the oil bust and the collapse of Penn Square Bank.
connection between the Pei Plan and the recent redevelopment boom is Hans Butzer, architect of the Oklahoma City Memorial and the SkyDance Bridge and a consultant for a 2010 public installation of Pei’s original scale model, who recently remarked, “A lot of the ideas that Pei started to formalize we’re still working with” (quoted in Surette 2010).

An example of such continuities is the Myriad Gardens, a botanical garden and park space in the CBD. The massive steel and glass tube that houses the tropical garden was completed in time for the city’s centennial celebration in 1989, and for a number of years stood out as a unique futuristic design element in the struggling downtown. One of the few elements of the Pei Plan to be built, this space was more recently incorporated into the grounds of the Devon Energy Tower as part of the Project 180 plan discussed in Chapter Four. The name ‘Project 180’ itself not only designates the number of acres targeted by the initiative but also of course conjures motion, an about-face, or a turnaround. But examining this site and its recent reworking allows us to maintain our analytical focus on the ways in which particular meanings long-associated with redevelopment in the city — the sense of movement, progress, renaissance, and collective benefit — draw on and highlight material qualities of the architectural interventions unfolding in redevelopment today.

77 Not entirely unique, however: the Myriad Gardens sat next to a singular structure most recently called Stage Center, a performing arts venue built in the 1970s around the concept of a ‘theater turned inside-out.’ Until its recent demolition, the facility, basically a series of large, colorful, metallic boxes and orbs connected by walkways and utility ducts, created an impression that might best be called retro-futuristic.
First, it should be noted that at fifty stories, dwarfing the tallest structures around it, the Devon Tower's verticality is an important aspect of what makes it a “key symbol for Oklahoma City,” in principal architect Jon Pickard’s terms, and “emblematic of [...] the renaissance” of the city (Bloom 2012). And yet in contrast to the hierarchy and competitive dominance conveyed by earlier generations of skyscrapers in the US (Domosh 1989), the Devon Tower and its surrounding complex seek to integrate the sense of vertical power with a sense of community and collectivity. Explaining the design of the structure, Pickard notes that the tower itself is modeled on an equilateral triangle, with each point gesturing to a prominent feature of the redeveloped downtown (Bloom 2012). A range of spaces in and around the base of the tower are open to the public, including a six-story rotunda, a cafe, and seating areas inside and out that segue into the updated Myriad Gardens. These spaces, it must be noted, are highly monitored by private security, and indeed it wasn’t long after the tower was completed that it became a focal point of direct contestation when activists associated with the Great Plains Tar Sands Resistance chained themselves to the doors of the building (Griffin 2013). This confrontation, and the fact that a glitter-coated banner unfurled in the building by protesters led to efforts by the police to charge them with staging a “terrorism hoax,” which carries a sentence of up to ten years in prison (Redden 2013), calls attention to questions of who is able to define appropriate use of this space and what kinds of dialogue about collective benefit will be tolerated here. Without eliding these crucial questions, I’d like to point out that the site has thus far attracted a diverse public: homeless Oklahoma Citians use the clean and well-maintained restrooms in the rotunda, Latino families enjoy the park on weekends, and tourists wander amongst Devon employees and downtown businesspeople.

Of primary significance for my argument is the attention devoted by designers to deploying particular material qualities of the site to harness affective flows among the
diverse groups of users of this space. The gesture towards surrounding sites of redevelopment by the tower’s equilateral triangle shape is, according to Pickard, more than symbolic: “We wanted the building to radiate that attention and energy” (Bloom 2012). The use of light and the foregrounding of the expansiveness of the building’s plains setting are also central to this sense of radiating energy and dynamism, and are incorporated into the design in a number of ways, from the glass shell surrounding the structure (fig. 24), which allows “awe-inspiring views out to the endless landscape,” to inset corners on the floor plates that highlight “connections to the outside” (ibid.). These efforts to blur or reverse an inside/outside dichotomy in the service of a sense of energy and motion are reiterated in the panoramic views from the restaurant at the top of the tower, named simply Vast. Such considerations also extend to the reworked Myriad Gardens, which was originally flanked by earth berms that shielded much of the garden from wind but also from street view. As project designers describe renovations, removing these berms was part of a larger effort to create a “more integrated, urban space that feels comfortable with its surroundings, rather than closed off from them, [which] provides a dynamic energy that more closely resembles an urban landscape” (no author 2012).

This conscious merging of building materials, urban spaces, and the sensory and emotional capacities of bodies through the intensification and direction of affects of movement and energy can be noted across many structures of the city’s recent architectural
boom. Chesapeake architect Rand Elliot, for example, seeks to harness “the power of color and light” in his work, designed in explicit contrast to “today’s office buildings [which] lack kinetic energy from the street”; as with the Devon Tower, architectural design at Chesapeake is explicitly linked to democratic values, in this case through the “egalitarian” imperative that all offices are the same size and have windows (quoted in Cohen 2012). This explicit material-semiotic linkage of energy, movement, and social values is echoed by Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett, who frequently argues that “investing in community” has precipitated an influx of “young, mobile, creative and highly educated talent” to the city, a movement of people which Cornett likens, invoking *The Grapes of Wrath*, to a reversal of the emigration of Oklahomans during the so-called Dust Bowl of the 1930s (cf. Cornett 2012). In hailing Steinbeck, Cornett perhaps unwittingly indicates the stark contrast between the creative class arriving in Oklahoma City and the dispossessed rural Oklahomans who left the state during the Depression. This apparent lack of sensitivity to questions of class should again raise a red flag with respect to who is included in and who is excluded from the city’s recent renaissance, a point I will return to below.

2.2 Intensifying movement, abandoning stasis

For now, however, I’d like to draw attention to one way in which recent redevelopment in Oklahoma City has notably departed from the preceding era dominated by the Urban Renewal Authority. As described above, redevelopment efforts of the 1960s and ‘70s drew heavily on a discourse that imbued redevelopment with meaning by invoking a series of contrasting binaries — movement/stasis, growth/decay, health/disease, and other similar tropes. I pointed out that these were not simply metaphorical devices, but drew their power in part by extracting qualities from the fabric of the inner city, much of which was indeed declining due at least partially to disinvestment on the part of property owners. These
qualities were then intensified through devices such as films, newspaper and television coverage, and other representations. But a curious thing has happened in the MAPs era: dominant actors in the city have come to eschew the negatively-charged components of the binaries so central to urban renewal discourse, and now focus almost exclusively on the more affirming senses of movement, growth, excitement, modernity, and community.

This shift can be observed in a perusal of virtually any of the many representations of redevelopment currently in circulation, a notable example of which is a series of promotional films that are in some ways clear descendants of the urban renewal films of the 1960s I discussed above. The work of Oklahoma City-based animation studio Skyline Ink is particularly notable in this respect. Commissioned by the Chamber of Commerce as well as architectural firms and developers, Skyline Ink’s short clips echo the ‘city of the future’ captured in the 1960s by parascopic camera (see fig. 25 below). The otherworldly quality of these recent films comes not from a peculiar graininess of film, but from the hyper-vivid colors, lines, and mobile capacities of computer generated imagery. Once again, motion is foregrounded here and taken to new levels of intensity. As an example, one clip commissioned by real estate developer The Banta Companies profiles the “renaissance” of the Midtown section of the city by depicting several sports cars dashing through this gentrified area at top speed, accompanied by pulsing electronic dance music. Each of these cars is shown racing along, executing hairpin turns and sudden reversals as they traverse streets that are empty of other traffic, flanked by sidewalks devoid of pedestrians, pausing only to allow the viewer to focus on the numerous restored buildings in Banta’s portfolio in the area.

Another film portrays the city’s vision for the area targeted by MAPs3, the Core to Shore plan to extend redevelopment from the CBD to the reworked Oklahoma River some three-quarters of a mile south. In this area, most of the pre-existing structures are either
already demolished or soon to be demolished, leaving the animation artists free to depict a fantastically transformed landscape, replete with the kinds of architectural and design features that now dot the city in sites like Whole Foods Market and the Boathouse District: all soaring lines, gleaming sculptures of steel, glass, and stone. Again, the viewer's perspective glides at different speeds and altitudes around the streetscapes and green spaces of this virtual city, speeding up and slowing down in accord with Gershwin's ‘Rhapsody in Blue,’ the soundtrack to the film. Gone in such films are the images and invocations of blight and decay so prominent in the films of the urban renewal era. In these descendants of those earlier films, all that remains is movement, growth, excitement, progress, and aesthetic beauty.

It should be said that the first MAPs initiative did rely on a contrast or juxtaposition, but one that departed from earlier invocations of blight and decay, focusing instead on the city’s lack of ‘quality of life.’ As Mayor Cornett puts it (Cornett 2012), “Twenty-five years ago, Oklahoma City was competing for businesses with a toolbox full of attractive financial incentives and we were coming up short. We asked for a candid appraisal from a notable business we didn’t get and were told that our incentives were as good, or better, than the
competition. They simply didn’t think their employees would want to live here.” Once again, this shift reflects an embrace of a broader shift in urban development thinking, the rise of the discourse of the entrepreneurial city that took hold in sites across the planet in the 1980s and ‘90s as globalization reached unprecedented momentum and cities had to compete for businesses that at least seemed geographically untethered. But it is notable that the discursive shift that accompanied entrepreneurial approaches to redevelopment in Oklahoma City marked a general abandonment of motifs of stasis and decay in the fabric of the city, and a concomitant intensification of the affirming elements of motion, excitement, growth, and community. The significance of this change will become clear as we continue to examine the imbrication of matter and meaning in the city’s recent redevelopment boom.

3. Circulation, sport, and passion

I’d like to now expand my analysis beyond architectural forms and the built environment per se to examine the circulation of bodies and other materials within and between these spaces. As Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (2002, p. 81-82) note, circulation is a central characteristic of the city. […] Cities exist as means of movement, as means to engineer encounters through collection, transport, and collation. They produce, thereby, a complex pattern of traces, a threadwork of intensities which is antecedent to the sustained work of revealing the city minute on minute, hour on hour, day on day, and so on. […] Distinguished by what they carry, how they carry, their stretch in space, and by their cyclicity, these forces and their traces do not necessarily lack order, even if they may flow. To the contrary, in order to smoothly displace matter and energy of varying types, they require all kinds of technical, material mediators, ‘machineries of displacement.’

Thus, Amin and Thrift argue, to understand how the materiality of the city structures circulation also requires attending “to the constant to and fro of the movements which sustain that fabric” (p. 83). Following from this position, while I have primarily focused thus far in this chapter on the structuring role of architectures (and representational devices such as film), particularly with respect to intensifying a sense of movement linked to the
experience of the city, it is also important to examine movement itself as part of the affective machinery of the city. With this aim in mind, I now turn to briefly consider the importance of a particularly affect-laden mode of movement in Oklahoma City, that of sport.

One of the first areas to be redeveloped in Oklahoma City following the oil bust was a former warehousing district that was rebranded by developers in the 1980s as ‘Bricktown.’ An owner of one of the first new businesses to open in this area in the early 1990s notes that the revival of the city’s professional hockey franchise — the Blazers, who began playing in a convention center downtown — “played a huge role” in driving development (Administrator 2012). This is hardly surprising in Oklahoma, a state in which college football has for many decades been fundamental to sociality across disparate social groups. More recently, this melding of redevelopment and sport is highlighted in the Boathouse District I mentioned previously, where Devon and Chesapeake have built prominent facilities for athletic training — the District has been named an official US Olympic and Paralympic Training Site — and recreation, including ropes courses, a zip-line, and kayaking.

The Boathouse District’s website, moreover, links the centrality of sport directly to Elliot’s architectural work, asserting, “Everyone appreciates the iconic architecture of the structures along the river, each designed by architect Rand Elliott, Elliott & Associates. Together, the architecture and athleticism of the Boathouse District are becoming recognized as a world-class destination by local and international visitors alike.”78 Again, the contrast created by the Boathouse District set within the urban fabric here is remarkable: multi-dimensional polygons of metal and glass, catching and reflecting the abundant sunlight, set against a backdrop of a decaying light-industrial zone, replete with old rail yards, a massive cotton mill, sprawling auto junkyards, and so on. In other words, it’s not just the

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78 http://boathousedistrict.org/boathouses-finish-line-tower
buildings themselves that create an impression, but also the placement of the buildings in the city itself. I will return to this point later.

When I have visited this area, I’ve been struck by the flurry of physical activity in and around these sleek structures: professional athletes work out side by side with “all kinds of people,” as one staff member put it while proudly showing me around the training facilities on a spring morning; kayakers drift about on the river between rapidly moving crew teams; and kids on field trips roll about on the grassy hillsides. That such quotidian movements are essential to fomenting an embodied sense of excitement and passion about the changes occurring in the city is made more forcibly evident in Chesapeake Energy’s key role in the acquisition of the city’s first NBA franchise, the Oklahoma City Thunder, who plays in a venue built as part of the first MAPs initiative and recently renamed the Chesapeake Energy Arena.79 Since moving from Seattle in 2008, the team has been tremendously successful, both on the court and in terms of attendance and merchandising, thus serving as a catalyst to the growing sense of pride and enthusiasm that has become evident among many Oklahoma Citians in the past decade or more.

Numerous examples of the team’s links to redevelopment and a renewed sense of pride of place for Oklahoma Citians can be easily found, but a profile in VeloCity, the official magazine of the city’s Chamber of Commerce (note the publication’s title), exemplifies this important dynamic and its direct links to architecture (Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce 2014). After describing the Thunder’s immediate success in the league upon

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79 The Thunder’s arrival in Oklahoma City was another major development in which Chesapeake CEO McClendon played a central role, as one of the purchasers of the team, formerly the Seattle Supersonics. The conditions of the team’s move to Oklahoma City were controversial by most accounts, primarily because McClendon and the other Oklahoma City-based buyers initially claimed intent to keep the team in Seattle but once the wheels of the deal were in motion, made it seem obvious that they hoped to bring the team to Oklahoma City all along. According to Forbes, the financial value of the team has risen rapidly alongside the move: “in 2007, its last year in Seattle, the Sonics were worth $268 million and sold 78% of available tickets,” the next year the team’s value was assessed at $300 million and they were selling out Oklahoma City’s Chesapeake Arena, and by 2011, the team was worth $348 million and was ranked by Forbes as among the top 15 most valuable NBA teams (Badenhausen 2012).
arriving in the city, the piece highlights the connections between the team and MAPs, offering a large computer generated image of the Boathouse District, with the Devon Tower and the rest of downtown looming in the background. The subsequent pages devote considerable attention to a cover story that ran in the *New York Times Magazine* in 2012, which focused on the Thunder but also covered the dramatic changes occurring in the city more broadly. The spread also prominently includes the following quote, attributed to “noted urbanist Joel Kotkin in *Forbes*”: “The Oklahoma City Thunder have helped to put a spotlight on what may well be the most surprising success story of 21st century America.” For a city and state that typically appear in national media coverage only in reference to socially dubious far-right political exploits, devastating weather events, and various ‘worst of’ lists, the positive attention drawn to the city in recent years thanks in no small part to the Thunder was a welcome change of pace for Oklahomans, as indicated by the comments highlighted in the multiple-page spread *VeloCity* devoted to the Times piece. “As an Oklahoman living away from his home state who routinely gets asked what Oklahoma’s like,” one reader wrote, “I am printing this article off and carrying it in my person at all times. This is a near-perfect representation of the Oklahoma City I love, and a near-perfect representation of the Thunder.” Another wrote, “As a native of Oklahoma City, I appreciated the way you wrote about our city…as a modern American place, with all the contradictions, sophistication, red, blue, etc., that characterizes any city of 1.3 million people. It’s validating.” Once again in this spread, a sense of physical movement and excitement is central: interspersed with reader comments are images of two team members in motion, and an image of the Times Magazine cover, featuring the same two players and two others, including two in mid-air, under the title “YEEOW!”

While this may seem like little more than media hype and Chamber of Commerce boosterism, the significance of the Thunder’s role in redevelopment — and the affective
resonance of redevelopment with many Oklahoma Citians — should not be underestimated. As Mayor Cornett and others have noted, the prevailing sentiment, particularly among young, urban Oklahomans, about the state and its cities had been for quite some time one laced with disappointment and a desire to leave as soon as possible. In the early years of the new millennium, however, I began to notice that this sentiment was changing for some Oklahoma Citians. Many people that I knew were staying in Oklahoma, or even returning from other cities and other countries. Moreover, not all of the people whose feelings about the city and state have changed dramatically are employees of fossil fuel giants; many are musicians, artists, lawyers, environmentalists, anarchists, and cycling enthusiasts, some of whom become involved in community service projects, open unique small businesses, and start communal feminist houses. The critical reader might assert that such creative types are typical of any gentrifying city, and as gentrification’s ‘tragic pioneers’ are destined to be displaced by more dominant fractions of the creative class (Ley 2006; Zukin 2008). However, I believe that the case of the local food movement in Oklahoma — particularly the struggle currently underway that I describe in the next chapter — illustrates the importance of not viewing the creative class in such essentializing terms or collapsing the distinctions between differently situated individuals whose positions may cut across multiple ‘classes.’ In a number of milieus around the city at least, a burgeoning sense of excitement was indeed palpable, and many Oklahomans began to exhibit a kind of state pride that was to me reminiscent of the much more noted sense of pride displayed by Texans, in the shadow of which Oklahoma had long dwelled. At
the time of this writing, it is not at all unusual to see tattoos of the scissor-tailed flycatcher or the state seal around town; the term ‘Okie,’ long a derogatory slur associated with the impoverished rural folk who left Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas and other places hard hit during the ‘30s, has been reappropriated and now adorns bumper stickers, buttons, and t-shirts.

Such affective and emotional transformations can be illuminated by Amin and Thrift’s (2002) emphasis on the “city of passions,” a term they use to denote “the city as a field of movements; a swirl of forces and intensities, which traverse and bring into relation all kinds of actors, human and non-human, in all manner of combinations of agency” (p. 83). For Amin and Thrift, this notion of passions is linked to an understanding of bodies as organized around particular sensory apparatuses and interpretive and motor capacities, in conjunction with a Spinozist/Deleuzian understanding that bodies are not self-contained wholes but emerge and re-emerge anew in association with other bodies and disparate things. For my purposes, a key point to draw from Amin and Thrift’s thinking is that these linked notions of passions and bodies underlie the argument that passions are generated in conjunction with images, around which they are organized. Patterns of organization of affects are thus somewhat open to change through challenges to the senses or meanings attributed to the images at the core of animating passions. Given that such images gain force through enrolling bodies and many disparate things in an assemblage, challenges to particular senses/meanings might come from quarters that seem quite distant from any particular image and its associated senses.

In other words, while the careful attention paid by powerful actors in Oklahoma City to the organization of passions around cultural sites such as iconic architecture and sports, and the meticulous articulation of these images with the material properties of glass, steel, kayaks, and basketball courts, would seem to hermetically seal power relations and perpetuate the status quo, it must be noted that the stability of the senses or values that cohere in
these images is only as resilient as the relations between a wide range of heterogeneous sites and actors. That such complex knots of matter and meaning — particularly when melded to powerful affective flows — are more volatile than we might think is nowhere more apparent than in the relationships between redevelopment and Oklahoma’s statewide local food movement. In the following sections, as I examine the careful imbrication of matter and meaning in foods and foodways in the city and the state, I ask the reader to bear in mind that the approach I take in this chapter is not meant to simply reiterate through multiple examples — architecture, sport, and foodways — the point that cultural milieus are used to undergird social power relations. Instead, the key point here is that these three milieus each offer specific qualities and convey certain senses, thus harnessing particular forces that reach across space and time to create something larger than simply the sum of these parts. Such interactions (and intra-actions) are part of an assemblage that joins redevelopment and local food, and hence mediates power relations in both of these territories. In returning to the territory of local food, we shall begin to see that this web of relations may not be as coherent or durable as it appears.

4. Material properties II: food

As I have already noted several times, food is clearly one of the cultural milieus in which corporate actors with a stake in Oklahoma City’s redevelopment have taken a keen interest. Now I’d like to explore the connections between foods and the other cultural milieus we’ve looked at in this chapter, which will lead us to focus further on how some of the material properties of foods mediate the relations between actors as diverse as iconic architectures, basketball, and the bodies of ordinary Oklahomans.

Food and architecture converge notably in several sites associated with the twin booms of food and redevelopment. First, the WFM location across the street from
Chesapeake’s corporate campus serves as the “anchor store” in a Chesapeake-owned shopping center designed by ‘starchitect’ Rand Elliot. The store’s design hews closely to the style of much of Elliot’s recent work in key sites around the city, most notably the buildings of the Boathouse District. Here again we find the strident sense of motion and energy, a rigorously modern (or postmodern) statement that was designed to harmonize with the design elements of Chesapeake’s campus, but contrasts markedly with much of what remains of the older built environment around it. Food-related sites within the corporate campus itself, including several restaurants and the now-decommissioned employee garden, also foreground forward-looking architectural and design sensibilities.

Turning our attention to the redeveloped CBD, we note that at the pinnacle of the expansive area reworked by Project 180, high atop the iconic Devon Tower sits a restaurant, the aptly named Vast. Here, the head chef situates his work in response to the city’s “culinary awakening,” noting, “People seek more sophistication and new experiences. Vast is not the first restaurant on this scene, but we are the first to do it on such a grand scale” (quoted in Golden 2013). This statement

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80 Elliot’s firm designed the shopping center, and served as the executive architect on the Whole Foods store itself, which was designed by San Francisco-based architect Mark Cavagnero.
hints at what is evident in these several key sites where energy companies, architecture, and the city’s food ‘revolution’ converge: the sense of movement, grandeur, forward progress, and excitement about participating in the larger contemporary world is materialized in and through the harmonization of elements of iconic buildings that stand out against the larger cityscape and iconic foods that equally distinguish themselves from the larger foodscape.

4.1 The spoils of annexing the territory of local food?

These linkages of foodways and spaces are rooted not just in the properties and capacities of buildings, but also gain strength and durability by the work done over the past decade or more by the local food movement, as I described in previous chapters, to create new senses of ‘local food’ by carefully weaving together a range of elements through which Oklahomans have learned to distinguish some foods from others. Several brief examples will suffice to illustrate the complex semiotic-material tapestries brought together in the union of local food and redevelopment. First, we might consider the case of John’s Farm, an organic wheat and grass-fed beef operation located in northwestern Oklahoma, owned and operated by John and Kris Gosney, whose families have worked the lands comprising the farm since statehood. John’s Farm is a truly stunning place of expansive, lush wheat fields, tree-lined windbreaks, and robust-looking cows whose red coats echo the hues of the surrounding Glass Mountains, the mesas and buttes of which are studded...
with selenite glittering in the sun. This site in many ways speaks for itself about the Gosneys as land stewards, and to allow it to do so, the couple often holds ‘farm days’ for the public. As producer-members of OFC, the Gosneys have been able to demonstrate some of the relations that constitute their farm to a wider audience, relations which are also illuminated with help from researchers at Oklahoma State University. The producer profile for John’s Farm on the OFC’s website reveals some of these relations, and highlights the Gosneys’ understanding of how to go about differentiating their product, which they market under the brand name ‘Cattle Tracks,’ from other meats on the shelf:

Calves are treated with dignity and respect in the animal-friendly atmosphere that provides sunshine, fresh air, open spaces, and less stress.[…] Calves are grass-pastured from start-to-finish, roaming fields and pastures that are certified organic.[…] Cattle Tracks beef was tested to validate the healthiness of the product. Here are the test results [as provided by] Analytical Services, Robert M. Kerr Food & Agricultural Products Center: The conjugated linoleic acid (CLA, a group of geometric and positional isomers of linoleic acid) has received special attention because of its beneficial properties for human health. A National Academy of Sciences report has pointed out that ‘CLA is the only fatty acid shown unequivocally to inhibit carcinogenesis in experimental animals.’ Cattle Tracks test results: mg/g lipid is 9.85. According to Oklahoma State University officials ‘the content of CLA in the sample of Cattle Tracks organic ground beef falls in the highest range of CLA content reported in the literature for beef.’

This excerpt expands the cast of actors involved in the production of ‘local food’ to include not only cows treated with dignity and healthy farm ecosystems, but also a wider range of relationships that add further resonance to meaning of the relations between the cow, the farm, and the consumer, including fatty acids and scientific research institutions. The Gosneys, it should be noted, are among the few OFC producer-members who have been able to market their products through WFM and other conventional food infrastructures, thus serving as a direct link between the territories of local food and redevelopment, bringing along the affective machines of science, nutrition, well-treated cows, and lush pastures, actors that connect powerfully to the affirming and positively-charged values of better human and ecological health.
As a second example, take Chesapeake’s Employee Garden, which most OFC members would not likely include in their understanding of the local food movement but nevertheless is arguably part of the much broader territory and multiple meanings now associated with ‘local food’ in Oklahoma, and clearly links foodways and redevelopment. This site adds to our understanding of the energies and passions related to embodied, pleasurable, food-related experiences, which reveals the stakes at play in such sites that perhaps echo the pleasurable passions of sporting milieux in the city. The garden was at one point staffed by two full-time gardeners who not only tended the garden but also worked closely with the hundreds of company employees who tended plots there. One of these gardeners spoke avidly about his work when I visited the garden in 2012, and described the enthusiasm and pleasure that many employees demonstrated for tending their plants, learning how to manage compost piles, and so on. In a remarkable video he showed me to illustrate his point, a young man in business attire dons a beekeeper’s mask to help contain a swarm of honeybees from one of the garden’s hives. He carefully lifts a branch covered by a dense mass of bees and places it in a box, helping the bees begin forming a new hive. Removing his mask, a potent expression is revealed on the man’s face, which to my eye looked like joy and wonder, and he laughs heartily as he completes the task. Several plots in the garden, moreover, are devoted to production for a local food bank, allowing employees to direct some of their time and labor towards charitable ends. As with the pleasures of sporting milieux in the city, in other words, the Chesapeake Garden draws on and harnesses the considerable power of what are for many people the visceral satisfactions of cultivating, growing, and donating fresh food and engaging with plants, animals, and soil. I am not simply drawing a comparison here, however, but rather arguing that these affective surpluses are generated together, reaching across the city from the Chesapeake Garden to the
Chesapeake Arena, intensifying in particular bodies while channeling through WFM and John’s Farm, and a number of additional, interlinked sites.

A final example is provided by the farm-to-fork restaurant Ludivine. As I described in Chapter Four, Ludivine, as a central node in the cultural milieu of the creative class, perhaps exemplifies the elite sensibilities and exclusive tendencies of AFNs broadly and local food in particular, and as such once again forges direct links between local food and redevelopment. These links once again go beyond the symbolic or representational, drawing strength from a range of material-semiotic actors, and in the process drawing them into the assemblage that coheres in part due to the unification of local food and redevelopment. First of all, the food at Ludivine not only looks but also tastes quite different from most food available in restaurants. While many critical food scholars have downplayed the importance of taste, casting it as merely an elite sensibility (e.g. Guthman 2003), Allison and Jessica Hayes-Conroy draw on Bruno Latour’s (2004b) work to argue that while taste may be socially constructed, it is precisely its constructedness that makes it effective and demands that the analyst scrutinize the array of actors that come together to enable bodies to ‘learn to be affected’ by particular foods. The potency of foods themselves should not be underestimated in this respect; the incredible attention to detail and qualities — and here I mean particular material properties — that characterizes Ludivine’s approach to food does quite literally make a difference in how the food is experienced by the eater. There is nothing
essential or universal about what this difference means or how it is experienced, but that
makes Ludivine’s food no less potent.81

Foods of course do not act on their own any more than buildings or basketballs do. With this in mind, we can note that Ludivine’s interior space is organized to highlight particular aspects of the restaurant’s function and sensibility. The main dining room is an intimate space, quite small in comparison to most restaurants in Oklahoma, and densely packed with tables and chairs. Rectangular in shape, the room feels centered around the open kitchen which occupies the back third of the space. Indeed, the kitchen is surrounded by bar seating, where patrons can watch the chefs preparing their food. During several visits I’ve made to the restaurant, as the dinner rush subsided, chefs segued into a host of preparatory tasks like covering a pork leg in sea salt for curing, pickling various vegetables, making preserves, and so on. These tasks are both a necessary part of the regular rhythms of such enterprises and a performance of the ethos underlying them. The same could be said of the array of pots, pans, hacksaws, and other implements hanging prominently over the kitchen, all of which make meaning not just by way of representation but also by what they do.

Moving beyond the space of the restaurant itself, Ludivine, as I noted in Chapter Four, sources the majority of its food from Oklahoma producers (and sometimes foragers). This is made clear on the restaurant’s menus, website, and video series, which is available on YouTube.82 This video series merits some scrutiny, as it further illustrates the complex interplay of forces drawn together in the entangled territories of local food and

81 I must stress here however that this potency is not a character of the foods-in-themselves, in the Kantian sense of discrete objects that possess qualities somehow ‘outside’ of experience of those qualities. Critiques of "foods themselves" recently appearing in critical AFN discourse target just such an understanding of food and taste (cf. Passidomo 2013), arguing that a narrow focus on foods themselves facilitates a fetishistic approach that elides broader social structures that shape how people relate to particular foods. From the perspective of assemblage thinking, however, the analytical choice between foods themselves and structures is not only false — one can consider foods as actors in relational assemblages — but also problematic in that it suggests that any attempt to understand foods as actors is fetishistic. With these thoughts in mind, my interest in the sensory elements of the foods on offer at Ludivine or other local food outlets is not concerned with foods as discrete objects, but rather with specifically how these foods participate in the production, maintenance, and potential transformation of the assemblage that brings together local food and urban redevelopment.

82 http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvK31j30MBr7FDTn96IVUA
redevelopment. The introductory text accompanying the videos on an earlier incarnation of Ludivine’s website encouraged diners to imagine their food as the culmination of a wide network of actors working together, rather than as a product of the restaurant alone: “At Ludivine, we believe in cuisine that is started by the farms and ranches around us, then crafted especially for our guests.” The restauranteurs’ understanding of the significance of that network is suggested by a two-second motif that opens many of the videos. In this sequence, a smooth but fast-paced shift in visual and aural perspective weaves a complex web of elements together in a seamless whole, beginning with a computer-generated image of an instantly familiar, stereotypical red barn beside a red farmhouse, both of which are framed by the edge of a wooded area burnished with autumnal foliage. Aurally, this image is accompanied by what sounds like a softly chugging diesel engine that one might imagine to be powering a tractor or farm truck. The viewer’s perspective broadens and deepens as the animation creates the effect of quickly ‘panning out,’ revealing a cultivated field neatly lined with crop-rows bordered by a rustic, semi-dilapidated fence. As the forest, farm buildings, and field recede into the background, the chugging engine sound continues but is peppered with a trilling birdsong. A tree branch comes into view, on which sits a bird, immediately recognizable to Oklahomans as the scissor-tailed flycatcher, now commonly featured in tatoos, “Okie Grown” t-shirts, and of course the iconic SkyDance Bridge. The bird also figures prominently in Ludivine’s logo, which is superimposed over the computer generated scissor-
tailed flycatcher as the videos’ introductory sequence draws to a close. Here again we see
direct links between the images and sensibilities associated with redevelopment, here fused
with the carefully cultivated tastes of gourmet food, the cultivation of which is explicitly
traced backwards from the plate to the literal cultivation of plants, animals, and farms in
Oklahoma. As such, the video collection serves as something of an archive depicting many
of the central actors involved in the local food movement in Oklahoma, including several
OFC producer-members as well as wild-crafters and gatherers, Urban Agrarian, Earth
Elements, and other enterprises, as well as several events related to local food. This wide-
reaching weave of materials and meanings is linked through Ludivine to the territory of
urban redevelopment, as it is through sites such as John’s Farm, WFM, and the Chesapeake
Garden. As I pointed out in Chapter Four, such linkages have both benefited and cost the
local food movement, which has gained access to broader markets but at the expense of a
deeper engagement with social concerns, not to mention now having to contend with a more
competitive market in which consolidation, co-optation, and domination by CFNs seems to
be increasingly common. We shall see that such linkages also suggest that this perhaps-
dubious exchange is not complete.

4.2 Political ecological traces

Indeed, a close look at Ludivine’s video series reveals one more important thing to
consider about the restaurant, and suggests that the less desirable effects of bargaining with
redevelopment on local food markets and the small enterprises that initially helped to create
‘local food’ may provide seeds for more rigorously pushing back against some of the actors
that have taken possession of local food. Here and there, many of the videos in the
collection capture traces of some of the more difficult political ecological issues that course
through the local food movement in Oklahoma and elsewhere. One video, for example,
features chef/co-owner Jonathan Stranger, who has become something of a celebrity chef, on a tour of OM Gardens, a mushroom farm near Norman that is owned and operated by a family that has long been centrally involved with the OFC. In one scene, one of the growers weighs a carton of mushrooms that she has just harvested and records information on a clipboard, part of the extensive paperwork required to maintain the farm’s organic certification. “They’re talking about making this kind of record-keeping mandatory for all vegetable production because of...the corporations trying to shut us down basically. I mean, they say it’s for food safety, but that’s a load of crap. It’s all the big companies that spray manure on their fields that are causing problems, and then they say, ‘well, everybody’s gotta’ keep super tight records now’ because a few people are doing things that are bad.” Stranger is included in this and other shots throughout, listening and observing, asking questions about specific mushroom varieties and the family’s motivations for starting their business, and pushing a wheelbarrow full of organic matter to a compost pile. Thus while the video leaves unexplored Jackie’s assertions about the entanglements between regulations and market struggles, the subject is raised, and explicitly tied not just to Ludivine, but to Stranger himself and his visits to production sites. Similarly, another clip is shot in the small town of Coyle, where perhaps two dozen people have gathered to learn about gathering wild edibles on a walk led by Jackie Dill, a member of the Cherokee Nation who has been leading similar walks for 15 years. Against a backdrop of vast expanses of grassland and sky, Stranger kneels in the grass, picking and tasting Iowa sage, wild mustard, and vetch, keeping up a running commentary. Jackie Dill, meanwhile, tells the gathered students of foraging: “In Oklahoma, goin’ on someone else’s land like this can get you shot dead. I have neighbors that would not hesitate to shoot you. So please always get permission, okay?” This moment, as fleeting as it is in the video, perhaps strikes a dissonant note with the idyllic, romanticized
Arcadian imagery foregrounded in Ludivine’s videos, raising the specter of a host of concerns about property ownership, violence, and control of resources.

Again, these and a number of similar moments in the numerous videos posted online may be only fleeting traces, among more affirming and positively charged socioecological narratives, of some of the thornier political ecological issues surrounding food systems. But these videos, most of which are perhaps five minutes or less in duration, were clearly condensed and edited down from more extensive footage, raising the question of why the film’s producers elected to leave these traces in the final edits. We can glean some insight into the question by considering some of Ludivine’s explicit engagements with food politics, including the fact that Chef/owner Stranger currently serves as president of the Oklahoma Farm and Food Alliance (OFFA), the local food lobbying firm I discussed in Chapter Four. Ludivine has partnered with OFFA in hosting dinners attended by legislators, state officials, and a range of actors involved in the local food movement, many of whom are OFC members. The most recent of these events, held in late April 2013, was attended by the state’s Secretary of Agriculture, the Executive Director of the state’s Water Resources Board, a number of state representatives and senators, and Oklahoma-based farmers, ranchers, food distributors, grocers, and chefs. A passage from OFFA’s website describing the event notes that local food industry representatives “were present to thank Oklahoma’s policymakers for passing” several pieces of legislation that took into account the perspective of small- to mid-sized enterprises producing primarily for local markets. Such traces of political ecological conflict further underscore the point I made at the end of Chapter Four, that the local food movement still contains latent capacities to open lines of flight into potentially more just and sustainable food systems. The question remains, however: how might these tendencies become actualized?
5. Conclusion: the noble, the common, and the struggle for foodways and the city

The examples of John’s Farm, the Chesapeake Garden, and Ludivine demonstrate how in the entanglements between the territories of local food and redevelopment, the latter has in many ways latched onto the suites of actors, affects, and meaning enrolled in the former, and hitched those suites into a larger assemblage that is also constituted in part by architecture, sport, and a range of passions and forces. We have now seen that each of the individual elements of this assemblage gains resonance through its relations to other elements. Through these interpellations of the matter and meanings associated with food, and their careful layering with architectures and the circulation of sporting bodies in the city, the positively-charged elements of redevelopment now more or less cohere in a nexus, an assemblage that rests on and conveys particular senses, thus harnessing powerful forces. Excavating this process reveals how dominant actors in the city became powerful, suggesting that their power derives neither from internal essences, nor their size or scale, but rather from their articulation with a wide array of actors that come together in an assemblage that includes the entangled territories of local food and redevelopment. In this chapter, I have focused on the roles of a wide range of materials enrolled in this process, which helps us to better understand how the local food movement followed the lead of redevelopment, foregrounding the numerous affirming or ‘feel good’ elements of local food — taste, quality, freshness, community, hipness, and so on — just as redevelopment has over time foregrounded positively-charged senses such as movement, pride, growth, and community.

The notion that local food has taken a page from the playbook of redevelopment suggests that the relationship between these territories is not unidirectional; the fusion of these territories is not necessarily something that one did to the other. Indeed, the yoking together of multiple affective machines of redevelopment is a tactic that is not of course exclusively the prerogative of dominant actors in the city. As an example, consider that Matt
Burch, the owner of Urban Agrarian, recently offered the following statement in a public talk at the University of Oklahoma (Burch 2014): “The chefs that feed the Oklahoma City Thunder came to us this year, because they wanted to support their community and they wanted to feed the players the best foods possible. They receive deliveries from us at least once a week these days. They are eating local, and we are not surprised at all that Kevin Durant went out and scored fifty-four points — *a career high* — just a few days ago!” The enthusiastic applause these comments drew from the crowd suggests the potency of such discursive linkages, a power of which Burch and others in the local food movement are much aware, as we shall see in Chapter Six.

However, there is reason to suspect that what is active and affirming for dominant actors in redevelopment may be less so for the local food movement. We have seen how redevelopment in the MAPs era has shed its ties to the negatively-charged elements so central to urban renewal discourse, and now focuses almost exclusively on movement, excitement, community, and so on. We have also seen several examples of how this discourse, however positively framed, may be obscuring many negative elements of redevelopment, including displacement through gentrification, a highly uneven spatial distribution of reinvestment in the city, and limits on who can use the quasi-public spaces of redevelopment, and how they can use them. These examples highlight why we should maintain critical scrutiny of the shift in redevelopment discourse represented by the ascendance of the entrepreneurial mode of redevelopment. This discourse affirms possibility and promises benefits for all, but, by leaving out any mention of decaying urban environments, blight, disease, and so on, silences questions about how some parts of the city become stagnant and then become revitalized. Largely absent in this framing as well are the people who tend to be associated with disinvested urban spaces — racial and ethnic minorities and low-income folk.
But there is arguably more to this shift than simple obfuscation or efforts to silence dissent. In Oklahoma City, it appears that dominant actors in redevelopment, in concentrating on and intensifying affirming elements of the assemblage, have become primarily more active, in the Deleuzian sense, or nobler, as Nietzsche might put it. As I described in Chapter Two, for Nietzsche, the ‘noble’ or ‘higher type’ is not necessarily correlated with any particular social values. Rather, it refers to an embrace or expression of the will to power, which creates but often destroys in order to do so; which in pursuing its goals and desires eschews prevailing wisdom; and which abandons the drive to self-preservation in favor of the drive to expansion, evolution, self-overcoming. ‘Noble’ in this sense is not attached to given social values, as in the common usage of ‘nobility,’ but rather recognizes that given social values are among the vehicles through which power operates. This is why conceptually reducing the will to power to domination, the drive to overpower others is incorrect: in Nietzsche’s work, social valuations such as ‘progressive’ or ‘community well-being’ are not necessarily threatened by or opposed to the will to power, any more than valuations such as ‘reactionary’ or ‘individual freedom’ are necessarily correlated with or reflect the will to power. From this perspective, what makes dominant actors in Oklahoma City’s redevelopment ‘noble’ is not that they have come to dominate, but that they have aligned themselves with the affirming, the active, the heedlessly-rushing forward.

It is easy here to slip into thinking that these terms — noble, active, affirming — signify something ‘good’ or ‘desirable.’ Once again, this would be to confuse social valuations with something that is neither ‘social’ nor ‘value,’ but rather the thing that produces the world and society through the interplay of values or forces. Indeed, from the standpoint of environmental sustainability or common wellbeing, an excess of active energies is often problematic, as it can lead to imbalances that produce outcomes that are, from particular standpoints, profoundly undesirable. In Oklahoma City, we have seen that
this active or noble mode of redevelopment has major flaws. But it has become primarily active, and thus perhaps more formidable.

Whether the reader finds Nietzsche’s metaphysics compelling or not, the analytic of noble and common types (or active and reactive forces) helps us to understand the significance of the shift in redevelopment discourse relative to the value shift in the local food movement that I described in Chapters Two through Four. The reader will recall that I argued that the local food movement, as it became increasingly entangled with the territory of redevelopment, underwent a shift from a primarily active mode of being to an increasingly reactive mode. As this shift entailed a foregrounding of taste, quality, freshness, and a cutting edge modernity or hipness, at the expense of some of the more critical social issues with which the early movement was concerned, the reader might wonder why the local food movement’s embrace of positively-charged values entails a reactive shift, if an embrace of similar values represents an active shift for the territory of redevelopment. This is simply because the local food movement’s shift towards foregrounding taste, quality, and other positive qualities meant embracing conventional economic philosophy by reducing local food to a niche product for elites, a specialty commodity. The early OFC was a very different animal, rushing forward in pursuit of its goal of creating a socially just, environmentally and economically sustainable food system, heedless of prevailing economic wisdom, the supposed realities of markets, or the imperatives of rationality. Most importantly, perhaps, it explicitly refused to accept any one understanding of its identity as expressed in its core values of social justice, environmental stewardship, and economic sustainability. As the OFC segued into a local food movement, which itself expanded in conjunction with the rapidly growing territory of urban redevelopment, much of the active energies characterizing the early OFC were subsumed and dulled, and the territory became increasingly more common, less noble. Not because it abandoned social justice per se; rather, the abandonment of social
justice was a product of becoming common, of allowing one’s identity to become increasingly fixed around common metrics, values, or rationales. Put a bit differently, by coming to desire the value added to ‘local foods’ more than the broader sets of values characterizing the early OFC, local food proponents became increasingly subservient to standard neoliberal discourses of economic instrumentalism, individualism, and a belief in the market as the primary vehicle of social and political change.

For the territory of redevelopment, by contrast, abandoning negatively-charged images of decay, stasis, and so on in an effort to frame the territory in terms that silence dissent to the benefit of powerful actors was not the product of becoming more common, but becoming something different, something new. Like neoliberalism itself, this embrace of affirming values — found not only in Oklahoma City’s recent redevelopment but in entrepreneurial redevelopment at large — represented a radical break from many elements of capitalist political economy and urban redevelopment that came before (Harvey 1990, 2007; Smith 1987, 1999, 2002). However dubious it is from ecological and social perspectives, neoliberalism seeks, promises, and affirms perpetual growth, movement, and creative destruction, all while maximizing social well-being: this is the epitome of the Nietzschean powerful animal rushing forward in pursuit of its desires, heedless of its own likely destruction. Again, this does not make it ‘good,’ but it does make it active, in Deleuze’s terms, or noble, in the Nietzschean sense.

There are many reasons to think that the noble rush of entrepreneurial redevelopment in Oklahoma City and elsewhere (to say nothing of neoliberalism writ large) cannot last indefinitely, including the social and ecological disruptions produced by profound

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83 This is not entirely accurate: as the term neoliberalism implies, this economic philosophy is a reprise of 19th century liberalism (see Polanyi 2001). However, its more recent rollout in conjunction with contemporary globalization represents a departure if not in kind, then certainly to an extent that suggests outcomes of an altogether different kind. In any case, the embrace of neoliberalism is affirming in that it rejects the prevailing political economic rationale that preceded it, Keynesianism.
inequalities, ceaseless growth, and heedless consumption of resources (cf. Harvey 2000, 2014; Foster 2000). This is precisely why critiques of both CFNs and dominant modes of redevelopment are crucially important, and why the case of Oklahoma’s local food movement and its articulation with redevelopment matter. Particularly if the local food movement can actualize its latent tendencies towards thicker understandings of social justice, deliberative democracy, and a refusal to allow its identity to be fixed by common rationales, and thus regain the noble ground in the assemblage that brings it together with redevelopment. Now that we have in this chapter explored the nature of this assemblage and gained a better grasp of the disparate materials, forces, and relations that constitute it, we can return in Part Three to the question of how and where this may happen.
Part Three
6
Core, Shore, District, and Hub

It is argued that only bulldozers or Molotov cocktails can change the dominant organization of space, that destruction must come before reconstruction. Fair enough, but it is legitimate to ask what ‘reconstruction’ entails. Are the same means of production to be used to produce the same products? Or must those means be destroyed also? The problem with this posture is that it minimizes the contradictions in society and space as they actually are; although there are no good grounds for doing so, it attributes a hermetic or finished quality to the ‘system’; and, in the very process of heaping invective upon this system, it comes in a sense under its spell and succeeds in glorifying its power beyond all reasonable bounds.

-Henri Lefebvre (1991/1974), The Production of Space

1. Introduction

As we have seen in previous chapters, the rush of redevelopment in Oklahoma City has not signified progress and an enhanced quality of life for all residents. Virtually the entire east side of the city, for example, where much of the city’s Black population lives, and most of the south side, characterized by many low-income and Latino neighborhoods, have seen little in the way of development funding or construction projects. Though these dissonant notes are not often foregrounded in the generally ebullient public discussion surrounding redevelopment, one need not stray far from the CBD or the Boathouse District along the Oklahoma River to encounter their traces.

Traveling west along the river from the boathouses on a neatly paved and landscaped path, one crosses under a series of road and train overpasses; under one such bridge sleeps a man, nestled among a pile of clothes, bedding, and backpacks. Atop another sits a man and a woman, displaying cardboard signs soliciting work, food, or monetary donations from passing motorists. Further along, just before a city park where a few Latino families are gathered around concrete picnic tables, grilling meats and playing music, one might notice a small street sign that reads, “TRAIL,” with an arrow indicating a newly paved sidewalk
heading north along Harvey Avenue. The sign and the pristine sidewalk stand out starkly from their surrounding milieu, a neighborhood in which returning grassland and forest is decidedly gaining the upper hand over human-built constructions: on many lots, two or three crumbling concrete stairs lead up to an area where a house once stood, as evidenced by the few patches of concrete visible through an otherwise dense carpet of grasses and scrubby trees (fig. 31). Among the houses that do remain, it’s sometimes hard to determine from the street which are inhabited and which are abandoned. Some areas contain surprisingly dense patches of young forest, in which one can glimpse old structures whose decaying forms don’t permit any easy recognition of what purpose they might have once served. If one is intrigued by this incongruent tableau and follows the ‘trail’ north along Harvey Avenue, one passes through several blocks of similar sights, surprised here and there by sites that speak to
a time when the area's fortunes were quite different: a leafy public park, a public school in a grand old building, a lovely old church, now boarded up.

Suddenly, just as one passes a small meat processing company and enters a treeless lot, a peculiar arrangement of shiny new metals comes into view a few meters to the north, crowning a small, neatly landscaped hillock. As your eyes disentangle this rather shocking visual disjuncture, its various elements distinguish themselves: in the background, perhaps 1500 feet away, rises the Devon Tower, and in the foreground sits the SkyDance Bridge spanning the newly relocated I-40 viaduct. The linear alignment of the bridge and the tower along the north-south thoroughfare of Harvey Avenue traverses the corridor of redevelopment that I described in Chapter Four. We shall see that this corridor mirrors a vertical axis that has played a central role in organizing the materiality of the city since its inception in April, 1889. For the moment, we need only note that this north-south corridor is discontinuous in several locations, particularly the dilapidated residential area I have just described, to the immediate south of the SkyDance Bridge, and the stretch of land immediately north of the bridge, between the new I-40 viaduct and the Devon Tower (see map on page 219).

Crossing the bridge — passing through the body of the scissor-tailed flycatcher, that is — and looking out over the area just north of I-40 at Harvey Avenue, one sees a crumbling area of old parking lots and cracked foundations where buildings once stood, in the midst of which stand the City Rescue Mission and a Salvation Army Family and
Women’s Lodge. Immediately northeast of this area is the Chesapeake Arena, where the recently-acquired NBA team the Oklahoma City Thunder plays. Northwest of that is the Devon Tower and the area recently renovated through Project180, described in Chapter Four. A wooden sign near the northern foot of the SkyDance Bridge declares that the dozens of acres of mostly cleared land between the bridge and the Devon Tower are in the process of becoming a public park.

This Central Park is a key component of the nearly $800 million MAPs3 plan, which also includes a new downtown convention center, a streetcar system, improvements to the Oklahoma River and the state fairgrounds, and a series of Senior Health and Wellness centers. This ambitious plan, expected to unfold over roughly a decade, is “the result of an inclusive community planning process known as ‘Core to Shore’ that was convened to consider what should be done with the land south of the soon-to-be-relocated Interstate 40.”

“Core to Shore” invokes a virtual Oklahoma City that city officials, planners, and developers began to envision after the Oklahoma Department of Transportation announced plans in the early years of the new millennium to shift the I-40 viaduct further south from the CBD, closer to the river. In this expansive vision, the wave of redevelopment that has transformed much of the CBD will expand southwards to the river, linking the CBD and the Boathouse District, in the process washing away much of the remnants of the old industrial and residential neighborhoods in that area and replacing them with new retail, entertainment, and residential developments.

MAPs3, it should be noted, has been the most controversial of the city’s recent redevelopment projects thus far. Initially, tensions were entangled with opposition to the I-40 realignment plan from light rail advocates and environmentalists, who objected to the destruction of some vestigial light-rail infrastructure that they argued could have been

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84 http://www.yesformaps.com/park.html
incorporated into a revitalized rail system that they see as inevitably necessary for Oklahoma City in the future. Eventually, MAPs3 skeptics began to criticize the fact that, as I have noted several times, large swaths of the city have seen little to no redevelopment in the first two MAPs initiatives. A city councilman, for example, from a district outside of downtown said, “I hear repeatedly [from constituents that] there needs to be some balance in this MAPs3 to pass. […] It’s got to be more than a downtown MAPs initiative. It’s got to have something for the rest of us” (quoted in Loudenback 2010). As one observer of Oklahoma City redevelopment politics put it, “Unquestionably and however one cuts it, the present MAPs3 focus is on continuing the downtown momentum generated by the success of MAPs1. Whether enough voters perceive their own identification with and involvement in ‘downtown’ may well tell the tale of MAPs3” (ibid). Despite such opposition, the plan and the one-cent “pay-as-you-go” sales tax to fund it were approved by voters in 2009, and the project is now underway. As of 2012, the city reported that 95% of property acquisition for the park itself had been completed.

As it turns out, the area targeted by the Core to Shore plan draws together the territories of the local food movement and redevelopment in ways that both reflect and depart from the previous relations between these territories, as laid out in the preceding chapters. For just outside the official boundaries of the Core to Shore plan target area lies the Farmers Public Market, an iconic historic structure that has recently galvanized the local food movement around efforts to create a local food hub. We will see in this chapter that this site represents the potential for a major shift in the capacities of the local food movement. At the same time, however, the idea of a local food hub is also intertwined with the notion of a ‘Farmers Market District,’ which would situate the local food hub at the center of another revitalized and hence re-valORIZED area of inner Oklahoma City. As the ideas of a local food hub and a Farmers Market District converge in and around the Farmers
Public Market, I argue that this site has become pivotal for the future of food systems in Oklahoma and redevelopment in Oklahoma City, a front line so to speak in struggles over and between these twinned territories.

To understand those struggles — and their implications for the local food movement’s prospects for becoming more expansive and durable — in this chapter I approach the site of the Farmers Public Market in several ways. First, in the section that follows, I situate the Core to Shore plan as part of the ongoing process of value production and appropriation in the city that is both the purpose and lifeblood of redevelopment trajectories. This is of course a spatial process, highlighting the relational nature of space and value generation, as particular urban spaces lose and gain value in and through their relationships to others in the production of the space of the city as a whole. Focusing here on value and relational space allows us to a) explore the relevance for this case of several senses of the term ‘infrastructure’; b) consider a parallel process of devaluation and revaluation in food systems; and c) thus recognize the stakes of the struggles over the area targeted by Core to Shore. Taken together, these insights enable us to closely examine the Farmers Public Market and the ideas of a local food hub and a Farmers Market District, asking what this site means for the prospects of radically reconfiguring food systems in the state, and possibly urban redevelopment as well. In particular, I offer a pair of ethnographic sketches that highlight both the tensions and opportunities presented by the Farmers Public Market. The relationship between Core to Shore and the Farmers Public Market, we shall see, demonstrates the stability of existing power relations in the city and beyond — the coherence and durability of the territories of dominant actors — but also brings to the fore the lines of flight that Deleuze and Guattari insist open up sooner or later from all territories.
2. Infrastructural interventions and value(s) in/of the city

As I’ve already noted, the SkyDance Bridge straddles the realigned I-40 viaduct as it passes through a section of the city that has long been divested of capital in the form of businesses, residences, or even basic infrastructural maintenance: to the south of the bridge lies a small neighborhood of mostly declining structures and vigorously growing woodlands, and to the bridge’s north sits an expanse of cracked parking lots, a few auto garages and assorted businesses, several abandoned structures, and a small handful of agencies serving homeless Oklahoma Citians. Further north sits the Devon Tower and the Chesapeake Arena, in the midst of the area revitalized through the Project 180 intervention; further south from the bridge lies the Oklahoma River. The map below is reproduced from the Core to Shore Master Plan, a document produced by the city. In this map, neither the bridge nor

Fig. 33 Map of areas targeted by MAPs

85 An old train station, built from striking gray stone, has also been preserved to the immediate northwest of the bridge, its elegance and solidity adding to the surreal disjunction between the bridge and its immediate surroundings to the north and south.
the Boathouse District is featured (possibly because these iconic structures were not initially included in the Core to Shore plan). Note, however, the placement of these sites in the context of the Core to Shore vision for the city: the Boathouse District lies in the area depicted on this map as Bridgewater (in the southeast quadrant), and the SkyDance Bridge crosses I-40 in conjunction with the bright yellow arrow superimposed over the central city in this map. This arrow was added by city cartographers here to illustrate the logic of the Core to Shore plan, indicating the future completion of a continuous north-south corridor of redevelopment stretching from the river to the CBD and beyond.

The reader will note the importance of ‘green spaces’ in this redeveloped swath of central Oklahoma City, from the river up through the imagined spaces of Promenade Park (currently the dilapidated neighborhood pictured in the introduction) and Central Park (currently the territory of homeless Oklahoma Citians and the agencies that serve them), continuing through another green space, unmarked on the map but representing what is now the Myriad Gardens/Devon Tower complex, through the Downtown Core and into another unnamed park space north of downtown, which is the National Memorial site. Indeed, the projected favorable impacts on surrounding property values of the plan’s proposed Central Park were explicitly foregrounded by city officials in their efforts to promote MAPs3: the ‘Yes for MAPs’ website notes, “Comparable parks in other cities report millions of dollars in private investment in the area following completion of their parks.”86 Moreover, as with redevelopment discourse more broadly in Oklahoma City and elsewhere, the primary strategy revolves around “leveraging” public spending on parks, infrastructure, and entertainment facilities through private investment in housing, retail, hotel, and any number of other land uses. “This park will provide a critical catalyst to attract private investment in order for us to take full advantage of the opportunity presented by the relocation of I-40

86 http://www.yesformaps.com/park.html
and the new Boulevard. It will connect the core of the city to the Oklahoma River and all of its redevelopment progress,” the website asserts, citing “more than 30 studies [that] have shown that parks have a positive impact on nearby residential property values - an excellent destination park has the potential to add 15 percent to the assessed value of all properties near the park, increasing our tax revenues.”

The explicit importance of this archipelago of green spaces, both actual and virtual, to the creation and spatial distribution of property values in the city draws our attention to an element of Oklahoma City’s redevelopment that I have not yet discussed — the deployment of infrastructures. City officials, boosters, and journalists have made clear the importance to redevelopment of not only green spaces, but the realignment of the I-40 viaduct, the construction of dams and locks to rework the Oklahoma River, and a series of other interventions into Oklahoma City’s infrastructures. Such deployments of infrastructure in the creation of value are of course not novel; state and private sector actors have long recognized the links between value and the organization of the flows of matter and energy that constitute societies, such as foodstuffs, wastes, people, goods, and electrical power, and utilized these links to stimulate economic growth in particular areas. Critical scholars, however, have drawn attention to the ways in which infrastructure not only modulates the distribution of property values but also mobilizes particular social or moral values and sensibilities (cf. Gandy 2003; Kaika 2004; Larkin 2004). Erik Swyngedouw (1999), for example, explores the historical production of the Spanish waterscape by scrutinizing discourses of modernity mobilized by several key intellectual and scientific figures, particularly a group of progressive liberal writers and artists in fin de siècle Spain who focused much of their writing and attention on the state-led modernization of irrigation systems as a panacea for treating what they viewed as the social malaise and backwardness of the country amidst the social and economic chaos that accompanied the loss of its last colonial
possessions. This ‘regeneracionista’ movement, Swyngedouw shows us, was deeply intertwined with particular understandings of nature, science, progress, and rural people. Such analyses demonstrate that infrastructures operate in what anthropologist Brian Larkin (2013) terms a ‘poetic register,’ conveying specific meanings or senses alongside the circulation of goods, people, and other materials.

This notion of an infrastructural poetics clearly resonates with the description of Oklahoma City’s redevelopment trajectory that I offered in Chapters Four and Five, where we saw that the city’s development strategy rests on the creation and harmonization of particular sites, materials, and passions — from iconic buildings to sporting and foodways — that are linked to one another through the extraction or intensification of certain qualities, including a sense of modernity, dynamism, movement, hipness, health, and other positively charged elements. In this context, it is clear that the SkyDance Bridge serves as more than simply a symbol of the city to motorists on I-40, and more than a pedestrian bridge between a currently reforesting neighborhood and a not-yet constructed public park; it also serves as a key node in the spatial distribution of property values in the city, which is in turn inextricably tied to the generation and diffusion of particular social values and aesthetic sensibilities. In other words, sites such as SkyDance Bridge or the farm-to-fork restaurant Ludivine are neither strictly signifiers nor signifieds, but rather material-semiotic nodes through which matter and meaning are more or less neatly joined in processes of ‘negotiation’ between multiple types of actors.

Recognizing the network created by these nodes illustrates a third understanding of infrastructures explored by critical scholars, the sense in which things not normally thought of as infrastructures can act as infrastructures. In this sense, steak from a grass-finished cow, repurposed industrial materials in a bar, the LED array illuminating the SkyDance Bridge, and the movement of Thunder player Kevin Durant work together to facilitate the flows of
value and values in and through Oklahoma City. It is here, in the exploration of what the relations between things do, where assemblage theory is useful in analyzing the infrastructural interventions made in Oklahoma City. In the following section, I consider how the assemblage that joins local food and redevelopment, among other actors, works to distribute economic and social values in both the city and food networks.

2.1 Struggle on the terrain of value(s)

As I have noted in several places, official narratives of the history of the MAPS projects offered by the city emphasize community input and mutual benefits to the “entire community” (ibid.), just as the city’s recent architectural renaissance is contrasted on the grounds of community benefit with the more instrumentalist, utilitarian architecture of the late 1970s oil boom. Similarly, media descriptions of changes in Oklahoma City’s foodways are often couched in terms of an undifferentiated collective, as in an article titled “Ten things that changed our dining habits in 2011” (Cathey 2011b, my emphasis). Such narratives obscure the uneven benefits and burdens created by redevelopment, as we have seen in the preceding pages, but these narratives also function as part of the infrastructure of property value distribution in the city. The history of urban development and capital investment in the US illustrates this contention more broadly: not only capital but also social esteem flowed away from inner cities and towards the suburbs during the mid-20th century, through a series of very specific mechanisms including racial covenants, blockblusting by realtors, bank lending practices, and economic development policies at all levels of governance (cf. Sugrue 2005; Wilder 2000), alongside the creation of transportation networks and other infrastructural provisioning (cf. Kunstler 1993). To reverse this flow of economic and social values and usher in the era of inner city redevelopment and gentrification required a concomitant reversal of social esteem, as inner city areas had to become desirable as living
places once again. In Oklahoma City, this necessity was obvious to city leaders. In Mayor Cornett’s words (quoted in Green 2012),

Fundamentally, most people in your city care about two things: They care about their neighborhood and their downtown. A city gets its identity from its core. One of the reasons Oklahoma City succeeded, now looking back 20 years, is that we convinced people who live in the suburbs that the quality of life downtown is important. We’ve convinced them their quality of life is directly related to the intensity of the core, that you can’t be a suburb of nothing.

As I argued in Chapters Four and Five, this ‘convincing’ of people was accomplished by not only narratives, but by the enrollment and harmonization of elements ranging from architecture to local food, in all of its multifarious meanings. The point to highlight here is that this concerted effort to re-valorize downtown was inextricably linked to the revival of property values in the inner city.

Again, this is something that redevelopment actors make explicit — the stimulation of consumer demand, in the terms of neoclassical economics, alongside public and private investments in property. In and of itself, this may not be grounds for critique, but it does raise the question of precisely how those benefits become distributed in the ways they do. As with another, more famous Central Park (see Gandy 2002, ch. 2), several critics have alleged that ‘backroom’ negotiations and inside information played a large role in the planning of Oklahoma City’s virtual Central Park, and Core to Shore more broadly, arguing that many of the properties adjacent to the park site changed hands in advance of the unveiling of the final plan. One of the subjects that participated in my research, whose identity I will omit here in deference to his politically sensitive position, alleges that at least one city council member was involved in a purchase of commercial property adjacent to the planned Central Park site; in this Oklahoma Citian’s words, the vision for Central Park and the desires of those who came to own property in that area “were marching hand in hand.”
Investigating the veracity of such accusations is beyond the scope of the present inquiry, but I mention them here to iterate a rather obvious point: the stakes of redevelopment in Oklahoma City concern more than just which areas of the city receive investment and which don’t, but also who profits from changing land values in the city. Regardless of whether or not specific real estate deals in and around redevelopment projects in the city are ‘corrupt’ or ‘legitimate,’ there is little doubt that the long-term history of investment, disinvestment, and reinvestment in Oklahoma City broadly follows a larger national pattern that benefits certain social groups at the expense of others. I raise this point again not to reify any social grouping as a monolithic, unitary entity, but rather as a reminder that there are discernible patterns in urban redevelopment processes across a range of sites, and that these patterns tend to include specific winners and losers. If this indicates something of the stakes of redevelopment, I assert that the genealogy of the assemblage that I have thus far offered in this case study demonstrates that the harmonization of social values — or senses or meanings — and a disparate range of ‘things’ constitutes the grounds of struggle over these stakes.

Intriguingly, this struggle over economic value on the terrain of social values and materials is reflected in parallel in both redevelopment in Oklahoma City and food systems in Oklahoma. In both cases, we can note that a value gap was created over the course of the mid-20th century: in the city, this is the rent gap described by Smith (1979), which was created by disinvestment from inner cities across the US. In food systems, this value gap was created by the rollout of industrial foods, which opened a series of niches for various specialty foods, from organics to local foods. In Oklahoma City, as in many cities, these two gaps are being closed in tandem, as capital and materials flow back into disinvested areas of the city and into particular modes of food production, distribution, and consumption. This convergence of value appropriation through the articulation of social values and the specific
properties of materials is occurring at a wide range of sites around the city, as we have seen. But nowhere is it more evident or more complex, perhaps, than at the Farmers Public Market building, a site that draws together foodways, architecture, infrastructure, and redevelopment in ways that both illuminate the status quo of power relations in the city and suggest the possibility that things could be otherwise.

3. The Farmers Public Market as infrastructural node

In the fall of 2012, the OFC completed its search for a new location for its Operations Center, and moved to a building that had for several decades housed Sterling’s Produce, a family-run vegetable and fruit retail operation located just southwest of Oklahoma City’s CBD. Importantly, the Sterling’s building sits adjacent to the Farmers Public Market, an iconic Spanish colonial revival building that has functioned as a catalyst in an ongoing effort to construct a newly revitalized regional food hub in Oklahoma City, in which locally-produced food is expected by some to play a central role.
Equal parts salvage operation and act of visionary imagination, this effort centers around the Farmers Public Market building which, since opening for business in 1928, accumulated around itself a number of structures housing food-related businesses that drew processing, retail, and wholesale elements of the food system together with increasingly sprawling industrial networks of food production, distribution, and consumption. Together, this complex of buildings and businesses served as a key component of a series of systems directed towards the transport, transformation, and sales of much of the foods that traversed Oklahoma City for several decades in the middle of the 20th century. Conjoined with roadways, rail-lines, electric power lines, water pipes, and so on, the Farmers Public Market was at the center of an infrastructural assemblage that directed and channeled flows of plants, animals, people, capital, and other materials.

Given this historical narrative, which I elaborate further in Chapter Seven, envisioning this site as a central node in a revitalized local and regional food distribution network has been, for its key proponents, perhaps relatively easy. Indeed, beyond the Farmers Public Market and Sterling’s buildings themselves, other vestiges of the area’s former glory in the food system remain in the form of a small handful of wholesale meat processing firms, fruit and vegetable distributors, and one retail operation, Piñata Produce, offering freshly roasted peanuts alongside a small selection of fresh vegetables, dried chiles, and other products geared towards the mostly Latino population of the neighborhoods to the south. However, the Farmers Public Market itself has not functioned as a farmers’
market in decades, and the major portion of food-related businesses, along with most other businesses, have long since fled the area. In recent years, the Market’s main occupant has been a small ‘antique mall.’

After four decades or more of disinvestment in this part of the city, the resulting landscape is typical of many similar postindustrial spaces: asphalt and concrete slabs where buildings stood or parking lots once functioned, punctuated arrhythmically by an assortment of crumbling, dilapidated structures which reveal, in their varying states of ruin, successive layers of use, improvised augmentation and rebuilding; patches of rotting wood flecked with bits of different coatings of paint emerge here and there from behind bent and rusting sheets of corrugated tin; the body of an old freight railcar oxidizes in the grass, a fragment of a wood-shingled roof resting against it; windows are painted over or boarded up beneath signs bearing half of the name of one business, the other half of which has fallen off or faded away to reveal the remnants of some other name, now illegible. Public investment has been equally scarce, and roadways, signage, lighting, and other basic infrastructural components are in similar states of disintegration.

The building serving as the new OFC Operations Center has fared better than many structures in the area, but still bears traces of shifting fortunes. Even its ‘better’ facade is fairly humble, and the reverse facade could almost appear as part of any number of abandoned structures nearby (fig. 36).
The Farmers Public Market building itself had fared better than many structures in the area, but was also in a state of serious decline when in 2002 Jody and Burt McAnally purchased the Market from its former owner, John E. Harden. The McAnallys owned several multi-family rental properties in the metro area, and had played a part in one of the first arts-led gentrification projects in the city in the Paseo neighborhood, which channeled the quirky local architecture and the remnants of that neighborhood’s hippie and artist elements into a revitalized arts district with a number of small art galleries, music venues, cafes and restaurants, and gift shops, accompanied by rising local property values and rents. The decaying state of the Market and its environs did not deter the McAnallys, not least of all because by 2002, redevelopment interventions in the city were already beginning to substantially rework large swaths of the urban fabric. Indeed, when the building went up for sale in 2001, it was framed by realtors, city officials, and the press as a site with great potential for latching on to the city’s redevelopment wave. In 2001, for example, an article about the property appeared in the city’s largest newspaper, The Daily Oklahoman, noting “The market rests between the downtown area and stockyards, where businesses are growing and work is underway for developing tourist attractions” (Colberg 2001). Oklahoma City Planning Director John Dugan was quoted in the same article as saying, “Other cities have used their farmers markets as linchpins for renewed commercial areas,” and pointing out that Boston’s Faneuil Hall market “has been transformed into a $100 million development.” In this framing, the Farmers Public Market had become “a property important to the city,” which in Dugan’s terms, “we’ve got to conserve” (ibid). Architect Rand Elliot referred to the Market as “a marvelous building,” and compared the McAnally’s plans for restoration to Seattle’s Pike Place Market (quoted in Hamilton 2002).

The McAnallys purchased the building and four nearby structures on roughly six acres of land for $850,000 (Chambers 2008) and, with the assistance of a $378,000 loan
from the city’s allocation of the federal Empowerment Zone program, proceeded to invest by some accounts as much as $2 million into its restoration. The antique and junk dealers were moved from the main building; some of them reopened in the outbuildings adjacent to the Market. Also cleared away from both floors of the main building was an assortment of ramshackle stalls, partitions, and other vestiges of past uses. Since the purchase and renovation of the Market, the building has hosted many weddings, concerts, boxing matches, and other events, ranging from a 2007 campaign appearance by then-presidential candidate Barack Obama to “extreme midget wrestling.” While such events have served as the primary source of income generated by the Market, the McAnallys’ plans for the building included from early on the idea of restoring the Market’s original function as a farmers’ market. More specifically, this vision imagined the farmers’ market as constituted by enterprises operating in the numerous stalls and random buildings around the Market proper — like the Sterling’s building now serving as OFC Operations Center — and cast the Market building itself as a mixed use retail and entertainment site, with a performance venue on the second floor, and a mixture of “boutique” retail operations on the ground floor, including a restaurant and some of the vendors operating in the Market building when the McAnallys’ purchased the property (Maile 2002). This vision for the Market eventually expanded to imagine the site at the center of an entire redeveloped neighborhood, to be called the “Farmers Market District.” Initially, however, this vision didn’t necessarily distinguish between types of food that might be sold in such a revitalized market; the Farmers Public Market was not, in other words, specifically entangled with ‘local food’ as called into being by the OFC, a phenomenon which scarcely existed as such in Oklahoma in 2002. That the purchase of the building happened to more or less coincide with the events leading up to the emergence of the OFC was a chance occurrence, a random coincidence.
Less random, perhaps, were the forces that drew the Market and the local food movement together. The first of those forces was Burt McAnally’s oldest son William, who returned to Oklahoma from attending university in California with what Burt called a “cutting edge mentality” about food not long after the McAnallys purchased the Market. 87 Soon, William had enrolled his parents in a vision of restoring the site to its “former glory” as a central node in a network of distinctly local foods, which eventually came to be thought of as a ‘local food hub.’ These entanglements did not immediately materialize, however. Burt and William had no connections to local producers, and their first attempt to reach out — an extensive letter-writing campaign to farmers whose addresses they located wherever they could — received little to no response. “It fell on deaf ears,” Burt told me, describing local food producers as “like a closed community. I mean, unless you’re one of them, or you’ve got some bona fides...It fell on deaf ears. We sent out hundreds of solicitation letters outlining the vision of reestablishing Oklahoma City’s first centralized farmers market” (ibid). The eventual opening into this community for the McAnallys came from the OFC, which William encountered in his search for local food when he returned to Oklahoma. Already deeply enmeshed with the OFC itself and a number of well-established farmers’ markets in the metro area, however, OFC producer-members were not at that time terribly interested in what likely appeared to be a dubious proposition of rebuilding an active food market in what was then a rather decrepit Farmers Public Market in a decaying part of the city.

The second force that drove the development of the idea of a local food hub at the Market was distilled from the drawn-out confrontation over eminent domain between April Harrington, a key producer-member of the OFC as Earth Elements, and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (see Chapter Three). This encounter produced a long

87 Burt McAnally, personal communication (3/5/2013)
struggle for Harrington, but ultimately led her to join forces with fellow OFC member Matt Burch to create Earth to Urban, the hybrid enterprise I described in Chapter Three. This venture combined Earth Elements Market Bakery with Urban Agrarian, and added a start-up kitchen for aspiring businesses and a small retail market offering organic and otherwise ecologically-friendly foods, all grown or processed by small- to mid-sized enterprises located in the state. As I noted previously, these businesses each contribute particular capacities, connections, and functions crucial to the realization of a revitalized local food hub: close connections, strengthened over time, with producers located in a variety of microclimates around the state, thus creating a sourcing network resilient to the challenging climatic conditions in the state; knowledge of a range of food preservation techniques such as canning and preserving that enable value to be captured from surplus produce and ‘seconds’; a range of retail outlets (a ‘brick-and-mortar’ storefront as well as mobile markets and stands at farmers’ markets); an established restaurant distribution network; and well-developed personal relationships with regulators, as well as extensive knowledge of regulations. While searching for a facility suitable for the operation they had in mind, Harrington and Burch heard about a building across the street from the Farmers Public Market. After gaining approval from the Department of Transportation (a required part of the eminent domain settlement), they hired a contractor to oversee renovation of the property which, like most of the buildings in the area, had suffered from prolonged desuetude.\(^{88}\) In the fall of 2011, they opened their new joint enterprise, a “community of businesses” that they explicitly referred to as a “local food hub.”\(^{89}\)

The presence of Earth to Urban, with the many components of the food system this hybrid enterprise brought together, adjacent to the Farmers Public Market, with its iconic,

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\(^{88}\) Matt Burch and April Harrington, Interview (4/23/2012)

\(^{89}\) http://earth2urban.com/Home_Page.html
nostalgia-laden history, then played a role in enabling Bud Scott, the Executive Director of the local food lobbying firm the Oklahoma Farm and Food Alliance (OFFA), to imagine the area as a central node in newly textured food system that relied heavily on local production and distribution networks, but also wove together elements of regional, national, and even international production and distribution circuits into a more sustainable, resilient fabric. In the summer of 2012, Bud agreed to legally represent the McAnallys in this effort in exchange for office space in the Market building, bringing legal expertise as well as OFFA's connections to farmers and ranchers, wholesale food distributors, legislators, food policy councils, tribal governments, and a host of other actors in the foodworlds of the state.

Finally, when the OFC moved its Operations Center into the old Sterling's Produce building in the fall of 2012, it seemed only natural that they would relocate to this nascent district.

In the process of relocating to the area, the OFC, Earth to Urban, and OFFA did more than just establish new businesses there; these relocations redirected several expansive networks into the Market and its environs. These networks had already been channeling flows of plants, animals, capital, human and non-human bodies, and other materials for some time. In bringing those flows together in one site, they became concentrated and intensified, producing what Manuel De Landa (1999), drawing on complex systems theory, has identified as the type of positive feedback loop that, when combined with a sudden infusion of energy into a discrete system, can produce sudden phase changes or ‘bifurcations,’ in which the array of possible outcomes produced by the meetings of the multifarious forces involved is greatly increased.

As a central catalyst in bringing these various networks together, the Farmers Public Market acts as an infrastructural node in the standard sense of the term ‘infrastructure,’ providing key capacities for organizing the movement of foodstuffs in the region in ways that capture economic value, capacities which are also enabled by the position of the site.
relative to the dense population and relatively wealthy customer base of Oklahoma City, as well as the network of highways linking farms around the state to this area south of the CBD. Following from my earlier discussion of the inextricability of economic value and social values, and the multiple roles and senses of the term ‘infrastructure,’ these organizational capacities of the Farmers Public Market are also endowed with poetic or semiotic resonance. Given the stakes of struggles over value and values in food systems and urban redevelopment in Oklahoma, it is imperative that we closely examine the interplay of forces converging on the Market so as to fully understand the significance of this site. To do so, in the next two sections I consider separately the ideas of a local food hub and a redeveloped Farmers Market District.

Since the McAnallys purchased the site, the Farmers Public Market has always been the meeting point of two visions: on the one hand, there is the vision of a Farmers Market District — an entertainment destination for locals and tourists that harnessed some of the profound energies flowing through the city in the form of ‘redevelopment’; on the other hand, there is the vision of a ‘local food hub’ that would serve to propel the local food industry to another level of development. These ideas have never been completely distinct, but neither have they been necessarily synonymous or coterminous. The notion of a ‘Farmers Market District’ had been tossed about for some time among the small but growing group of actors assembling in and around the Farmers Public Market, and over the course of the past year in particular, the materialization of this vision has increased in speed and intensity as it has fused with the idea of a local food hub as envisioned by William McAnally, Scott, Harrington, Burch and others. Efforts to bring these increasingly enmeshed virtualities into being have thus far proceeded on two distinct, but often overlapping fronts, each drawing on different allies and invoking distinct values and goals.
3.1 Farmers Public Market as local food hub

The idea of a revitalized food hub centered around the Market began, as already noted, with ‘local food’ at its center. Earth to Urban, the OFC, and eventually a “centralized farmers market” for Oklahoma City\(^{90}\) would provide the immediate mechanisms through which local food would pass from producers to consumers, in some cases by way of intermediate steps such as restaurants, whose chefs immediately began adding Earth to Urban to their regular procurement rounds in 2011. OFFA’s director Bud Scott, however, who tends to perceive a more panoramic view of the political economy of foodscapes in the state, soon began to imagine a more diverse food hub that would incorporate some of the larger wholesale and processing operations remaining in the vicinity of the Market, which are primarily connected to conventional, highly distanciated and industrialized food networks. In Scott’s terms, their sourcing strategies are based on “getting their product for the best price”;\(^{91}\) these conventional food enterprises in other words pursue a more narrowly instrumentalist approach to food systems. To Scott, however, these attributes are not necessarily mutually exclusive with the goals and rationales of the local food movement, and thus there is no insurmountable force preventing these enterprises from being favorably articulated with the small- and mid-sized operations that produce for the OFC, Earth to Urban, Ludivine, and other local food outlets. In a lengthy conversation I had with Scott in Spring 2013, he offered me the example of Tanaka Produce, noting that its owner/operator is interested in sourcing local and he would like to get those connections with those producers to put it on his route. But it’s a lot of work for distributors to make those relationships. […] Tanaka doesn’t have the time for that, he’s doing his distribution model. So we’ve discussed the idea of bringing [some local producers] in and connecting him with them, so he can utilize them. So, you know, [we’re] trying to expand on the current models, and utilize the infrastructure that’s here (\textit{ibid}).

\(^{90}\) Burt McAnally, personal communication (5/3/2013)

\(^{91}\) Bud Scott, personal communication (5/3/2013)
It is important to consider a little further the ideas presented here for conjoining what are, from some perspectives, quite different food networks. On the one hand, Bud’s framing acknowledges that even firms that ostensibly prioritize profit over all other concerns might be useful or even necessary allies for more socially- and ecologically-oriented businesses. On the other hand, it raises several questions about the terms and possible effects of such interactions: Do all players come to the table with the same degree of bargaining power, or does power accumulate around some actors more than others by virtue of their articulation with much more expansive assemblages? In other words, in the current configuration of food networks in Oklahoma, does a conventional food wholesale operation need connections to small local producers of ‘speciality foods’ as much as those smaller producers might need that connection to successfully ‘scale-up’?

According to Scott, another wholesaler in the area has employed a staff member whose primary job is to develop and maintain connections with local producers, suggesting that, at the very least, some conventional firms see value in the growing market for local foods. This certainly resonates with wider trends in food markets. Debra Tropp (2008), for example, demonstrates that only 20-25% of local food sold nationally is sold through farmers’ markets, and while other types of direct farmer-to-consumer sales are growing, the majority of local food sales are mediated through (at least one) additional party, be it a specialty grocer, restaurant, hotel, or ‘alternative’ model like the OFC. Thus it becomes easy to imagine conventional wholesalers seeking to capture some of the value in this burgeoning sector. Nevertheless, as of 2008, ‘local foods’ only accounted for about 1.6% of total food sales in the US (Johnson et al. 2013); on the face of it, as a now-substantial body of work in political ecology demonstrates, such marginality seems to demand close scrutiny of relations with more centrally-positioned actors.
The case of Whole Foods Market (WFM) discussed in previous chapters is perhaps instructive here: in summary, my discussions with several different types of local producers about their relations with WFM suggest that a range of outcomes are possible, but in order for producers to reap a profit, their business model must be based on, or at least capable of, generating volumes of product sufficient to produce profits from a small margin. This is not the type of model that many local food businesses have developed over the past decade or more in Oklahoma, which tend to be based more on fetching premium prices for ‘specialty’ products. As such, these enterprises generally must restructure their business or be excluded from volume-oriented larger markets. This form of exclusion may not be a problem; indeed the success of the OFC in its early years stemmed in part from the fact that they operated outside of supermarkets, wholesale distributors, and other spaces of conventional, industrialized food, creating their own markets instead. The challenge, however, is that many of the small-scale local producers are struggling to hold their own in changing markets, as noted in Chapters Three and Four, and of course seek to earn living wages and create more stable and resilient businesses. In any event, while wholesale distributors are not of course the same as retail supermarkets, the example of WFM does at the very least suggest additional reasons for closely scrutinizing the relations that emerge when small- and mid-sized producers become entangled with much more expansive networks, operating on different principles, ostensibly in pursuit of different ends.

In addition to linking local producers into higher volume distribution networks, Bud’s more expansive vision of a food hub also makes room for the fact that some of wholesale distributors in the area receive products from global supply chains, thus providing access to a number of products (e.g. bananas, sugar) that cannot be grown in Oklahoma. In this respect, Bud’s vision, while based on a demonstrated commitment to the viability and long-term success of small- to mid-sized producers growing for local markets, using
ecologically friendly methods, is also clearly pragmatic, recognizing that a viable reconfigured food system would likely need to retain some elements of the currently dominant distanciated system. This of course raises questions about environmental issues beyond ‘food miles,’ such as deforestation, pesticide and herbicide use, chemical fertilizers, and so on, as well as social concerns surrounding labor, surplus value accumulation, other potential problems. As I have already discussed in previous chapters, the OFC and other actors in the local food movement have explored and debated such questions for years, with several different outcomes. The OFC, for example, decided to allow a producer-member to sell coffee through the co-op that is grown in a number of places around the world but roasted in Oklahoma. More importantly from environmental and social perspectives, that producer-member sources only from enterprises that use ecologically benign methods and foreground the social relations of production through mechanisms like Fair Trade certification (although see Jaffee 2007 and Wilson 2010 for insight into ongoing struggles in Fair Trade networks). In this case, the social and environmental implications of the non-local food in question are explicitly foregrounded. It remains to be seen how — or if — such issues are directly taken up in the new networks that emerge from the nascent food hub centered around the Market building. Based on my discussions with Scott, Harrington, Burch, and others involved in the local food hub project, it appears that these actors have abandoned any essentialist or ‘pure’ notions of local food as ‘alternative’ in favor of a more hybridized notion of both local and industrial food networks. As I argued in earlier chapters, this is probably a wise and necessary decision (see also Alkon 2013; Bloom 2009), but it also intensifies the importance of clarifying what makes some local foods different from others, and finding ways of communicating those differences to a wide variety of publics (see also Mount 2012).

Part of what determines how such complex dynamics develop over time will be the allies that the local food hub draws to its side. For instance, one potential source of energy
— in the form of capital, publicity, and legitimacy — for the food hub is direct assistance from the US Department of Agriculture. According to Scott, a high-ranking official in the agency’s Agricultural Service Marketing Division has expressed a strong interest in Oklahoma City’s revitalizing food hub, and reportedly wants to “make the (the hub) a spotlight project for food hubs nationally,” beginning by providing a newly designed architectural rendering of the food hub as it might exist in a more developed form. At the close of my fieldwork, this connection had been stymied by then-ongoing struggles to complete a federal budget, but this connection to the USDA suggests that the potential remains for the food hub to be drawn into much more expansive networks of funding, institutional support, and legitimacy. More locally, Oklahoma City’s Planning Department has indicated that, pending matching funds from ‘stakeholders,’ they plan to commit funds and staff hours to projects in the Farmers Market District, as they have done for other redevelopment projects. Finally, Ludivine’s co-owner/chef Jonathan Stranger has agreed to buy a 60’ x 40’ greenhouse and donate it to OFFA for use in the food hub as a start-up facility for enterprises lacking capital but interested in producing greens and other vegetables on a contract basis for Ludivine. In this case once again, it remains an open question whether the relations that emerge from that project foreground ethical elements beyond the ecological realm. The picture arguably becomes much more complex when we move beyond these more obvious food-related allies of the cause of a local food hub in Oklahoma City and consider the vision for a redeveloped Farmers Market District.

3.2 Farmers Public Market as Farmers Market District

The vision of a Farmers Market District clearly echoes a prevailing frame employed by real estate developers and city government during the recent redevelopment boom, in

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92 Bud Scott, personal communication (5/3/2013). Given the often politically fraught nature of such alliances, I am not naming the USDA official here.
which many of the segments of the city targeted for redevelopment have been branded as
‘districts,’ including the Plaza District, the Boathouse District, the Arts District, and so on.
This act of naming is more than ‘mere’ semiotics, as such appellations also mark the
boundaries that delimit and concentrate the flows of redevelopment funds, public and
private, into and through the city. Dubbing the area as a ‘district’ then is clearly a strategic
move in that, first, it couches the project in terms that are sensible to Oklahoma Citians, who
have seen and participated in processes through which a host of ‘blighted’ areas became
‘districts’ in the past decade or more; and second, as already demonstrated by the federal
Empowerment Zone loan the McAnallys secured, it establishes and consolidates an object
towards which development funding might be directed.

Joining the contest over public and private development monies is not in itself
grounds for critique, of course; public redevelopment funding programs exist, in theory, as a
reflection of a collective desire to pool and direct resources towards improving our cities.
Instead, from the perspective of the current inquiry, and bearing in mind the unequal
distribution of burdens and benefits of previous gentrification processes in Oklahoma City,
the salient question is what is the relationship between the multiplicity of meanings
proliferating around ‘local food’ in the city — many of which now flow through the nascent
food hub centered around the Farmers Public Market — and the still largely inchoate
Farmers Market District? Will this district follow the pattern laid down by previous
gentrification processes in the city, thus further cleaving ‘local food’ from broader concerns
with access, inclusivity, and food security, or could the Farmers Market District itself
somehow serve to extend local foods’ significance and reach into the foodworlds of less
affluent and racialized minorities in the city, thus also shifting the meaning and impacts of
redevelopment?
It must be emphatically stated at the outset that this question remains an open one, and as such demands further study. My fieldwork to date, however, has provided some important insights into the dynamics at play here. First, as with many disinvested areas in the city, the flight of capital, energy, new building materials, and particular kinds of people from the area surrounding the Market did not create an emptiness or a vacuum. To the contrary, a wide range of actors quickly flooded into the area, including the grass, microbes, mold, and other ‘natural’ forces whose participation is necessary in the production of the rent gap. At the same time, a number of homeless people and the organizations that work with them also came to inhabit this area of the city. Goodwill and the Salvation Army both have very large facilities within a mile or less of the Market, as do several other similar non-profit organizations. In addition to the facilities offered by these organizations, homeless people have for years found and created spaces in which to congregate, socialize, and take shelter in the empty lots, abandoned buildings, and fragments of forgotten infrastructure in the area, all of which is framed and covered by sheltering patchworks of colonizing woods and grassland. While it would probably be a serious overstatement to argue that homeless people are able to inhabit and use these spaces without being molested by anyone, the relative scarcity of other people in this area by day or night likely does reduce some of the pressures that come with proximity to crowds of ‘homed’ people, not least of all in the form of police surveillance. Comments from business owners in the area confirm the general feeling that police presence in the district is relatively low compared to other areas in town. At the same time, the CBD is within walking distance, providing access to amenities such as bus transit and public restrooms, as well as potential sources of food (donations, garbage dumpsters, etc.), money (‘panhandling’ is common in some areas of the city), and other useful materials of the types that have long since ceased to proliferate in the area itself, aside from those brought there by homeless inhabitants (e.g. shopping bags, clothes, containers, backpacks,
etc.). In the photograph below, which captures a typical scene in the area, note the two men sitting and talking under the canopy of trees. To the left, the jagged edge of the old I-40 viaduct looms over the scene.

If this description of the area surrounding the Farmers Public Market sounds familiar, it is because much of the space I am describing here overlaps with the area targeted by the city’s Core to Shore plan, or MAPs3, which I described in the introduction to this chapter. As the map below demonstrates, the Farmers Public Market (indicated with the red star) is located just outside the area officially included in the Core to Shore plan, indicated by the dashed red line. Thus, while the Market itself is several blocks from those boundaries, the larger Farmers Market District envisioned by Scott, McAnally, and others is contiguous with (and perhaps overlaps in some places) the western border of Core to Shore. As such, while not receiving direct public investment from this initiative, the area may benefit from its spatial proximity to those spaces more directly targeted by what is expected to be a multi-billion dollar infusion of public/private investment. We might also recall the Riverfront development project planned by former Mayor Kirk Humphreys’ firm, as mentioned in
Chapter Four, as instructive here: the site for this project is, like the Farmers Market District, outside but adjacent to the boundaries of Core to Shore, situated just across the river from Wheeler Park. The Humphreys Company has been said to be waiting for market conditions to be right before they begin construction work on the site, but the purchase of the land — and the Santa Monica Pier’s ferris wheel — suggest that the principals at the Humphreys Company have been willing to bet on Core to Shore’s potential to reach beyond its official boundaries in transforming existing space.93

93 The second point to make here relates to the nature of what we mean when we speak of the categories ‘private’ and ‘public.’ The Humphreys Company’s purchase of and plans for the Riverfront site have long been publicly acknowledged and even well-publicized; this project is not, in other words, a ‘backroom deal.’ Nevertheless, the neat dovetailing of property acquisition, private and public development planning, and public office (recall that a principal at the Humphreys’s company is Kirk Humphreys, former mayor who championed MAPs) characterizing the Riverfront project suggests that if we are to speak about redevelopment strategies in terms of ‘public’ and ‘private’ actors, we must bear in mind that drawing clear lines between these categories is difficult at best. Individuals, like knowledge, can and do move back and forth between, or simultaneously occupy, positions in both private and public sectors.
There is of course no inherent reason to critique on ethical grounds such efforts to latch on to redevelopment initiatives; such synergistic effects are indeed precisely what these initiatives are (in theory) designed to produce. I highlight these efforts with respect to the Farmers Market District not to make a priori assumptions about this project, but to raise a question that implicates both redevelopment and the local food movement: who will be included in this district, and who will be excluded from it? For proponents of the entrepreneurial approach to redevelopment taken by the city thus far, this question is clearly important in assessing claims of ‘collective well-being’ and ‘mutual benefit for the entire community’; indeed, we have already seen substantial reason to be wary of such claims. For the local food movement, this question has an obvious bearing on whether or not local food is to remain a niche market product for elite consumers, or might yet somehow expand to represent a more serious threat to CFNs. Again, my research to date does not provide a definitive answer to this question, but I now offer two ethnographic sketches drawn from my fieldwork to convey something of the complex, emergent nature of the territorial struggles converging on the Farmers Public Market.

4. Encounters in an emergent site, part I: “Everybody’s farmers market”

In April 2013, I visited the OFFA office in the Farmers Public Market and had an extended conversation with Bud Scott and Burt McAnally, perhaps the two most central figures in the vision of establishing a Farmers Market District. In this conversation, a series of goals, considerations, and priorities moved through the comments made, often refracted through the questions and prompts I offered. These perspectives, it seemed to me, existed in varying degrees of harmony and dissonance, the balance of which was clearly being worked out in a somewhat improvisatory and ongoing process, in which our conversation perhaps served as a moment of particular intensification and elaboration. Throughout this creative
process, the tones and volumes of voices, as well as the facial expressions and the positions of bodies, all varied considerably as currents of concern shifted from background to foreground, sometimes cutting across the landscape of the discussion in surprising ways as new elements entered the terrain.

Burt McAnally has a forceful personality, by own his admission speaks directly and without much forethought, and often relies on irony and a sardonic sense of humor to present his perspective. Bud Scott is no less active in his approach to conversation, although tends to reflect more and thus offer carefully measured comments. Both men laugh easily and heartily, thus much of the conversation occurred amidst the reverberations of laughter and booming voices bouncing around OFFA’s small office in the Public Market. These complex arrangements of bodies, sound waves, thoughts, and emotions, entwined with the tactile and sensory rhythms and smoke and nicotine from hand-rolled cigarettes, as well as color-coded maps of the Farmers Market District hanging on the wall, and the fading sunlight streaming through the window, together constitute a specific moment in the life of the assemblage that brings together the local food movement and redevelopment. From the perspective of assemblage thinking, this moment should not be reduced to an expression of that assemblage per se, but rather reveals insights into the dynamics of its constituent components, the building blocks of power.

In this conversation, I was curious to learn more about the vision(s) for a Farmers Market District/local food hub as expressed by two of its central proponents, and the efforts underway to concretize that vision. Given the exclusionary elements of redevelopment and gentrification in Oklahoma City, I was also interested to engage with Burt and Bud about how they saw their project fitting into redevelopment trajectories. Thus far, the proponents of the Farmers Market District have not explicitly framed the issue in terms of accessibility or social justice concerns. Arguably, however, even those observers
who are not concerned about food justice or food security would be hard pressed to deny
that one of the requirements of a ‘food hub,’ especially one seeking public funding, is that it
be able to produce and distribute foods that are accessible and desirable to wide segments of
society. With these thoughts in mind, I framed several comments and questions around these
themes, pointing out that redevelopment in the city has clearly not been ‘for everyone,’
noting that the Market itself was positioned on a fringe between gentrified and marginalized
zones, and asked how their vision(s) for the site would articulate with this challenging
dynamic. It seemed that the concerns I inserted into what was initially a very affirming
discussion about the positive things going on in the area struck a slightly dissonant note.
Both men seemed to agree with my assessment of redevelopment thus far in the city, but
when I asked about the possibility of framing the Farmers Market District in terms of
potential for “more inclusive” forms of development, Burt interrupted sharply by asking,
“Well yeah, okay. What’s your point?” He then went on to reiterate sentiments he had
expressed in an earlier conversation, adding, “Well, I mean, it’s like I was sayin’, that’s why
we’ve got a crappy bus system, because poor people ride the bus. […] It’s like I was griping
about Oklahoma city public schools: well you know, if you can’t afford to send your kid to
private school, you’re probably inconsequential.” These comments were offered in a tone of
contempt, or perhaps disgust, towards the priorities of some Oklahoma Citians with respect
to collective goods like public transport systems and education, as suggested by the present
marginality of these networks. However, while Burt expressed clear disagreement with those
priorities, he seemed skeptical about the possibility of confronting them directly, much less
changing them on a significant level. When I pressed the idea further, suggesting potential
alliances with community organizations who represent low-income and racialized minorities
in the city, Burt was dubious, and said, “I think that would be really rough to organize and
tough to put together, they don’t have the, they don’t have the resources. I don’t think they
have economic resources, and I don’t think they have the insight and the knowledge to effectively do that.”

Bud then interjected that he “would like the district […] to cater to those low income folks,” noting that there is a bus stop at or near the Farmers Public Market. In other words, as meager as they might be, the beginnings of an infrastructure can be gleaned that might facilitate greater access to the proposed food hub. Burt immediately replied, “That’s one of the things Jody [McAnally] and I have always maintained, [that] this is civilized. And this is — we want this to be something for everybody. [Bud interjects: “Absolutely.”] You know, not just for the white people that live northwest of town, how ‘bout the black people that live northeast, or the brown people that live south?” As Burt mentioned Oklahoma City’s Black and brown residents, Bud pointed out that one of the businesses operating in the nascent Farmers Market District is a small tortilla factory, owned and operated by Latino Oklahomans. Similarly, he added, one of the few remaining retail enterprises is the Piñata Store which, as I described above, caters specifically to Latino shoppers. “We want that Latino community in here,” he stated, going on to say, “I’ve already been in contact with the African American producers on the east side of town because they’ve had a failure with their farmers’ market. So hopefully we’ll bring them over here. They have a bunch of goat producers as well. We want to be able to bring their product in and give them a space to sell.” [Now Burt interjects: “Absolutely.”] The way I see this market is the consolidation of farmers markets.”

Burt: Eventually, this will be the farmers market.

Bud: Will be the farmers market.

Eric: Yeah, not the white rich people’s market.

Burt: Yeah, this is the farmers’ market. Everybody’s farmers market.
From there, our discussion segued a little further into how such an inclusive vision might be realized. Bud mentioned the importance of “working with [the Department of Human Services] and identifying their public services recipients, especially in this area, and target them, just make sure they know they can come down here, they can go to Urban Agrarian and use their WIC, they can go down to the farmers’ market and [do the same].” Bud seemed receptive to my suggestion of applying for a food desert grant, which the OFC had unsuccessfully sought in the past. And then our discussion moved on for a time into other unrelated topics.

Skeptical readers will likely be quick to point out that relying on a skeletal bus system and food stamp programs to confront food insecurity and the inequalities of access to healthy food does little or nothing to address the broader forces that produce inequality and food insecurity, whether we think of those forces as expressions of underlying structures or as assemblages. As true as this may be, I relate this encounter in part to assert, as I think Burt and Bud would likely agree, that these points are and can only be departures or beginnings of what may or may not be a process that cuts more deeply and broadly into existing power distributions. The key point here, again, is that existing power relations were produced through processes and interactions (and intra-actions), and are ongoing.

Indeed, even within the nascent Farmers Market District itself, power flows in multiple forms, raising some thorny issues. As Bud, Burt, and I made our way from the office into what had become a chilly night, discussion turned briefly to the increasing tensions between the homeless habitués of the district and the newly expanding food-based enterprises in the area. In recent months, Earth to Urban had been burglarized by someone who had climbed through a small opening around a cooling unit in a walk-in refrigerator, destroyed an office safe and stolen several thousand dollars, among other items, and several local food actors attributed the break-in to homeless people squatting in a nearby empty
building that had once housed a business called Buddy’s Produce. A Bikram Yoga studio located in a newly renovated building just north of Earth to Urban had also been burglarized several times. Moreover, at least one violent altercation had occurred between homeless squatters in an abandoned building and the legal tenants of a nearby property, who were not directly related to food enterprises.

These growing issues clearly presented problems for the vision of a vibrant food hub and redeveloped Farmers Market District, leading Bud and Burt to consider hiring a security firm to create an environment that would better lend itself to their vision for the district. Bud mentioned to Burt that he had talked informally with an Oklahoma City police officer about the possibility of hiring off duty officers for this task. The officer told him that he thought it could be done, and that the first step would be to create an “inventory” of regular homeless habitués by conducting brief interviews in order to gather information that would be used to aid investigations in the event of future incidents. Given that many homeless people likely frequent this area, as I argued above, in part because it has been less scrutinized by the police in the past, it struck me that the process of gathering this information is not only of perhaps questionable legal standing, but would also likely serve to alienate and drive homeless habitués from the area. Indeed, it seems likely that the primary goal of the ‘inventory’ would not be to create a database for aiding future investigations as much as an effort on the part of the off-duty police to create an aura of surveillance in the hopes of producing homeless subjects that would monitor themselves, perhaps seeking dwelling places where they would be less likely to have to deal with the police. We should be wary of making any a priori assumptions about the specific manner in which the interviews for this data collection would take place, but the explicit use of the term ‘inventory’ — conveying to me a task of counting materials for managerial purposes — seems to further support the notion that this intervention would likely produce effects beyond aiding future investigations.
What those future ‘investigations’ might be like, moreover, is also questionable, as we shall see below.

As it turned out, I wasn’t alone in feeling dubious about this approach. Burt immediately expressed strong doubts and concerns, noting that this ‘inventory’ idea carried “Nazi” overtones and sounded altogether too much like a “police state” for his liking. I added my own doubts, and Bud agreed that this was not the best option. As we stood in the parking lot, though, he gestured toward a lone figure walking in the street beside the Market — a man wearing a hooded jacket and a backpack, coming from the direction of downtown, heading southward towards the Exchange Boulevard overpass that spans the Oklahoma River and leads into the neighborhood where the old OFC Operations Center lies — as evidence of the steady foot-traffic typical of the area, which suggested to Bud and Burt the need for heightened security. As the conversation came to a close, Bud and Burt mentioned that many of the old buildings in the area have long been stripped of metals and other materials that might be used directly or, more likely, sold into vast networks of recycling and resale.

During the point in the conversation outlined above when Burt, Bud, and I focused on questions of redevelopment, food, and inequality, the pace and intensity of interleaved comments, gestures, and expressions of faces and bodies accelerated, as something like a new territory began to form around the initially dissonant mark I had made in the conversation. For Gibson-Graham (2006), this encounter — and perhaps especially the presence and active participation of myself as researcher and ally of the other participants — might serve as exemplary of a process of “cultivating subjects” of more ethically-oriented economic relations, a step towards and a conscious fostering of community economies. I share the broad notion of approaching research as an active participant, and thus one of my roles in the above-outlined conversation and many other similar moments.
was to raise questions that I thought might highlight the ethical issues inherent to the Farmers Market District project and Oklahoma’s food relocalization movement more broadly, in hopes of both maintaining a critical perspective among participants and contributing towards opening new vistas onto particularly daunting challenges that often seemed to exceed the bounds of what any reasonable person might expect from food relocalization proponents in terms of fundamentally transforming expansive, durable assemblages. Allison Hayes-Conroy argues (2010, p. 741) that these moments of “providing occasion for difference” when “co-creating data” with research subjects are inherently political. In reference to similar moments in her own research, she writes, “Not only did they probe the catalytic power of various good and bad feelings brought about in/through Slow Food, but they also moved toward action – toward resisting the notion that pleasurable sensations about food (and related matters) could somehow be ‘true’ in such a way so as to reduce, eliminate, or render irrelevant other means of being affected by the world. This resistance was put ‘at risk in the setting’ in different ways: by asking questions to indicate uncertainty, by telling counter-stories that suggest other legitimate ways of feeling, and simply by continuing to bring up the issue of difference in feeling and sensation.”

All of these considerations suggest the importance of bearing in mind that we simply cannot know the effects our research may produce in the world. It is no less important however to move beyond emphasizing the role of the researcher and explore the broader array of forces at play in the emerging assemblage that is the topic of this dissertation. That is, my role was not central in this broader constellation of forces — and certainly not my role as intentional, consciously-willing subject — nor was my research plan structured primarily around participatory action research strategies such as focus groups or
activities designed to contribute towards particular outcomes. From some philosophical perspectives, moreover, the other two subjects — as subjects — that participated in and emerged from the discussion described above were also not necessarily central actors. As Deleuze argues — and taking into account work by Judith Butler and other feminists on the Foucaultian dual meaning of ‘subject,’ which captures both the idea of a conscious, willing agent (the I of a sentence), and a body subject to the power of other forces — whatever we might conceive of as intentional, consciously-acting ‘subjects’ is already ‘downstream’ in some respects from the operations of power, or is perhaps a reactive mode of power. As Nietzsche puts it (2006/1883-1885), “I you say and are proud of this word. But what is greater is that in which you do not want to believe — your body and its great reason. It does not say I, but does I.”

With such perspectives in mind, I would like to highlight once again here, against any temptation to think of this territorializing encounter as purely or primarily ideological or discursive, that this was very much a process of bringing not just thoughts and ideas into some kind of alignment or at least mutual intelligibility, but was more broadly an attunement of thinking, feeling, idealizing bodies and things. Attunement not only with each other, but also with the room, the setting sun, the unseasonable cold front then besieging the city, and a host of experiences and impressions related to the topic at hand. In short, while language was an important mediator here, words and concepts were only one of the animating forces in play, and indeed words and concepts are inextricable from physical texts, lungs, tongues, lips, vocal chords, ears, and so on. In relating the following encounter, I shift focus further

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94 I did conduct two focus groups that I conceived of as explicitly action-oriented, but even in those cases, I tried to maintain a stance that was normative, in that ethical concerns such as inclusivity and unequal power relations were foregrounded, yet also non-normative in that I had no specific ‘solution’ or end point in mind for the best way to deal with or even conceptualize whatever issues arose with regard to ethics and power. For more on the idea of ‘being normatively non-normative,’ see Amin and Thrift (2002).
away from language and what people said (one of the things bodies do), instead scrutinizing other, nonvocal things that bodies did, alongside the agencies of other actors.

5. Encounters in an emergent site, part II: Building a better block

In 2012, an organization called Better Block OKC (BBOKC) entered the territory of redevelopment in Oklahoma City. This organization annually selects a city block or two as the site of an event in which for one day, an imagined redeveloped version of the area is constructed and performed. This task involves months of scouting potential sites, meetings with stakeholders, generating promotional materials and redevelopment plans, convening volunteers to envision projects for the event, and in the final weeks and days leading up to the event, working on-site to construct (mostly temporary) components of the imagined ‘better block’ such as pop-up shops, public art installations, seating and bike parking, performance spaces, signage, and other assorted functional and didactic constructions.

Intriguingly, both the 2012 and 2013 events organized by BBOKC were closely related to the local food movement: in 2012, the event was set at N.W. 7th St. and Hudson Blvd., immediately adjacent to farm-to-fork restaurant Ludivine, and in 2013, the site chosen was the Farmers Market District, or more specifically, the blocks that bracket the north and west sides of the Farmers Public Market.

BBOKC and their events have received substantial media attention, and the organization’s primary organizers, Kristen Vails and Allison Bailey, have participated in the University of Oklahoma’s Ted Talks X series. The BBOKC events themselves are sponsored by a range of local businesses, foremost of which in 2013 was a large local car dealership. BBOKC itself is affiliated with the Urban Land Institute (ULI), a non-profit organization founded in 1936 that describes itself as “an education and research institute with more than 30,000 members across the globe” whose “mission,” according to the website of ULI
Oklahoma, is “to provide responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment.” A perusal of materials offered by ULI suggests that the group is broadly aligned with the tenets of ‘green capitalism’ and ‘new urbanism,’ in which the goals of sustainable development and community building are understood as potentially existing synergistically with the goal of directing private and public capital into investments that most effectively produce value. Among several “priorities” listed on ULI’s website, we find: “creating resilient communities; understanding demand and market forces; connecting capital and the built environment through value; promoting intelligent densification and urbanization; and integrating energy, resources, and uses sustainably.” Further research might fruitfully explore this network as a mediator in Oklahoma City’s redevelopment trajectory, and in urban development processes in what appears to be a range of sites across the globe. For my present purposes, however, I offer this brief sketch of BBOKC’s parent organization to suggest something of the rationales underlying BBOKC’s strategy, and to provide another glimpse of the broader networks with which the local food movement in Oklahoma is entangled.

The day of the BBOKC event at the Farmers Market District was unseasonably cold and overcast, with a biting wind blowing relentlessly from the north. When I arrived in the late morning, visitors were rather sparsely distributed around the two blocks at the center of the event, clustered mostly along a row of booths selling arts and crafts and a few prepared foods like pickles and relishes, as well as in and around Earth to Urban. Several food trucks were gathered in the “community dining” area, a weedy gravel lot between buildings, in which several makeshift tables and chairs had been built out of milk crates, scrap wood, and other random materials. The constant sound of wind whipping through the buildings

95 http://oklahoma.uli.org/about-us/

96 http://www.uli.org/about-uli/mission-priorities/
competed with a dull roar generated by refrigerator compressors on the trucks. As I sat, eating beef and black bean tacos topped with “salsa roja, pickled onion pico, sri racha sour cream, cilantro, and roasted garlic demi” and accompanied by smoked Israeli couscous, a genial man passed by and gave me a Pabst Blue Ribbon beer from a case he was carrying around. Among the visitors that day were the state’s Secretary of Agriculture, Jim Reese, and his family, as well as Steve Lackmeyer, a prominent local journalist who regularly writes about downtown redevelopment and has recently begun championing the cause of the Farmers Market District.

The windows of a vacant building on the corner of one of the blocks were covered with thick paper stamped with small boxes, accompanied by the prompt: “I would like…in the OKC Farmers Market,” a sampling of responses to which included, “tamale vendors who make vegan tamales,” “more lighting at night,” “kid friendly,” “a butcher,” “ATM machine,” “more green space/community garden,” and “friendlier environment.” Another prompt read, “I wish this was,” some responses to which included “Pastry shop,” “a group art studio/collective,” “magical witch shop,” “café,” and “corner pub/look @ that door, AWESOME,” with an arrow pointing to a boarded-up door. This small selection of ideas conveys something of the mixture of excitement and hesitation with which visitors approached the site that day, which in turn resonates with Bud Scott and Burt McAnally’s hopes and concerns for the Farmers Market District.

This mixture of emotions conjured by the site arguably represents a front line of sorts, the point at which the optimism and forward-facing excitement about the city felt by many Oklahomans — as captured in the scissor-tailed flycatcher’s proliferation in tattoos, coins, t-shirts, and public art — meets the sense of stagnation, stasis, and skepticism about the future that has long tainted the way many Oklahomans feel about their state. The Farmers Public Market and its immediate surroundings literally materialize this meeting
point: here, a handful of structures have been restored and revitalized, rescued from the brink of destruction, and thus stand out amidst widespread decay and desuetude — the Farmers Public Market itself, but also Earth to Urban, the yoga studio, and a few other spaces. These revitalized spaces link directly to the dynamic assemblage created by the synthesis of recent innovations in architecture, sporting, and foodways in the city, as I discussed above. It is of course not incidental that BBOKC chose food-related sites for their first two events. Food, as a necessity and/or luxury item, as bringer of health or disease, as ecological friend or foe, is a potent force to enroll in a given assemblage.

But just as we saw in discussions of key sites in previous chapters, the Farmers Public Market’s would-be transformation requires careful attention to interweaving specific materials and particular meanings. Especially because of the site’s unique position as a front line between the forces of movement, progress, and excitement, on the one hand, and stasis, decay, and skepticism, on the other hand. As we glimpsed in my discussion with Bud Scott and Burt McAnally, this is a particularly volatile and ambivalent space, in terms of both emotions and physical encounters. How does the visitor make sense of the mixture of revitalization and decay, excitement and anxiety surrounding them? Of the gourmet food trucks parked outside Earth to Urban, or the idyllic murals of rural agrarian life inside the Market’s ballroom, juxtaposed against the crumbling building off to the side of the Market, painted with American and Mexican flags, where Burt McAnally has created an amateur Latino youth boxing facility, or the steady but slow movement of homeless habitués more or less constantly visible in the background?

BBOKC, in its explicitly pedagogical approach, provides some insight into how sense might be quite literally made of this whorl of emotions and materials. In addition to the participatory visioning exercise described above and similar mediations that projected towards a future Farmers Market District, the event offered a number of materials that were
positioned towards the Market’s past. These included several black and white photos, pasted on pieces of reclaimed wooden pallets, of the Market in its heyday as a farmers’ market, accompanied by captions such as: “Photo says: “Scene in Truck District containing 150 Truck loads fruits and vegetables — Public Market 6:30 A.M. Oklahoma City, Okla.” Many of these historical photos were also featured on BBOKC’s Facebook page in the weeks leading up to the event, with captions that crystallized a vision of the Market as a site that created community, in the broadest sense of the term, through directly connecting producers, consumers, and foodstuffs. One caption, for example, reads, “FARMERS MARKET DISTRICT was meant for food, market, and community since the FARMERS PUBLIC MARKET opened in 1928. Imagine chickens squawking, children playing, people walking — and row after row of OKLAHOMA FARMERS displaying their local produce.” This narrative of the Market’s past has been central to not only the BBOKC event, but also to the framing of the site offered by McAnally, Scott, and other proponents of the Farmers Market District and local food hub visions. At the BBOKC event, these images/narratives were interwoven with current redevelopment in the area, as some of these photos accompanied larger placards featuring maps of the area as performed that day, with stars denoting “existing district businesses” such as Earth to Urban and the Bikram Yoga studio (fig. 39). Still other materials worked to capture the ongoing production of space in the area on a shorter time scale, such as in photos of particular views
within the BBOKC site with the caption “Before #BBOKC,” positioned in front of the same site, now modified in various ways.

Also present were a range of materials that less explicitly evoked temporal processes, foregrounding instead particular spatial concepts and values. For instance, several miniature raised garden beds, each colorfully painted with insects, wind turbines, and such, were accompanied by a sign that read, “Community gardens are a good use of vacant land and create relationships between neighborhood residents.” Another sign read, “Street musicians add to the diverse aural experience of a street and engage people, subconsciously making them stay, listen and interact.” A third read, “Street trees provide shade, lower the ambient temperature, and create natural barriers between pedestrians and traffic. Street trees also make streets feel narrower and cars move slower, cutting noise and making pedestrians feels safer.” Another exhibit, entitled “Learn About Walkability,” featured two satellite images, one labeled “urban environment” and the other “suburban environment” (fig. 40 below). Affixed to each of these were several lengths of neon orange string, which were identified by a nearby sign as representing “a 10-minute (half-mile) walk.” Visitors were encouraged to draw the string across the map to see what services and amenities one could reach before the length of string ran out, in order to “Explore how land use & street patterns affect walkability in these two different neighborhoods.” The captions themselves abstained from explicitly evaluating the merits of the two neighborhoods, demurring, “Both neighborhoods offer a mix of single family homes, apartments, and community services. The arrangement of these elements dramatically changes how walkable the community is.” Experimenting with the strings, however, made clear that the image labeled as the urban neighborhood was superior in terms of walkability. More than just valorizing one vision of the ‘the urban’ over others, we see that this particular activity is intended to achieve the elemental goal of
(re)creating an embodied sense of how walking itself might fit into city life.

These materials, clearly intended to teach Oklahoma Citians particular values derived from specific visions of urban development that are shot through with urban planning discourse, convey an interesting mixture of authoritative expertise and emphasis on phenomenological aspects of urban experience. While one might question the bold and general assertions made in the captions, which suggest that all urbanites experience phenomena such as narrow streets and street performers in the same way, and that all inhabitants of a given city share particular visions of development, it’s also important to note here, following Callon, Butler, and many others, that these materials and the knowledge they represent also function performatively. That is, while the formal knowledge products that probably informed these materials likely purport to describe urban phenomena and how urbanites react to it, these knowledges can also in turn shape how those phenomena are experienced by urbanites. The active presence of these materials — both those that are explicitly pedagogical and those that simply offer what Lefebvre calls (1991/1974) “representations of space” — at BBOKC exemplifies just such a moment when formal knowledge reveals its entanglements with the world that it initially sought to capture and fix.

Several “pop-up” businesses were also rendered sensible with the help of pedagogic signage, which explained to visitors that these ephemeral enterprises “help prospective businesses see an area or building’s potential.” Existing brick-and-mortar businesses, however, were not accompanied by signs, except for several street signs with directional
indicators leading visitors towards specific locations and businesses to visit on-site. Although these signs included the Antique Mall section of the Market, it is not yet clear how the rapidly changing spaces entangled with food relocalization that are now gathering around the Market will articulate with the milieu of the Antique Mall. As noted above, the Antique Mall occupies an outbuilding that runs in a semi-circle around the north and west sides of the Market building. In the first decades of the Market’s existence, this building was occupied by ‘truck farmers,’ who could pull their vehicles right up to their individual booths for easy unloading and display of their products.

After four decades of serving as the Antique Mall, the outbuilding is now a tightly packed warren of individually managed enterprises, owned and operated primarily by older individuals and couples. Each of these businesses occupies one or more of the original produce vendors’ stalls, and is densely packed with innumerable objects and artifacts salvaged from the past: old cowboy boots, an “1890s cowboy bathtub,” Barry Manilow and Tony Orlando records from the 1970s, street signs, beer steins, dishes, tools, bizarre dolls, Christmas decorations, and many other items. Not unlike many such antique malls across the country, this site conveys an air of long inhabitation by the shopkeepers, who sit languidly watching TV, listening to the radio, and chatting with each other and with the occasional passerby. A table laden with crock pots, casserole dishes, and plates of food is cordoned off with rope and a sign that reads, “for vendors only.” Most of the stalls have been outfitted with various facades consisting of awnings, miniature shingled roofs, wooden planks and siding, Christmas lights and tinsel. The distinct impression of accumulated time and layer upon layer of different uses, values, and significances that pervades the Market and its environs is amplified here in the Antique Mall, with its baroque collection of temporal artifacts and overlapping structural and aesthetic interventions.
An old but obviously well-functioning heater fills the space with warm air, and a number of BBOKC visitors make their way into this warm, dimly lit interior and explore its labyrinthine passages. Many of these visitors carried their food inside and wandered around bemusedly examining the wares on offer, though I saw no one purchase anything during the time I spent inside the Mall that afternoon. Burt McAnally passed through at one point, and introduced me to Bill Hogan, the Market Master who has managed the Market since the 1970s, a wiry gentleman wearing a western shirt with pearl snaps and a large brass buckle in the shape of a horseshoe, studded with bits of turquoise. As the three of us chatted about the history of the Antique Mall, it was evident to me that Burt, who has a background in and intense interest in history, is enthralled with the trajectory of the Market over time. Moreover, he has made several comments in press coverage suggesting that he envisions the Antique Mall as having a place in the revitalized Farmers Market District. Nevertheless, I found it somewhat hard to imagine how this quirky community of people and artifacts might fit into a vibrant, redeveloped Farmers Market District, if for no other reason than the likelihood that rent would increase dramatically. It remains to be seen what ‘progress’ might mean for the small businesses that have gathered in the Market during its several decades of marginality in the city.

Leaving the Antique Mall, I passed into the main Market building itself, where the monthly “Trade Days” event was underway, a cross between a garage sale and an arts and craft fair that takes place on the ground floor of the Market, where the most established retail food vendors were located in the first several decades of the Market’s existence. In the late ‘20s and early ‘30s, several of these businesses included more elaborate versions of the miniature building facades later added to the antique vendors’ booths, including facades of a candy store and a Dutch bakery, both of which have been well-maintained and recently restored as part of the McAnallys’ efforts to revitalize the site.
Passing through this area, which was much less trafficked during the BBOKC event than other parts of the broader Market campus (to use Burt’s term for the general area surrounding the building), I walked out into the small parking lot on the south side of the Market and started to make my way towards the OFC’s new Operations Center. On the way, I saw Tom Green,97 the owner/operator of a nearby local food based business, helping a woman transfer a series of items from the bed of a pickup truck to his van. I greeted Tom and spoke briefly with him. Initially, he said nothing to indicate that something out of the ordinary was occurring, and simply said he would talk more with me later, as he had “to help this lady move her stuff.” I started to walk away, but then decided to offer to help. I had noticed two police vehicles parked nearby, but only as I began moving items, which consisted of dingy blankets and random patio furniture cushions, backpacks, tools, a pair of children’s bicycles, and so on, from the truck to the van did I realize that the police were somehow involved with what Tom and the woman were doing.

After several minutes of moving items, Tom said, during a pause in which the police spoke with the woman, “This is a weird deal,” and told me that he had been returning to his business from a delivery and came upon the woman, whom he had not previously met, sitting in the parking lot, in tears, near the police vehicles. He followed an immediate impulse to stop and ask what the problem was, and the woman explained her predicament in this way: She and her fiancé were homeless, and they had borrowed the truck from someone they had recently met in order to move their belongings from one homeless camp to another. On the way, the police had pulled them over and approached the vehicle at gunpoint, alleging that the truck had been reported as stolen. They proceeded to arrest her fiancé, who was driving the vehicle, and were apparently debating what to do about her when Tom arrived on the scene. Seeing Tom’s van, the woman asked him to help her unload her belongings from

97 A pseudonym.
the truck and move them to a nearby secure location. Despite having obvious doubts, he continued to follow his initial urge to help and agreed. Now, telling me the story, he expressed that he regretted following this impulse, particularly after hearing that the secure location the woman had in mind was the vacant Buddy’s Produce building, where the several squatters had been living that Tom and others in the area suspected as being responsible for the recent burglaries of his business and the Bikram Yoga studio. “Most of them are thieves,” he said, clearly struggling to reconcile the frustrating and damaging experience of having his businesses broken into and burglarized with his impulse to help the woman, who may or may not have had some connection to the burglary. Sympathizing with his predicament, I ventured that I felt he had done a generous and good thing in agreeing to help her, and suggested that perhaps this encounter might provide an opening into a more collaborative, or at least less oppositional, relation among the inhabitants and habitués of the area. He seemed to like this notion, and relaxed slightly as he commented that the scene in which we were immersed, unfolding on the very edge of the BBOKC event, epitomized the dynamic of the area in certain respects.

As we were quietly having this conversation, we watched the police interrogate the woman. They had been watching her, Tom, and myself remove items from the bed of the truck and from behind the seats and in the glove compartment of the cab. Some of the final items we moved included two used car batteries, and when the woman asked the police for a small flashlight that was attached to the keychain that also held the keys to the truck, the police expressed doubt about her story concerning how she had come to be in the truck. One of the officers questioned her again about the man who had loaned the truck to her and her companion. Growing clearly exasperated with the long and rather incoherent nature of her account, he brusquely told her, “Shut up!” and asked her where she had met the man with the truck. When she replied that she had met him “on the homeless circuit,” the officer
laughed in derision and repeated the term ‘the homeless circuit’ in clear contempt, seeming
dubious that such a thing might exist or be worthy of a proper name. Watching this scene
unfold, it seemed clear to me that Tom shared my revulsion at the way the police were
treating the woman, and when I made a comment to that effect, he agreed. Recognizing that
our own involvement with the situation was complicated — at some point Tom told me that
the police had only agreed to let the woman take the stuff and leave because she told them
that Tom was her brother — I felt like the most I could do was observe the police to make
sure that there was a witness to their interaction with the woman. If their treatment had
become any more aggressive, I imagined that starting to record video of the incident would
hopefully create a favorable disruption.

Fortunately, they soon desisted and allowed her to leave, at which point she
approached Tom and me, thanking us politely while embracing us and introducing herself as
Clara Yew. She then offered us another name, saying that Clara Yew was an alias she used
“on the street,” but she wanted us to know her real name, which she offered to verify with
identification cards that she pulled from her wallet. The three of us climbed in the front of
Tom’s van and drove the short distance over to the Buddy’s Produce building, where we
unloaded her belongings onto a loading dock. During the unloading process, Tom engaged
with Clara in a conversation about the burglary, remaining careful not to strike an accusatory
tone. She told him that she had lived in the building intermittently over the winter months,
and that a number of people “bounced in and out” regularly, but asserted that they were all
“polite people,” and could not be the ones responsible for the break-in. Tom then explained
that his business was small and struggling, adding, “If you get the opportunity to dissuade
someone from breaking in there, please do so.” Clara agreed, but noted that with warmer

98 A pseudonym.
weather approaching, she didn’t anticipate staying in the Buddy’s Produce building again for quite some time.

After a brief conversation in which she worried about how she would get her fiancé out of jail and how they might complete their move to another camp, she pulled back the collar of her shirt and showed us her collarbone, which had clearly been broken or dislocated at some point in the past and not received proper medical attention, and was now jutting out at an awkward angle and pushing against the skin. Despite her considerably daunting position, Clara struck an upbeat tone, and thanked us again. During this final exchange, Tom seemed to remain confused and nonplussed. The BBOKC event was still in full swing, so we had no time after we parted ways with Clara to discuss what had gone on, as he needed to get back to his business.

This encounter between Clara Yew, Tom Green, two Oklahoma City police officers, and myself, alongside a stolen truck, a host of ragged personal belongings, and a vacant building, perhaps encapsulates certain elements of the current dynamic of the Farmers Market District, as Tom pointed out. The confrontation between the police and a homeless Oklahoma Citian does not come as a surprise, to be sure. But Tom’s impulse to intervene on Clara’s behalf, even after the ethical and perhaps legal complexities of the situation came into sharper relief, suggests that there is no inevitable outcome to the ongoing struggles in this area. Particularly when faced with the visceral force of a direct encounter with a living, breathing, and emotionally distressed human being — as opposed to a passerby at a distance, a form glimpsed slipping into a dark doorway, or even a generic ‘homeless person’ invoked in conversation — more or less stable complexes of emotion, significance, and value can give way to unpredictable swerves, which may open lines of flight into new, still inchoate territories.
I am not arguing that a more harmonious relation between homeless habitués and local food business owners will be ushered in by this encounter. Rather, the encounter demonstrates that the series of instances that together constitute those relations are suffused not only with ethical decision-making, but also with less conscious forces, fugitive currents that course through and between bodies, inciting them to actions that surprise the thinking, consciously evaluating mind: a harsh command, barked from the throat of a uniformed officer, combines with the feel and the scent of dirty, fraying bedding and clothing; skin weathered by sun and wind, an embrace, tears, a protruding collarbone, a smile; a stolen truck, a flashlight, used car batteries, and a vacant building that once functioned as a produce wholesaling operation.

As the day of the BBOKC event wore down, I worked my way around the perimeter of the main proceedings, examining the cracked sidewalks, crumbling walls, and boarded up buildings of the area, which are interspersed with a handful of functioning businesses. One block north of where the event was taking place sits an old entrance ramp to the now-decommissioned I-40, which at the time of the BBOKC event was blocked with concrete retaining walls (see fig. 41 below). The sections of the demolished viaduct that ran through the heart of the CBD, near the Devon Tower and the Chesapeake Arena, were removed, but on the west side of downtown, near the Farmers Market District, a stretch of the old interstate remains, quickly buckling and being overrun by encroaching vegetation on the grassy embankments on either side of the road, in the interstitial spaces beneath now-closed overpasses, and increasingly on the road itself. Walking from the BBOKC event, I skirted the barrier blocking the on-ramp and walked up onto the old highway. To the south, the Farmers Public Market stood over a host of humbler structures and empty lots. To the west, the empty, crumbling, and weed-infested highway stretched on and out of sight over a small hill. Less than a mile to the east, the Devon Tower loomed high above the rest of the downtown
skyline; in the foreground, set against the reflective steel and glass of the tower, several billboards advertised the Salvation Army and the City Rescue Mission, the latter of which offered “Help. Hope. Healing.” Approaching the point where the old viaduct now ends abruptly in a jagged rupture of concrete, I noticed a pile of clothes and a couple of plastic containers lying beside a worn-out mattress, sitting on the surface of the old interstate, where someone had obviously been dwelling.

6. Conclusion: coherence and virtuality

Later, I sit at the bar at Ludivine, drinking wine, eating locally-raised, grass-fed steak, and scribbling down field notes. The shelves housing the array of liquor bottles behind the bar look like ‘rustic,’ repurposed wood, set against bare brick. The bar is roughly-finished steel which also conveys the air of being some repurposed relic from an industrial site. My knee rests against what looks like a vintage zinc ceiling that’s been painted white and used as a front for the bar. Coming from the Farmers Market District, I’m profoundly struck by the
vast chasm between these materials as they live as part of this enterprise and what I imagine as an array of materials that bear some resemblance to these but still lie ensconced in the post-industrial, post-commercial spaces constituting much of the still-virtual Farmers Market District. I recall Bud and Burt’s comments about the stripping of valuable metals and such from many of those buildings, which in turn brings to mind a scene in the documentary film *Detropia* (Ewing and Grady 2012), in which unemployed men attach chains to their pickup trucks to pull apart what may have been an old building or a vast piece of machinery, explaining that the metals will be sold to recyclers and serve as construction materials for new industrial developments in China.

The same object — a length of steel paneling, for example — may find itself entering completely different assemblages, characterized by distinct imperatives flowing from divergent values, imbued with fundamentally different senses of value. In the process the ‘same’ thing becomes something different as these senses increasingly become part of the length of steel, and intertwine with other actors to harness and direct power as it flows here and there, pooling up in some places and draining away from others. In much the same way that a bag of organic wheat berries becomes a different thing, carrying distinct effects for various actors, depending on whether it moves from a farm into WFM or into the OFC, the length of steel that forms the bar at Ludivine, instead of being removed by scrap gatherers somewhere and shipped to China to be melted down and transformed into a support in the wall of a factory where jet skis or digital tablets are made, now sits in Ludivine, supporting not only my plate of food, glass of wine, and notebook, but also lending its support to Ludivine’s Arcadian vision of nature, the ability for several small- to mid-sized, ecological farms to stay in business, and the power of fossil fuel companies like Devon and Chesapeake to remain among the elite natural gas producers in the US. Among many other things.
Which, once again I must assert, is not to suggest that a length of repurposed steel is as powerful as, say, Chesapeake’s former CEO Aubrey McClendon. As I have stated numerous times, power congeals and sediments around particular material-semiotic knots, enabling some actors more than others. The fugitive affective energies I have described in two encounters at the Farmers Public Market are important to bear in mind because they remind us of the impossibility of permanent stasis in the configurations of power, and they highlight the micropolitics upon which all politics rests, often more unstably than meets the eye. But the vignettes I have offered in this chapter are not meant to overstate the fluidity and volatility of power relations, which can indeed achieve remarkable degrees of stability and duration.

Indeed, it’s important to note that in the months following the BBOKC event, a city councilman and longtime OFC member named Ed Shadid ran for mayor on a platform based in part on an explicit critique of dominant redevelopment rationales in the city. Throughout his campaign, Shadid — who used the Farmers Public Market for a number of his campaign events — explicitly critiqued governance structures and processes in the city (and the complicity therein of a largely uncritical media), using terms such as ‘oligarchy’ and ‘plutocracy’ in his public speeches. Such language, it must be noted, had not been heard in Oklahoma City politics for some time. Incumbent mayor Cornett shocked observers in the state and beyond by refusing to even debate with Shadid during the campaign. This race galvanized not only many progressive-minded Oklahoma Citians, but also an increasing number of people who feel left out of redevelopment as it has been implemented. As one journalist wrote (Griffin 2014), “people who usually don’t pay attention to the mayor’s race are starting to hear Ed’s message while seeing their streets unrepaired and monied, downtown interests getting sweetheart deals and streetcars to nowhere.” In a city where less than 10% of the voting public participates in local elections, many Shadid supporters were
optimistic that even a small surge of voters favoring Shadid could turn the election. Despite Shadid’s efforts, which many Oklahoma Citians saw as representing a significant challenge to the status quo, Cornett ultimately won the March 2014 election. The status quo, in other words, while perhaps under attack, remains resilient.

Nevertheless, at the end of the day, whether Shadid won or lost, whether the homeless circuit is driven into other marginal spaces, whether the Farmers Market District reduces the local food hub to yet another exclusive, gentrified food space for elites, I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter the openings, the contingency, the virtualities inherent to even the most stable-seeming relations of dominance. We could of course read the events related in this chapter as simply further evidence of the power of powerful actors in the city, and indeed the account does suggest that the territory of redevelopment remains much stronger and more expansive than that of local food, seemingly even overcoming the territory of local food from ‘within,’ in some respects. However, I must reiterate here that the struggles depicted in this case study are ongoing, and their outcome is perhaps less predictable than we might imagine.

Consider that the previous chapters, in focusing on local food and its growing entanglements with redevelopment, demonstrated the processes through which power relations in the city and state were reinforced, extended, assembled. Bearing that process of assemblage in mind, we might simply note that what is assembled can be disassembled. Yes, the critical reader will object, but what would it take for such a process of disassembly to occur? In any absolute or foolproof sense, this is of course impossible to predict. Nevertheless, in the concluding chapter of this case study I do offer a number of observations and suggestions for producing more just and sustainable food systems and more inclusive modes of urban redevelopment. Before doing so, however, we must take a final analytical cut through the fabric of Oklahoma City, making a deeper incision into the
city’s history so as to better understand the *longue durée* of the relationship between space and power, and what that relationship means for the future of food systems and the city.
7
The Market and the city: Space, society, and transversality

For a long while now I have been looking at this city... In the end I must say: I see faces that belong to past
generations... I keep seeing the builders, their eyes resting on everything near and far that they have built, and also on
the city, the sea, and the contours of the mountains, and there is violence and conquest in their eyes. All this they want
to fit into their plan and ultimately make their possession by making it part of their plan.
-Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science.

When cities find themselves on sure foundations and safely on their way, their subsequent development is much the
same; but in their small and insecure beginnings, with now a spurt ahead and now a plunge into the depths, there is
always room for drama and adventure.
-Angelo Scott (1939), The Story of Oklahoma City

1. Introduction

We have now seen that the infrastructural and architectural remnants of the Farmers Public Market and its environs, which were once the city’s mid-century food hub, lend their strategic placement in the spatial trajectories of urban redevelopment to the local food movement, concentrate the substantial networks of local food that have developed over the past decade or more, and provide a potent substrate of meaning and historical identity upon which local food advocates construct their vision for the site. Harnessing the energies and materials of redevelopment seems to present the opportunity for the local food movement to overcome some of the forces that in the second half of the 20th century served to disassemble the more locally-based food networks that once flourished in and around the Farmers Public Market, forces that included the rise of supermarkets; the consolidation of food processors and wholesalers, articulated within increasingly distanced networks of industrial food production; and the eventual departure of those businesses from the inner city to the periphery. At the same time, tensions with homeless populations in the area surrounding the
Farmers Public Market illustrate the risks of attempting to yoke urban redevelopment to the vision of a local food hub, prompting us to ask ‘local food and redevelopment for who?’

Nevertheless, I concluded that the tensions emerging in and around the Farmers Public Market should be viewed as central to struggles that are as of yet unfinished; while the vision of a local food hub relies in part on the notion of a potentially gentrified ‘Farmers Market District,’ the latter may be dependent on the former as well. As we have seen, the symbiosis between these two intertwined projects is at times uneasy, and indeed the contours of this relationship — in terms of which vision and which values come to dominate — are shaped by actors that appear to operate at different scales and wield widely disparate powers. The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, for example, as important as it is for thousands of Oklahomans, seems no match for the real estate developers and corporate natural gas giants whose needs and drives are profoundly linked with redevelopment.99 But what constitutes the agentic capacities of these ‘powerful actors,’ enabling them to appear as dominant, and tempting the critical analyst to conclude that struggles over food systems and redevelopment in Oklahoma City are not in fact ongoing, but rather were finished before they even began?

In Chapters Four and Five, I proposed that even the most hegemonic-seeming actors in the city, such as developers and energy corporations, have derived their power in part precisely through their efforts to take possession of the growing networks of local food proliferating around the state and beyond. We saw that the power of Chesapeake Energy, for example, to shape urban space partially depends on the repurposed building materials, foraged fungi, and artisanal vials of handcrafted cocktail tinctures that make up a local farm-to-table restaurant, and the particular meanings and values that are extracted from and foregrounded in these materials. To point out that Chesapeake Energy is constituted in part by a farm-to-fork restaurant does not imply that there is any parity in the relationship

99 Nor is it accurate to think of the Regional Food Bank as oppositional in any direct way to dominant actors in the city, not least of all because many such actors support the food bank through large donations, serving as board members, etc.
between these two entities; clearly this is a mismatch even greater than that which we saw in
the case of the nascent local food hub. And yet we saw that viewing Chesapeake as
constituted by a range of heterogeneous actors brought into view an expanded field of
analysis and a much broader sense of politics, in which points of contestation proliferate,
and sites of creative divergence from the status quo may multiply faster than our would-be
hegemonic actors can co-opt them. In this expanded field, we saw that architecture and
sport have played essential roles alongside local food in mediating social relations in the city,
not least of all because of their capacity to fuse social values with materials in ways that
facilitate particular distributions of economic value in the city. This brings us, in other words,
to a broader concern that has long been of interest to social theorists: what is the
relationship between society and space, or put a bit differently, how does the arrangement of
things interact with the organization of society? And what might these broader questions tell
us about the more specific concern of the present inquiry regarding the possibility of
making AFNs more expansive and durable?

Urban scholars in particular have long explored the mutually constitutive relations
between the built fabric of the city and social hierarchies (cf. Nietzsche 1974/1887; Benjamin
range of philosophical and theoretical approaches have been deployed in such inquiries,
differentiated broadly by whether they imagine power (and particularly powerful human
actors, be they individuals, classes, or institutions) as producing the city, in a ‘top-down’
fashion, or as the contingent result of interactions across wide spectra of relationships. This
latter framing is not so much a ‘bottom-up’ approach to power, but rather one in which
power’s peaks and valleys emerge through action or agency distributed across materials of
varying kinds. From this perspective, social power and the materiality of the city are mutually
constitutive, and it makes little sense to speak of either environmental or cultural (or
economic) determinism, since the categories of culture, economy, and environment are all understood as mutually interpenetrating hybrids, constantly in production, rather than pre-existing entities with stable identities (Whatmore 2002; Latour 1993/1991). Determining which of these approaches more closely approximates a True metaphysics is not the concern of the present inquiry. Instead, I am interested in deploying this more distributed notion of the relation between space and society to see what it can do for our analysis of Oklahoma’s local food movement, particularly the struggles centering on the Farmers Public Market.

I have already demonstrated some of the ways that the Market and its environs serve as an intensification and magnification of contestation over the future of the city and of the state’s food systems. But the Farmers Public Market offers even further insight into the contingent and always-unfinished nature of Oklahoma City and its entanglements with the state’s food systems. In previous chapters, I have illustrated some of the ways in which social power relations in the city have influenced the development of the local food movement. We saw that the fabric of the city, from buildings to basketball players, shares a mutually constitutive relationship with power, and as such is also implicated in the development and transformation of the local food movement. In the chaos and tumult of the present and recent past however, where we have concentrated most of our attention thus far in our case study, it is sometimes hard to recognize contingency or gaps in power, particularly when the fabric of the city, for most of us so intransigent, seems so pliable in the hands of the powerful. To more fully grasp the powers that shape food systems and the city, in this chapter I draw primarily on archival research I conducted at the Oklahoma Historical Society, alongside several secondary sources, to analyze the Farmer’s Public Market, exploring its emergence and development as the result of forces that, even if we choose to view them as inherently or innately powerful, illustrate the often capricious, unpredictable character of power.
This becomes particularly apparent when we situate the Market’s history in the broader history of the city itself. Oklahoma City presents a fairly unique case for studying the relationship between the material fabric of the city and social power relations. It was founded relatively recently, in 1889, which means that the successive layers of development constituting the city are somewhat easier to observe and distinguish than in older cities. Cities like Valencia or Rome, which have been inhabited for many centuries and experienced multiple conquests and waves of destruction and reconstruction, present a much more complex palimpsest to the urban analyst than the fairly humble site of Oklahoma City. But what makes the city even more singular is that prior to the so-called ‘Land Run’ of 1889, when Indian Territory was formally opened to Euro-American settlement, Oklahoma City did not exist. In one day of that year — April 22nd — some 10,000 people converged on the site and began to literally assemble a city in quite a rapid fashion. Examining key aspects of this process, which perhaps presents a high-speed portrait of city/society-building dynamics, is the first step we will take towards understanding the longer arc of the city’s history.

2. The river, the railroad, and the Land Run

In many ways, Oklahoma City begins with what was until recently called the North Canadian River. We have in previous chapters observed some of the ways the river that traverses the city has been important to flows of investment capital, visions of the city, and the production of urban space. From the beginning, as a central component of MAPs1, the city’s recent redevelopment boom has been premised on re-imagining and reconstructing the river. With MAPs3 and the vision of Core to Shore, the river’s place in the city has become even more important. Working in accord with the iconic structures in the Boathouse District, kayaks and riverboats, athletes and the equipment and specialized knowledge with
which they are entangled, dams and locks, engineers and architects, computer generated
visual spectacles, and a number of other actors, the river’s powers are harnessed and directed
as they become caught up in changing assemblages. The great number of actors that have
converged on the river in this process suggest the extent to which the river’s powers are
necessary for the assemblages of redevelopment in the city to function as they have, and as
they are expected to.

However, these recent efforts to take possession of the river — that is, to imbue it
with new values (nature, sports, design, modernity) and alter its form (dams, locks,
landscaping, a steady volume and flow of water) so that other values (land values in
conjunction with social values) can be intensified and extracted from it — are but the latest
in a long series of negotiations between the city and the river. Before the current refocusing
of interest on the river, this waterway, like much of the area around it, had been marginalized
in the city for several decades. Primarily due to modifications by the US Army Corps of
Engineers, the river was largely ignored by and invisible to Oklahoma Citians in the late 20th
century, who, if they thought of the river at all, tended to see it “as a drainage ditch that
needed to be mowed three times a year” (Lackmeyer 2013a). As Mayor Cornett put it
(Cornett 2012), “[Before MAPs], there wasn’t an Olympic rowing/kayaking training center.
Heck, there wasn’t even a river.”
To the city’s first residents, such a state of affairs would have been largely unimaginable. In the early years of the 20th century, as the city’s socioecologies were taking shape, the river was an important site of recreational activity (Lackmeyer 2013b). The archives of the Oklahoma Historical Society contain a number of photographs of picnics and boating trips along the river, near which also sat Delmar Gardens, a large amusement park that offered rides, live performances, a beer garden, and a zoo (fig. 42). This amusement park, a widely-known piece of the city’s history, was in operation from 1902 to 1910, at which point it suffered severe damage when the river flooded. Such major floods were characteristic of the river in the early decades of the city, and residents expected some degree of flooding from the river annually. This tendency played a large part in the Corps of Engineers’ decision to assert control over the river in the 1940s.

Long before its active role in making (and unmaking) the sociality of the city, the river had been a key actor shaping human activity in this area. Emerging from the Sangre de Cristo mountains in New Mexico, the Canadian is part of the Arkansas River watershed, which drains water from 47,700 square miles (Everett no date). Long an important source of water for indigenous peoples and the nonhuman animals such as bison with whom their lifeworlds were entangled, the river also played a major role in colonial interventions here, serving as a route of exploration and traffic in goods, soldiers, missionaries, and other actors entangled in circuits of European, and later American, imperial expansion (ibid.). In the 19th century, as the lands now known as Oklahoma were gradually enclosed on all sides by US territory and became home to increasing numbers of coercively-relocated indigenous groups, one of the most prominent routes for merchants and travelers through Indian Territory ran along the Canadian River (Baird and Goble 2008).

Prior to the 1889 opening of parts of Indian Territory to settlement, the Southern Kansas Railway built a line in 1886-87 from the Kansas-Indian Territory border south to the
town of Purcell, a bit south of the geographic center of the state. In 1887, this line was extended south into Texas by the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railway. At the intersection of this north-south rail line and the Canadian River, a small train station was located, most likely because this stop provided access to the water supplied by the river. This train station became the point of ingress for a sudden infusion of materials and energy on April 22, 1889, when parts of Indian Territory were opened to Euro-American settlement.

The so-called ‘Land Run’ of 1889 is one of the final dramatic moments of imperial expansion across the North American continent. As one president of an Oklahoma university put it during an address delivered 100 years later, “(T)he run squeezed into one ‘supreme moment’ the national experience of three centuries in terms of white dealings with this country’s native peoples and nations. It was, from the perspective of the great majority of the Indian population of what was to have been a uniquely Indian area, another invasion of Indian land by non-indians” (Walker 1994). The complex, contentious, and often violent interactions between not only the governing bodies, but also the citizens, economic systems, customs, knowledges, plants, animals, and microbial assemblages, of the United States and the dozens of indigenous Nations living within Indian Territory that led up to the opening of tribal lands to outside settlement have been studied extensively (cf. Debo 1970; Lynn-Sherow 2004; and Kidwell 2007, among many other sources), and far exceed the scope of this inquiry. For my purposes, it’s sufficient to note that in the years and months leading up to the opening, the would-be settlers that were gathered around (and in many cases inside) the soon-to-be claimable territory represented a considerable, pent-up mass of matter and energy in the form of materials both organic (people, nonhuman animals, plants and seeds, bacteria, coal and other fossil fuels) and inorganic (wagons, tools, wood, iron, etc.), as well as those items that might be said to straddle the organic and inorganic (language, customs, knowledges). When this mass was suddenly unleashed on the state, and on the future site of
Oklahoma City in particular, with no formal government whatsoever in place, the immediate result was a phenomenon that by all accounts was almost entirely lacking in order and anything resembling systematicity. Chaos broke out as people struggled to assert their claims on a first come, first served basis. A reconstructed account published in 1892, based on interviews with participants in the run, described the scene (Davis 1892, quoted in Stewart 1974, emphasis in original):

And then, a trumpet call, answered by a thousand angry yells from all along the line, and hundreds of men and women on foot and on horseback break away across the prairie, the stronger pushing down the weak, and those on horseback riding over and in some cases killing those on foot, in a mad, unseeming race for something which they are getting for nothing. These pilgrims do not drop on one knee to give thanks decorously...but fall on both knees, and hammer stakes into the ground and pull them up again and drive them down somewhere else, at a place which they hope will eventually become a corner lot facing the post office, and drag up the next man's stake, and threaten him with a Winchester because he is on their land which they have owned for at least three minutes.

Two clarifying points must be made here: One, US military presence in the area did instill some degree of order, though this proved difficult to maintain over time. Two, and more fundamentally, as Foucault has demonstrated (1991), the individuals and groups that descended on the area were of course in many respects self-governing; that is, they were articulated within a series of norms and more or less systematically organized hierarchies of values and ways of rendering the world about them intelligible, which in part shaped the possible contours of their actions and decisions. The notion of private property, for example, played a prominent role in shaping the immediate actions of settlers, who are said to have literally leapt from train cars while they were still rolling into Oklahoma Station to be the first to stake their claims on desirable pieces of ground (Scott 1939, p. 15).

The potency or resilience of such forces should not, however, be overstated. Indeed, accounts of Oklahoma City's dramatic founding indicate that under these remarkable circumstances, settlers became entangled in a network where normal modes of
subjectivation were to some extent attenuated. This observation resonates with and corroborates similar points I have made in previous chapters: any particular ‘mode of subjectivation’ must be viewed as inextricable from the networks of spaces and actors with which it shares a mutually constitutive relation. Once removed or distanced from those networks, and entangled with a different set of mediators — and the accompanying, multiple relations of forces from which (and only from which) meaning or value is generated — a subject/body also becomes something different. In Deleuzo-Guattarian (1987) terms, removing the subject from a given assemblage is a literal process of deterritorialization, which typically involves the traversal of one or more lines of flight into yet other processes of marking and assembling distinctive territories within which new forms of ‘stratification’ — or subjectivation — will occur. This process of deterritorialization and re-territorialization becomes clear as we trace the transition from the ‘chaos’ of the Land Run to the increasingly stable network of forces called Oklahoma City.

What were some of the characteristics of the network of forces converging on the nascent city? First, before the land run, a number of representations of Indian Territory had traveled from the area into broad networks that extended at least as far as the eastern United States and Europe. These included military reports; paintings and drawings by artists such as George Caitlin; travelogues and naturalists’ accounts by Washington Irving, Charles Latrobe, and John James Audubon; and innumerable stories told by traders, trappers, soldiers, missionaries, sharecroppers, and ‘boomers’ (the name given to those non-indigenous people who lobbied the US government to open the Territory, and on numerous occasions entered illegally and attempted to found new townships) (Stewart 1974). Among reports offered from Boomer scouts was a description of the land surrounding the Oklahoma Station stop on the Southern Kansas Railway: “Oklahoma Station, on the North Canadian River, is the

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100 This insight, articulated throughout Nietzsche’s works, also becomes clear when Foucault’s writings are juxtaposed with those of Latour (Gabriel and Sarmiento, forthcoming)
ideal spot. (There is) a beautiful stream of swift, running water, and in the valley a very rich, sandy loam soil, covered with bluestem grass as high as a man’s head” (ibid.). Several years later, beginning in December 1888 — before the city existed, that is — a daily newspaper called *The Oklahoma City Times* was already being published in Wichita, Kansas (ibid.). In this movement from occasional representations generated through sporadic travels to daily media coverage, we can discern a spatial and temporal rhythm, taking shape ever so gradually, that marked a growing acceleration in the process of territorializing the city. This is the passage from the first to second movements of the refrain, in Deleuzo-Gautarian terms (see Chapter Two). The capacity of these representations to participate in this process was, of course, a function of their articulation with a series of other networks, including political wrangling at the federal level, the rapid expansion of communication and transportation networks (see Cronon 1992), and the beginnings of a national media, among other forces.

This city being built first in papers, maps, and minds was also being constructed in the host of materials accumulating in anticipation of the ‘run,’ enabled by several legal allowances provided by the US statutes that opened the territory: First, settlers were allowed to travel across otherwise restricted Indian lands to position themselves for the opening three days in advance, which made it easier for a number of “Sooners” to slip across the boundaries into the Unassigned Lands and conceal themselves until the opening. Secondly, those who could afford to do so were allowed to ship freight, including building materials, tools, and other goods, into existing depots, provided that it was left in sealed cars on sidings; Oklahoma Station is said to have received the largest portion of these city-building materials (Stewart 1974). Thus particular individuals and groups were strategically positioning their bodies and the city’s built environment while no city had yet been established.
When thousands of people converged on the site, carrying what they could, the city began to take on a more durable form. As noted above, this was a disorderly scene: “For one year and eleven days laws or ordinances were what the citizen’s groups said that they were in assembled consensus. Enforcement was only that which a majority was willing to accept. Troops were (there) only to keep the peace” (Stewart 1974). While ‘chaos’ is perhaps the most common term used to describe the processes unfolding, some historians have also argued that the early self-organizing processes occurring in the rapidly stabilizing territory can be viewed as a collaborative achievement. George Shirk, an historian and Mayor of the city in the 1960s, observed, “(T)hat there existed no formal law nor civil code for a period of almost thirteen months is in itself incredible. The remedies that today we accept as commonplace such as probate, suits for debt, actions because of accidents, and so on, simply did not exist. […] Yet […] the fact that (citizens) were able to live side by side, jostling for their claims and their ground with relative harmony and concord, is probably the greatest tribute of all” (quoted in Stewart 1974).

While the initial processes of city formation here were not a Hobbesian dystopia, then, it is clear that the relative stability that emerged was produced and contested through a series of mediations. For one thing, following on my earlier comments about the assemblages from which these individuals emerged, particular markers of difference accompanied settlers:

There were some women and children, but the people […] were predominantly male. And they were of all types. There were the business folk who had made a competence somewhere else and had freight cars of various types of goods waiting on sidings. […] There were quite a few lawyers and other professional men. There were land owners and successful farmers. There were also the unskilled, who had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Some folk were well educated. Some were illiterate (Stewart 1974).

While the remarkable conditions of the run likely destabilized these categories to some extent, undoubtedly some of the hierarchy of meanings that inhered in these distinction of
gender, class, age, and so on were transported into and helped shape the nascent assemblage. These forces were not ‘purely’ discursive of course, but also likely corresponded quite often with abilities — literacy, for example, as noted by Stewart — and with the actors that accompanied some people but not others into the new territory, as evidenced by the “various types of goods waiting” on rail sidings.

Not least among these materials were surveying tools, including chains and transits, which were already being deployed by rival groups seeking to define the townsite (ibid.). Power coalesced around two principal rival factions who had done some degree of organizing in advance of the opening, the Seminole Land and Improvement Company and the Oklahoma Colony Company. Both groups scrambled to hold political elections in the first days of the city, as a method of securing legitimate control, but the social formation of the nascent city was too unstable for the results to hold. This instability did not last long: the inchoate contours of power in the city took shape alongside the built environment itself, as the building materials and tools that had been accumulating on rail sidings were promptly mobilized in the construction of crude structures. Within days, a town of several thousand people, resembling many towns in the western US at the time, had begun to take shape, a series of wooden buildings, tents, and lean-to’s arranged around two not quite-aligned street grids laid out by the competing town ‘companies’ (see fig. 43) In an early struggle to privatize water provision, one individual dug a water well and began selling water for five cents a pint.
On the second day, as struggles over lot ownership continued, a number of people not associated with the two companies "walked about, asking people to attend a mass
meeting […] to form a committee to adjudicate claims,” (ibid.). The committee of fourteen men that emerged from this meeting soon began moving about the town, defining streets, alleys, and blocks, a process that was so contentious that “a large triangle made of cottonwood logs was put together and carried on volunteer shoulders,” from inside which the committee made its deliberations. Note here that while property values in the early days of the city seem to have fluctuated wildly, and in many cases property changed hands through non-commodified transactions such as physical confrontations, it is clear that broadly, the value of particular spaces was initially anchored by proximity to the train station, and was likely soon mediated in various ways by the emplacement of a formal street grid. Further archival research might shed additional light on the specifics of how property values shifted alongside the increasing durability of the city’s form, but it is worth noting that the Seminole Company’s survey of the city was centered on the train station, while the Oklahoma Colony’s rival survey was further south. Several days after the ad hoc claims adjudication committee commenced its work, the first elections to produce relatively durable results were held, from which a prominent member of the Seminole company emerged as temporary mayor of the city. Within a week of the opening, the Seminole group had swept a more expansive election that created positions for a police judge, city attorney, city treasurer, city engineer and six seats on a city council. The rival company held their own election, attempting to establish a separate but adjacent
townsite, and struggles between the two factions continued for the first year, revolving around subsequent elections for frequently vacated public offices, and attempts to finalize competing plats marking lots and street grids. Eventually, however, the Oklahoma Colony Company’s townsite was incorporated into the larger Seminole territory (ibid.).

These struggles also cut across and were mediated by developments in the business community. A Board of Trade was established in May 1889, with a prominent member of the Seminole group serving as the first president. A number of businesses were quickly established, which by June 1889 included four banks, ten hotels, and twenty-one drug stores (ibid.). One of the first banks to exist in the city is said to have operated from a covered wagon owned by T.M. Richardson, one of the merchants who had shipped lumber into the area in advance of the opening on April 22nd. Richardson soon opened a lumberyard and established a brick-and-mortar bank at a prime location in the rapidly stabilizing matrix of streets and lots (ibid.). Also prominent among the businesses seeking to gain traction in the city that first summer were a number of food related enterprises: thirty-four groceries, twenty-eight bakeries, thirty-seven restaurants, seven ice cream parlors, twenty one “confectioners,” and eleven flour and feed stores (ibid.). An account written by one early Oklahoma Citian recalls the central role played by wild game meat in the dietary practices and economies of the early days of the city: “Oklahoma was the paradise for game, and a bewildering profusion of it was spread before us. Before every meat shop were strung long festoons of quail, prairie chickens, great bronze wild turkeys, ducks, geese, rabbits, deer” (Scott 1939, p. 101). This trade in game drew together shopkeepers in the nascent city with Indian hunters who visited the city to sell freshly hunted meat. One such merchant was James Wyatt, whose grocery store, built with lumber purchased from Richardson’s lumberyard and situated at another ideal location in the street grid (Stewart 1974), was none
other than the Crescent Market put out of business in 2011 with the arrival of Whole Foods Market (see Chapter Four).

The structures housing these enterprises quickly evolved from tents, wagons, and crude sheds to more durable wooden structures — several businessmen, including Henry Overholser, the “father of Oklahoma City,” had entire prefabricated buildings shipped in by rail — and then brick and stone buildings of several stories (Schwenk 2009, p. 31). During this initial melee of ‘lot jumping’ and the hasty construction of streets, buildings, and governing systems, the population of the city declined by more than 50%, from an estimated 10,000 to less than 4,000, but quickly began rising again throughout the 1890s. It seems likely here that many of the thousands who left during this phase were those who had failed to secure advantageous positions in the stabilizing social and material fabric of the city. Those who came later surely experienced a very different process of assimilating themselves to a more coherent and articulated city. This second phase of early growth was helped along by the efforts of several leading businessmen who, in a move foreshadowing dominant development rationales of today, deployed political influence, city boosterism, and private capital towards persuading the Frisco Railroad to extend their network of tracks, which included connections to Kansas City, Chicago, and St. Louis, to Oklahoma City rather than Guthrie, the original territorial capital (ibid.). This move was central to Oklahoma City soon supplanting Guthrie as the state capital.

The network of railways traversing the city expanded rapidly, enabling the city to become a hub for the distribution and processing of an increasingly productive agricultural industry, which formed the initial basis of the city’s economy, as well as that of the state more broadly. This combination of agricultural production, processing, and distribution, railroad networks, light industrial firms, construction, and banking, together with rapidly sedimenting institutional norms and organizations such as various offices of city
government, a board of trade, and so on, soon formed something of a positive feedback loop, in which the matter and energy flowing into the city was directed into the built environment, a process of “mineralization” (De Landa 1997) that enabled the stabilization of institutions and hierarchical structures. Following a number of scholars (e.g. Harley 2002; Craib 2004), these developments demonstrate that power relations in early Oklahoma City were mediated in no small part through the deployment of several actors, including stakes, chains, transits, and plats, whose capacities rendered legible the space of the burgeoning town in accord with claims made by particular individuals and groups. These actors were then linked with wood, nails, metals and other construction materials that quickly gave form to a range of businesses, dwellings, and other structures, which helped to make durable and demarcate the streets and infrastructures that would come to direct flows of people, materials, and energy through the city. We have seen that power relations, while not completely unstructured, were highly unstable and perhaps somewhat more malleable at the moment when starting guns and bugle calls heralded the opening of the Unassigned Lands, but quickly began to stabilize alongside and accumulate in the built form of the city. It’s important to bear in mind here, however, as Manuel De Landa points out (1997), that when viewed as systems, human social groupings are like most nonlinear systems in being characterized by the interplay of co-existing hierarchies (or top-down, rationalized forms of control) and “meshworks” (or self-organizing, more spontaneously generated forms).

This is partially why, as the example of Crescent Market illustrates, this early period in which power relations and the city emerged together does not of course ‘explain’ in any comprehensive sense power relations in the city today. Even if the scope of this project enabled me to do a more extensive historical-genealogical study of the case, which might indeed shed new understanding on current struggles, we would not of course arrive at the ultimate origin of power as it shapes the city today. Fortunately, this is not our goal. Instead,
I offer these reflections on the city’s emergence to demonstrate some of the specific ways in which inequities in the distribution of power among human actors are reliant upon webs of non-humans, which in turn make their way into the form taken by the city. As Scott (1939, p. 11) put it in his memoir, “Many cities, it may be presumed, had their start on a certain day; but few, if any, have started with such a rush and so dramatically.” This historical anomaly provides an opportunity to glimpse the interplay of power and urban form unfolding at a pace accelerated to the extent that these processes become clarified in their intensity.

An important point to underscore from the above sketch of the city’s early days is the central roles played by the Canadian River and the rail lines that traversed the city and connected it to much wider networks: the intersection of the river and the first of these rail lines provided the train stop that was selected as the site of Oklahoma City in advance of the Land Run; property values, while initially volatile and shifting in accord with other factors, were heavily influenced by proximity to the train station; and those businessmen able to mobilize materials waiting along the rail sidings on the day of the Run to claim lots, emplace them via mapping a survey grid, and erect structures on them were strategically well-positioned in the nascent city to profit from business ventures and, no doubt, from land speculation. Not coincidentally, then, the x-y axis formed by the railroad and the river that, as we saw in previous chapters, has been so central to the city’s more recent development processes, goes back to the city’s founding and beyond, emerging from the interplay of geology, hydrology, ecology, commerce, technological development, and imperial expansion.

In Chapter Six, tracing the vertical line in that axis along the heart of the redeveloped core drew our attention to the importance of green spaces to both property values and social values in the city. Returning to that string of green spaces, and continuing north from the redeveloped CBD, we find an archipelago of parks and monuments, nestled among picturesque neighborhoods: Goodholm Park, Sparrow Park, Guy James Park, and
just south of N.W. 36 street, Edgemere Park. One could continue to pursue this trajectory to the Chesapeake campus, around N.W. 56 street, but we are going to pause in this journey to consider Edgemere and Guy James Parks, which form the core of the Edgemere Park Historic District. It is here where our historical sketch of Oklahoma City begins to link directly back to the Farmers Public Market.

3. John J. Harden, Monopolist of yesteryear

Three blocks wide and nine blocks long, the Edgemere Park neighborhood strikingly manifests particular currents of late 19th and early 20th century thought in architectural and landscape design. Described as “one of the earliest community planning projects in Oklahoma and West of the Mississippi River” (Eilers and Leider 2009), Edgemere was one of many developments in the US that drew inspiration from the City Beautiful movement (Schwenk 2009) and the ideas of Ebenezer Howard and other urbanists who sought to combine rational, centralized planning at a large scale with notions of wilderness drawn from the Romantic movement in order to combat what were perceived by many observers as the intertwined problems of social breakdown and public health issues. The city park at the core of the neighborhood is traversed by a gentle creek cutting through rolling, wooded hills. Surrounding the park is a network of winding lanes filled with single-family homes, the majority of which are gabled brick and stone cottages, many in the Tudor Revival style popular in the US in the 1920s, featuring steeply peaked roofs, arched doorways, and
distinctive chimneys. These broader national and international networks of ideas combined in Oklahoma City with a rapidly expanding streetcar and railroad network that enabled horizontal expansion of the city in pace with the verticalization of the city’s core (fig. 46). As with earlier material sedimentations of built forms in the city, these expanding transit networks were clearly entangled with the drives of economic actors, many of whom had begun developing their power in the initial opening of Oklahoma Territory to EuroAmerican settlement in 1889.

Historian Terry Griffith (2000 p. 21) notes, “Real estate speculators such as Anton Classen, W.L. Alexander, John Shartel, and W.F. Harn controlled the expansion of Oklahoma City with their promotion of an electric streetcar and interurban rail system. Their leadership in land development funded the electric rail system from 1902 to 1916, in an effort to guide urban growth towards their real estate holdings.” Sites like Edgemere, which had been an outlying rural district during the city’s early years and then became a golf and country club, were by the 1910s and ‘20s readily accessible by public transit and automobiles; these areas were quickly transformed by a boom in residential and commercial building as the city’s population doubled in the 1920’s from 91,000 to 182,000 and building construction expenditures quadrupled (Schwenk 2009).

One of the principal actors in developing the Edgemere Park addition was an entrepreneur named John J. Harden, who commissioned an artist’s rendering of his vision for the layout of the area in the 1920s; the foundations upon which homes were soon built
were laid in this drawing before being laid in the rolling hills of the golf course that would become Edgemere Park.

Harden is said to have possessed a remarkable capacity to gaze at a swath of land and select spaces particularly well-suited for development. As Harden’s biographer Robert Burke (1998) puts it, “He was a master at taking raw land, landscaping it to perfection, and promoting (it).” Edgemere was one of many neighborhoods he took part in developing in Oklahoma City and in a number of other cities around the country, beginning in Belden, Michigan in 1907. Born in Michigan to working class Irish immigrants, Harden's prospects took a decisive turn when he married Frances Hale, the daughter of rancher and real estate dealer David A. Hale, “one of Nebraska’s most influential political and business leaders of the last quarter of the 19th century” (Burke 1998). Frances’ inheritance provided the capital necessary for Harden to begin purchasing land in peri-urban areas of rapidly growing, suburbanizing midwestern cities. Hearing about the population boom and need for housing
in Oklahoma, which became a state in 1907, he and his family moved to El Reno, a town west of Oklahoma City, in 1908. The image above, dated 1905, suggests the extent to which the city that Harden encountered had gained much more solidity and order in just over a decade since the chaos of the Land Run. As such, the production and organization of particular values — and hence of value — alongside the spaces of the city would require more than surveying tools, nails, and planks of wood.

For ten years, Harden developed properties in towns around Oklahoma and in south Texas, and in 1915 he began expanding his activities into the cemetery industry. In 1918, when the Hardens moved to Oklahoma City, the city was beginning to boom: “When World War I ended […] 7,000 men who left the city for military service came home to find only 100 vacant living units. The shortage of reasonably-priced housing offered a golden opportunity to men like Harden with subdivision development experience. Harden used money made in prior developments to buy every available parcel of land he could find in northwest and northeast areas of Oklahoma City,” (Burke 1998). By this point in the city’s history, in other words, Harden was able to take advantage of developments in transportation to invest in land ever further from the CBD, the earliest beginnings of a process of inner city devaluation.

In Harden’s case, however, it is clear that this process involved more than rail lines and highway infrastructure. The aesthetic affinities that served him in developing neighborhoods and cemeteries extended beyond landscapes and into architecture, melding with the practicalities of urban design and infrastructure. In his cemeteries, he augmented the elaborate landscaping with impressive mausoleums, whose interiors featured exotic materials such as Italian Carrerra marble and hand-painted ornamental ceilings — one was said to be modeled on King Tut’s tomb — and exteriors that drew on the sleek modernity of the Art Deco movement (ibid.). Such aesthetic affinities entwined in Harden with a knack for
developing friendships with key allies. Among the close relationships he cultivated were friendships with bankers, political figures, writers, and celebrities, which were often initiated and maintained over time at the parties Harden hosted and attended around the world, and on hunting and fishing trips hosted at a ranch he eventually purchased in Montana: “Harden was a natural host. He was in his comfort zone whether hosting a wild party in Washington, D.C. or a fishing trip in Wyoming. […] (He) spared no expense in showing his friends a good time” (Burke 1998, p. 169). These political connections helped enable him to “gain favorable treatment in the installation of water and sewer lines in his subdivisions” (Burke, p. 39). At all such occasions, Harden was aided by a capacity to consume alcohol seemingly constantly (ibid).

In 1920, he bought an interest in Western Paving Company, and soon became president of the company and bought out the other major shareholder. This enterprise primarily traded in naturally-occurring rock asphalt, which, when used for paving, does not need to be heated, thus requiring less expenditures on heating plants and other infrastructure than artificially-produced composite asphalt. The primary natural asphalt deposit in Oklahoma is the Dougherty Pit, a site that began to be mined in the mid-1890s, employing at times as many as 600 laborers. By the 1920s, as Harden began working his political connections to secure $1-2 million in paving contracts per year, his Western Paving Company was purchasing asphalt mined from the Dougherty Pit by a company called Continental Asphalt. When Continental went into receivership in 1923, Harden leased the pits himself and went on to expand the infrastructure and labor pool. He was able to influence legislation that created ‘paving districts’ around the state, which required only 50% of the owners of roadside property to approve paving projects, proposed via popular petitions, in order for bonds to be issued that would finance the paving. Harden hired men to circulate petitions for projects and gather signatures. In addition to enabling his paving...
company to win contracts to pave many of his own housing developments, Harden drew interest on the paving bonds that he or one of his many companies purchased (ibid). One of the ways in which Harden’s empire survived the Great Depression was through wielding influence to harness federal WPA funding for increasingly expansive paving schemes.

Harden was renowned in his lifetime, and remains so for those who know his story in Oklahoma City, for being a successful businessman who played a significant hand in shaping the city in the boom years of the 1920s, and he was notorious for doing this through gaining near-monopolies on cemeteries, paving, and large swaths of the real estate market in the city. The brief account I have provided of the development of his empire demonstrates that his power to shape Oklahoma City, among other sites, was painstakingly constructed over a period of years through the bringing-together of a diverse range of materials. These materials included the affects that constituted his own body — a particular aesthetic sensibility, a high capacity for alcohol consumption, a love of entertaining, hunting, and fishing, and a capacity to develop and maintain relationships with important allies. But this in no way implies that his power flowed solely from an innate capacity or force of will that directed all the necessary components of his empire, enabling him to rise up from obscurity to the heights of fortune and influence. Quite to the contrary, his growing power absolutely required the preliminary step of combining his affects with those of his wife and her family fortune and connections. This new, more powerful territory then had to be articulated with aesthetic and technological appropriations of the topographies and ecological relationships characterizing the sites of cemeteries and subdivisions, which in turn required a constant expenditure of time and energy cultivating and maintaining connections with the durable territories surrounding politicians and celebrities. These were not purely ‘social’ connections, as we have seen, unless by ‘social’ we mean a series of actors including not only people but
alcohol, hotel rooms, hunting lodges, guns and fishing rods, bears and moose, and many other materials in addition to Harden’s body itself.

### 3.1 Petro-city, Agri-city

As Harden’s territory expanded and became enmeshed with these many other expansive territories, it was able to further harness flows of matter and energy moving in and out of Oklahoma City. These included asphalt, brick, stone, wood, steel and a host of other building materials, laboring bodies, and of course the curious multifarious entity known as ‘capital.’ Many of these flows were connected in one way or another to the flow of oil from underneath the surface of many parts of Oklahoma and out into a vast array of globe-spanning networks. The state’s first oil extraction boom occurred from just after statehood to 1930, peaking from 1913 to 1920, just as Harden’s territory was coalescing; during this period, “Oklahoma became the largest oil-producing entity in the world” (Boyd 2002, p. 98). The growth of Oklahoma City, and of the state’s built environments in general, was profoundly connected to the massive increase in economic activity that accompanied this sudden extraction and commodification of concentrated energy in the form of oil. Harden’s empire, like those of many wealthy Oklahomans, was directly linked to oil and its growing territories in the early 20th century — he owned interest in multiple wells. More broadly, the expansion of the city’s residential housing stock and roadways was profoundly tied to influxes of capital and people that were in turn tied to oil.

This tells only part of the tale, however. While the state’s urban areas were booming, the agricultural depression of the 1920s was taking a toll on rural areas. A range of factors contributed to chronically low US agricultural prices during this time (Goodman et al 1987): production had increased as the result of burgeoning mechanization and consolidation of farms, which were in turn driven by demand from Europe's disrupted agricultural markets.
during World War I. After the war, the debt that many farmers had taken on to increase farm size and intensify production to meet high demand became an insupportable burden, particularly when US crop prices plummeted due to overproduction as European agriculture began to recover. These stagnant conditions continued throughout much of the ‘20s, but despite Oklahoma City’s continued reliance on agriculture as part of its economic base, the city continued to thrive. This was made possible in part, no doubt, to the increased importance of oil, but also in part by the expansion of two strategies of value capture by non-farm actors, substitution and appropriation (Goodman et al. 1987). Briefly, appropriation occurs when discrete elements of agricultural production are “taken over by industry – broadcast sowing by the seed drill, the horse by the tractor, manure by synthetic chemicals” (Goodman et al., p.2). Over time, those aspects that were successfully appropriated by industry became specific territories of industrial activity, which to some extent structured subsequent options for farmers. Substitution entails the industrialization of the products of agriculture in order to create ‘inputs’ for food processing; the countless products derived from corn are the classic example here (Pollan 2006). As all phases of food systems became increasingly industrialized over the course of the 20th century, farmers were ever more squeezed by industries that appropriated the value of food products both ‘upstream’ and ‘downstream’ from farms themselves, from producers of inputs and farming technologies to processors, wholesalers, and retailers. Oklahoma City was the site in Oklahoma where many of these industries concentrated in the early 20th century. Thus the city and its hinterlands, then, like Chicago and other cities resting on agricultural economic networks, functioned as a machine that was both fed by and contributed to this reshaping of food systems in the US: “The primary factor behind the [city’s] accelerating growth at a time of high agricultural sales and low farm income was Oklahoma City’s emergence as an agricultural clearing house for the state’s farmers. As a result of improved all-weather roads
and railroad and interurban rail connections, merchants in Oklahoma ‘sold, processed and shipped more food and fiber than ever before’” (Schwenk 2009, p. 42).

While Harden’s monopolistic ventures in cemeteries, housing, and paving were benefitting from the steady transfer into the city of capital derived from agriculture (and indeed also contributing to the process by improving transit options and providing places to accommodate the increasing mass of living and dead bodies in the city), he was evidently not content to simply observe others in their direct capture of agricultural surplus value. By the mid-1920s, an ongoing matter of concern in the city provided him with an ideal opening through which to get in on the action.

4. The Birth of the Market

Since at least the mid-1910s, fresh produce sellers in Oklahoma City regularly gathered on a stretch of California Street west of downtown to engage in direct sales to consumers. Numbering in the hundreds, these vendors would back trucks and horse-drawn wagons up to the curbside, creating an impromptu and largely unregulated market for fresh

Fig. 48 Farmers’ street market postcard, 1926. Image courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society
produce. A photograph of the site taken in the early 1920s (fig. 48) suggests that this self-organizing market was orderly enough to allow cars and wagons to pass on the street, which was lined on both sides by produce wagons and trucks, while shoppers thronged the sidewalks and perused the wares on offer. Two controversies persistently plagued the California Street market, however. First, business owners along this same stretch of roadway complained that the market created congestion, chaos, and refuse that were detrimental to their enterprises. At the same time, rapidly growing commercial food wholesalers complained about the unregulated competition they faced from the market. These struggles between merchants and farmers were both exacerbated and mediated through a second controversy in the form of health and sanitation concerns; refuse, scents of decaying food, and the regular flooding of the Canadian River, which in turn brought rats into the area, all played a part in the dynamic surrounding the California Street market. In 1924, the city unsuccessfully attempted to pass a bond issue to fund construction of an official market, and a way of ameliorating these tensions continued to be sought until 1927, when John J. Harden proposed a solution in the form of an unusual private/public arrangement.

Having followed the California Street controversies, Harden moved to purchase several acres of land at the site of the old Delmar Gardens amusement park, near the intersection of Reno and Exchange avenues, in the spring of 1927. In June, Harden made a proposal to the City Council offering to design and construct “a public city market […] which will be modern in every respect,” for which he would arrange financing himself. The proposal included several provisions, such as limits on rental rates for farmers and merchants contractually determined in an agreement with the city, paving of surrounding streets and parking areas, and a clause stating that once Harden had recouped his investment plus 10% annual interest, he would give the property to the city outright. In addition to these

101 Letter, John J. Harden to Honorable Mayor and City Council, 28 June 1927.
and several other provisions, the offer laid out carefully articulated specifications for the
structure of the market: the market grounds were “to contain not less than 120,000 square
feet of market space,” in addition to which Harden would
build a suitable market building to contain not less than thirty business booths for
rental to merchants for the display and sale of merchandise and to contain not less than
One Hundred stalls of dimensions at least eight feet by sixteen feet in size, covered
with suitable roof and equipped with proper counters, which may be rented to farmers
and truck growers for the sale of produce […] to be completed and ready for operation
no later than March 1st, 1928. […] Said market place shall be a reinforced concrete,
fire-proof building with concrete or mastic floors so constructed that same may be
thoroughly cleansed, and said building shall be equipped with proper and adequate
heating and toilet facilities, and a refrigeration plant. Said building shall be two stories in
height and provide a meeting place for farmers and truck growers without cost for their
day time meetings.

Note that Harden’s attention to detail here encompassed design elements that would
appeal to farmers — who were already well established at the California Street open market,
as contentious as it may have been, and thus needed to be enticed to move — and to assuage
city officials’ health and sanitation anxieties. In the months leading up to his proposal to the
Council and their vote on the issue, Harden meticulously worked to assemble a network
through which the market venture could emerge, relying heavily on several key actors. First,
Harden wrote letters to individuals with experience with farmers’ markets in cities around
the country, from St. Paul to Houston, as well as USDA officials, soliciting advice and
information. Among these correspondents was Arthur Goodman, who had been involved
with Seattle’s Pike Place Market for 18 years, and authored a book entitled Markets, Public and
Private, Their Establishment, Operation, and Management. In his reply to Harden, Goodman
wrote, “I have in my possession, perhaps the most complete collection of data pertaining to
markets in the world.”

Not only did information and insight from these experts enable Harden to “(meld) the successes and failures of other cities to make Oklahoma City’s market
the nicest in the nation,” (Burke 1998, p. 114), these data and Harden’s connections with the foremost experts in the field lent legitimacy to his proposal.

Legitimacy was also constructed through a second set of mediators, signed resolutions from a number of organizations pledging their support for Harden’s proposal. These organizations ranged from the Oklahoma County Fruit and Truck Growers Association to the Oklahoma Farm Wives, and all focused on health concerns surrounding the California street market. “RESOLVED: That we condemn the present marketing system on California street as unsanitary and inadequate to supply the wants of the people and this growing city,” one typical document concluded. As we shall see, securing endorsements and cooperation from farmers and others involved in food industries was one accomplishment; maintaining those relations was a bigger challenge.

Third, Harden worked his political and business connections, gaining the support of the president of the Chamber of Commerce, and working towards arrangements with railway officials to extend service to the market. Together, this combination of experts, data, written resolutions, and political and business connections — alongside Harden’s already durable and expansive network — lent considerable strength to the virtual market proposed by Harden. Moreover, as several journalists noted, the financial risk was borne by Harden: “It is true also that Harden, in building his market, will assume a big risk. If it isn’t financially successful, he stands to take a heavy loss” (no author 1927). This was no philanthropic venture however: Harden’s offer was made on the conditions that

the City will designate Block Five, Delmar Garden Addition to the City of Oklahoma City, as the only public market place to be known as the Oklahoma City Public Market, for a term of at least thirty-five years and will prohibit all public markets south of Tenth Street. […] Furthermore, the City Council will pass the necessary ordinances to prohibit the sale of truck, vegetables, fruit, meat or any farm products at retail, which is produced, grown or raised by the sellers thereof, at any other public place within the City of Oklahoma City, [also] prohibiting the establishment of private market houses

103 Resolution, Oklahoma City Trades and Labor Council, 26 August 1926.
during the life of this contract, [also] prohibiting hawking or selling fruits, vegetables, meats or any produce from wagons, cars automobiles, trucks or other vehicles whatsoever, or from any stands, stalls or places of business erected or constructed upon the public streets of the City of Oklahoma City.

As remarkable as these demands may seem, given that they would grant Harden a monopoly, sanctioned and enforced by city government, on the sale of fresh produce and farm products in the city, Harden was able to push the agreement through: I took the above excerpt directly from the contract that was signed by Harden and the Mayor 13 October 1927.

This outcome did not occur without encountering considerable friction, however. As city council debates heated up and media coverage expanded, several criticisms of Harden’s proposition emerged. Chief among these, predictably, was the assertion that Harden would gain monopoly control over yet another industry in which the public felt it had a central stake. In the words of U.M. Baughman, one of several city councilman who opposed the deal with Harden, “(W)hen one man or group of men have at least two lines of business in the city which are in the nature of public matters, to wit: street paving and burial grounds, in which they have practically a monopoly, it would not only be unfair but unwise to extend to this same citizen or group of citizens a concession that also would be virtually a monopoly of control and distribution of food products of the community.”104

Other concerns raised by council members and journalists included what some saw as an excessive rate of profitability for Harden in the deal, location issues, and finally, doubts about the legitimacy of the materials from farmers gathered in support. Baughman pointed out that “The provision barring farmers from our streets when they seek the right to sell their products is a dastardly insult to them. No provision whatever is made in this contract for the farmer who comes to the city only for an hour or so to sell his products. He must pay

the full day’s rental for a market stall, regardless of how long he is going to be occupying it.” William McGinnis, the chairman of the Oklahoma County Farmers’ Union claimed that he had signed a statement of support thinking he was signing only on his own behalf, not that of the Union’s members. “The farmers on market row are not unanimously in favor of any one plan. So far as I know, no effort has been made by the city to get them together or to get the views of a majority of them,” he is quoted as saying. Moreover, he adds, “The Oklahoma City Truck Growers Association, said to be favorable to the Harden plan, is a very loose organization, formed since the recent difficulties regarding occupancy of the streets. It comprises only a part of the truck farmers occupying stalls on the market.”

While any definitive account of the complex struggles between differently situated farmers, city council members, Harden and other “city capitalists” (as one local journalist referred to Harden), and a host of other actors is beyond the scope of this inquiry (and likely impossible, given scant written evidence), these statements do indicate that power struggles between farmers were wrapped up in the citywide debates regarding Harden’s increasing control of key industries. Moreover, it seems clear that at least some farmers objected to Harden’s plan, and probably to any plan to centralize and regulate the sale of fresh produce and farm products. Indeed, at one point, a group of forty-two “hucksters” — street produce vendors — threatened a civil suit against the city that would ask for an injunction against the ordinance prohibiting street sales contained in the deal with Harden. Archival evidence does not indicate why, but the suit was not filed at that time. The council eventually backed Harden’s plan, and on September 1st, the day after the mayor signed the contract, ground was broken on the market site.


107 No author (1927). “Contract with municipal government may be set aside by Harden if courts back hucksters.” *The Oklahoma City News*, 17 August.
4.1 Assembling the Market

Construction of the market building lasted throughout the fall and winter of 1927-1928. Among the principal building materials were “cement blocks manufactured on site by Harden’s own Western Paving Company” (Burke 1998, p. 113), covered with stucco in the manner of simulated Spanish Colonial style. Meanwhile, the contingent nature of the burgeoning territory of the Farmers Public Market — particularly its dependence on the participation and cooperation of growers — is suggested by a letter to Harden from J.W. Eakin, an “agricultural agent” at the Fort Smith and Western Railway Company.\footnote{Letter, J.W. Eakin to John J. Harden, 12 November 1927.} Eakin begins by writing, “Learning through Mr. Draper, Saturday, that you was anxious to ascertain the situation relative to the attitude (sic) of the Truck Growers and Farmers to the Market House, which you are constructing, numerous efforts were made to reach you by Phone; without avail.” Eakin then goes on to assure Harden, “As a member of the Sub Committee on Fruit and Truck growing; working under the direction of the Chairman, Mr O.B. West it has been my good fortune to attend several community meetings; speaking and listening to speeches by Mr West and other members of the Committee, as well as the Farmers and Truck Growers, and I feel safe in assuring you that if the matter is handled properly I do not apprehend any serious difficulty in securing the necessary co-operation of the Farmers to make the proposition a success.” Harden’s efforts to develop relations with regional rail companies suggests not only the necessity of rail lines directly servicing the area surrounding the Public Market, but also his need to tap the evidently considerable amount of effort and time spent by both railway personnel and agricultural producers in developing and maintaining their interdependent connections. Eakin tells Harden with satisfaction, “I visited your Architect for the express purpose of acquainting myself with the details of the
construction of the Market House, and your Architect very willingly and painstakingly went into every detail of the matter, and I feel sure that when the farmers are made acquainted with the whole proposition, they will be almost 100% in favor of it.”

It must be noted here that these events were occurring only a decade after the Green Corn Rebellion, mentioned in Chapter Two, in which a thousand farmers in the Canadian River Valley armed themselves and set out to “march on Washington.” This event, thought to have been fomented by an agent provocateur as part of an effort to denounce radical movements in the state, was disastrous for the Socialist Party in Oklahoma, allowing opponents of radicalism and organized labor to cast those movements as “disloyal” and “treasonous,” and justifying brutal crackdowns by police and vigilante groups on union members (Sellers 1994). Socialist agrarian politics had also been largely deflated by the temporary increase in agricultural prices brought on by WWI (Baird and Goble 2008). Nevertheless, these events were part of recent memory for rural Oklahomans, and there is little doubt that the strident anti-corporate, pro-socialist spirit of the early 20th century remained present in one form or another, particularly given the increasingly exploitative relationship between farmers and food industries upstream and downstream in the food chain, as discussed above. With this context likely prominent in the minds of entrepreneurs seeking to do business with farmers, Eakin cautioned Harden that his efforts to bring farmers on board his Public Market venture “should be done in a persuasive way with no mention of any Ordinance or Law compelling them to support it. My suggestion is that a large sketch be made — that can easily be seen across a Hall or Schoolroom, at night, and plain enough to be easily understood and with this drawing the Committee could again visit these Communities and explain the whole proposition to them in a way that, I think, would agreeably settle the whole matter.” While Eakin concluded his letter with the assertion that he “would not make this offer were [he] not convinced […] that both the Farmers and the
City are in a position to reap the “Lions share” in the deal,” we shall see that Harden’s relations with vendors in the market were often contentious, and many farmers ultimately refused to abandon the streets in favor of the market.

However, the profit-making potential of the venture had attracted interest around the country as early as July, 1927, when Harden received a letter from S.W. Strauss and Co., a Chicago financial firm that had financed the Chicago Produce District by way of a mortgage bond issue.\textsuperscript{109} Harden replied that he was interested in eventually “putting a bond issue on it,” but not until later in the construction process.\textsuperscript{110} Meanwhile, he began contacting various enterprises, including Sears and Roebuck, selling them on the idea of locating near the market. The scope of his rationale for monopolizing farm product distribution on a site surrounded by land he owned becomes apparent here, as he offers a guaranteed flow of customers to entice the retail giant to open a location on his land: “We are going to have a wonderful proposition in our exclusive Oklahoma City Public Market. We expect to bring 40\% of the people of Oklahoma City down there to do their trading, as all the farmers’ vegetable trucks and wagons must locate there under the City Ordinances. We could place your building directly opposite the Market and I am satisfied that the location will appeal to you.”\textsuperscript{111} At the same time, Harden was making connections with railroad officials, one of whom wrote, “I might say that we are probably as much interested in the success of the market as you are,”\textsuperscript{112} and working to promote the market to farmers. Whatever fraction of local farmers that belonged to the Oklahoma Truck Growers’ Association was meanwhile attempting to work out the finer points of allotting stall space in the market; before the building was anywhere near complete, there was already concern about this issue, and while

\textsuperscript{109} Letter, R.H. Hart to John J. Harden, 25 July 1927.

\textsuperscript{110} Letter, John J. Harden to R.H. Hart, 9 August 1927.

\textsuperscript{111} Letter, John J. Harden to C.B. Rohner, General Manager

\textsuperscript{112} Letter, H.R. Hudson, Oklahoma Railway Company to John J. Harden, 12 June 1928.
the Association members planned to allot stall locations via lottery,\textsuperscript{113} this process proved to be contentious.\textsuperscript{114}

By Spring, 1928, as construction was nearing completion, Harden was working out a financing deal with Herbert Heller and Co., an investment securities firm based in New York City, with whom he was also engaged in a bond transaction related to city sewer and paving bonds; letters and telegrams indicate that they had financed sewer bills for Harden’s Crestwood housing addition, with a result that Heller and Co. found unsatisfactory. Despite the poorly performing first bond issue, Heller and Co. ultimately agreed to handle the Public Market bonds. The deal was helped along by social visits paid to Heller’s family in New York by Harden’s daughter, Jane, and by letters from Oklahoma City’s mayor providing glowing testimonials in support of the firm’s financing of the market, which, Heller noted, would help his firm to sell the bonds to New York investors. It likely did not hurt that Heller was also interested in rumors he had heard about Harden selling his Western Paving Company.

During the final negotiations over the bond issue, Harden let Heller know that he had been in touch with contacts in Ft. Worth, Dallas, and Tulsa, and was contemplating similar ventures in those cities. Things looked promising for Harden and Heller: “At the present time we have a goodly part of the Market Bond issue sold and will be able to give you the best part of the money right away. Also, we expect to be able to clean this entire issue up within a month or so.”\textsuperscript{115} When the market opened for business on 16 June 1928, Harden informed Heller that the grand opening, featuring live music and free bags of produce for the first 15,000 people, “was a revelation to everyone. We passed over 50,000

\textsuperscript{113} Minutes of Oklahoma Truck Growers’ Association. 8 September 1927.

\textsuperscript{114} No author (1927). “‘Stuffing’ charged in market lottery.” \textit{The Oklahoma City News}, 1 September.

\textsuperscript{115} Letter, Herbert Heller to John J. Harden, 1 June 1928.
people through the market and every merchant in there sold out his stock at least once and some of them twice.”

Bob Burke (1998, p. 114) writes that when the market was in its prime,

The main floor contained 45 stores or business booths. Harden’s daughter Jane ran a candy store called Jane’s Kandy Kitchen. There was also a drug store, Dutch oven bakery, drink stands, vegetable counters, coffee stands, meat markets, a delicatessen, card shop, paint store, music store, potato chip shop, flower shop, and spice store. Patrons of a beauty shop and barber shop on the mezzanine had a spectacular view of the main floor. [...] The auditorium became famous as a roller-skating rink, boxing arena, meeting place for farmers and other civic organizations, and a dance hall where Count Basie, Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys and Merl Lindsay often appeared.

As word spread around the country about Harden’s market, both Heller and Harden began to receive inquiries from entrepreneurs in other cities interested in similar ventures. Harden demanded that Heller deliberately mislead one competitor in Tulsa, where Harden hoped to establish a market himself. “I note what you say about Vic Gray, and my suggestion would be that you inform him that these bonds are almost impossible to sell and that you are not interested in any more of them.” Harden also revealed a more expansive plan to Heller, writing, “I will then make the rest of these cities and make the proper deals and we can handle the Bond Issues when they are ready. [The] idea [...] is to have a chain of three or four Markets and after the bonds were sold and the markets on a good paying basis, we could organize them into a parent company and sell a nice issue of preferred common stock on them.” Heller agreed, and went so far as to send Harden a copy of his response to Gray, in which he said, “we are having such a tough time selling the Market Company bonds, that we would not, at the present time, consider trying to sell any other Public Market issues.”

116 Letter, 18 June 1928.
117 Letter, John J. Harden to Herbert Heller, 6 June 1928.
118 Letter, Herbert Heller to Vic Gray, 13 June 1928.
4.2 Relentless struggle

Very soon, however, doubts began to appear, foreshadowed in a friendly letter to Harden from a local attorney who had taken some “out-of-town people” to visit the new market and “examine the building from a technical standpoint.” These visitors were duly impressed, but the author noted that “one remark” made to them by a vendor “that was difficult to figure out was how the rental charged the farmer would pay the interest on that portion of the place used by each farmer.”

Over the first year of operation, Harden failed to regularly send operating statements to Heller’s firm, and correspondence between the two began to show signs of tension, as Heller demanded statements and Harden put him off, first by putting attention on the ballroom, which he admitted he had “not been able to rent […] to any advantage.” At the same time, Harden was building wholesale produce houses west of the Market, and working his connections with the Chamber of Commerce to make sure that tenants were found. Heller increased the pressure, noting that the bond holders were requesting a list of lease holders for the stalls. Harden demurred initially, arguing, “I do not want to do this unless it becomes necessary, because I do not want anyone in New York bothering these people, because they are only interested in getting their interest paid,” which Harden assured Heller would be sent to New York before the due date, but eventually complied with the request. By mid-November, Heller was complaining of “rather large discrepancies between the statement Harden finally sent and the projected profit figures Harden and his experts had produced in their original promotions of the bond issue.” For several months, a similar pattern characterized their regular correspondence, and if Harden’s letters are to be trusted,

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119 Letter, George Henshaw to John J. Harden, 13 July 1928.
120 Letter, John J. Harden to Herbert Heller, 8 October 1928.
121 Letter, John J. Harden to Herbert Heller, 13 November 1928.
122 Letter, Herbert Heller to John J. Harden, 19 November 1928.
he was learning how it difficult it was to make a viable business relying on the vagaries of agriculture, even with the competition legally locked out. From several other letters in this string, it seems that both Harden and Heller, as well as other financial firms, were wheeling and dealing with other players and trying to play each other on the market bond issues. By May 1929, the relationship appears to have soured completely, with Harden writing a furious letter to Heller: “I don’t like your insinuation that we did not treat you fair in this matter. […] The market deal has been a disappointment to us, but we think enough of it to put our personal funds into these bonds to take up the $15,000 which was due.”

Meanwhile, lawsuits were being filed against the city by produce “hucksters,” challenging the legality of the proposed ordinances guaranteeing Harden’s monopoly, which began going into effect in the fall of 1928. The ordinances themselves merit a brief consideration. No doubt aware of the dubious legality and probably even more dubious public reaction to state complicity in the production of a monopoly, the city elected to frame the ordinances as a necessary response to a state of “emergency,” the declaration of which “being immediatley (sic) necessary for the preservation of the peace, health and safety of Oklahoma City and the inhabitants thereof.” Section 1. of the first ordinance reads,

That before any huckster, hawker or peddler of food stuffs in the City of Oklahoma City, shall offer for sale or handle any such food stuffs intended for sale, he shall submit himself to the City Physician of said City for examination, and shall procure a certificate from said Physician showing that he is free from infectious, contagious or communicable diseases. Such certificate shall be in force for a period of not more than sixty days from the date of issuance thereof and any such certificate may be revoked at any time by said City Physician or the Director of the Department of health of said City if the holder thereof is not free from infectious, contagious or communicable diseases, and such person shall procure a new certificate showing him to be free from such diseases before he shall be authorized to offer for sale, handle or peddle such food stuffs.

123 Letter, Harden to Heller, 14 May 1929.
124 City Ordinance N. 3434, 2 October 1928.
This hygienic mode of control was elaborated in later sections of the ordinance, including a passage that reads, “The bodies, beds and sides of all vehicles used by such huckster, hawker or peddler of food stuffs, and the boxes, baskets or other receptacles used by them for the handling of such food stuffs shall be kept clean and free from dirt, dust, insects, foreign matter or any injurious substances. All persons selling or offering for sale any of such food stuffs shall keep their hands and bodies clean and shall wear clean clothing over which clean aprons shall be worn at all times.”

Several ordinances were eventually passed, the first of which prohibited street vending within a square mile of Harden’s “Public” Market, and a later ordinance going so far as to ban within the city limits any “Private Market[...], defined to mean any privately owned building, structure or premise in which stalls, booths, stands, spaces or structures are rented, leased or let for the purpose of the display and sale of meats, milk, vegetables or food stuffs of any kind whatsoever.”

These ordinances demonstrate several points to consider. First, given that the narrative of danger posed by unregulated street food sales to the public health operated in disputes at the California Street unofficial market, in Harden’s struggles to secure a Market deal with the city, and in the subsequent confrontations between the city and hucksters, this case offers an example of some of the ways in which public health and safety discourses emerge from within and mediate power struggles between a variety of actors. In this case, those actors included particular farmers, entrepreneurs, and city council members, and of course public health officials themselves, who would continue to enjoy a steady increase in their reach over the following decades.

Moreover, Harden’s correspondence goes on to demonstrate that these regulatory struggles against hucksters also drew strength from the rapidly growing wholesale industry, who were actively seeking support from the city in the form of regulations to crush this
opposition to their expanding distribution model. Harden’s involvement with these struggles was tied not only to his desire to control the flow of direct sales from farmers, but also to the fact that these wholesale enterprises were increasingly located adjacent to the Farmers Public Market, and many of them were Harden’s tenants: in a letter to Heller written in late 1928, Harden notes, “We are going to build more farmers stalls on the property[…]. We are building ten wholesale produce houses directly west of the Market and we already have six of them leased.”

It should be noted here that wholesalers’ complaints centered around the allegation that “peddlers” were bringing in “distressed offerings of Fruit and Vegetables from dealers in the larger markets of [Arkansas and Texas], who have perhaps obtained the goods through forced sale,” which the wholesalers distinguished from “local legitimate jobbers [i.e. those selling produce in the Farmers Public Market], those who contribute freely, their time and money to the support and upbuilding of our city.” There is no reason to doubt that the practice, still common today, of reselling at farmers’ markets produce purchased from out of state wholesalers was occurring in the late 1920s. However, the presence in Harden’s correspondence archives of a number of letters from wholesalers complaining about this issue, alongside the complete absence of evidence of complaints from farmers about out of state peddlers, alongside the lawsuits filed by street hucksters against city ordinances, suggests that these struggles were largely about the restructuring of local and regional food production and distribution systems, rather than (or perhaps in addition to) a struggle between in-state and out-of-state producers per se. In any case, the tone of the wholesalers’ complaints presents a monumentally ironic twist to this story of monopoly control, given

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125 Letter, 13 November 1928.
their assertions that that the hucksters and peddlers somehow enjoyed an “unfair market condition” and had an interest in “our city [that was] other than mere trading.”\textsuperscript{126}

In these letters, newspaper articles, and city ordinances, an intriguing sketch of the nature of food systems in the state at the time emerges, in which the Farmers Public Market and its environs served as a node through which more and more of the food bought and consumed in the city flowed. It should be clear from the above account that this node was formed as something like a dense knot of often-contentious relations, each of which was connected to an expansive web of territories, including fleet-footed finance capital, railways, farms, wholesale food distributors and processors, state agencies, discourses of public health, journalists, newspaper presses, fruits, vegetables, farmers, asphalt and asphalt miners, sketches and architectural plans, farmers, the Farmers Public Market building itself, and the structures accumulating around it.

Within the market itself, enrolling this diversity of actors in a frictionless network was proving difficult, as conveyed in a letter from one of Harden’s lieutenants describing a system for inspecting meat moving in and out of one of the butcher shops in the market in order to disrupt the practice of meat distributors dumping poorer quality, “off-color” meats. After less than two years of operation, by the end of 1929, Harden let Heller know that his company was “taking over the operating of several of the largest stores inside the market building, i.e. bakery; delicatessen; meat market; candy store, etc., in order to make an offering of quality merchandise at low prices, to attract customers. It is our intention ultimately (sic) to take over the other concerns as their contracts expire. We were compelled to do this in order to insure the necessary rental income from space; this income being used to repay bondholders, principal and interest; and return on the investment.”\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{126} Letter, Carroll Brough & Robinson, Inc., Wholesale Grocers to E.M. Fry, City Manager, 29 May 1929.

\textsuperscript{127} Letter, John J. Harden to Herbert Heller, 16 October 1929.
As he was being summoned to New York by Heller to discuss the failure of the
bonds to return an investment, Harden had 1,000 postcards printed that depicted the
market, with the caption “Built by John J. Harden” (fig. 49, below) and was evidently seeking
testimonials from the Fruit and Truck Growers Association in support of efforts to establish
markets in other cities:

We, the Executive Board of the Oklahoma County Fruit and Truck Growers
Association wish to announce that the building of the Oklahoma City Public Market
House, by the John J. Harden interests, has made it possible for the farmers and
gardeners of this county to have a splendid basis for operating, and a place where they
find a ready sale for their products at good profits. This Market also enables the
consumer to buy direct from the producer, thereby making a saving to the consumer.
Knowing this to be true, we, the committee, heartily recommend the building of similar
markets in all cities of this size and operated under the same rules and regulations that
we have here.¹²⁸

Despite such glowing testimonials, the Farmers Public Market as a farmers’ market
was not ultimately a successful business. As noted above, it appears that this was not in fact
the ultimate purpose of the structure. Instead, the building — in conjunction with city
legislation — was intended to control the flow of foodstuffs through the city, thus also
directing flows of people through the city, and thus raising the value of Harden’s land
around the Market. To be clear, Harden may have envisioned the Market as a successful
venture in its own right as well, particularly perhaps if he had been able to open a series of
such markets around the country and eventually sell the company that owned all of them. If
this is the case, Harden seems not to have understood the economics of farmers’ markets, or
broader transformations to food systems then gathering steam. Indeed, the type of locally or
even regionally grown farm products that lay at the heart of Harden’s bid to assemble a
monopoly on food retail in the city were by the mid-1950s likely well on way to being
absorbed and transformed by the territory of large-scale, consolidated food systems that
Harden, in drawing together food producers, processors, and wholesalers in one

¹²⁸ Affidavit, Oklahoma Fruit and Truck Growers Association, 11 December 1929.
infrastructural node centered on the Market, had perhaps helped to create. In any event, it is almost certain that he overestimated the city’s ability to grant him monopoly control of food sales, which appears to have never quite materialized. By the mid-thirties, the Market had gone into receivership, and Harden leased it out to a corporation, of which he owned 25% of the stock.

4.3 Decay, dispersal, and rebirth

Two additional vignettes about the market bear mention. First, a lawsuit against The Oklahoma City Public Market was filed in 1954 by Finis and Helen Kirk, two vendors of “farm products” who had occupied the same three stalls in the market since its opening.130

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129 I don’t wish to overstate this point; to be clear, my fieldwork to date has not explored the broader effects the Market may have had in shaping food systems in Oklahoma from the 1920s onward. There is no doubt, however, that the Market building served as a catalyst or node around which many food-related industries concentrated, thus influencing the spatiality of flows of foodstuffs in the region. Future research might explore the precise implications of that spatial shift. Based on Harden’s correspondence, in any event, it’s not clear whether or not he saw his Farmers Public Market as a key node through which the industrialization of food systems in Oklahoma might develop; it’s more likely that his goals focused on raising land values by directing the flows of foodstuffs and people in the city. Whatever effects this scheme had on food systems were probably incidental, from Harden’s point of view.

130 Oklahoma County District Court Petition No. 134,465, “Finis and Helen Kirk vs. The Oklahoma City Public Market, a corporation.” 11 October 1954.
The suit alleged that Harden had “paid little or no attention to the terms and purposes” of his contract with the city, and had “operated the market solely for thea (sic) purpose of deriving profits for it and the said John J. Hardin (sic),” and more specifically, that Harden was now “annoying and interfering with plaintiffs in the operation of their said business and attempting to regulate the commodities which they may sell so as to destroy their said business as a going concern.” The suit sought only that Harden “be restrained and enjoined from in any manner interfering with them in their use and occupancy of said stalls and in the conduct of their said business,” and that he cover court costs associated with the case. If the court failed to restrain Harden, and the Kirks were driven out of business, “the purpose of said contract [between Harden and the city], the public benefit, [would be] defeated and destroyed.” By the account of Harden biographer Burke, Harden’s personal life declined markedly throughout the ‘30s and ‘40s; his vaunted capacity to consume alcohol was now thought of as “alcohol abuse”; his efforts to build a family had failed, his first wife, Frances, divorced him, and his children wanted little to do with him in his later years. Throughout the 1950s, he spent vast amounts of his fortune on an ill-fated hotel venture in Acapulco. In this context, the Kirks’ legal case, which basically depicts a petty tyrant chasing the smallest sources of profit, or perhaps just seeking to lord it over the remnants of his domain, seems of a piece with what appears to be a trajectory of gradual dissolution.

The second vignette is from 1981, nearly twenty years after John J. Harden’s death, by which time the Market was owned by his son John E. Harden, and served primarily as an antique mall in a decaying neighborhood. It was during this time that the Market was being placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the city council was approving a ban on loitering in the city “for the purpose of inducing or enticing a sex act, or for begging or
A letter from a vendor who had rented a stall for several years informs Phil Daugherty (a legal representative of John E. Harden) that she has no choice but to close her business because of interferences by some people and especially by your night-watchman, Marvin [...], who makes it a point to be close to the door of my shop or to watch it so as to be aware of what might happen there [...] He follows me around if I do any business in other shops and stares at me or interrupts my speaking with whomever I am talking to. He makes sure he passes me and my car or parks next to me periodically. John had complaints about Marvin’s bothering small girls in the Market as well. Marvin in previous years was a reliable and good person but since his illness had somewhat relied on the bottle [...] Having him under such circumstances as night-watchman with two untrained dogs at the Market is unnervate (sic) enough, but being sure of irrational behavior on his part when I am at the Market constitutes extreme aggravation to me.

At that time, the Market primarily functioned as an antique mall, said to be the first such establishment in Oklahoma City when it took on that function beginning in the early 1970s, nearly a decade before the Oklahoma Historical Society waged a successful campaign to have the site listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Database searches of newspapers and magazines turn up a number of articles from the ‘80s extolling the virtues of the site as a prime tourist spot for Oklahoma City visitors with an interest in antiques, collectibles, and memorabilia. By 1993, however, its decline even in its capacity as antique mall can be glimpsed in an article in the Austin American-Statesman, which offers a “word of warning: The bathrooms in the public market are also antiques and in great need of cleaning, so plan ahead” (Pego 1993). Harden biographer Bob Burke’s description of the site, authored in 1997, notes, “(The) building housed about 30 antique dealers and one of the state’s best rare and used bookstores [...] (O)ver 70-years-old, the large auditorium on the second floor was just a shadow of its former self. A time-worn sign advertised the fact that Bob Wills once played in the building” (Burke 1998, p. 118-119). Burke’s account also provides a glimpse into the process of gradual dissolution of food networks surrounding the


132 Letter, Anita H. Bright to Phil Daugherty, 3 August 1981.
market, which by the late 1990s was ongoing but had not yet gone as far as it would over the following several years: “Farmers, nurserymen, and fruit growers continued to sell their products in outside stalls that extended for a block north of the market building” (ibid).

By 2002, the Harden family had put the Market up for sale. While viewing an apartment complex in an outlying area of the city, Burt McAnally mentioned to the realtor showing them the property that he was on the lookout for a site in which to hold amateur and regional professional boxing matches; Burt had dabbled in boxing earlier in life and had never lost his passion for the sport, remaining involved as a promoter off and on over the years. The realtor replied that he had a perfect site in mind: the old Farmers Public Market building. Burt was dubious, as he had previously been inside the building’s ground floor and ruled it out as a boxing venue because a number of concrete support stanchions obstructed visibility. He had not seen the second story auditorium, however, and when the realtor took Burt and Jody to the Market and led them upstairs to a mezzanine overlooking the auditorium, they were both instantly taken with the site: a 500-square foot unobstructed space, with high ceilings and a wall-to-wall hardwood maple floor. Burt relates that he immediately felt that it was just the site he had been seeking as a boxing venue, while Jody was simultaneously imagining its broader potential as an event space for weddings, fundraisers, and so on.133 As a potential event space, in other words, the Farmers Public Market was drawn back towards the center of struggles over the future of food systems in Oklahoma.

5. Conclusion: Transversality and the city as subject

These final vignettes are important not only because they set the stage for the Market’s involvement with more recent struggles over food systems, but also because they

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133 Burt McAnally, personal communication (3/5/2013)
reveal that the site was not only born in but remained a space of negotiation and micropolitics long after Harden’s days of power in Oklahoma City and beyond. Like any space, the Market is traversed with shifting power relations, affective surges that cut through the space from any number of other points, heading in any number of directions. The micropolitical elements of these struggles of course inflect with processes and relationships reaching out across various reaches of space and time, intersecting those more expansive networks in complex and often unpredictable ways. But the history of the Market, and indeed its situation within the broader history of Oklahoma City, drives home the point that what we tend to think of as ‘politics’ on a ‘macro-scale’ is always constituted by the often messy relations between various kinds of actors, situated in particular spaces. The ‘macro’ is perhaps best thought of as always composed of myriad micro-connections, just drawn together in lengthier, more complicated spatiotemporal webs or networks. Which is not to suggest that such networks can’t become something more than merely sums of their parts. To the contrary, the case of the Farmers Public Market exemplifies a key point of assemblage thinking: the lines of flight that open up from territories quite often emerge from what Deleuze and Guattari call “transversal” connections between actors in the assemblage. This concept is perhaps best illustrated by the Deleuzo-Guattarian example of the Thynnidae wasp and the hammer orchid (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/1980).

To grasp the significance of this relationship, we might picture a male Thynnidae wasp, encased in its own sensory world, encountering the hammer orchid as a set of visual and olfactory characteristics (quite distinct from the hammer orchid that we humans encounter from our own sensory bubble), which deceptively signal to the male wasp that atop this object sits a female wasp. The wasp approaches the flower, and attempts to carry away what it believes to be the female wasp, which is, to the male, the most significant element of the object before it. Given that the orchid is only mimicking the female wasp, the
wasp’s efforts to mate are unsuccessful. But in the process, the wasp may come into contact with the pollen packet of the orchid, eventually carrying pollen off to perhaps repeat the process with another orchid, this time depositing the pollen. The orchid, meanwhile, to arrive at this encounter – to affect the wasp – has been interpreting and acting on a number of other signs from its environment as defined by the orchid’s sensory apparatus, including perhaps the length of the day, the temperature of the soil and the air, and so on. The wasp is perhaps not part of its sensory world at all, and yet these two beings are interwoven as one shared body.

Over time, this relationship produces a co-evolutionary process in which descent by filiation occurs, but something else also takes place, a trajectory of becoming that draws specific parts of the wasp and the orchid together in a novel, shared body, unleashing a new set of forces that act on other forces in potentially new ways, shifting balances of power between entangled bodies: the wasp is harnessed by its desire operating in accord with the orchid, while the orchid is “liberated from its own reproduction” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/1980, p. 294). For Deleuze and Guattari, this is less a question of the linkage or conjugation of separate bodies than a “shared deterritorialization [that] passes between them, carrying them away” in a line or block of becoming. Deleuze and Guattari, in other words, aren’t interested in the individual organism as subject per se, but rather in the idea that there is a type or mode of becoming that operates through (or rather perhaps is) the assemblage, which occurs through the interpretations and actions of organisms acting as individuated subjects, encased in the senses and imperatives of their own bodies or lifeworlds. This type of becoming, although it emerges through the affective and sense-making imperatives of the various lifeworlds that constitute the assemblage, also always exceeds the imperatives, drives, and senses that exist in any of the constituent parts. In the case of the wasp, we note that, believing themselves to be pursuing sexual fulfillment, the
wasps participate in the larger ‘structural plan’ of the collective subject of the assemblage, which flows from the imperatives not just of the orchid, but of this larger assemblage.

How does this example relate to the Farmers Public Market, or the broader history of Oklahoma City? In this chapter we have seen how the organization of particular flows of materials — wood, rail-lines, bricks, foods, asphalt, fossil fuels, capital, human and animal bodies, etc — that have accumulated in Oklahoma City created something of a feedback loop, in which each moment of accumulation structured and directed what came after. In some respects, we might say that the ‘power’ that gathered around and produced Harden and the Farmers Public market alongside much of the city itself is still operating and mediating current struggles, including those engulfing the food movement and the homeless circuit. What is that power? What elements constituted it? Wall Street firms, but also cemeteries, mausoleums, asphalt, labor, roads, and neighborhoods. City government, but also Edgemere Park: its houses, topography, and Harden’s reported aptitude for reading landscape and envisioning particular potentialities for it. This power, or these powers, are arguably aligned now with a very different set of actors. Indeed, the Public Market building itself, even in its faded, decaying state in the early 2000s pulled the McAnallys into its orbit, serving as a condition of possibility for a revitalized food hub. Arguably, the vestiges of the materials accumulated and organized in this area are a major part of what enables the dream of a ‘local food hub’ to cling to a chance to become a reality. According to Bud Scott, the USDA seems to recognize this, and BBOK’s interventions centered around highlighting particular vestiges and drawing them into a performance of a re-imagined Farmers Market District.

Thus, while the assemblage of Oklahoma City has shaped and been shaped by social relations, an unexpected thing has occurred in the Farmers Market District: a set of relative outsiders has become entangled with material forces that serve as infrastructures for a view of food systems and development that diverges in multiple ways from the dominant vision.
This is where the capacities of these assembled materials begins to mean and do something else, to act on behalf of other causes and groups, to switch sides, so to speak. This divergence, even if still perhaps more virtual than actual, is precisely the kind of transversal line of flight or becoming that Deleuze and Guattari saw in the relation between the wasp and the orchid. Its transversality emerges not simply from the local food actors’ convergence on the historic site of the Market, but also in conjunction with the many disparate types of actors brought together by the entangled territories of local food and redevelopment, from iconic architectures to corn mazes, NBA teams to corporate employee gardens.

The significance of this line of flight will be magnified by the extent to which the local food hub and Farmers Market District now struggling to emerge around the Market building actually subvert the dominant paradigms of food systems and urban redevelopment/gentrification. But are these actors different, or are they becoming John J. Hardens, converging with more dominant developers and powerful interest groups? There is little doubt that the materials brought together in the Farmers Public Market have meant different things at different times in the Market’s history. The assemblages with which they articulate has changed, thus they become something else. When we consider the existing and potential links between the Farmers Public Market and local farmers, the OFC, and thus to local ecologies; as well as the possibilities, however slim, for different outcomes with relations between the Farmers Market District and homeless folk — the durabilities that might develop in the local food movement in tandem with the Regional Food Bank, for example; in short, the differences that exist within the sociomaterial multiplicities of ‘local food’ in Oklahoma, we can glimpse that the food hub that seeks to emerge now cannot help but operate in greater or lesser degrees of accord with rationales and forces very different from those out of which the place emerged in the 1920s; the assemblage is different, the
place cannot be same, regardless of continuities we might find in the city’s development projects or the rationales of developers, capitalists, or politicians.

The question remains, of course, how might those differences be further catalyzed?
Possession: Becoming expansive, durable, and noble

“Territory” is too frequently understood to mean something rigid and well defined, like a city block. Wolf territories are highly plastic [...] And this idea, that there is a high probability that in a certain area you will find the members of a certain pack on a regular basis, is tenable. But we are not talking about well-delineated areas patrolled in an orderly fashion by paramilitary creatures — a notion spawned by confusing the idea of territory with the idea of private property.

- Barry Holstun Lopez, Of Wolves and Men (1978)

There is no mystery about the fact of association, of an interconnected action which affects the activity of singular elements. There is no sense in asking how individuals come to be associated. They exist and operate in association. If there is any mystery about the matter, it is the mystery that the universe is the kind of universe it is.


1. Introduction

In many respects, the case of the local food movement in Oklahoma arguably resonates with the findings of critical scholars of alternative food networks (AFNs) and gentrification: The local food movement has indeed struggled to include marginalized Oklahomans and to significantly engage with broadly-conceived notions of social justice; it has instead increasingly oriented itself towards catering to relatively affluent, mostly white consumers. In pursuit of ‘value-added’ premium prices attached to speciality products, it has become less distinguishable from corporate agribusiness, making its territory more susceptible to co-optation. In the process, ‘local food’ was drawn into the territory of urban redevelopment. Enrolled in struggles over gentrifying spaces in Oklahoma City, local food actors have thus far contributed to the appropriation of value — economic value and social values — on behalf of dominant actors in the city, from energy corporations to real estate developers and elected officials. In short, the territory of redevelopment has in many ways taken possession of the territory of local food.
That this case seems to corroborate existing research in this way is deeply disturbing to me, as someone who has followed the development of the OFC from its early days, and quite closely in the past five years. The grave social and ecological issues associated with conventional food networks and dominant modes of redevelopment often seem little closer to being ameliorated in any significant way in Oklahoma. In this sense, my work in Oklahoma underscores the seriousness of the challenges facing proponents of more socially just and ecologically sustainable food systems and cities.

And yet it must be said that this aspect of the present study is its least significant contribution to research on AFNs, redevelopment, and gentrification. Not least of all because there are already many studies that demonstrate that AFNs, individually and collectively, are by and large subservient to larger political economic forces, and that cultural actors in gentrification are similarly pawns of more powerful actors. To demonstrate such findings again is of little use if doing so only contributes to a sense of failure, futility, and melancholy. Just as importantly, to read this case as primarily an instance of domination by powerful actors is empirically dubious at best, however satisfying it might be in terms of producing clear, concise, and ‘critical’ knowledge of society. My goal in the preceding chapters was to capture the shifting and delicate balance of power as unevenly distributed among many actors in Oklahoma (and beyond), and thus bring into view an assemblage that is not a unity, but a growing multiplicity, a machine of differentiation. Like all machines, this one exhibits an observable degree of coherence and yet is also shot through with inconsistencies and tensions, weak spots and faulty linkages. I hope to have demonstrated that even the most successful attempts to manage the balance of powers constituting this assemblage cannot avoid the nearly incessant emergence of lines of flight, passageways into worlds in which this assemblage is crumbling and being overcome by another.
If thinkers such as Elizabeth Grosz and J.K. Gibson-Graham are correct in asserting that our ability to imagine — and recognize — the world differently is the pre-condition for any politics of transformation, then making those lines of flight visible and exploring them through research is at least as important as chronicling exploitation and domination, if not more so. To whatever extent we as researchers, or even as conscious subjects, play a part in the world’s continued becoming, the account I have offered seeks to actively stimulate the imagination, and to present the quotidian ‘stuff’ of the world in a manner that dispels the apparent givenness of things, which I see as a fundamental aspect of recognizing things as changeable. As I discussed and sought to demonstrate in Chapters Six and Seven, however, the present case study is also concerned with the ways the world’s continued emergence exceeds the conscious strivings of human subjects. From the perspectives of thinkers such as Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari, it is precisely by acting as individual subjects seeking to exert our wills that we contribute towards the production of larger assemblages, subjects with ‘wills’ of their own, which often produce outcomes unimaginable to everyone involved until they occur.

The local food movement in Oklahoma emerged in the early 2000s in the interstitial spaces of conventional food networks, where a handful of producers and consumers interested in ecologically- and socially-oriented foods formed the Oklahoma Food Cooperative. This enterprise was unique in its spatial form and function, and its ownership structure, which brought together both producers and consumers as owner-members. Also important to the group’s early identity were their three stated core values — social justice, environmental stewardship, and economic sustainability; an explicit recognition that competition and cooperation can and do exist in a variable relationship; and an “unwritten rule” of drawing on the diversity of member positions as a resource in personal and collective “evolution.” In all of these ways, the OFC broke with conventional economic
wisdom and social norms, which I argued, following Nietzsche and Deleuze, reflected the particularly ‘noble’ or ‘active’ forces characterizing the early cooperative. As the OFC grew rapidly, it began to orient itself more around instrumental notions of being ‘businesslike,’ foregrounding profit and efficiency at the expense of the social and ecological values that had initially set the cooperative apart (Chapter Two).

This instrumentalist orientation was reflected in many areas, such as struggles over the percentage of each sale appropriated by the cooperative, labor remuneration, and democratic governance of the enterprise. Changes in leadership, including a gradual replacement of founding members by a second generation of leaders and a growing coterie of paid managers with professional backgrounds, articulated with the trend towards instrumentalism in complex ways. These changes, alongside rapid growth in membership, gradually separated members into various groups with diminishing direct overlaps: a small number of leaders, a massive number of mostly anonymous customers, and producers. Frustrations with internal politics and member ‘burnout’ led to the splintering off of several new enterprises specializing in Oklahoma grown products, signaling a shift from the OFC as “the only game in town” to a broader local food movement. This expansion increased the capacities and reach of local food, through filling infrastructural gaps, building knowledges, and forging political alliances. At the same time, the social and ecological orientation of the early OFC was further marginalized in the broader movement and in the OFC itself, signifying a further shift away from the ‘noble’ nature of the early OFC, and towards a more ‘common’ or reactive stance (Chapter Three).

By 2011, several national grocery chains specializing in ‘green’ products opened locations in Oklahoma City, including most notably Whole Foods Market (WFM). City boosters heralded this as part of a larger food “renaissance” in the metro area, alongside the proliferation of farm-to-fork restaurants and smaller enterprises specializing in local foods.
Such celebratory narratives partially explain how the differences between these varied enterprises were minimized, as most flagrantly illustrated by a McDonald’s marketing campaign that cast the fast food giant’s offerings as ‘local food.’ Far from being solely a contest between various food related enterprises however, the expansion and significance of local food was also part of the city’s entrepreneurial redevelopment strategy. Led by fossil fuel giants, elected officials, and real estate developers, this strategy focused on “quality of life” interventions, in which local and other specialty foods played an important part.

Changes in tandem in the city’s foodscapes and built environment created uneven impacts for the local food movement and lower income and racial and ethnic minority communities: as local food increasingly became a niche market commodity, access to this market became more consolidated in the hands of a few well-situated players while smaller enterprises struggled to survive in the more competitive market; at the same time, neglected inner city neighborhoods were gentrified, displacing previous residents (Chapter Four).

However, in order for the territory of redevelopment to effectively take possession — to some extent — of that of local food, a wide range of materials and forces had to be carefully interwoven with particular meanings, or senses. An efflorescence of architectural innovation in Oklahoma City that unfolded in conjunction with the local food movement was a central actor in this process. As with local food, dominant redevelopment actors such as Chesapeake Energy supported and relied on the creation of iconic structures placed around the city as nodes in a network of value generation and intensification. Here, through the meticulous deployment of material properties of these structures, social values such as collective well-being, progress, and aesthetics fused with embodied passions such as health, excitement about participating in the modern world, and pride in place, which in turn mediated the spatial distribution of property values in the city. This was not accomplished by architecture alone, but through the imbrication of architectures with foodways, sport, and a
series of infrastructural interventions in the city. Together this nexus of matter and meaning harnessed an affirming sense of movement and dynamism, representing the ‘noble’ nature of neoliberal redevelopment. Careful scrutiny of this imbrication of material properties and values reveals that the networks of disparate relations that support dominant actors in the city also adumbrate important differences between various actors in the now expansive territories of local food and redevelopment with respect to ongoing political ecological struggles. Bringing those differences to the fore is arguably central to the local food movement’s chances of regaining the ‘noble’ or ‘higher’ ground (Chapter Five).

Nowhere is the significance of such differences made more apparent than the Farmers Public Market, a site that has become a catalyst in struggles over food systems in Oklahoma and redevelopment in Oklahoma City. The OFC and a number of other important local food-related enterprises and organizations have gathered in and around the Market, concentrating the capacities and flows directed by the local food movement in an infrastructural node that has attracted the favorable attention of institutions ranging from the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma to the US Department of Agriculture. At the same time, the Market’s location just outside the ongoing wave of redevelopment in the city makes it a potentially prime location for another revitalized consumer zone, dubbed the Farmers Market District, a vision that has attracted its own allies, from the Urban Land Institute to Oklahoma City’s planning department. Tensions between local food actors and homeless Oklahoma Citizens who have territorialized this area during its long period of disinvestment suggest some dissonance between the visions of a local food hub and a Farmers Market District. Close inspection of the lived experience of such tensions demonstrates the volatility of the assemblage linking local food and redevelopment in Oklahoma, even as wide-ranging forces converge on this site (Chapter Six).
But how to understand the significance of such volatilities while the status quo of power relations in Oklahoma City clearly remains resilient? This question begins to look rather different when considered in the context of the *longue durée* of the relations between social power and space in Oklahoma City, which demonstrates the *capriciousness of power*. This city emerged dramatically, in a rush of land grabbing that produced a settlement of 10,000 people in a single day in 1889. While the social implications of this event were momentous in terms of the displacement of indigenous groups, and in terms of who was able to seize the most valuable lands in the nascent city, the event itself was far from purely ‘social,’ in the conventional sense of that term, which implies the relations between agentic human actors. Instead, the location of the city, the distribution of land values therein, and the development of social hierarchies in accord with particular organizations of urban space, were all the emergent results of an array of actors both human and more-than-human, from rail lines and rivers to surveying tools and building materials. The ways in which the Farmers Public Market itself was woven into the sociomaterial fabric of the city in the 1920s further illustrates the complexity and tenuousness of the negotiations required to create durable, expansive assemblages. Cast against this historical/genealogical account, the current status of the Market as a contested infrastructural node reveals that assemblages are often unruly subjects; they can and frequently do switch sides and subvert the intentions of all who seek to possess them.

As a whole, the trajectory of entangling the territories of local food in Oklahoma and redevelopment in Oklahoma City as traced in this study offers a number of insights for those involved with the case in particular, but also for the broader universe of cases of AFNs, redevelopment, and gentrification. In the following sections, I outline these insights before concluding with some broader comments on power, knowledge, and research methods.
2. Differentiation, difference, and expression

In accord with the findings of Phil Mount (2012), Alison Alkon (2013), and others, one of the clearest conclusions to emerge from my research is the profound importance to the local food movement of successfully differentiating itself from the many actors that have to a great extent taken possession of the territory of local food. This is well-known by many central actors in the movement, as attested to by the OFC’s marketing slogan “Real Food, Real Local.” However, as this slogan also illustrates, it is a grave error to attempt to base this differentiation primarily on the grounds of where products are grown or made. This approach rests on a romanticized vision of reconnecting farmers and consumers, which not only obscures the divergent situatedness of and between these categories, but in doing so also opens the door to enterprises ranging from national corporate grocery chains to fast food behemoths and “foodie breastaurants,” all of whom can capitalize on featuring local foods, thinly defined.

To more effectively combat such co-optation, as Mount argues, the local food movement must find ways to highlight the ecological and social relationships that constitute their enterprises, and explicitly situate those relations within the messy politics of food systems. Everyone closely involved with local food businesses has some grasp of why, beyond economies of scale, conventional foods tend to be significantly cheaper than foods produced with ecological and social values foregrounded: the politics of regulations, certification, inputs and techniques, and how human and more-than-human bodies are exploited all play in to the final price of food items and shape which businesses survive and which fail. Many local food enterprises in Oklahoma differ on some or all of these fronts from CFNs, and they can all do a much better job of making those differences central to the meaning of their products and businesses. The goal of such efforts at differentiation can’t be solely to
cultivate sympathy from consumers for producers or laborers, thus reducing consumption to an act of charity. Charitable deeds, while of course laudable, already tend to have a place well within the confines of the status quo without seeming to do much to transform it. A more rigorous engagement with the systemic effects and far-reaching social and ecological ramifications of food systems would go further towards making clear the respective (and often multiple) roles played by differently situated actors in food systems and the implications thereof. We might call this a more reflexive or critical form of differentiation. Fortuitously, recent years have seen an increase of such engagements from AFN proponents broadly (e.g. Bittman 2013; Kenner 2008; Philpott 2013). The trend in Oklahoma has sadly been the opposite.

In Oklahoma and elsewhere, however, the question is how to effectively accomplish this task of reflexive differentiation. Marketing campaigns, in the standard sense of that term, are not sufficient. We have seen throughout the present study just how many different orders of things had to be enrolled and orchestrated for the assemblage that links local food to redevelopment to cohere. From this perspective, marketing campaigns play only a bit part at best in constructing assemblages and their subjects. Moreover, the extent to which the representation-based approaches of marketing take hold depends on their capacity to resonate with the material propensities and qualities of bodies and other kinds of ‘things.’ The question is how to make local food express more reflexive values, or more specifically, express the more reflexive values that already constitute the relations underlying local food enterprises in Oklahoma.

From the perspective of assemblage thinking, one answer might be to focus on literally building or weaving existing reflexive or political ecological differences into as much of the semiotic-material fabrics of local food as possible. As I noted in Chapter Five, the farm-to-fork restaurant Ludivine does this to some extent through the design of its
restaurant, the hacksaws and other implements prominently displayed and used in the kitchen, the relationships with particular producers and their far-flung production sites displayed in videos, and to a lesser degree, the restaurant’s connections to the Oklahoma Farm and Food Alliance and other more explicitly political engagements. Thus far, however, aesthetics, quality, and taste have far outweighed thornier political ecological concerns in the weave of matter and meaning that constitutes Ludivine. And this is even more true in most other local food enterprises. Reversing this balance across the material-semiotic fabric of local food enterprises — foregrounding the social, political, and ecological relations through which particular qualities such as taste or ‘localness’ are created, in other words — would seem to be paramount. Accomplishing this, of course, would depend entirely on the nature of each individual enterprise and the relationships which undergird it, which is perhaps partially why this approach has not been taken more often.

2.1 The OFC as once and future catalyst

This is where the OFC merits special attention. Both formally and informally, the OFC remains a singular entity. It is owned by both producers and customers. On a shoestring budget, it operates a modular, flexible, and mobile network that is capable of foraying into areas where corporate entities bound to the necessity of profit maximization cannot venture. Its Articles of Incorporation insist that social justice, environmental sustainability, and economic stewardship must all three be present in equal balance in order to begin constructing a meaningfully different food system. Perhaps most importantly, it once had a strong tradition of explicitly viewing the social and political differences built into its structure and function as resources in personal and collective “evolution.” As Phil Mount (2012) points out, such deliberative or agonistic democratic elements are also fundamentally important to maintaining meaningful and resilient differences between AFNs and CFNs.
Together, these differences set the OFC far from all other local food enterprises in Oklahoma, in terms of balancing social, ecological, and economic concerns. The potential for the OFC to regain its central role as a catalyst in the territorial struggles over food systems in Oklahoma is contained in these formal and informal attributes. My study illustrates the extent to which many of these distinguishing features have in fact become deeply attenuated over time. But in demonstrating how this has happened, it also reveals the contingency of those changes, and suggests that what has been assembled can be reassembled.

There are many ways in which this reassembling might be accomplished. First, the cooperative would benefit greatly from reframing itself as a distribution network, rather than as an enterprise whose cooperative ownership structure truly governs production, distribution, and consumption. Distribution is in fact the element of the food chain that the OFC-as-cooperative focuses on. It's true that through the OFC’s model producers and consumers are drawn into direct engagement with the distribution side of the food chain in unique, interesting, and important ways. But producers continue to own their own businesses separately, a fact that is not highlighted in the current framing of the OFC. This creates some problems. One of the enterprise’s primary functions is moving food and capital around the state, which involves human labor. Producer-members have long used their rights as cooperative co-owners in struggles to shape these flows of materials and value. In and of itself, this may or may not be problematic. What is at issue here, however, is that in framing itself as a hybrid cooperative for so long, in which producers and customers are ‘in it together,’ the OFC has obscured the meaning of internal struggles, enabling producers to fight in the name of the common good, even when it’s not clear that particular interventions produce more than narrowly accruing benefits. Struggles over volunteer/crediteer labor illustrate this all too well, and also suggest one way in which the OFC might structurally
work towards such a reframing: re-invigorating Waldrop’s idea of making the cooperative a ‘triple hybrid’ by creating a new class of worker-owners.

On its own, it’s not clear that such a notion could pass a membership vote any more successfully today than three years ago. This is largely because of the silo-ization problem in the OFC that I discussed in Chapter Three, in which the vast bulk of customer members are far removed from the actual operations of the cooperative. This issue is connected to the almost complete loss of member awareness of (and here I mean not only far-flung customer-members but also some among leadership and producers) — to say nothing of robust, deliberative democratic discussion of — the OFC’s core values, knowledge of cooperative business principles, or habituation to the mostly-forgotten tradition of mobilizing difference as a resource. Most members today have never known these qualities that reflected the early, nobler OFC, and indeed have rarely if ever had cause to conceive of the enterprise in terms that go beyond taste, freshness, quality, and perhaps a thin connection to local ecologies and economies.

It’s possible that the OFC could address the twinned problems of silo-ization and loss of ‘noble’ qualities together by pursuing a general strategy of reversing their focus on catering to the ‘creative class’ in Oklahoma City and Tulsa (a focus that of course is not exclusive to the OFC but extends across the local food movement in Oklahoma and beyond). As some leaders suggested several years ago, the OFC is capable of reaching customers around the state in smaller cities and towns that are not likely to be colonized by corporate ‘green’ grocers anytime soon. Indeed, at the time of this writing, the latest reports from the OFC’s Route Manager demonstrate that in recent months, some of the most successful pick-up sites are in smaller cities and towns around the state. This has occurred without tremendous investments in building customer bases in these areas, as far as I know, which leads me to imagine greater potential for robust growth in outlying routes. This takes
on further resonance in light of the fact that poverty and food insecurity are highest in the state’s rural areas, many of which are classified as food deserts. Not only would focusing on these areas as well as marginalized areas in Oklahoma City and Tulsa potentially provide access to public and private funding (failing to secure one food desert grant surely shouldn’t deter the OFC from attempting many more such grant applications), it would also allow the OFC to shift the balance of their core values back towards a more rigorous engagement with social justice.

This point draws our attention to the fact that simply expanding their attention beyond the ‘creative class’ will not alone return the OFC to its former noble state. It must also work to reconstruct its identity as a cooperative business — in which members recognize their rights and responsibilities as co-owners — that places an equal emphasis on all three core values and, perhaps above all, pursues deliberative democratic ideals and practices. Reconstructing this identity would be a daunting, laborious task, just as it took tremendous effort to mute these once-vigorous qualities. One place to start is member education and training. The last attempt (that I’m aware of) to revive the Core Values and Education Committee, in which I was one among several rather frustrated participants, illustrates the problematic way in which the cooperative has come to think about member education, which is to say as an afterthought. A committee might be necessary to change this, but it is certainly not sufficient. Instead, the board and management must make education a priority for at least all new members, and foreground pedagogy in every phase of the OFC’s operations. Again, this will be effective only to the extent that the noble qualities of the early OFC can be woven into the semiotic-material fabric of the cooperative.

Moreover, this must be done in such a way as to draw any new actors, members or otherwise, that enter the OFC’s territory into direct engagement with those qualities. As abstract as this might sound, it is in practice quite concrete. When, for example, the next
group of university researchers arrives to study the cooperative, members must endeavor to negotiate with those experts about the kind of knowledge that would be valuable to the cooperative, and how to go about producing that knowledge in ways that maximize the deliberative democratic potential of the co-op. Similarly, when members seek training from the well-intentioned agricultural economists at state universities, those members should explicitly engage with those experts about how to articulate the cooperative’s social and ecological commitments with the conventional economic wisdom on offer. Similar habits must be cultivated in engagements with state agencies, regulatory bodies, journalists, legislators, and so on. That this is currently an impossibility was forcefully illustrated for me in a focus group that included OFC members and WFM personnel, in which the latter were clearly more versed in the basics of cooperative principles than some of the OFC members.

Which only underscores the fact that all of this is much easier said than done, of course. In part because of the deeply entrenched internal power relations already structuring the OFC, but also because of the multifarious relations between the OFC and a host of other types of actors. A small anecdote will illustrate what I mean here. It might seem peculiar that, when WFM and other corporate ‘green’ grocers arrived in Oklahoma City, the OFC opted to frame themselves in the romanticized terms of “Real food, real local,” rather than working to foreground some of the cooperative’s much more forceful distinguishing characteristics. I thought this was odd, and I mentioned to a couple of third generation OFC leaders that they could have emphasized, for example, one of the last vestiges of the old OFC that still sets them apart from other enterprises: the fact that they continue to appropriate only 10% of each sale from producers, and allow producers to set their own prices. From a producer-centered understanding of social justice — which arguably coheres somewhat in even romantic visions of small family farms — this is a major distinction from virtually all CFNs. But when I pointed this out to OFC leaders in a discussion of the merits
of “Real food, real local,” they seemed surprised and suddenly inspired, almost as if they were waking from a dream or recalling fragments from a forgotten past. At that time, I was only beginning to realize that this was in part because the values of redevelopment had (at least partially) colonized the territory of local food.

This raises another concern with respect to the local food movement’s capacity to enroll actors in expressing what sets them apart from CFNs: redevelopment has consolidated its territory through enrolling and harmonizing a wide range of actors, including foods and foodways. Is the local food movement already too deeply entangled with redevelopment to express — *i.e.* materialize — alternate values? Or, given that the relation between these two territories is symbiotic but highly uneven in terms of power, how can the local food movement harness the prodigious energies of redevelopment without being completely harnessed by those energies? My findings strongly suggest that the strategies in this respect taken by the local food movement to date have largely entailed attempting to beat redevelopment and other dominant actors at their own game, which I believe is a grave error.

### 3. Beating dominant actors at their own game will not work

We have seen throughout much of the present study that the “Real food, real local” campaign mounted by the OFC reflects a broader shift in the local food movement towards emphasizing the ‘feel good’ values of taste, freshness, quality, and perhaps a certain aesthetic hipness that resonates with larger national and international ‘foodies’ discourse. These values harmonize, not coincidentally, with the affirming stance struck by Oklahoma City’s redevelopment strategy, which foregrounds movement, dynamism, excitement, and so on. For local food actors, this strategy seems ill-advised on two counts.
First, it actively blurs the lines distinguishing the various senses of the term ‘local food’ that have proliferated in the city and state (and beyond), thus diminishing the resources available to local food actors in waging territorial struggles. Taking the metro area farm-to-fork restaurants as an example, we might ask why Ludivine has discontinued its video series in the past couple of years? Why has Local, another farm-to-fork restaurant, abandoned its earlier practice of including descriptions on its menus of its sourcing practices and relationships with specific producers? If these restaurants continue to source a substantial amount of product from small-scale, ecologically- and in some cases socially-oriented farms, failing to highlight this on menus, websites, in interviews with local press, in discussions between servers and patrons, and so on seems to be a missed opportunity to express forceful differences. If, on the other hand, these changes simply represent shifts away from actual practices underlying such differences on the part of these restaurants, these enterprises obviously have less material to work with in expressing differences between themselves and more fetishized or romanticized versions of local food enterprises.

It could well be that these restaurants learned over time that their businesses flourish and people pay premium prices whether they maintain impeccable standards of sourcing locally or not, and thus opted to go the more profitable route of relying primarily on industrial food and buying only whatever token local products are necessary to maintain a veneer of localness. If so, in addition to further expressing a convergence with the instrumentalist values of CFNs (and thus undermining the capacities of a meaningfully different local food movement to ‘scale up’), this seems perhaps a short-sighted strategy in that most individual enterprises are unlikely to have the resources to contend with large corporate entities that can play the same game while also benefiting from economies of scale, access to finance capital, and so on. To continue with the example of farm-to-fork restaurants, one could perhaps imagine how Ludivine’s place in the cultural milieux of the
city might enable it to persist into an era when restaurant groups specializing in “foodie
breastaurants” across the country start to muscle in on the market for farm-to-fork
restaurants, but it is more difficult to imagine how in that scenario Ludivine could be
anything more than an anomalous niche within a niche. In other words, trying to beat
dominant actors at their own affirming game seems to represent the road to either being
dominated by larger forces, or in the best case scenario, becoming virtually indistinguishable
from such forces.

This leads us to the second problem with trying to beat dominant actors at their own
game. As I argued in Chapter Five, highlighting only the feel-good, positively charged values
of local foods is not ‘noble’ or active for the local food movement like it is for dominant
actors in redevelopment. This is simply because entrepreneurial development strategies
harness the powers of neoliberalism, which is an assemblage that deviates from standard
economic wisdom that prevailed in the US and Europe for decades. Oklahoma City, and
Oklahoma more broadly, is in some ways a frontline for neoliberal restructuring today,
mobilizing economic ideas that were until the 1970s quite radical, at least for much of the
20th century, taking libertarian ideologies to extremes even as the social and ecological health
of the state suffers dramatically.\textsuperscript{134} To avoid being misunderstood, I must reiterate an earlier
point here by clarifying that I do not mean ‘noble’ in the standard sense when I describe
neoliberalism or entrepreneurial development strategies in these terms. Advocates (who are
perhaps more accurately called \textit{subjects}) of neoliberalism are noble in the Nietzschean sense
because they have rushed heedlessly forward, recklessly destroying much in pursuit of their
goals and in the name of market fundamentalism, overturning social norms and

\textsuperscript{134} Oklahoma City leaders and boosters frequently trumpet the economic health of the city, citing relatively low
unemployment figures throughout the recession. Such broad brush characterizations say little about the kinds of work
people are finding, or the number of people who have given up searching for work. The extreme disparities in property
values and high rates and uneven distribution of food insecurity and poverty in the city and across the state tell a very
different story. Moreover, it must be added that further analysis of the city’s relationship to economic discourses needs to
take into account notions of ‘post-neoliberal,’ growing interest in urban commons movements, and so on.
longstanding relationships of all kinds, even if they risk their own destruction in the process. Market fundamentalism and its expressions in neoliberal discourse are clearly applied selectively and unevenly, of course, as tools, not a blanket that smoothly covers the world. Nevertheless, neoliberalism is arguably the dominant social-ecological-economic paradigm for much of the world, which is precisely why the OFC’s initial rejection of this paradigm was an expression of nobility. In other words, while the assemblage of neoliberalism initially represented a radical break from the status quo, latching on to it in the early 21st century is closer to falling in line with the new status quo. This is why, for the local food movement, abandoning these now-common economic rationales and social norms is a nobler, more powerful path. And one that I believe coincides with efforts to foreground reflexive differentiation, not attempting to beat dominant actors at their own game.

4. Diversity, resilience, and the role of the State

At the same time, the OFC’s model shouldn’t be thought of as the only way or even the best way forward for local food, or for economy more broadly. There are at least two good reasons for avoiding this pitfall. First, it may turn out that economic diversity, much like biodiversity, is a source of resilience and contributes to a productive, generative ferment (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003; Larsen et. al 2008). As J.K. Gibson-Graham, Timothy Mitchell, Manuel De Landa, and others have demonstrated, societies have long been supported (and undermined) by an array of economic relationships and practices. Efforts to eradicate such diversity and create monolithic economies, be they capitalist or communist, seem to have typically created mass social and economic upheaval and ecological destruction. Most scholarly and popular discourse has yet to even recognize actually existing economic diversity, of course, which represents a problem, if indeed economic diversity does correlate with resilience. This observation only underscores the importance of enterprises such as the
OFC, as well as the role of scholars in making visible and valorizing such enterprises, as Gibson-Graham have forcefully argued (cf. Gibson-Graham 2008).

To recognize economic diversity does not, however, necessarily address the historically demonstrated tendency for capitalist firms to monopolize or otherwise control political economic and ecological relations. Far from a question of competition in open markets, the question of which firms thrive and which fail has much more to do with the way markets are assembled and transformed (Callon 1998; Mitchell 2002; Holm and Nielsen 2007). Competition, in other words, does not occur on a playing field; the playing field is the result of many forces, including but not limited to competition. The entities collectively known as ‘the State’ of course play important roles in shaping markets for food products, a point that the OFC and other local food actors have come to realize is critical to their efforts to become more expansive and durable. In the early days, the OFC “flew under the radar” of state actors, as one former OFC president put it, but this has gradually changed as the cooperative and other local food enterprises have come to recognize that the State is not only an adversary but also a necessary ally. Industrial agribusiness in Oklahoma literally came into being in conjunction with the emergence of the state’s governing apparatuses, and together state agencies and agribusiness have formed a virtually seamless web ever since. As I noted previously, this arrangement cuts across the assemblage joining local food and redevelopment in myriad ways, and to effectively begin to address those intersections would require at least another dissertation. But even limiting the discussion to state actors in urban redevelopment, it seems clear that the local food movement must recognize the imperative of engaging with the State in assembling markets in which its nobler values can survive. That this is once again not an easy task makes it no less important.

However, the foregoing comments should not be taken to suggest that focusing primarily on the State is the best way forward either. Indeed, it appears that social resilience
probably rests primarily on non-commodified, informal, and largely unaccounted for labor and exchange that occurs almost entirely outside the orbit of state intervention (Ironmonger 1996; Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003). Moreover, the State cannot ‘solve’ social problems because the state, like the market, is social, in the Latourian — which is to say genealogical — sense of the word. Neither the market nor the State can transcend this fact through appeals to scientific knowledge, either, a point I will return to shortly. But the State can be and is mobilized in (or perhaps more accurately is an expression of) struggles to mediate the relationship between what Manuel De Landa (1997), following Braudel, calls “meshworks” — or relatively horizontally-structured, autopoietic systems such as street markets — and hierarchies or “anti-markets” such as capitalist monopolies. A world in which this rather commonplace point included both capitalist and non-capitalist enterprises and relationships would greatly enhance the survival prospects of firms such as the OFC. As such, working towards this vision of the State should be part of each enterprise’s engagements with state actors, and central to the vision of food policy councils, local food lobbying firms such as the Oklahoma Farm and Food Alliance, and other organizations and institutions involved with food.

This brings us to the second reason why the OFC’s cooperative, deliberative democratic model ought not be thought of the model to pursue or esteem above all: to become rigidly fixed on any one particular ideal or set of ideals — capitalism or non-capitalism — is the first step towards becoming reactive precisely because it loses sight of the fact that ideals, like categories, identities, and concepts, are masks that power dons to mediate particular interactions. From this perspective, once we have declared a given phenomenon as the fixed target of critique or the unwavering goal, we have fallen under the spell of forces more powerful than ourselves, we have become reactive. Things, i.e. relations, like capitalism or cooperativism can be used to address matters of concern such as the desire
for one individual or group or another to accumulate value, but they can also be deployed for other ends. This assertion of course contradicts some readings of both Marxian and neoclassical economics, which insist that economic relations reflect universal laws and unchanging essences. Such narratives, like those of Science more broadly, have been a source of power to particular actors through their appeals to sovereign Truth (Nietzsche 2000/1872; Latour 2004a; Mitchell 2002). But there are other sources of power, and here we might look to the early OFC again as leading the way in its embrace of anti-essentialism and its commitment to self-overcoming.

5. Self-overcoming, anti-essentialism, and the problem of the public

As discussed in Chapter Two, the early OFC was distinguished by its commitments to mobilizing its diversity of membership as a resource in personal and collective “evolution.” This tradition of deliberative democracy may be seen as a great weakness as well as a formidable strength. It was perhaps weak because of a paradox of democratic thought: structuring a social grouping in ways that maximize participation and distribute power over decision-making creates not only the potential for the ‘tyranny of the majority,’ but also for the majority to decide to abandon democratic commitments and other ideals of collective wellbeing. Founding leader and current OFC president Bob Waldrop, for example, has fervently resisted many of the changes that have occurred in the cooperative, but his commitment to democratic governance has forced him to repeatedly concede to the wishes of the majority. This paradox, however, is less an inherent flaw of democracy than a reason to constantly foreground power as an analytic and political rubric while resisting the urge to rely on scientific truth, expertise, or rationality as guiding lights that somehow shine independently of power (Flyvbjerg 1998; Mitchell 2002). Indeed, it is likely that the values of the early OFC fell not to democratic participation, but rather in conjunction with silo-ization
and a loss of broad, well-informed democratic participation by member-owners. Adopting some of the measures I suggested above might help to counterbalance this weakness, real or perceived.

This is important not because deliberative democracy is the 'silver bullet' solution to social problems either, but because it can be a source of strength, resilience, and adaptability, as the early OFC realized. Particularly when coupled with what might be called an anti-essentialist stance towards identity and a commitment to individual and collective “evolution,” which were also attributes of the early OFC. Frequent contact between divergent people and milieus does not guarantee utopian social outcomes or personal or collective growth that is necessarily desirable from any particular position. But frequent contact with diverse Others coupled with a spirit of self-overcoming and anti-essentialism stands a better chance of harnessing the powers of collectivities or ‘publics’ who have come to recognize their being-in-common, their position as members of multiple shared publics.

As John Dewey (1927) argues, the notion of ‘the public’ as a pre-existing entity is problematic in that it obscures the multiplicity of interests, identities, concerns, and desires that cut across social entities, both individuals and groups. Dewey argues instead that we should understand publics as the emergent product of individuals and groups drawn together by shared matters of concern. As Dewey puts it (1927, p. 147), the democratic ideal,

from the standpoint of the individual[…]consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common. Since every individual is a member of many groups, this specification cannot be fulfilled except when different groups interact flexibly and in connection with other groups.

Expanding these concepts to include more-than-human actors resonates with Latour’s similarly pragmatist notion of publics and democratic life (cf. Latour 2004a). A key
to these notions of the public(s) — at least for those of us who still value the idea of society as a vehicle for potentially maximizing well-being and enabling individuals and collectivities to fully exploit their own capacities — lies in resisting rigid attachments to singular, unchanging senses of identity, in terms of people and ‘things,’ as conveyed by Dewey’s invocation of “flexibility.” For both Latour and Dewey, it’s important to note, these ideals are not utopian, but rest on notions of constant negotiation and frequent struggle. Dewey in fact highlights the inextricability of individual and collective interest, offering the example of a member of a “robber band,” who “may express his powers in a way consonant with belonging to that group and be directed by the interest common to its members. But he does so only at the cost of repression of those of his potentialities which can be realized only through membership in other groups. The robber band cannot interact flexibly with other groups; it can act only through isolating itself” (Dewey 1927, p. 148). The early OFC actively cultivated such flexibility in relations between differently situated individuals and groups, organized around the common (and affirming) ground of a healthier, more just and sustainable food system. As Waldrop put it, “the conservative fundamentalist Baptist would actually be willing to shake hands with the lesbian Wiccan, as long as it was over a bag of locally grown carrots.” Similarly, while the founders emphasized the importance of all three core values, they also recognized the need to refrain from too rigidly settling on any particular conception of social justice, environmental stewardship, or economic sustainability. Such rigidity would not only lose sight of power’s operations, but would also potentially undermine precisely the kind of capacity- or power-maximization enabled by flexible relations between groups that Dewey highlights.

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135 It’s worth pointing out here that dominant actors in redevelopment — as with their parent assemblage of neoliberalism more broadly — seem to have recognized the power of appealing to similar sentiments, enticing us all with the affirming narrative that self-actualization is the key to both individual and collective well-being. Neoliberal discourse of course reduces the relationship between the individual and the collective to one in which narrow self-interest is the best way to produce collective well-being (Harvey 2007). Highlighting this difference is obviously important, but so is recognizing the potency of the affirming narratives offered by neoliberalism, and perhaps by capitalism more broadly. That this notion, unlike Dewey’s formulation, is a utopian ideal does not make it any less alluring.
Such an interest in flexible sensibilities in relations between individuals and groups as key to maximizing and harnessing powers demonstrates the importance of a kind of anti-essentialism, conceived broadly as a refusal to ascribe identity to pre-existing, fixed essences that can be fully known. But it also hints at the limits of a ‘pure’ anti-essentialism, in which things are conceived as having no inside but are rather emptinesses at the center of vortices of relations, devoid of meaning except for that which is inscribed from without. The “powers,” of which Dewey speaks, of a given person or thing may take on meanings only in particular relations with other actors, but those other actors must contend with those powers in the struggle to generate or fix particular meanings. To return to the example of the ice chest, the power of this humble device to subjectivate OFC members as cooperative subjects and/or instrumental capitalist subjects is deeply intertwined with a range of properties of the ice chest, including its capacity to keep food cold, its low cost, and its relative portability, making it small and light enough to fit into many spaces and to move around relatively easily but not so easily that individuals can typically move it about on their own. To express the limits of anti-essentialism a bit differently, from an assemblage perspective, to say that something has been constructed or assembled does not mean that it was constructed from nothing, but rather that it was constructed through the alignment of many actors, who together constitute what may be called its ‘essence.’ As Deleuze puts it, drawing on Nietzsche’s work (2006/1962, p. 4),

A thing has as many senses as there are forces capable of taking possession of it. But the thing itself is not neutral and will have more or less affinity with the force in current possession. There are forces which can only get a grip on something by giving it a restrictive sense and a negative value. Essence, on the other hand, will be defined as that one, among all the senses of a thing, which gives it the force with which it has the most affinity.

This is a profound statement, and one that has significant bearing on politics and struggles to direct the world’s continuing emergence. What is the sense, we might ask,
attributable to the Farmers Public Market which gives it the force with which it has the most affinity? From the perspective of much critical scholarship on AFNs, gentrification, and cultural milieus, the answer is clear: such sites emerge from the aesthetic values of dominated fractions of elite classes, and as such are destined to ultimately serve as outposts of colonization by the dominant fraction of those classes, as we’ve seen in cities around the world. From the perspective of the present study, however, sites such as the Market may take on very different senses and unleash forces more powerful than what today appears as dominant.

6.∞ On transversality and becoming Gay Scientists

Such differences in perspective are quite literally matters of interpretation. Nietzsche argues for an approach to knowledge that begins by explicitly recognizing all knowledge as interpretation grounded in the world being interpreted; in bodies, in things, in power — knowledge as power, and power as knowledge. Power/knowledge, as Foucault puts it. But only the most cynical — which is to say ‘common’ — readings of both Nietzsche and Foucault assume such formulations to mean that power is repressive, limiting, negating, and thus knowledge, too, is repressive, limiting, and negating. Nietzsche repeatedly makes clear that this is but one form of power, and not necessarily its most effective or dominant face. This is why Nietzsche is able to conceive of a new kind of knowledge, a new science that not only admits its grounding in power, but accentuates that grounding as essential to creating the world, never merely reflecting it. Such a conception of science requires scientists powerful enough to stand up to questions such as: who created this knowledge? Why? What does it do? Who does it affect, and how? Such a science could not claim to stand outside of social struggles, to “short circuit politics” as Latour puts it, but would instead broaden and deepen what we mean by ‘politics’ and ‘science.’
In short, scientists would embrace their creative role as artists, fully cognizant that knowledge makes matter dance, sing, become expressive in new ways: this is what Nietzsche calls the Gay Science. Such a science does not mean that ‘anything goes’ or that Gay Scientists will simply ‘make up’ knowledge. To the contrary, nothing could be more concrete, more objective than knowledge that owns up to its hard fought and won existence as the result of forces meeting forces. The “ecophysiological grounds” of knowledge, as Babbette Babich puts it (1994), are a much more solid foundation than the imaginary of a world outside of society, power, or influence. At its best, assemblage thinking, also known as genealogy, opens lines of flight towards a Gay Science. This dissertation is meant to contribute to this nascent territory.

To return to the case of Oklahoma’s local food movement and its entanglements with redevelopment in Oklahoma City, a Gay Science approach to these entwined phenomena would not treat the transversal becomings illustrated by the Farmers Public Market as simply as simply an opportunity for stylistic affectation or a whimsical postscript. The continued unfolding of the world is nothing if not difficult to predict. To assume that the future outcomes of struggles over food systems and urban space in Oklahoma and beyond are foregone conclusions is akin to believing that our analyses of past events reveal the Truth of those events, rather than masking events in generative ways. If scholarship leads us to ‘know’ in advance the futility of attempting to create more just and sustainable foodworlds and more democratically shaped modes of urban development, one wonders if scholarship is perhaps complicit in making a world in which such efforts are known to be futile. Fortunately, most of the people and things struggling to bring more just, sustainable, and noble worlds into being do not know the futility of their struggles.


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Fig. 50 “Fantasy Flock,” by Julie Zickefoose. Used with the artist's permission.