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## Moveable Feasts: Locating Food Trucks in the Cultural Economy

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Dr. Matthew Zook, Director of Graduate Studies

MOVEABLE FEASTS:  
LOCATING FOOD TRUCKS IN THE CULTURAL ECONOMY

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Jessa Megan Loomis

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Anna Secor

Lexington, Kentucky

2013

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### MOVEABLE FEASTS: LOCATING FOOD TRUCKS IN THE CULTURAL ECONOMY

In this thesis, I consider the emergence of a new generation of food trucks and question their popularity, narration and representation. I examine the economic and cultural discourses that have valorized these food trucks, and pay attention to the everyday material and embodied practices that constitute them. This research is situated in Chicago, where proposed changes to the existing mobile food vending ordinance spurred contentious debates about food safety, regulations, rights to the city and livelihoods. I follow the myriad actors involved in the food truck movement to understand the strategies employed to change the mobile food vending ordinance on behalf of these food trucks. As part of this, I raise questions about what interests are prioritized, and what interests are marginalized especially in light of Chicago's long history of policing Latino street vendors. I conclude by considering what food trucks can elucidate about the city, the changing economy, and the molding of laboring and consuming subjects.

**KEYWORDS:** Neoliberalization, Entrepreneurs, Economic Restructuring, Policy Mobility, Subjectivity, Chicago

Jessa Megan Loomis  
July 31, 2013

MOVEABLE FEASTS:  
LOCATING FOOD TRUCKS IN THE CULTURAL ECONOMY

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# CHICAGO

*By Carl Sandburg*

Hog Butcher for the World,  
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,  
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;  
Stormy, husky, brawling,  
City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I  
have seen your painted women under the gas lamps  
luring the farm boys.

And they tell me you are crooked and I answer:  
Yes, it is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free  
to kill again.

And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is:  
On the faces of women and children I have seen the marks  
of wanton hunger.

And having answered so I turn once more to those who  
sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer  
and say to them:

Come and show me another city with lifted head singing  
so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.  
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on  
job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the  
little soft cities;

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning  
as a savage pitted against the wilderness,

Bareheaded,  
Shoveling,  
Wrecking,  
Planning,  
Building, breaking, rebuilding,

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with  
white teeth,

Under the terrible burden of destiny  
laughing as a young man laughs,

Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has  
never lost a battle,

Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse,  
and under his ribs the heart of the people,

Laughing!

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of  
Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be  
Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,  
Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### *The Rise of Food Trucks*

#### *Introduction to the New Generation of Food Trucks*

This thesis takes as its site of inquiry the food trucks that began to appear in Chicago in late 2010. These food trucks actively reinvented the image of street food from something that had previously elicited a fear of food poisoning, into something that was a novel, hip, and recession-friendly version of organic, local and gourmet food. With their colorful exteriors, clever business names and inventive food offerings, these food trucks are narrated as well suited to the contemporary economy, and have gained cultural currency for the food that they offer, as well as the ways that they contribute to the vibrancy of life in the city.

While this new generation of food trucks appeared in Chicago in 2010, the food truck phenomenon began in late 2008 when the Kogi Korean BBQ food truck appeared on the streets of Los Angeles. Since the fall of 2008 when Kogi hit the streets, food trucks have only grown more popular, in Los Angeles, certainly, but far beyond as well. This interest in and enthusiasm for food trucks can be seen in the marketing magazines and business weeklies that have documented their rise. An entire industry dedicated to educating and providing technical support to budding food truck entrepreneurs has now appeared, including How To books, food trucks design and marketing firms, food truck insurance, and food truck tracking websites. Paraphernalia, such as cookbooks featuring recipes from food trucks, and a wide variety of food truck television shows have become available to consumers. On the February 11&18 2013 cover of *The New Yorker*, artist

Simon Greiner remade the traditional Eustace Tilley that adorns the cover into “Brooklyn’s Eustace,” a tattooed, bearded hipster flanked by a food truck in the background (Figure 1).

Myriad actors have taken note of the rise of food trucks and interest, from multiple and diverse arenas, has led to a proliferation of food trucks from sometimes unexpected places. For example, attempting to be a part of the trend, Chick-fil-A opened a food truck in Washington, DC (Figure 2) and Rachel Ray started a food truck for dogs (Figure 3) to promote her high-end dog food line (Olson, 2012). These pre-existing mass marketed, mass produced food empires have taken up the food truck *form* as a representational strategy to signify their brand in ways consistent with the framing of food trucks. These major food companies are attempting to tap into the image of the food truck as a non-corporate, local, small-scale site of consumption. By squeezing their corporate product into the food truck, these brands are strategically using the form to take advantage of the qualities associated with the food trucks, while maintaining the benefits of a corporate brand identity.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Transnational companies like Proctor & Gamble and Wal-Mart have also created food trucks of their own. These “food trucks” do not serve prepared or consumption-ready food, but instead simply mimic the creative appearance that has become a signature

of the trucks themselves. Without the gourmet, local, or haute cuisine that have become the cornerstone for the food truck's remaking, these companies have merely created a delivery truck with a window designed to make it 'fun' to buy milk and diapers. These companies are attempting to capitalize on the hype of the food truck by mimicking its form; this act of morphing a big box transnational into a tiny food truck demonstrates the significant interest in and utility of food trucks as transformative consumption spaces.

City governments, too, have devised ways for food trucks to be useful for the everyday business of the city. Taking advantage of the 'fun' associated with this form, the Boston city government deployed "City Hall To Go" (Figure 4) in an effort to convince reluctant urbanites to take care of business they would otherwise defer. The truck offers a 'menu' of city services, such as dog licenses and requests for birth certificates. The city government also uses the hypermobility of the food truck to reach neighborhoods far from city services, and to encourage otherwise reluctant Bostonians to quickly attend to city business near their work, or in their neighborhood.



Figure 4



Figure 5

The food truck form has also been picked up in the art world. In 2012, the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art curated an exhibit titled "Feast." As part of the exhibit, artist Michael Rakowitz created the Enemy Kitchen food truck (Figure 5), which offered Iraqi cuisine served by veterans of the Iraq War. The truck gave out food at

museum event, and also joined the food truck scene in Chicago for the duration of the exhibit. Rakowitz, known for his provocative and political engagements, instrumentalized the food truck to spark conversations about topics that are not always palatable, a signature of his style. Rakowitz explained that his work "...is closer to "architectural intervention" and not[ed] that, by design, lines blur between his art and the real world. "Slippage," he called it." (Borerelli, 2012). By using the popular form of the food truck, Rakowitz seduced viewers to consider his political project around food, identity, war, and culture. The Enemy Kitchen food truck is another example of the way that the food truck form has been employed because it is a zeitgeist that itself has meaning and explanatory power that can be used for multifarious aims.

These are just a few examples of the growing prominence of and economic and cultural interest in food trucks. From the use of food trucks to sell corporate fast food, to the use of food trucks as a way to provision municipal services, to the use of food trucks as political art, these reinventions demonstrate that food trucks have purchase as cultural markers, as well as considerable signifying power. The new food truck scene in Chicago, for example, grew from an enthusiasm for and a familiarity with food trucks in other US cities. Whether it was the food truck vendor that visited Austin, Texas to conduct in-person research, the vendor who bought her truck and business concept from a proven entrepreneur in San Francisco, or the vendor with no restaurant experience but armed with his familiarity with popular representations of food trucks from reality television shows, most of the vendors I interviewed were tapping into a food truck imaginary that they had encountered through popular representations that were already widely circulated, and flexibly taken up.

## *Outline of Thesis*

In this thesis, I consider the emergence of food trucks in Chicago, and question their popularity, narration, and representation. In the three chapters that follow, I tease out the economic and cultural discourses that narrate food trucks, as well as the material and embodied practices of mobile food vending in Chicago. The meaning of street vending is contingent on contextual factors, and those factors can and should be interrogated as a way to make sense of larger social, economic and political phenomena. As such, I consider the emergence of these food trucks in Chicago, a city with longstanding restrictions on mobile food vending that in 2012 made changes to the mobile food vending ordinance to encourage a food truck scene in the city. I question the strategies employed to change the mobile food vending ordinance on behalf of these food trucks, including the discourses and practices that make a case for ordinance change. Through this lens I question what food trucks can elucidate about the city, the changing economy, and the molding of subjectivities.

In the first chapter, I consider the history of mobile food vending in Chicago, paying particular attention to the way street vending has been narrated as a marginal or suspect economic activity. I consider the rules and regulations that, for the last two decades, have restricted the practice of street vending in Chicago. I then consider the case being made for changes to these rules to accommodate the new generation of food trucks. I ask about the ways that food trucks have been framed as an economic activity well suited for times of economic contraction, and as such, I call attention to the compelling case being made to change these policies after nearly two decades of existing policy. This, I argue, is within and furthers the creative class and creative city vision that

constructs the city for some, while completely ignoring the needs and interests of other groups. Ultimately, I critique the neoliberal policy environment where increasingly homogenous solutions remake the culture and economy of the city.

In the second chapter, I inquire into the way that a new generation of food trucks has been materially and discursively produced through language and everyday practice. I use interviews with street vendors to show how the new generation of food trucks is being differentiated from previous forms of street vending. I excavate the use of the phrase “roach coach” that consistently surfaced in nearly every interview I conducted as a positional foil to this supposedly new iteration of mobile food vending. I also consider the use of space, the presentation of vendor identity, and the aestheticized truck as a way that food trucks are working with the visual to communicate difference in all the ways that matter for policy change.

In the third chapter, I consider food trucks as a site where the political is engaged, and subjectivities are actively being reworked. As part of this, I focus on two subjectivities that are central to the much celebrated food truck: the entrepreneur who is said to be creatively overcoming crisis and the foodie consumer, spending his or her way to frugal, experience-oriented, local engagements with the economy and the self. This consumption in the form of politics is suggestive of other engagements and commitments of the neoliberal era that will be explored in this chapter, and in the conclusion.

### ***Methodology***

This research was conducted between March 2012 and April 2013. For six weeks between the end of May and the beginning of July 2012, I lived and conducted fieldwork



in the city of Chicago. My fieldwork occurred in the weeks prior to the revisions that were made to the mobile food vending ordinance. This fortuitous timing meant that food truck vendors were eager to voice their thoughts about the policy environment and the need for revisions to the mobile food vending ordinance. I was able to follow closely the organization and implementation of the political campaign led by and on behalf of food truck vendors. For thinking about methods and approach, I draw from scholarship on qualitative methodology, principally in the vein of feminist research (McDowell 1992, Rose 1997), and also qualitative methods more generally (Cope 2005, Crang 2002, Fairclough 2009, Herbert 2010).

I come to this research with the understanding that all knowledge is situated, and the belief that the knowledge of the research participant has a long way to travel to be understood by the researcher in ways that honor both the information and its intended meaning. As part of this understanding, I reflected on my own positionality by considering the ways my identity, self-presentation, and way of being during research enabled some research opportunities and foreclosed others. I attempted to document these reflections on research as a learning process in meta-notes during fieldwork.

I was interested in and took seriously the everyday socio-spatial practices of street vending. During my initial two weeks in Chicago, I spent significant time observing food trucks during their normal hours of business. I observed the food trucks from afar and took copious field notes about the everyday material aspects of food truck vending, including but not limited to location, weather, customers, mix of trucks, parking, duration of stay, and engagement with street life. I observed the lunch crowd and curbside practices from a distance at the popular and highly trafficked food truck gathering sites at

Madison and Monroe, 600 West Chicago and the Aon Center. While the majority of lunchtime stops were in or near downtown, the University of Chicago campus in Hyde Park was also a popular destination, so I conducted observations there as well. I also attended food truck gatherings on the weekend and at night. These gatherings were often organized as a fundraiser for a local charity, to provide lunch for a conference, as was the case of the food truck gathering at TechWeek at the Merchandise Mart, or at a bar like Fischman Liquors. The insights gained from these observations enabled an attention to the wider practices of food truck vending in Chicago beyond the frame of the individual vendor or food truck.

Once I felt sufficiently familiar with the rhythms of the food truck scene, I introduced myself and my research project to food truck vendors, and asked them to complete a brief one-page survey about their experiences as food truck vendors in Chicago. I was able to collect 31 completed surveys, at a time when approximately 38 trucks were vending with regularity. No food truck vendors denied my requests to complete the survey. These surveys provided valuable insights about themes across the food truck vending scene in Chicago. Beyond their use as a data gathering tool, these surveys also provided a useful entre into requesting interviews with food truck vendors.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with a total of 13 individuals, including two food truck enthusiasts who held jobs in business but were both attempting to monetize a food truck support service, one law firm, and nine food truck operators. The intention of these interviews was to inquire into the everyday working life of food trucks in Chicago, and to hear firsthand experiences of attempting to make a living as a food truck vendor. As such, I asked questions about vendors' experience of vending, their

employment histories, their perceptions of the current mobile food vending ordinance and their experience attempting to comply with and follow the regulations governing their livelihood. These interviews were recorded and I transcribed them at a later date.

Additionally, I conducted an informal interview that was not recorded with an individual who briefly owned a food truck, but quickly transitioned into a brick and mortar business with the same restaurant concept.

These interviews ranged from 25 minutes to nearly two hours and were conducted at a time and location convenient to the individual being interviewed. As such, interviews were conducted in often loud and public places, during or at the close of lunch shifts. As part of these meetings, I was able to visit two of the kitchens where the food was prepared<sup>1</sup>, and was also able to ride along in the open cab of two other food trucks as they were in transit from one location to another. Following Elwood and Martin (2000), I was aware that the knowledge produced during these times was influenced by the setting of the interview, as well as the timing in the vendor's work day when the interview occurred. The timing and location of many of these interviews was conducive to a rich and confessional environment when vendors were able to step back from their personae on the truck and seemed to be leveling with me in a way that their public presence would not necessarily allow. This was not the case with all interviews, but there did seem to be a noticeable shift between a vendor's customer service presence, and their personae as a

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<sup>1</sup> According to the mobile food vending regulations at the time, all food sold onboard a food truck needed to be prepared and packaged in a kitchen certified by the health department. One food preparation site was a commissary serving multiple food trucks, and the other was a small one-room cook space that the vendor expressed an interest in turning into a take-out window.

small business owner being interviewed. These interviews provided insight into the everyday experience of food truck vendors beyond what I witnessed during the lunch hour—namely, life beyond the public eye when vendors were planning, preparing, unwinding, and recharging for another day.

### ***Social Media in Research***

I spent the month of June conducting research on the emergence of food trucks in Chicago. Social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, are important means through which food truck vendors communicate their current location, menu availability, and site arrival times to their hungry followers. After months of tracking the movement and spatial distribution of food trucks through location aggregator websites<sup>2</sup>, I joined Twitter in April 2012 to directly connect with and follow my research participants.

I crafted a 140 character Twitter-compliant bio. To the Twittersphere I am, singularly: “Graduate student in Geography at the University of Kentucky, spending the summer chasing food trucks around Chicagoland!” This exercise of claiming a singular identity—possibly my first introduction to my research subjects—therefore, was not taken lightly. I quickly realized the complicated polyvocality of my singular Twitter feed, which was visible to my research participants, as well as academics and old friends. In an attempt to manage this complexity, I played with the content of my tweets, consciously reworking them beyond what any disciplined Twitter user would think prudent. I tried to engage with the community of food truck operators by composing tweets that referenced

---

<sup>2</sup> For examples see:  
[www.chicagofoodtruckfinder.com](http://www.chicagofoodtruckfinder.com) or [www.foodtrucksmmap.com/chicago](http://www.foodtrucksmmap.com/chicago)

our interactions earlier in the day, while re-tweeting posts that I wanted to share with academic friends and followers. The urge to manage the presentation of my identity and research interests was based in a desire to ensure that knowledge of my project, gathered in my Twitter feed, did not unduly influence my research subjects' responses to survey and interview questions, or in the worst case, dissuade them from participating in my research.

By the close of my research I became a more sophisticated Twitter user and found my Twitter voice and style. I learned how to use hashtags (#), how to reference others via their Twitter handles (@chifoodtruckz), and grew better about thinking in characters rather than paragraphs. My first attempt at using a hashtag #foodtruckcelebrity was appropriately evoked, the food truck celebrity himself assured me. Unfortunately, I butchered a later attempt to communicate #foodtrucksareeverywhere, which violated my own style guidelines (words that begin and end with the same character should not be sandwiched), and wasted 20 precious characters on an unreadable reference.

The 35 tweets that were sent while I was in Chicago are mostly milquetoast reports about what I ate from food trucks, how many miles I biked, and what joyful things I uncovered during a little over a month of research in a city that I had no ties to other than my interest in the El, *Nature's Metropolis*, and the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. As the weeks went on, and my in-person interactions with my research subjects became more prominent than my digital ones, I felt increasingly free to tweet about, for example, the complicated and controversial mobile food vending ordinance in Chicago. These tweets certainly divulge my interests to anyone doing a close and inter-tweet reading, but

they do not scream my political leanings, research analysis, or even, true confessions as a hungry and often fed-for-free food truck chaser.

### ***Conclusion***

The new generation of food trucks is often described as dynamic, creative and vibrant. These adjectives are intended to describe the food trucks themselves, their role in the economy, the people consuming from and operating the trucks, as well as the affect they have on the urban streetscape. Food trucks are also narrated as a business concept that is easy to get into, and as such, food trucks have been celebrated a way to invigorate the local economy in a time of limited business opportunity and economic contraction. Support for food trucks in Chicago has arisen from myriad actors with diverse interests in fostering a food truck scene. In this thesis, I have set out to interrogate the multifarious rationales for bolstering food trucks and creating policy to encourage their existence in Chicago. Through this inquiry, I hope to show how food trucks are a site for urban, economic and cultural projects that are often less than transparent.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *The Chicago Mobile Food Vending Ordinance*

#### *Chicago as a Case Study*

Chicago has longstanding restrictions on mobile food vending, and a significant history of policing vendors whose livelihoods are made by selling food from carts and trucks on the street. In this chapter, I consider the history of mobile food vending in Chicago to demonstrate the long entrenched belief that street vending is an illicit economic activity. I inquire into the restrictive aspects of the mobile food vending ordinance that have marginalized the practice of street vending, making it nearly impossible to comply with regulations and to vend legally. This history is important because it underscores the political commitments that have framed mobile food vending as a suspect and improper economic activity for nearly a century.

This chapter is an inquiry into the history of mobile street vending in Chicago, and the contemporary campaign to change the ordinance that regulates mobile food vending practices. In the context of this anti-vending history, I consider the campaign to revise Chicago's existing mobile food vending ordinance. This campaign was inaugurated when the first 'new' food truck took the streets in late 2010 and was undertaken by these new food trucks and their advocates.

Street vending has been a contested form of economic activity in Chicago for decades, so recent interest in revising the policy to accommodate the new food truck movement signals a reversal of longstanding restrictions on and aggressive policing of mobile food vending more generally. I consider the campaign for policy change and

analyze the significance of the revision of the mobile food vending ordinance in a city that for so long has attempted to dissuade mobile street vending.

### *Street Vending in Chicago*

The history of street vending in Chicago is often traced back to the Maxwell Street Market, an open-air market known for having a chaotic mix of people and goods. The market, which had its origins in the 1880s, was situated at Halstead and Maxwell streets in Chicago until it was removed in 1994. In 1912 the Market was recognized by the Chicago city council and simultaneously had formal management and oversight structures added (Morales, 2000). This regulation and management process was an attempt to discipline otherwise unpredictable economic activities that were perceived to be chaotic. In Chicago, this formalization process led the city to briefly think of the market, and street peddling more generally, as a legitimate income earning strategy and as a way to alleviate unemployment in the city.

Interest in Maxwell Street Market as a legitimate space of income generation waned quickly after the Market was formally recognized, and since that time street vending has been a contested form of economic activity in Chicago. Alfonso Morales, a sociologist, has conducted extensive research on street vending and public markets. On the case of Maxwell Street Market, Morales (2000) writes,

Corruption was incompletely anticipated in the regulatory apparatus which governed vending at Maxwell Street and once established became lucrative and was exploited by city appointees and others. Vending continued, but slowly became enveloped in a negative aura that replaced the relatively positive view of vendors and vending of the 1910s. Since the 1920s street markets and vending have lost much of their status as a policy tool and legitimate occupation category... Since the decline of progressive era practices Chicago land politicians have not seen vending as a



legitimate occupation and instead have either ignored it or constructed it as fraudulent and even law breaking and without redeeming values (p.85).

As Morales's account shows, street vending is not separate from the long history of corrupt politics, nepotism, ward bosses, and aldermen in Chicago that have framed these economic practices as suspect. Perceptions of street vending, then, are tied up with regulatory practices and the implementation of policies that govern them.

In the 1990s, during the administration of Mayor Richard M. Daley, the trend of marginalizing and aggressively deterring mobile food vending continued through practices and policy-making that essentially criminalized street vending. The most notable enforcement of this policy occurred in 1991 and 1997, when the Health, Police, Revenue, and Streets and Sanitation departments were mobilized to impound any food vending truck or cart in violation of the city's health code. These departments cruised the streets, located vendors, and poured bleach over the food the vendors were carrying because it was not prepared in a commercial kitchen and thus violated the city's municipal code. The aldermen who drafted the ordinance wrote that street vending represented a serious public health risk, a position that disregarded the food safety precautions that vendors took and the care with which the food was prepared and presented (Pollack, 1997). Accusations went so far as to claim that if these vendors were not stopped, people would die. These aggressive actions and inflammatory framing of mobile food vending, and vendors were part of the Daley administration's campaign to "clean up the streets."

Restrictions on mobile food vending, then, have long been framed around ideas of street vending as a public nuisance and disruption to ordered life on the street. This "quality of life" ordinance, which was targeted at neighborhood with high numbers of

immigrants, including Pilsen and Little Village<sup>3</sup>, was intended to keep mobile food vending from the streets of Chicago. Since this time, this ordinance has posed a significant challenge to the livelihoods of street vendors in Chicago, making it nearly impossible to sell food on the street and conform to the city's regulations.

### ***The Chicago Mobile Food Vending Ordinance***

When the new generation of food trucks appeared in Chicago in late 2010, they were regulated according to the remnants of the ordinance put in place during mayor Daley's regime in the 1990s. In July 2012, the Chicago City Counsel, on the advisement of current Mayor Rahm Emanuel, changed the mobile food vending ordinance to accommodate some of the demands brought up by food trucks and their advocates. This change included additional permitting options for a range of mobile food vending operations that were designed to better represent the diverse livelihood practices of mobile food vendors.<sup>4</sup> The new licensing differentiates between a mobile food dispenser and a mobile food preparer. The former license only represents a few changes to the previous version of the ordinance, while the latter is a licensing structure that allows vendors to cook and prepare food onboard the vehicle. The prohibition on cooking on the truck was the most fervently opposed aspect of the previous ordinance, but as will become clear in the next section, that change was not actually desired by vendors themselves, but rather was useful rallying point for the campaign to change the mobile

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<sup>3</sup> Neighborhoods in Chicago with a significant portion of Latino residents

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted, however, that these changes only apply to mobile *vehicles*, so the call for change on behalf of pushcarts and other non-motorized forms of street vending was not met.

food vending policy. These allowances come with additional fees, restrictions, and health and safety inspections.

While a new licensing structure has since been put in place, and new rules have taken effect, none of the vendors I talked with in the summer of 2012 have applied for the new license under the current structure. In fact, of 126 food trucks licensed to operate in Chicago, only one of them, The Salsa Truck, had applied for the new food preparer license which allows food trucks to cook on board. (Eng, 2013). This disinterest in the new licensing structure will be discussed further, but in short, the changes are thought of as prohibitively expensive as a result of higher fees and additional health and safety requirements that must be met. Vendors that started a food truck under the old ordinance designed their business concept and truck to comply with the existing law—to take advantage of the ability to cook onboard would mean a significant expense to retrofit their vehicle and to change their food preparation location and practices.

In the following section, I review aspects of the existing mobile food vending ordinance that were the subject of scrutiny, and those which the campaign for policy revision were intended to address. Through an attention to the legal contours of the ordinance, as well as how those laws affect vendors' everyday experiences as they attempt to make a living as food truck operators, I show which aspects of the ordinance affect vendors, and in which ways. When possible, I have included the complications these rules have presented in vendors' own words. It should be noted that, while the specific aspects of the ordinance that changed are important, my larger goal is to problematize the campaign for change, the discourses that cast that change as necessary, and the processes through which that change occurs.

### *Hours and Duration of Operation*

The Chicago mobile food vending ordinance limited the time of day when mobile food vendors could operate. Food trucks were not able to vend before 10AM or after 10PM, which were limitations out of step with the hours of operation for other food and beverage establishments in Chicago. This rule meant that food trucks interested in selling in the morning to hungry people on their way to work would actually be breaking the law. Also, in many cities, food trucks became popular through partnering with bars without food options to provide dinner or to offer late-night food to hungry patrons. The restrictions on vending hours prevented food trucks from vending during hours when other food and beverage establishments were open, which frustrated these food truck vendors and made them believe that this rule was arbitrary and unfair. In response to these critiques, the new ordinance permits vending at all times of the day except between 2PM and 6AM.

In addition to limiting the times when food trucks could be on the streets, the mobile food vending ordinance mandates that food trucks spend no more than two hours at any given location while they are vending. The requirement to move location at least once every two hours is very difficult for vendors. From my observations last summer, this rule was not being followed. Many of the vendors appeared at the location they would be at for the duration of lunch at around 11AM. If these vendors were to comply with the two hour time limit, they would have to leave that parking space at 1PM in search of another location. While some food trucks were lucky to sell their entire inventory within this two hour timeframe, food trucks that had additional food to sell should have left that spot and searched for a new parking one according to the law. This

aspect of the mobile food vending ordinance was not brought up in any of the interviews I conducted, likely because it was being ignored. This rule still exists under the new regulation, but with the potential for GPS trackers to be added to every vehicle, it will become very easy to enforce this aspect of the rule by monitoring it from afar.

### *Parking and the 200 Foot Rule*

Additionally, the food truck ordinance prohibited food trucks from vending at locations within 200 feet of any brick and mortar store or restaurant that sells food, whether it's a convenience store, fast food chain, or local sit-down restaurant. Proximity restrictions exist in many places with food truck regulations. For example, in Boston food trucks can only vend at designated food truck stands, in New Orleans the restriction is 600 feet away from a brick and mortar restaurant, and in San Francisco the rule currently stands as 50 feet away from a brick and mortar and up to 1,500 feet from a school. All of these restrictions, regardless of the actual distance, have been critiqued for what have been called anti-competitive underpinnings that favor existing restaurants and food vending establishments.

The search for a viable parking spot that complied with the 200 foot rule was often difficult for the vendors I interviewed. The parking spots that food trucks were seeking were part of the general parking available to all passenger and commercial vehicles in the dense and congested area of downtown Chicago. As such, once the vendors were able to find a legal parking spot where their vehicle could fit, they were responsible for paying the hourly parking fee, just as any other vehicle would be required to pay. In high trafficked, desirable locations in the heart of downtown, parking could cost vendors as much as \$6.50 per hour. On a few occasions, I was planning to meet a

vendor at a spot they were intending to vend, and despite having already tweeted their intended time and location to followers, they were unable to find parking when they arrived at the location. In one particular case, I watched as a food truck vendor double-parked and proceeded to vend to her followers who were eager for their much-anticipated afternoon snack. This particular food truck was able to finally squeeze into a spot when someone returned to their vehicle minutes after their parking meter had expired. In the intervening moments, however, the vendor was simultaneously worried that they would receive a ticket, while also being motivated to take a relatively small risk to be able to stop and sell her product.

The 200 foot rule did not change in the most recent revision of the mobile food vending policy and continues to have major implications on the everyday vending experience and livelihood strategies of the food truck vendors. One of my interviewees explained

I've got all this food and I gotta sell it, but if I don't park, I can't sell it. So, sometimes you'll miss an entire day and that can mean hundreds of dollars, a deficit in your sales that day. So, it can hurt.

The fact that these vendors are unable to sell their food if they cannot find parking is a significant barrier to mobile food vending as a reliable livelihood strategy. Some have developed strategies for dealing with the parking limitations, including parking a passenger car at a highly trafficked location hours before the lunch rush and then slyly swapping it for the food truck. Others have worked with friends within the food truck community to coordinate their arrival and departure times so that when one vehicle leaves another takes their spot rather than surrendering it to a passenger vehicle. This, of course, has and will continue to breed animosity within the food truck scene in Chicago

as some food trucks have found allies, and others have not. These are tactics that vendors have devised to overcome or make do within an otherwise stressful and burdensome restriction that makes a precarious livelihood even more unpredictable.

As more food trucks appear in Chicago, I imagine this 200 foot requirement, and the limited parking spaces it produces, will only continue to complicate the experience of vending. As this vendor explains

I hate the 200 foot rule, but I'm still doing fine. I could be doing better. I could be doing way better, but a big problem is the other food trucks that keep messing up and keep bringing attention. There are a handful of trucks out there that never have ever ever ever had any problems at all. You know like, if those trucks were the only ones out there, it would be a breeze, cause you don't have to worry about someone ruining like, you know, your spot. And like a lot of those guys are very respectful of other people's spots...So I would never take their spots. If I show up and there's already like, you know, another spot open other than their spot, I would take that, but uh, you know I'd try to respect then. They put in the time to build up the spot, you know, like it sucks when you first show up to a spot, and another food trucks shows up there.

In this vendor's view, trucks that follow the rules of the street, and do not make problems within the food truck community, or provoke the police by visibly disregarding the rules, are acceptable vendors. The frustration that this sentiment was conveyed with, however, hints at a tension within the mobile food vending scene. Socially enforced rules of politeness, good neighborliness, and deference to the 'elders' in the circle, then, will likely become more important as the number of vendors increases.

I asked a similar question about choosing a location and finding parking to another vendor. In line with the thinking expressed by this vendor around limited parking spots and showing respect for long-standing members of the food truck scene, he responded

It's odd how that works. The best thing I could compare it to is like watching *Deadliest Catch*. All these guys in the ocean, like you have this huge ocean, but yet, some guys think that some areas are theirs. Just how they work together is this very unique relationship. You're all, of course, fighting for like the good spot, you know, and the customers, obviously... Some trucks like to park with each other more than other trucks. And some guys get along together better than other people. And, uh, I don't know if there's any sorta like, there is no science to it, it's an art, definitely. And uh, I think there's a lot of room for food trucks in the city. It might limit out. Obviously, the city should put a cap on it at some point, because, I mean, where is everybody going to park? I mean, it's just too much.

In the everyday social interactions and negotiations of limited parking, it is clear that there is a lot of potential for strife between food trucks. Here, the vendor is explaining that at some point in the future, there might be just too many vendors for the city to handle, and thus, the city should limit the number of trucks based on available parking spaces. This brings together questions of competition and regulation that are part of the already existing discourse on food trucks, but framed in other ways.

And lastly on the question of the 200 foot rule and available parking, another vendor explained his willingness to follow the rule, but difficulty knowing exactly where vending was legal or illegal. In his response to my inquiry about parking, this vendor explains the challenge of serving customers who are not aware of the regulations that prohibit him from vending in certain locations. He said

Can I please everyone? Probably not. Especially because a lot these guys, a lot of people don't know the rules and regulations, and so they say, "Oh why don't you come to this corner?" I legally have to be 200 feet away... Before I opened my food truck I actually went in the middle of the night and measured 200 feet and I said, if I park here, I'm going to be legal. And I don't know how many people do that now. They want to open food trucks, but they don't do that. But I actually did that. I actually did that for awhile—I went and at 3 o'clock in the morning, we would



measure. There is a Corner Bakery<sup>5</sup> over here, and I would measure. And I would say, if I park here I'd be legal. And again, I don't know how many people have done it, but I found quite a few spots. And some of the spots, I actually know where they are. I probably know the city pretty good right now! I just discovered that, I probably know the city very well right now.

This vendor is an exception in that he actively tries to find ways to make the 200 foot rule work for him and his business. While this requirement is perceived to be an unreasonable burden on food trucks vendors who are preoccupied with selling their food, this vendor frames the rule more as a condition of doing business. It does seem like this vendor went above and beyond, however, using a tape measure to ensure that he is far enough from already existing permanent locations that sell food. In a food truck scene that focuses on only highly desirable, well-trafficked spots in the downtown, and on office buildings with limited options, knowledge of all of the locations without a high density of businesses already selling food is important. Through attempting to comply with this law, the vendor has gained intimate spatial knowledge of the city. His good-faith effort shows that it is possible to know the spaces that are legal for vending, but that knowledge doesn't mean that a vendor with a truck full of food for a day of vending will have an incentive to turn back home if there are no available spots when he or she arrives downtown.

Only in recent months has the City of Chicago, following cities like Portland, OR and Austin, TX, established permanent locations or "stands" where food trucks can congregate and vend in designated areas that are only for food trucks. These spots, however, are part of a lottery process that comes with fees, so this attempt to formalize and designate areas for vending has not been popular.

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<sup>5</sup> A chain of bakeries in multiple US cities

In my time in Chicago, I only saw one food truck receive a ticket for violating the 200 foot rule. I heard experiences from a few other vendors who were served with a ticket that they were later able to contest. While the process of taking time off work to contest the ticket was described as wasteful and unnecessary, none of the vendors who I talked with actually were required to pay the fine at the end of the experience. That being said, the threat of legal action or fines makes this a difficult and precarious livelihood that requires vendors to plan and strategize.

### *Cooking Onboard*

The aspect of the mobile food vending ordinance that has been most frequently and vocally opposed is the prohibition on cooking or preparing food onboard the vehicle. This means that all mobile food vendors must package their goods at an off-site kitchen or commissary and keep food hot under heat lamps or in a heated food storage unit on their truck. Vendors are not allowed to do any preparation or customization onboard the truck, and have been fined for having preparation materials, such as cutting boards and kitchen knives, as equipment on the truck. Food truck vendors prepare a fixed number of food items for the day, which means that they risk either not having enough meals to meet the demand, or preparing too much food, and having to discard the items they prepared when they are not purchased by the end of the day.

The requirement that all food be prepared, cooked and sealed in packages off the food truck is the antithesis of what originally popularized the new food truck in other cities—fresh, well-prepared food. The fact that this aspect of the ordinance contradicts the celebrated practices of the new food truck movement elsewhere has meant that this aspect of the ordinance has become a useful way to galvanize support for ordinance

change. Advocates for the food truck ordinance change, and local media accounts, therefore, routinely detail this aspect of the ordinance, although from my interviews, it is not the part of the ordinance that most affects vendors.

As expressed in interviews with food truck vendors last summer, food trucks were not interested in the ordinance changing in this way. Many of the vendors explained that they had gotten into the food truck business with a product and overall business concept designed to comply with the ordinance as it existed. Being able to cook onboard, then, would not change their everyday experience of vending, especially for sweets trucks who would never find it preferable to equip their trucks with ovens for baking. One vendor explains the limitations of a truck that cooks onboard as being out of step with the Chicago lunch time routine, and the harsh weather. He said

Do I want to cook on my truck? No. I really don't think from the experience that we have seen, it would work only in the summer time. Or only with the weather applies for the waiting. If you go to a food truck where you actually have to place your order, you have to wait, you know, you only have an hour for lunch. It takes you 10-15 minutes to get to my unit, then you're going to place your order. It's gonna take me 10 or 15 minutes to prepare your order. And then that leaves you half an hour. And then you've got to go back to your office and you've got 15 minutes to eat. So it makes no sense. It would only make sense in the nice weather. Now lets go to the Chicago weather—eight months its cold.

Another vendor echoes the belief that Chicago is not ready for, or does not need food trucks to cook onboard, going so far as to say that the no-cook version of mobile food vending fits Chicago better than the cook onboard model. He attributes this to the lunch norms in Chicago, and other factors that he believes are specific to the culture of the city. He further explains that in order for this to occur, and to be significant for the mobile food vending culture, prominent Chicago chefs will likely need to be the first to make the shift. He said:

Not being able to prepare food on the truck? Ehhh? For me, it doesn't really matter...I'm not really interested in doing food prep on the truck. I don't think Chicago is necessarily ready for it right now. Chicago, unlike, New York, unlike Austin, unlike LA, everyone here has a really like structured schedule. Lunch is lunch. So whether its 11 o'clock, or noon, or whatever, its probably only a half hour, you know. They want to get their lunch and go. But yeah, as far as cooking on the truck, I think at some point it might hit. I don't really feel like being the guy that figured that out, I'll leave that to somebody else. And I think that's better left to your big name chefs in Chicago. They are the ones that can get things going. If you could get Rick Bayless out there talking about this, and Grant Achatz running a truck, then you might have something. You know, then people will fall in line. Anyone else preparing food on the truck, I don't think anyone's really going to care. It's not going to draw them out of their office. Its' not going to make them want to wait in line. But once they realize, once that happens and people realize really good food can come off the truck, it opens it up to everyone else. But I think there is a definite order which it needs to happen in.

These two very candid quotes show the flawed logic of staking a campaign on the need to cook onboard. These vendors developed a concept to comply with the mobile food vending ordinance, and feel that their business will not be more successful if they cook onboard. This demonstrates the complicated politics of orienting a campaign for policy change around one aspect of the ordinance that publicly appears as a legitimate reason to demand policy change, but in practice is not a change that many vendors would benefit from or desire. Of course, there are food trucks in Chicago that developed a business concept around cooking onboard, and they have found ways to get around the ordinance, with mixed success.<sup>6</sup> From what I heard and what I saw during my time in Chicago, this

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<sup>6</sup> During the time that I was in Chicago, there was ambiguity around whether food trucks were able to cook onboard their vehicles at private events and in privately-owned spaces. Two food trucks were explicitly designed for cooking onboard had found ways to make regular stops where they were able to ignore the prohibition on onboard cooking. At events where food trucks were invited, many vendors that would not normally cook onboard often decided to sell a freshly prepared menu item.

would be more work and more costly for vendors. They acknowledged that the food quality would increase, but they were not willing to say that it was necessary for their business.

### *Brick and Mortars v. Mobile Food Vending*

A major tension that exists in the food truck debate in Chicago, certainly, but also across the United States, is brick and mortar restaurants' fear that food trucks will steal customers and have an unfair advantage over them. Restaurants argue that they often have long-standing commitments to the city, including paying taxes, rent, and insurance, as well as employing more people than a food truck likely could. Many of the debates in Chicago centered on alderman Tom Tunney of the 44<sup>th</sup> ward. Tunney is owner of Ann Sather restaurants, and food truck vendors said he had worked hard to make it difficult for food trucks to succeed in Chicago. Tunney is also a longtime member and former chairman of the Illinois Restaurant Association, an affiliation that has rightly led some to question his participation in the mobile food vending policy process. When I asked a vendor about his thoughts on the mobile food vending ordinance, and the campaign to change it, he said

It's really idiotic. I mean, it's Chicago. It's the way business is done here, unfortunately. Shortsighted politicians with...Actually its not so much shortsighted. I don't think a lot of this stuff is based on immediacy, I think its based on greed. Like, the main politician, the main guy that shut down this ordinance has his own restaurant chain, brick and mortar restaurant chain. Obviously it's against his own self-interest if you buy into that logic that you need to have food trucks operating in the city. I think it's insanely short sighted.

This sentiment was echoed in an interview with a lawyer attempting to take legal action to change the food vending ordinance on behalf of the food trucks. He said, “[The law]

exists for one reason and one reason only: to protect a few, politically-connected restaurants from competition,” (*The Huffington Post*, November 14, 2012). In the Chicago case, it is clear that the history of corrupt politics and mistrust between the business community and local politicians figures prominently in these arguments, and only fuels the political resistance and sense of marginalization felt by food trucks.

While people on different sides of the debate argue that they want a robust and world-class food scene in Chicago, they cannot agree on what policy would produce this reality or what economic interests should be prioritized. The actual policies that were put in place were fought vigorously from the food trucks and their advocates, while the restaurants, arguing for their own livelihoods, appeared to be anti-competition, elitist, and motivated by fear that their food could not stand up to food coming off of food trucks. Restaurants were painted as out-of-step and behind the times with what consumers wanted, and readily became the object of critique in this campaign for change on behalf of food trucks. People who enjoyed food trucks, who might otherwise identify as politically progressive, ended up arguing for deregulation, unfettered competition, and other ideals of free market capitalism. Indeed, there are many tensions produced when myriad actors with diverse interests come together within the food truck debate, and this, I argue, is part of why food trucks are such an interesting site for analysis.

### ***The Food Truck Imperative and Changing Food Truck Policy***

In this final section of chapter one, my goal is to elucidate how discourses of food truck liberation are tied into specific economic and urban cultural discourses that have enabled the mobile food vending regulations to change. I focus on efforts on behalf of the

so-called creative class to craft a city that appeals to their interest and provides amenities that are sought after in other urban areas. I then expand my analysis to situate food trucks within the narratives that position food trucks as an economic activity well suited for the contemporary economy. I close this chapter by questioning how and why food trucks have become a necessity for cities such as Chicago and attempt to show how the commitments that undergird these policies and practices spread.

### *Policy Practices*

Beyond consumer demand and the popular discourses circulating through various channels, there are also important questions about how mobile food vending policies get made or revised. In environments where quick solutions to diverse problems are sought, existing policies are willingly taken up no matter their quality or fit for the problem. The quickening of the policy process has occurred because problems can now be identified with increasing speed<sup>7</sup> and solutions are demanded as soon as a ‘problem’ has been framed. While abbreviating the time from problem to policy solution may appear to be beneficial, the quickening of this process has meant less nuanced investigation into the historic and place-based specificities of the problem (Peck, 2011). This has led to increasingly generic responses to problems, as well as to problems only being understood

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<sup>7</sup> Volunteered geographic information (VGI) and other geospatial technologies have made it possible to calculate, monitor, and respond to ‘problems’ in real time like never before. The data produced by urban citizen scientists, and others interested in documenting the ‘ills’ of the city have sped up the time that a problem becomes a solution. This can also be seen in the IBM led campaign to use technology to make “Smart Cities,” or in the Code for America program that has interns develop technology-based solutions to change urban government.

relative to the available policy solutions. In the case of food trucks, the problems are understood in the register of urban decline, high unemployment, and ever-present economic crises, while the solutions are mostly derived from urban economic development strategy within the logics of creative planning. This approach also assumes shared political values such that the policy take up is assumed to produce specific (economic, spatial, social) effects that are desired.

This hasty move to define problems as things that can be solved, or that have already been solved, has limited the range of potential solutions to already existing policy responses. This has come to mean that favorable practices are shared quickly without regard for how elements designed for one location or context fit the new policy environment in which they are being taken up. This manufactured urgency from problem to solution has facilitated the movement of specific policies and created a limited policy ecology where the same solutions are willingly adopted to solve problems that may present very differently (Peck and Theodore, 2010). As increasingly homogenized policies are shared as “fast policy” (Peck, 2002), policy solutions become increasingly homogenized as well. It is in this policy environment that the myriad and diverse aspects of urban life have come to be problematized around and seemingly resolved through the creative class and creative city strategy. Through this policy process, the principles of Florida’s creative class thesis, which I will discuss in the following section, have spread.

I will now turn to what the campaign to revise the mobile food vending policy and food truck-led urban economic development is suggestive of to briefly inquire into the effects of this policy. A focus on effects is important because the rapid pace with which these policies are taken up means that it is unlikely that there will be an inquiry into their



underlying principles, logics, or commitments before they are adopted. We must consider how the uptake of fast policies such as these are mobilized and have the potential to quickly reconfigure—or more deeply entrench—certain economic policies and practices.

### *Creativity Strategy*

The proliferation of food trucks and the policy debate that surrounds their emergence in Chicago is part of a desire to accommodate the creative class. Richard Florida's book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) has greatly informed city planning and economic development strategies in the decade since it was printed. In it, Florida makes the case that cities should be looking to attract and retain the creative class, a group of people that Florida defines as scientists, engineers, architects, educators, writers, artists, and entertainers. While economic growth strategies previously sought to attract and maintain companies, Florida argues that economic growth is now contingent on attracting and satisfying these 'creative' individuals, and as such, the city is supposed to be planned for and remade to satisfy the needs of the creative class.

Florida's creative class thesis has been critiqued by urban scholars as classist, as reworking the economy through the neoliberal(izing) scale of the individual, and as fundamentally ignoring the mobility of capital that is central to the workings of his thesis (Evans 2009; Markusen 2006; Pratt 2008 ). Jamie Peck (2005) has been one of the more vocal critics of the thesis, showing the internal contradictions of Florida's central tenets, and demonstrating the ways that 'creativity' has been framed by those taking up Florida's cause as a remedy to urban decline, but in actuality perpetuates the neoliberal landscape of policy solutions and urban priorities. While academics across the social sciences have critiqued Florida's creative class thesis, planning and development strategies within a

“creative” framework have only proliferated. Since 2002, city governments have enlisted Florida himself, or his ‘creative’ prescriptions, paying millions to reinvent their city in his vision.

The idea that food trucks can lure and retain creative classes is an idea that is also being made by the proprietors of food trucks themselves. They think of themselves as creative and recite the narrative to make a case for their own existence. One of the owners of Hardwood Pizza in Lexington, KY explains, “...an active and vibrant downtown is nearly required these days to keep the coveted ‘creative class.’ Mobile food can be really interesting too, almost artistic.” (Ace Weekly, May 9 2012). A decade of effects has led ‘creative’ professionals to think of themselves and their assumed desirability in Florida-esque terms, making the creative class into the hegemonic paradigm of urban planning and urban economic development.

The food truck imaginary and the creative class thesis encourage those responsible for curating space, including policy makers and other local decision-makers, to be interested in accommodating the urban foodie consumer. In Chicago, this has meant a change to allow food trucks on the street, and in locations in downtown where mobile street vending had previously not been permitted. In Manhattan, food trucks are being brought up freight elevators to accommodate the culinary interests of hip creative workers in advertising and design who are too busy to chase their lunch on their own. In an interview with *The New York Times*, the person responsible for bringing these food trucks to a property in Manhattan justified allowing food trucks into the building:

Denise Rodriguez, a vice president at RXR, said that for those kinds of tenants<sup>8</sup>, “We had to be sure of the quality of the food.” Years ago, she added, “People didn’t want to eat at roach coaches” — traditional lunch trucks, of dubious cleanliness. “But now there is a whole new generation of trucks with high-end food, so we brought in the food-truck association,” she said. “This is a building full of Brooklyn hipsters. Now they have a place to eat.” (Collins, 2012)

While New York has had an active mobile food vending presence for over a century, Rodriguez articulates a need to scrutinize the type of food trucks being welcomed into the building. The trucks that are welcome are designed with these specific creative consumers in mind, and are intended to enhance the experience of those working in the building, rather than detract from it, as Rodriguez seems to be saying the lunch trucks of “dubious cleanliness” would. She explicitly cites the “type of tenant” that would be interested in having these food trucks in the building, and makes a clear distinction between the traditional lunch trucks and the new generation of food trucks. Rodriguez’s willingness to accommodate the interests of food truck enthusiasts is couched in the certain cache that is wacky-kitschy-chic that is seen to be congruous with the demographic profile of the workers in that building.

Out of a desire to attract and retain these so-called creative individuals and through the narrative that food trucks are a hip urban cultural marker, food trucks have become an expected feature of the urban landscape. The pressure to compete and keep pace with other cities is inherent in the creative class doctrine; at any moment, creative professionals could flee for the likes of a place that more successfully appeals to their interests. As such, cities are perpetually on the hook to cater to the perceived interests of

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<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere in the article it is explained that the industrial building was designed for storage and repackaging companies, but now is occupied by advertising and design firms.

this illusive group with discerning tastes. This logic is what led to Chicago's campaign to change its existing mobile food policy to try to keep pace with other US cities. We hear echoes of this inter-urban competition and anxiety-induced urban placemaking in this quote from Chicago's mayor Rahm Emanuel who attempts to justify the need for policy change by saying:

...It helps the city catch up to others across the U.S. that have hundreds more food trucks than the few dozen operating in Chicago. "Fifty other cities have figured out a way to go forward on food trucks...Chicago is known as the Second City and I just wanted to be sure we weren't known as the 52nd city. (Babwin, 2012)

Out of desire for this creative class consumer subject, policy is created to remake the city to the demands of some. These discourses, about accommodating the creative class, and keeping pace with the urban amenities and cultural activities offered by other cities is what necessitated and brought about policy change in Chicago. This demonstrates the reality that is being created and lived up to through a process of consumer demand and acquiescence to the principles of the creative class thesis.

Food trucks have been scripted as a necessary urban amenity without which Chicago cannot claim they are a cultural forerunner. Chicago, then, is left to adopt food trucks before its too late. While simply reproducing a trend that was initiated elsewhere, Chicago is required to make these efforts, or suffer the consequences. Chicago is left to play catch-up by adopting a policy that has been favorable elsewhere, instead of pursuing a vision of the urban that is uniquely Chicago. This homogenization process occurs through the uptake of policy that attempts to harness positive effects of economic activities that have been proven to appeal to this coveted group or 'class' in other cities.

### *Post-Collapse Economic Activity*

This enthusiasm for food trucks is born out of and arrives at the same time as the economic collapse of 2008. It is not a coincidence that food trucks proliferated in this time. Relative to starting a brick and mortar restaurant, the food truck is a business venture that requires significantly less capital. As a result, food trucks have been described as an excellent business opportunity in a time of economic uncertainty or contraction. It has also been described as an economic activity that is well suited for the contingent laborer in an economy of shrinking opportunities and limited stability. Indeed, many of the vendors I talked with found themselves unemployed, or looking to change jobs without many options being provided for them. *Forbes Magazine* explains that food trucks are:

Light-weight, mobile, and able to cater to a niche customer base, the food truck is the perfect restaurant for the gig economy. It's perfectly suited to the mobile worker. Food truck mobile apps can tell people where their favorite restaurant-on-wheels is at any given time. Food truck vendors can avoid the tight regulations that plague their brick-and-mortar competitors (Kain, 2012)

This quote introduces the ways that food trucks have been framed as social and economic solutions to the problems of the contemporary city and the contracting economy. This narrative valorizes food trucks as well suited to an age when there is little commitment required and few opportunities for big moves. In this vision, the banal and once reviled food truck becomes an activity with social and economic benefits. This narration has enabled the food truck to become popular across the US, and to necessitate policy change in Chicago. For example, the so called “low barrier to entry” has made food trucks

appear to be a business with fewer risks, even if they require significant financial commitment.<sup>9</sup> As a new entity in Chicago, it is unclear if these food trucks are actually generating profit for the vendors. While new businesses often struggle to make profit in the initial years of the venture, many of these vendors were more excited about the concept or the potential future success that food trucks would bring, rather than the food truck itself.

Mobility, and the challenges and opportunities related to movement are another characteristic that makes food trucks fit well into the post-economic collapse narrative of success. A food truck is not fixed to any particular neighborhood, street corner, or place. As such, it can easily insert itself into the most visible, productive, and profitable spaces, and just as easily remove itself when those areas no longer prove profitable. Instead of committing to the infrastructure of a brick and mortar, food trucks are seen as a less expensive way to try out a concept or promote a brand. As such, the food truck is seen as inherently temporary, a stepping stone that serves its purpose as a start-up, but does not have aspirations of permanence. This is an economic activity of little commitment that is inherently temporary. Ventures such as these demonstrate an impermanence and lack of commitment that is suggestive of a broader impulse towards temporary interventions, and the hypermobility of capital.

This post-economic collapse narrative has been used in the push to make policies that are favorable to this new generation of food trucks. This narrative valorizes food

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<sup>9</sup> While some vendors were able to get old delivery trucks, or even postal jeeps that they outfitted for their needs, other vendors invested upwards of \$100,000 for a new, fully operational kitchen that would allow them to cook onboard if and when the ordinance changed.

trucks as economic activities that are well suited to a time of economic contraction or decline. These are discourses about the economic effects for the economy, for employment, for urban vibrancy and street life. As such, food trucks are reworking the creative class narrative only to the extent that it posits creativity as a type of ‘making do.’ To be clear, this is a revised narration of the creative class thesis, but not a change to its underpinning principles that are founded on and are reworked through neoliberal economic principles.

Of course, the adoption of policies that support the growth of these activities only after they have been proven elsewhere is fallible. While food trucks appear to be economic drivers with universal appeal, it’s impossible to account for local specificity, and the unpredictable effects when trying to replicate what has been successful elsewhere. In a time when ‘crisis’ has necessitated an interest in proven results and practices, and when cities are desperately trying to adopt already existing policies that have been economic drivers elsewhere, we should not be surprised that Chicago was willing to change decades of anti-mobile food vending policies to accommodate the interests of these food trucks.

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter I have detailed the specific aspects of the mobile food vending ordinance to consider how the rules and regulations spelled out in this ordinance affect vendors’ everyday lives. I have also shown how the creative class thesis and neoliberal economic strategies have narrated food trucks as essential for the economy and essential for the life and trendiness of the city. I have also attempted to unpack the enthusiasm for

foods trucks by focusing on the economic discourses that have narrated them as a necessary fixture of the creative city accommodating the cultural interests of the so-called creative class.

In an attempt to inquire into the ways that food trucks have been useful for or productive of certain economic and cultural commitments, I have considered the ways that they are a material instantiation of particular economic principles and practices. I have also considered the ways that discourses were strategically marshaled to necessitate policy change. In the chapter that follows, I consider how the campaign to change Chicago's mobile food vending engaged with the history of street vending to make a case that these food trucks were different from that negative and marginalized history.



## CHAPTER THREE

### *The Campaign to Revise the Mobile Food Vending Ordinance in Chicago*

In this chapter, I attempt to understand how the new generation of food trucks, as an instantiation of mobile food vending, is different from and has been produced as different from previous examples of mobile food vending, including the lunch cart, the hot dog stand, or the taco truck. The question of difference is significant to my inquiry because I am researching the most recent campaign for change in the mobile food vending policy in Chicago. Arguments for policy change on behalf of the new generation of food trucks hinge on the ways that the policy is understood to be out of step or ill-suited to the new generation of food trucks. The call to revisit the long-standing mobile food vending policy, which was discussed in the previous chapter, had to make a case that the “new” generation of food trucks is different from previous iterations of mobile food vending. I argue that this campaign relies in part on the public perception of the new generation of food trucks, and how they are different—in all the ways that matter for policy change—from previous mobile food vending.

To begin this inquiry, I will review the way that the inherently mobile and often itinerant spatial practices of street vending have implicated this economic activity and made it suspect. I attempt to understand longstanding negative perceptions of street vending to then consider what types of socio-spatial practices or bodily ways of being are permitted in the contemporary city. This is a question about the act of street vending as well as the identity of street vendors. After considering the ways that street vending has been framed as an immanent challenge to the coherence of the hegemonic spatial order, I turn to how this view of street vending has been strategically inversed to present a

legible, desirable form of street vending: the new food trucks and the so-called creative entrepreneurs that own them.

In order to understand how the production of newness, or difference more generally, has inaugurated the process of policy change, in the second part of this chapter I develop a line of questioning around the representational and discursive practices of the new generation of food trucks. I question the curated meaning-making in order to understand how and why food trucks, as highly stylized and designed objects, signal their newness, normality and difference from deviant or otherwise out of place forms of street vending. This focuses on the discursive and material practices that normalize and naturalize these new food trucks, which I argue produces a spatial belonging that is different from how other forms of mobile street vending are perceived. I then offer significant empirical examples around the trope of the “roach coach”, which was discussed in almost all of my interviews with food truck vendors. In this inquiry into the discursive practices of the new generation of food truck vendors, I will show how the constitutive outside, or Other is being evoked by new vendors to bring coherence to this “new” generation of food trucks, and to set it apart from other examples of mobile food vending. I will close with a consideration of the ways this produced difference has been used to necessitate policy change.

### ***Out of Place***

#### *Ordered, Rational Space*

Street vending has been perceived as an affront to otherwise intentionally organized and designed space. Research on this topic—from Mexico City to Quito to

Mumbai—details the modernizing impulse to order and rationalize space such that state-led campaigns and neoliberal governance strategies react against street vending as an affront to an intentionally planned urban environment (Acho-Chi, 2002; Hunt, 2009). Writing about urban informality and the modernist interest in order, Amin Y. Kamete (2013) details how the western desire for rational urban spaces attempts to deal with “unruly” cities in southern Africa. In this article, Kamete explains the way that notions of what he calls the “desired city” are always out of step with the “actually existing city.” Scholars have also documented the disciplining process of street vending in urban public space, including gathering areas such as plazas, and commercial districts. Bromley and Mackie (2009), Crossa (2009) and Steel (2012) document vendors’ resistance strategies to state-led efforts to repress and exclude vendors from public space. Crossa specifically draws out the ways that neoliberal entrepreneurial governance strategies have been employed to privatize otherwise public space so as to exclude certain groups, including street vendors, from being visible in these spaces. Similarly, Stacey Hunt (2009) looks at the way the State attempts to discipline street vendors’ ‘culture of informality’ by moving vending operations inside to formal stalls or permanent markets. These inquiries have also included the frame of public street eating and the private eating of home (Valentine 1998), the everyday practices of vending in a variegated and uncertain legal and political landscape (Devlin, 2011), and the impulse to gentrify, securitize and privatize previously public spaces (Crossa, 2009).

The desire to formalize the informal aspects of street vending, or to erase street vendors’ presence from public spaces, has been critiqued by these authors and others for its underlying logics that work to remove vendors from outside spaces, as well as to

encourage them into more formal and organized capitalism and more regulated and standardized labor. Formalization can be understood as a technique of calculation that disciplines vendors and vending activities by compartmentalizing them into specific spaces that only then are permitted to be legible and visible. The need to attend to formalization as a disciplinary practice should not discount the very real health and safety concerns around food preparation that have legitimized the call for regulations that are intended to protect the public from unsafe food handling practices.<sup>10</sup> Rather, I simply mean to call critical attention to the discourses of safety and cleanliness, and the ways they are marshaled to make some vending practices acceptable, and others suspect in the call for revisions to the ordinance

Writing from the perspective of architecture, and the impulse to make ordered built environments, Yatmo (2008) argues that street vending, and importantly, vendors themselves, are urban elements that are “out of place.” She writes, “...rejection of street vendors represents an attempt to achieve visual order in the urban environment” (388). Through explaining that planners and other architects of the city perceive street vendors to be an affront to the deliberately ordered built environment, Yatmo highlights the ways that the socio-spatial practices of vending appear unpredictable in both the spaces they occupy, their practices in space, and the time that they are present. This follows a traditional planning logic which aims to minimize unpredictable elements that have the potential to offend the established spatial ordering. The argument is predicated on a belief

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<sup>10</sup> The irony of the campaign to reverse what have previously been considered health and safety regulations in the city that is the setting of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, is not lost on me here.

that perceptions of how to act in space, and what is normal, natural or expected spatial practice is dictated by architecture or the built environment more generally (See Mitchell, 2003). Thus, street vending as a type of spatial practice that disorders space—or at least invites an aspect of chaos to an otherwise logical milieu—should be discouraged according to this logic.

### *The Production of Space through Practice*

In his book *In Place/Out of Place* (1996), Tim Cresswell writes,

...spatial structures and the system of places provide historically contingent but durable “schemes of perception” that have an ideological dimension. In particular, the place of an act is an active participant in our understanding of what is good, just, and appropriate. (p. 16)

For Cresswell, places are defined by our actions, or practice, in them. As such, the everyday use of a space constitutes that space, and actively reinforces its meaning. Established practices, then, communicate the intended use of space and present as a visually ordered landscape. Reiterative spatial practice has a naturalizing affect that produces a seemingly coherent spatial order. The meaning ascribed to space through everyday practice allows places to be useful for enforcing order in society, without having to legislate or actively enforce that order. Making the established order appear as a natural order allows power to work through space without exposing itself. As such, the pull, inertia, or reiterative aspects of normalized practice maintains hegemonic order through the appearance of fixed and coherent space.

While Yatmo emphasized the built environments’ role in conditioning spatial practice, Cresswell’s argument emphasizes the ways that ideology informs and conditions spatial practice to construct a socially understood meaning of space. The way that the

ruling ideology dissolves into, or rather maps onto space is especially effective for maintaining power. The appearance that a behavior is natural allows space to maintain or enforce dominant ideologies without having to explicitly reference its governing principles. Cresswell also writes about the ways that discourse works to normalize actions and make them appear common sense. Much of his book addresses the actions, behaviors and identities that intentionally or otherwise transgress this normalized order and are made to appear out of place. Cresswell's writings on ideology, ways of being, and transgression have significantly influenced my thinking about street vending and vendors.

We can also think about this in terms of what Rancière calls the partition of the sensible. In calling attention to the spatial sense making, or logics of space, Rancière explains the way the symbolic and material work together to create and maintain a hegemonic order. He writes that spatio-political regime defines what can be seen, said, or enacted in space through the logics of distribution. Rancière (2010) writes,

It consists, before all else, in recalling the obviousness of what there is, or rather of what there is not, and its slogan is: 'Move along! There's nothing to see here!'...It asserts that the space for circulating is nothing but the space of circulation. Politics, by contrast, consists in transforming this space of 'moving-along', of circulation, into a space for the appearance of the subject: the people, the workers, the citizens. It consists in re-figuring space, that is in what is to be done, to be seen and to be named in it. (p. 37)

The established spatial order, according to Rancière then, has a policing effect that works to maintain power. Contingency can disrupt this dominant spatial logic, however, and signal an alternate spatial logic, which is the space of dissensus. In the disruption of the established order, politics is inaugurated and the established spatial order can then be contested. The potential for politics, then, is inextricably bound with and informed by the way we use space, the way we understand who has a right to that space, and the way

interactions happen in that space. As Mustafa Dikec (2012) notes, "...space is a mode of political thinking, and different spatial imaginaries inform different understandings of politics" (p. 670). In a variety of ways, food trucks, or street vending more generally, disrupts the produced normality of this established order, and thus, contains the potential to inaugurate politics through new spatial thinking; in its capacity to gesture at an alternative spatial order, mobile street vending has been made to appear deviant. I will discuss the spatial practice that aides in the appearance of deviance in the following sections.

### *Mobility and Ephemeral Spatial Practice*

Mobility, and the challenges and opportunities related to movement, are central to food trucks. As Cresswell notes, mobility appears to be a kind of superdeviance that has historically implicated mobile food vending. Mobility disturbs the idea that space can be segmented into clearly defined places. Because the easiest way to establish order is through the division of space, mobility becomes a basic form of disorder and chaos—constantly defined as transgression and trespass. It is no accident, then, that the control of mobility is foremost in the minds of those who have an interest in maintaining their own order (p. 87). Mobility has enabled food vendors to seek out customers, and to vend when and where they find it convenient or profitable. While this economic activity relies on movement, food truck vendors have found ways to control their image, and to prevent their vending and themselves from being thought of as deviant, undesirable or problematic.

The ephemerality of mobile street vending counters the logic of the city as an ordered, designed, and planned environment that is predictable and cannot easily be changed. The temporary nature of street vending allows street vendors to occupy a space otherwise unable to be occupied, even for a short amount of time. The idea of temporarily occupying a space, no matter how briefly can be understood as a sly use of otherwise unusable space. Street vending mundanely yet repeatedly ruptures the established meaning of space and inaugurates the possibility of a new order through its everyday practice. To the viewer, this temporary occupation can be read as resistance; the fleeting possession of space for activities that are viable, but not necessarily permissible is an affront to the coded use of that space and a moment when that space can be rewritten. In this intervention, the capitalist order has the potential to be subverted or rewritten. The spatial rhythm of street vending, then, is a sort of chaos that invites new meaning into space, and opens up the opportunity for the space to resist the meaning that would otherwise be affiliated with its use. This floating meaning hinges on the very ephemerality of the activity in the space that allows it to be occupied in the first place.

In this case, the economic activity of street vending presents an alternative to organized, sanctioned, formal, capitalist street life. As such, street vending has the potential to—as Rancière would say—inaugurate politics because it gestures at a use of space beyond that which is sanctioned or orderly. It makes sense, then, that the presence of street vending as an extra-legal or unauthorized activity would demonstrate the contradictions inherent in the established order through intervening in and disrupting established spatial practices. It is the aspects of street vending that express precarity, or contingency that make street vending such a powerful spatio-political intervention into



the established order. Without its momentary character, the space would actually be recoded, thus losing its ability to hint at, or let shimmer, the potential for something other than the established order to exist.

### *Street Vendors*

While much of this literature foregrounds the activity or practice of street vending, there is also important work done on the way that the socially constructed identity of street vendors influences the perceptions of their practices. Kate Swanson's (2007) scholarship looks at the case of indigenous beggars in Ecuador to question revanchist policies and urban renewal strategies that enroll discourses of cleanliness and modernity to deny the right to appear in the street. In her article, Swanson skillfully connects the ways that "the aesthetics of the city and the aesthetics of the body" (p. 709) are linked such that vendors whose visible identity characteristics offend the aesthetics of the city are denied the right to vend on the street. Swanson concludes underscoring that this urban agenda furthers "hygienic racism that deepens pre-existing racial-spatial divides" (p. 725). These practices of marginalization and erasure have met many itinerant street vendors, and have been critiqued as state-led disciplinary processes of oppressed populations including new immigrants, racialized minorities, and the poor.

Street vendors are the embodiment of intervention, the persistent wedge in an ordered environment, and evidence of the occupation of space that is not supposed to be occupied, either at all, or by people like them. As such, it is not just the spatial practice of street vending that disrupts the established order, but the presence of racialized, classed, and otherwise Othered bodies in a space they were not supposed to be visible that codes

street vending as a deviant act. The discursive history of mobile food vending in Chicago is rooted in ideas of differentiation and founded on the way that bodies are coded in racialized and classed ways, such that some bodies are permissible or not offensive in public urban space, while other bodily ways of being are discussed as “offending” the spatial order. In the case of mobile street vending, discourses of being in place and out of place have as much to do with spatial practice as they have to do with bodily presentation and ways of being in the streetscape.

As a result of its ability to be reread and have meaning reascribed, street vending has the potential to demonstrate some of the more nuanced aspects of the workings of the contemporary economy, city, and subject. John Cross (2000) writes about the shifts in the way that vending as an economic activity has been represented, engaged with, and can be understood through the logics of modernity and postmodernity. He writes

... the very fluidity of the notion of the informal sector is what makes it such a fascinating—and in a certain sense “post-modern”— field of study: it defies the simplistic categorization process and throws all definitions into doubt. In other words, it points out that the distinction between “appropriate” and “inappropriate” economic behavior is not a matter of laws or rules, but of definition, motives and power. The distinction is above all not one of legality (which is a purely formal category), but the ability of competing interest groups to impose and enforce their own perceptions of legality. In this case, informality often appears in the grey area between the imposition of laws (typically favoring large businesses and well-organized unions) and the lack of enforcement of those laws due to a combination of the inability of the state to do so and the ability of the poor and relatively unorganized to thwart enforcement. (p. 33)

Cross’s observations about the motivations that animate an inquiry into street vending are significant because they highlight the ways that street vending can be perceived differently and put to different ends depending on the framing of it as an economic activity. As I have shown throughout this thesis, street vending generally, and mobile

food vending in particular have a long history as an activity that has been signified and resignified. The way street vending and street vendors are represented draws upon a combination of a variety of cultural, economic and political factors. Representation affects the way that policy is made, and the way that street vending is framed as a commercial activity.

In this section, I have argued that street vending as an economic activity and spatial practice has persistently been perceived as out of place, disorderly, and an affront to the streetscape or built environment. Through mobility, and thus a fleeting presence in particular places, street vending has been thought of as disrupting the otherwise planned and disciplined space that is designed to appear rational and coherent. The example of street vending demonstrates that the range of acceptable (inoffensive, or so outside of the established order it is illegible) street life has been whittled down to purposeful economic activity in, or movement through a place. Following this logic, the only way street vendors will be considered ‘in place’ is when their ‘out of place’ characteristics are able to be ignored due to the prominence or legibility of characteristics that render them ‘in place.’

I have also argued that the identity of a street vendor—in their bodily ways of being and racialized and classed bodily presentations—have been coded and rendered suspect elements of the streetscape. It is, then, the very aspects of a vendor’s identity that makes them disliked, or the frenetic act of street vending in need of ordering, where the possibility of alternatives can be found. Now that I have established the ways that street vending and vendors have been perceived to be disorderly and unpredictable, I will show the ways that the new food trucks attempt to show that they are not deviant, which I

believe is a question of representation and curated meaning-making. To do this, I will focus on the discursive and material practices that normalize and naturalize these new food trucks.

### ***Producing Difference- In Place***

#### *Strategic Discourse*

This “new” iteration of intentionally stylized mobile vending in the form of food trucks is part of a long history of street vending in Chicago. While street vending and mobile food vending—in the form of the chuck wagon, or the lunch cart, or in Chicago the tamale or elote vendor—has a long history, these new food trucks have been seen as, and actively produced as a different form of street food. They are a post-economic collapse, recession friendly, consumer driven, hyper mobile, gourmet, local, social media savvy remaking or reincarnation of mobile food. The idea that some food is better than others is actively produced and signaled through the aggressively stylized presentation of the truck and the appearance of the vendor; these aesthetic markers stand in for, or code this food truck as palatable to the foodies’ tastes and taste. In this section, I will first look at the discursive practices of the new generation of food trucks around the trope of the “roach coach”, and then I will look at the curated meaning-making that vendors engage in to make their food trucks appear visually desirable, in place, or positive.

#### *Difference*

The new generation of food trucks has manufactured their identity through strategies that differentiate them from other forms of mobile food vending. This process

of identity formation through othering is one strategy that food truck vendors and their advocates have used to produce their own identity and activities as legible, coherent and different from other forms of street vending in all the ways that matter to justify policy change. What Derrida has called the ‘constitutive outside’ has been used to create an identity for the new generation of food trucks through what it is not. The “new” food truck and the “new” food truck vendor are being produced in and through a relation of opposition to a version of street vending that has been thought of as suspect or deviant.

While the socio-political processes that produce this distinction are themselves interesting and important to consider, Chantal Mouffe (2005) reminds us that the lines of division, or the grounds upon which these identities are set in opposition are just as important as the way the identities are produced. The way you understand identity produces antagonisms, such that the alliances you create are grounds for politics. As Mouffe writes,

I have found the notion of the ‘constitutive outside’ particularly useful [. . .] because it unveils what is at stake in the constitution of identity. . . . Once we have understood that every identity is relational and that the affirmation of a difference is a precondition for the existence of any identity, i.e. the perception of something ‘other’ which constitutes its ‘exterior’, we are, I think, in a better position to understand Schmitt’s point about the ever present possibility of antagonism and to see how a social relation can become the breeding ground for antagonism. (p. 15)

In his book *In Place/Out of Place* Tim Cresswell also writes about the way that populations or actions can be rendered out of place. Positional ideologies, as Cresswell refers to them, actually affirm what is normative, ordered, or in place, by defining what is deviant. That is, by having an identity or practice to gesture to that is uncommon, not normal, or deviant, normalcy of the established and conforming order is underscored. This description of the ordering and management of everyday life is an excellent way to

think about how the normalized and geographically ‘in place’ new generation of food trucks has been constructed, especially in contrast to other mobile food vending trucks, which have long been constructed as exterior, other, or inherently deviant. In the following section, I will focus on the discourses that are enrolled in the production of the new generation of food trucks to make them separate or different from mobile food vending writ large.

### *Discourses of the Roach Coach*

Mobile food trucks have often been referred to as “roach coaches”, and have historically been perceived as unsanitary and illegal. Fear of food poisoning still appears in descriptions of food trucks, and is a powerful deterrent to understanding food trucks as something that is normal. Discourses that have imbued food trucks with a lack of cleanliness have discredited food trucks writ large. In order to manage the perception that all food trucks are unsavory, a new generation of street food vendors has actively tried to separate themselves from long-standing negative perceptions of mobile food vending.

Vendors produce this separation by enrolling negatives tropes of street food vending to construct a version of street vending that they frame and critique as undesirable. Through their discursive practices, these food truck vendors are actively shaping the conversation around street vending, and creating two different groups of street vendors. This difference, which separates these new food trucks from a history of mobile food vending, is a simple rhetorical and visual move that instead of revising narratives of street vending generally, creates a distinct identity upon which policy can shift in their favor. This makes it easier for policy change to be inaugurated on their behalf, rather than justifying the revision or undoing nearly a century of mobile food

vending law. In this production, vendors usually call forth the image of the roach coach.

In the following example, a food truck vendor that I interviewed described the difference.

He said:

I think that, you know, Chicago for decades actually, there was only one type of food truck and that was the roach coach. That's the standard pickup truck, the chrome plating on the back of it. Those guys, the quality of food they serve off there, is not there. It's definitely lower grade. They work, there are too many companies that work in the city, Triple A and Thunderbird, and they work off a completely different business model than we do...Eating off the food trucks now people are seeing, like, the quality of food is much different than off those vehicles, but we still get a lot of people who think, they go by, they go "oh roach coach, don't eat that." There was like an older couple last week, the wife wanted to eat and the husband actually pulled her and said, "oh, the food is crap off those things."

This vendor calls on the long history of street vending in Chicago and attempts to distinguish his business as a different business model with a higher quality food. The vendor is articulating that his business is hampered by this negative imaginary of the roach coach, which has made him have to actively show his customers that they should trust his food. In the closing example, the vendor expresses his frustration that, despite his best efforts to communicate to customers that his business is *clearly* different, his food truck is confused with the reviled roach coach. Another vendor described it this way:

They call those trucks roach coaches because Triple A and Thunderbird, they've basically got the lockdown on that business. By law, people who rent from Triple A and Thunderbird, those cars, you can go over there now and rent one. You don't have to put a name or anything on it, you're anonymous. It just says Triple A or Thunderbird, whichever company you rent from. And you're supposed to buy the food from them, but a lot of people will buy one or two things, and then they go around by Cermak and

Paulina<sup>11</sup> and load up illegally, from people that either cook it at home, or buy it from a restaurant that is about to throw it out. It's mystery food. You don't know what the hell you're really getting. You don't know if it's expired, so they call them roach coaches, and they're nasty.

In this vendor's narration of the lawlessness of these vehicles and the illegality of the food they sell, it is clear that he has a strong distaste for this form of mobile food vending. He is incredulous at their anonymity, and stages his argument around the inability to know who, exactly, sold the food you purchased and where it came from. He also appears an authority on the exact practices that make it an unacceptable way to provision food and engage in the food economy. In no way does he consider himself or his truck through this framing. By numerating the aspects of the roach coach that are unsavory and different from his own truck, this vendor is communicating that not all forms of mobile food vending are the same, and that some, certainly, are not to be trusted. He continues this line of thinking, extending his disdain to the arena of policing and enforcement. He says:

The city is like, all they want to do is hassle us. Why don't you bother roach coaches? A roach coach could like run you over, and what are you going to report? "Oh, a Triple A truck ran me over!" "Oh, well there are thousands of them, which one was it?" ... Roach coaches were typically selling to construction workers, or off the beaten path places, so the restaurant industry did not care about them, the city did not care about them, they just let them do their thing, even though they are supplying themselves, most of them illegally. But, now us, who are trying to do everything right, getting permits, going by sanitation codes and things like that. No, no, we're the problem. We're the bad apples here.

Again, the vendor from the previous quote demonstrates his anger that 'roach coaches' and his food truck are conceived the same way but have not received the same treatment

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<sup>11</sup> An intersection in the lower west side section of Chicago.



under the law. In this quote, the vendor extends the idea of their lawlessness beyond his explanation of the untrustworthiness of their food, and even posits that the truck itself could inflict bodily harm with no consequences. He is angry that his food truck is understood as similar, but that, as he understands it, his truck has been more aggressively policed, when “roach coaches” have gone unnoticed, despite their extra-legal acts. Throughout both quotes, the vendors are trying to grapple with the injustice of roach coaches escaping the political ire of the restaurant lobby. They are also trying to underscore just how unfair it is that these “roach coaches” seem to escape the legal and political battles that the new generation of food trucks has faced in Chicago. This vendor was attempting to call attention to the state of exception that made these vendors not subject to the rigid enforcement that he felt like he was experiencing, while simultaneously undermining their image and separating himself from it.

Narratives that enroll ‘roach coaches’ as a positional foil actively create the image of these new food trucks as separate from other forms of food on wheels. As food truck vendors attempt to revise visions of mobile food vending to frame their truck in a positive light, they are actively remaking the meaning of their trucks in their discourses and actions. As they try to fix the meaning of their mobile food as positive, they also work actively to try to fix the meaning of previous food vending as negative. Of course, plenty escapes this attempt to fix meaning, and that is part of the frustration we hear here.

### *Visual Presentation*

Food truck vendors and food truck advocates have worked to render new food trucks a desirable and interesting aspect of the streetscape through managing the image

and identity of the truck. The visual presentation of most trucks—from the truck’s name, to its aesthetic and design, to its location, to the appearance of the vendor, to the food it served—is thoughtfully planned, and realized. In this section I show how strategies of representation that control what is visible, recognizable, or legible produce a food truck that, unlike other forms of mobile food vending or street vending, are not deviant, are instead, “in place.” These strategies distract from the reality that the food trucks in Chicago share more with the reviled roach coach than it does with the food trucks that have become popular elsewhere.

For example, the food being served on food trucks in other cities came from high quality ingredients, or sophisticated preparation techniques yielding gourmet or haute cuisine. The prohibition on cooking or preparing food onboard the food trucks has made this type of food truck difficult to replicate in Chicago. In cities like Portland and Boston, the food being served on these trucks has stuck to an affordable, recession-friendly pricing. That is not the case, however in Chicago. My lunch would routinely cost eight to ten dollars for food that had been prepared many hours earlier and had been kept at a stable temperature for hours. This meant that no food could have fresh fruit or vegetables on it, since those items would not hold up to the strong heat. I would also routinely be presented with food that had wilted, was soggy, or was over or undercooked. Only a few of the 32 trucks I surveyed claimed to be using organic or local ingredients, and even less claimed an interest in preparing food that could be seen as haute or innovative. When I asked one of my interviewees if he thought his customers thought that the food coming off his truck was ‘gourmet’, he said:

I’m sure some of them do, but again, I think that’s perception. It’s totally subjective. Quite frankly, I would prefer that they find it fun more than

gourmet. That's why everything is, everything is separate. It's a jigsaw puzzle of a meal. The other trucks will give you this sandwich, it's all in there. It's in the bag, its heavy. It's awesome. It's pretty tasty. I want you to be able to appreciate all of these different things for what they are... But mainly I just want people to have fun with it. I don't care if they think its gourmet. I want them to (pause) be satisfied. Not just physically to sated (pause) I want their souls to be satisfied by my food. I really do. That's good food to me.

This vendor attempts to frame the food coming off of his truck as 'fun' and 'satisfying to the soul' because it does not conform to the aspects that have made food trucks popular in other cities. This may be because many of the vendors do not have a background in food, but instead have backgrounds in marketing, or other industries, with only a personal interest in food. This is very different than in other cities where food trucks have been the pet projects of highly skilled chefs. This lack of attention to the quality or preparation of the food coming off of food trucks, combined with the higher price point of the food, makes me wonder why people choose these food trucks to begin with. This is likely a combination of desires to support a local food economy, as well as an interest in supporting a food truck scene more specifically. In many cases, people might not realize that the food trucks in Chicago are serving food that has been kept at a stable temperature for hours, and of questionable quality. This is the very critique of the roach coaches that these vendors' engage to manufacture an appearance of difference.

### *The Image of the Food Truck*

For these reasons, the visual has been one way to align these trucks with the successful food truck imaginary coming from elsewhere, within the laws of the mobile food vending ordinance in Chicago. By controlling the visual image, these food trucks are able to emphasize the aspects of the food truck that conform with the imaginary of hip,

gourmet, or haute food trucks in other cities across the United States. The food trucks of the new generation are often painted in bright colors with inviting and professionally designed graphics. They often have creative or clever names, and a business theme that appeals to their intended clientele. A prominent sweets truck, in response to my question about food truck concept, said:

Well we just knew that it was going to be green, basically. It had to be green. We thought it was eye catching. It would be a downfall and an advantage at the same time because people can see it, but then a downfall because you actually get seen by the police, and people that maybe you don't want people seeing you. Because, you know parking is an issue, sometimes you have to kind of skirt it a little bit. So there's the upsides and downsides to it. And also the color of the Peapod truck<sup>12</sup>, which is also an upside and a downside because every time people see the Peapod truck, they see us too. They get a little excited, and then they get a little sad. So, it's kinda good.

This vendor details the strategies of visibility and invisibility that come with the design of her truck. She is pleased that every time her customers misrecognize her for the Peapod truck, they are also thinking about her truck. Since the food truck cannot rely on a location to signify the meaning of the food they are selling—like restaurants in high rent districts of the city—communicating the significance of the food truck becomes very important.

The viewer performs this same analysis of food trucks, making sense of them, reading the signs and signifiers to come to a decision about their meaning. This act of discerning or differentiating when food is concerned, makes sense—we are conditioned to see, smell, and taste our way to pleasure and away from molding, rotting, or unsafe food. This is a relation between food and body that is intimate—a taking in, an

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<sup>12</sup> The Peapod truck is a grocery delivery truck

incorporation, an assimilation, a metabolism of food into body. Discerning or differentiation then, is not just socially at stake, but correct viewing and interpretation is necessary for a person's health and safety.

### *Mobility as Desirable*

The vendors of the new generation of food trucks and their advocates have inversed mobility-as-deviance and instead framed food trucks' mobility around scarcity. The appearance of scarcity, which brick and mortar restaurants can only establish through limiting their hours, has produced a certain cache that is undeniably positive and essential to the success of the new generation of food trucks. This view was articulated by Chicago Yelp user Adriane P. on her October 23, 2011 review of the Haute Sausage food truck. She wrote, "Some of the appeal of food trucks is it's like a scavenger hunt to find them. Or maybe when you're out and twiddling your thumbs they pop up like a bonus in a video game. Score!" Adriane P.'s review of the Haute Sausage truck, in which she comments on the favorable effects of the truck's mobility, clearly constructs this truck's mobility around the exclusivity and playfulness associated with something that needs to be found. These new food trucks rely on social media to announce their location, and on food truck location aggregator websites, such as Roaming Hunger, to track their travel patterns. These new technologies enable a new level of mobility that in some senses, is very fixed, or findable.

While the early stages of the food truck movement were characterized by the food trucks' mobility around the city, formal and scheduled gatherings, such as pods in Portland and Off-the-Grid in San Francisco, have moved food trucks away from their

origins as spontaneous and unpredictable, to where they are now increasingly fixed, regulated, and disciplined aspects of the streetscape. Fears of getting sick and being unable to find the business that wronged you are no longer. The meaning of mobility then, has changed, and been resignified such that these new food trucks gain credibility as they become increasingly predictable facets of the urban

### *The Selectivity of Social Media*

In addition, the new food truck has a virtual presence that projects an interesting and desirable identity of the food truck and the food truck vendor. Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter have been employed to produce an interesting and coherent identity for the new generation of food trucks. Reviews from amateur foodies on websites such as Yelp and FourSquare, clever tweets about the daily menu from vendors, up-to-the-minute location information, and a sleek website come together to change the image of the reviled “roach coach” into an aggressively stylized new generation of food trucks with a hip following of foodie consumers. The identity of the truck is constructed through the ways that the vendor communicates with his or her customers on social media. The voice and tone of the communications—sassy, kind, ironic—creates an identity for the truck that resonates with a particular population that these trucks want as their consumer.

Through social media, food trucks have access to an already pre-sorted group of desirable and hip consumers. Users of this technology are clued in to cultural trends and eager to be part of something novel. The subset of the population that is on Twitter is already an in-crowd of consumers. In the morning, food truck vendors communicate with their followers via general announcements about their location and food offerings.

Vendors will make direct contact with food truck enthusiasts on campuses, in office buildings, or at locations that they are known to frequent. By adding these enthusiasts' Twitter handle or the hashtag #foodtruck to a message, food truck vendors are able to directly target their audience.

There are a few instances when this produced division has been complicated. These aspects stand out as contradictions in an otherwise aggressive attempt to produce a stark difference between the new food trucks and previous iterations of mobile street vending. These moments when food trucks argue for the need to have the mobile food vending ordinance changed are instances when they are trying to make this appear as an issue for all, when in fact the benefits would only accrue to some. This is the difference between the rhetoric and the reality of what would come from change. These gestures at justice or equity are evoked in name only. As I understand them, they are nominal attempts to justify the need for policy change without actually bringing about change.

For example, in this example of inquiring about food trucks and their interest in serving food deserts, instead of just vending downtown, one vendor said,

I think so because some of the tougher neighborhoods, as you could say in the city, need, I think they really need to have their own minorities step up. And you know, not a lot of people can afford a building. But being able to afford a food truck is a lot more feasible, and being in those parts of the city, would really give a boost economically to the area and supply better quality food, cause right now, there are a lot of areas that people eat, literally eat crap. And everything is processed, which is what they eat, which is bad. Everyone knows of the obesity problem in our country is bad. Food trucks, I think can definitely help out in that regard.

In this case, the vendor is positioning food trucks as a healthy alternative to the food otherwise available. He acknowledges that there is a need, but he does not claim responsibility for fulfilling this need. By explaining that these “tougher neighborhoods”

need to “have their own minorities step up” this vendor marks downtown as the population he has the right to vend to, while food deserts should be served by people from neighborhoods with need.<sup>13</sup> While it makes sense that quality food could be brought to these areas, and there are ample examples of this very thing<sup>14</sup>, this vendor has expressed no interest in changing his vending practices to remedy this acknowledged problem. It is easy for this vendor to suggest food trucks could be a solution to food deserts, unhealthy food options, and obesity without making any claim that he will be the person changing this situation. Under capitalist profit-maximizing logic, even changes in policy to incentivize food trucks to vend in these locations will not change practices, or the perceptions of who or what is responsible for making this change.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I considered how the practice of street vending and the racialized and classed identities of street vendors have long been framed as deviant, or out of place. I then considered the ways that the new generation of food trucks has produced themselves—through discourse and representation—as different from the history of street vending in Chicago. As part of this I considered how food trucks’ mobility has been managed into palatable displays of exciting-not-frightening movement. I also questioned the way the food truck vendors enrolled the trope of the roach coach as a positional foil to produce their own identity in opposition to that deviant form of mobile food vending.

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<sup>13</sup> This vendor does not live downtown.

<sup>14</sup> Including Fresh Moves in Chicago  
<http://www.theatlanticcities.com/neighborhoods/2011/11/grocery-stores-wheels/528/>



Through evaluating these strategies, it is clear that the new generation of food trucks has worked hard and been successful at inverting the previous deviance of street vending as a practice and street vendor as an identity to make a case that the mobile food vending ordinance needs to be changed on their behalf. The fight to wrestle the image of the old food truck from the “new” has shifted the meaning-making process squarely away from the image of the “roach coach”, into the realm of hip, foodie interests.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The Food Truck as Site of Subject Formation*

In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to provide rich examples of the everyday lives of food truck vendors and the discourses that celebrate and critique their actions in very public ways. In this chapter, I will consider these material and discursive practices as conditions of a certain kind of subjectivity. My goal is to question what type of subject positions are called forth and come into being through the food truck movement. I have chosen to focus on subject formation because, beyond careful attention to the everyday practices of food truck vending, and the discourses and strategies of differentiation that were part of the campaign for policy change, I have come to think of the food truck as a site where certain politics and ideologies are able to be (re)configured. This invites larger, and I would argue, more significant questions about what priorities, logics, and commitments food trucks are suggestive of, and useful for. This inquiry, then, explores two subjectivities: street food vendors as entrepreneurs, and consumers as foodies. I will briefly review the relevant literature on subjectivity to explain my orientation to subject formation.

#### *Subject formation*

Subjectivities are formed in and through discourse and made in social practice. In the case of food trucks, discourses frame the labor and identity of vendors, and recursively influence how vendors understand and make sense of their own identity. In their everyday experiences of mobile food vending, these vendors occupy the position of a valorized or marginalized vendor, which in the food truck movement has been thought

of as a certain type of economic actor. This argument hinges on the idea that subjects are formed or interpolated through discourse and practice, and while they appear autonomous, are immanent to the conditions in which they are formed. We can ask, then, what subject comes into being in and through the food truck milieu. Mitchell Dean writes in *Governmentality*:

This free subject is a situated one...It is found within its relationship to family, community and culture. It is situated in organic networks of affect, identification and care. It is also situated within 'artificial' but no less real networks of identification based on lifestyle choice, habitation, profession and career path, patterns of consumption, and voluntary association. Finally, it is institutionally and organizationally located. The free subject is found in the workplace, the community organization, the school, the home and the shopping mall. It is here that its choices will be made sovereign and its decisions will be calculating. (p.193)

Following Dean, the subject is located in and constituted through relations in these institutional and organizational spaces. The proliferation of spaces for association has allowed myriad ways for the subject to appear autonomous, even as their subjectivity is lodged in wider networks of power and structural commitments. The illusion of the sovereign subject works to relegate the process of subject formation and divorce new subjectivities from the economic, political and cultural processes that inaugurate them. As processes of subjection appear insignificant or illegible, the processes that inaugurate them and the logics that underpin them are ignored even as they frame the very landscape of possible subject positions and condition of possibility that bring these certain subjects into being.

Gokariksel and Secor (2009) expertly document the constitution of the subject in and through ideology in their discussion of the veiling-fashion industry in Turkey. In their analysis, Gokariksel and Secor show the ways that Islamic expression and values are tethered to neoliberal capitalism such that identity is redefined through and adapts to the

demands of the neoliberal context in the form of *Homo Islamicus*. This is not to say that nothing is sacred or in excess of neoliberal economic ideology, but the authors' analysis of veiling-fashion shows the complicated negotiations of identity in, through, and against neoliberalism and economic restructuring. By exploring the ways that the neoliberal subject squares her or his practices with the values of neoliberalism, we can see how Islamic identity, or any identity for that matter, can incorporate, adapt to, or transform to a new normal around neoliberal ideals. In the process of (re)forming identity, it is clear that the subject is flexible and able to assimilate ideological or political commitments that might otherwise appear to contradict the very principles of its founding. These observations are particularly useful in considering what subject can be inaugurated in and through food trucks that might otherwise appear impossible.

Finally, I want to end my brief overview of subject formation with a specific consideration of worker subjectivities and the identity of the laboring subject. In their writings, which apply Lacanian theory to work and organizational functioning, Arnaud and Vanheule (2005) discuss the way that "Human subjects are caught in a network of discourses that "speak" through them (one could even say: that "cause" them) and where they unconsciously situate themselves" (p. 362). While perceptions of identity in the realm of work previously hinged on an understanding of the perceived significance of the type of employment (doctor, lawyer, teacher), or the reputation of an individual's employer (GE, Coca-Cola), importance has now come to rest on the individual characteristics of the laborer. Work identity, then, has changed from an association with a type or work, or place of work, to the characteristics of the laborer him or herself. The significance of work, then, has come to rest on the valorized capacities of the laboring

subject; whether the characteristics of the individual laborer are legible in the ways the economy demands determines how the laborer is understood and perceived. To perform work that expresses certain desirable skills or affectations, or at least to be able to narrate your labor in this register, is one way the working subject has willingly taken on these embodied expressions of a new type of work. To this, Arnaud and Vanheule explain, and offer a warning:

From the Lacanian point of view, we claim that the activity of work (as a typical human occupation) is also structurally non-satisfying. This means that it is structurally impotent in providing specific satisfactions to those who engage in work. The idea that work could provide the subject with fulfilling added value is an illusory product of wishful thinking: work is nothing but work. (p.363)

The need to be subjected to be legible, or the willingness to be ‘hailed’ as a condition of existence, is clear. The worker is created in the discourses of the economy, the values of the employer, and the needs of the job market. Subjects, who are fundamentally dissatisfied and desire legibility and coherence in times of waning subject potentialities, are easily able to misrecognize themselves in these revised discourses of work. In times when work is merging with, or becoming fundamentally unrecognizable from a previously distinct “personal life”, it makes sense that coherent visions of ideal workers would incite a turn towards this subjectivity. As such, in the discourses of work, or in the practices of the laboring subject, a particularly fertile site for new subjectivities is taking shape.

### ***Chapter Outline***

In this chapter, I will further consider the subjectivity of the vendors of the food truck movement, through one characteristic that persistently appears in the narration of

their identity: entrepreneur. For this inquiry, I will draw on the narration of food truck vendors from media sources, as well as from interviews I conducted with food truck vendors. Through considering the discourse and practices of the food truck vendor as creative entrepreneur, I will show how the food truck entrepreneur is a subjectivity constructed within a larger narrative of the worker subject, or neoliberal laborer. As everyday practices and discourses of identity become sedimented, the individual vendor comes to navigate, occupy and perform the subjectivity of the creative entrepreneur. As such, the food truck should be understood not only as a form of economic activity suitable for the contemporary economy, but also as a site where notions of the city, subject, and economy are reworked and revised.

I will then briefly consider the consumer subject in the form of the foodie, who is the target for these food trucks. The identity category of ‘foodie’ is more significant than its appearance as a consumer subject for food trucks, and I will attempt to contextualize the food truck foodie within this broader subjectivity. The identity of the foodie has gained prominence in the last decade and has come to signify a suite of identity characteristics. I will conclude the chapter with a consideration of the ways that this entrepreneurial subject and the consumer foodie subject further the economic ideology of neoliberalism by embodying its central tenets and serving as an image of a truly neoliberalized economic actor and economic activity.

### ***The Neoliberal Subject as Entrepreneur***

The entrepreneur has been valorized in many contexts for his or her innovation, creativity, resilience, risk taking, and vision. The entrepreneur is always narrated as

successful; if you fail, you are not an entrepreneur, unless you return again, successful.

The imagine of the entrepreneur is easy to champion—they are our better selves, the person we would all be if we were not restricted by our situation, constrained by our need for stability and a consistent paycheck.

I am not interested in who is, or what it takes to become an entrepreneur, which has been the subject of numerous inquiries in business and entrepreneurship studies. In this chapter, rather, I am interested in the effects of the discourse on the construction of entrepreneur as subjectivity. In this inquiry, I am bypassing questions of the use of entrepreneurship, the category of what counts as entrepreneurial, and other arguments that attempt to valorize the entrepreneurial spirit; instead, I focus on the *work* discourses of entrepreneurship perform in processes of restructuring the economy. The emphasis here is on the changing identity of the laborer, and the ways that the concept of an entrepreneurial subject has been put to use for remaking labor subjectivities and as a broader site for processes of neoliberalizing the subject. In their attempt to show the character of the entrepreneur through the Lacanian notion of ‘the Real’, Jones and Spicer (2003) write that entrepreneurship discourse

...offers a narrative structure to the fantasy which coordinates desire. It points to an unattainable and only vaguely specified object, and directs desire towards that object...It is not in ‘being’ an enterprising subject that one secures identity, but in the gap between the subject and the object of desire. Not only does it not matter that the object is unattainable. This lack is central to maintaining desiring. (p. 18)

Jones and Spicer attempt to show that the openness of the signifier “entrepreneur” is what makes it a desirable object able to fulfill the aspirational gap. They conclude by writing:

...it is precisely because of the paradoxical and apparently mysterious nature of entrepreneurship discourse that allows it to be such a continually effective discourse in enlisting budding entrepreneurs, and reproducing the

current relations of economic domination. (Ibid, 2003, p.18)

While Jones and Spicer show how this discourse creates desire, I think the discourse on entrepreneurship has become more precise, and from it, a specific economic actor has emerged in the name of the entrepreneur. Whether the subject could otherwise be defined as ‘entrepreneurial’ is beyond the point. As I will show, the concept of the entrepreneur has been taken up and willingly used to label a set of specific actions or outcomes that have been put to use and are useful for the remaking of laboring subjectivities as the economy is restructured.

### *Food Truck Entrepreneurs*

As I have discussed in earlier chapters, the food truck form has been explained as well suited to the precarious economy. It is also a form of economic activity that has been narrated as perfect for the contingent laborer in an economy of shrinking opportunities and limited stability. The entrepreneur in the age of precarity is either bold enough to seize the circumstances, or is given no other choice but to find a solution, or to turn lemons into lemonade. The entrepreneur is also, rightly, thought of as the one who can ‘make do,’ (deCerteau, 1984) who is able to see opportunity where others cannot, and to make an intervention where others see only impossibility.

The discourses on the food truck vendor are encapsulated in the identity of an economic actor that is passionate about food, excited for work, and creative. These characteristics have been used to define the operator of a food truck not just as a vendor, but as the championed entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs are framed as economic super actors who generate positive economic effects well beyond normal economic activity. The image or imaginary of the entrepreneur, and values associated with the entrepreneurial



subject, are furthering a specific type of economic actor that embodies the economic ideology of neoliberal capitalism. This subjectivity comes into being through narratives of ‘crisis’ that signals exceptional times and the need for exceptional subjects. The entrepreneurial subject, then, is called forth in a time of limited options to innovate and make options when none are presented. While some may consider themselves to have entrepreneurial tendencies, the entrepreneurial subject is interpolated in times of exception, but for the long-term. The formation of the entrepreneurial subject, then, begins in crisis and gains traction when persistent crisis demands repeat performances as an entrepreneur. Through this, the body and mind are trained to respond, react, and perform entrepreneurially.

The economy is characterized by fleeting commitments and hypermobility, where capital temporarily affixes itself in space but then quickly closes shop. In this economy, responsibility sits squarely on the shoulders of the individual—this is a responsabilization for failures, as well as an exaggerated emphasis on illusions of meritocracy. In this imaginary, the entrepreneur is the agent of change, the intervener in an order that has been made to appear sensible, but is not. It is in this version that we see a kernel of hope for an alternate future, where we hold the individual entrepreneur as someone who will, in Lefebvrian terms, be able to intervene in the spatial order to produce alternative space, or spaces of possibility. It is also this version of the entrepreneur that makes hope persist, and gives optimism a persona. But heroic individuals will not save humanity from cancer or reverse global climate change, for example, despite our historic narrations of the singular (male, white) hero. As we champion this super actor who transcends the limits that others believe apply to them, we are led to put faith in a savior who is born of the

same economic processes that we hope he or she will triumph over.

It may be difficult to wrestle the image of the entrepreneur, then, free from its capitalist impulse, or to imagine the entrepreneur's talents outside the totalizing impulse for wealth accumulation. As we valorize the entrepreneur, we see the rise of the entrepreneurial generation, where everyone is his or her own brand, and instead of collective economy, every economic actor is competing for waning opportunities in a context that defines success in increasingly narrow terms. The individualism and unforgiving competition that characterize the current economy undermines the social contract of responsibility, and instead of spurring innovation, has produced an unhappy present.

The narratives too are reworking urban subjectivity. By reframing the street vendor as a distinctly creative entrepreneur, the idea of the autonomous, responsible worker subject or laborer is further entrenched. This not only reframes vendors, but circulates this worker imaginary more broadly, promoting a version of creativity as getting by, surviving, or innovating around difficult circumstances. One of the food truck vendors articulated this vision, saying:

It shows people that uh, you can be an entrepreneur, that you can go out there with a lot of sweat, and a little bit of money and really do good. And I think we don't have that right now. We do, but we don't.

The entrepreneur, then, is narrated in terms of his or her creative scrappiness, and passion for work and craft, despite the difficult economy. The reification of the creative ethic in some striving and resilient individual economic actor is an example of how the food truck has activated and is a site where the discourses and practices of neoliberalism are instantiated and from which they are valorized and circulated. In the language of Brenner

and Theodore (2002), food trucks are an example of actually existing neoliberalism, and a case where the city as site does matter.

In this section, I have briefly examined the imaginary of the food truck entrepreneur. In doing so, I have sketched out the discourse of work and of the celebrated economic actor in recessionary, or ‘crisis’ times. In this next section, I will examine the ways street vendors have identified themselves in this discourse as a way to reinvent themselves, make their labor legible as they work in an industry that was previously criminalized or at the least, marginalized. This follows the research of Estrada and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2011) into the narrative strategies that street vendors employ to carve out positive identities that invert the negative identities of shame, criminalization, and humiliation usually associated with street vending to value their own labor. This is an inquiry into the act of subjectivation, and the way vendors are recreating themselves, and embodying neoliberal ideals.

### *Entrepreneurial Affect*

In this section I question the ways that laboring bodies are being called to exhibit certain capacities and affectations as a requirement of work. Affective labor is work that is supposed to produce or elicit emotional effects, or to make people feel in particular ways (Hardt and Negri, 2004). This follows from Thrift’s (2004) definition of affect as “...a set of embodied practices that produce visible conduct...” (60). Using the example of food truck vendors, I consider the specific practices of the food truck vendor and how their labor is narrated, both by them and by others, as entrepreneurial. I focus specifically here on the image of the entrepreneur as it is reworked in a time of a contracting economy to be a laborer who creatively ‘makes do’, and thus, is remade for an economy of

precariousness and perpetual crisis. This affective labor, I argue, imbues value or structures the way that customers feel about and understand the meaning of their experience at a food truck. From this, I question the way that workers take on certain skills and behaviors, and live up to them as a form of aspirational laboring. I question the invisible labor of affect, and the way it structures bodies to make affective labor appear natural.

In her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011) Lauren Berlant asks us to think about how we collectively navigate what is overwhelming by *adjusting* to the cruel realities of our lived present. Berlant thinks we can understand the present through and in our bodily attunement to the world. This means paying attention to how we assimilate new ideals and adapt to new demands through what has been reconfigured and what appears anew. In this ontology of affect, Berlant aims to reveal how people are forced to create new ways of being to accommodate the ever-changing world around them. Berlant explains that the ordinary or everyday aspects of living that we could previously rely on for stability—work, home, or personal relationships—are crumbling or inherently unstable in ways that they have not been in the past. In this time when perpetual crisis has become naturalized as a condition of the everyday, Berlant writes, “...people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on” (p. 8). While the stress of everyday survival is not new to the chronically poor or to those in a reoccurring state of financial instability, Berlant means to highlight the ways that manufactured crises stress our everyday and makes it difficult to adjust to anything more than the challenge immediately in front of us. Through paying attention to the individual and collective adjustments that are required to cope with the unpredictable

and burdensome present, we are able to understand the new norm that is continually inaugurated.

Thinking alongside Berlant, who understands the changing realities of late capitalism through how they manifest in everyday embodied affects, in this section I would like to think about the “scramble for modes of living on,” which I understand to be the tactics born-of-necessity that enable survival, even as they condition a sort of protracted life on the margins. I understand them to be made visible in discursive strategies as much as they are incorporated as embodied realities.

In my interviews with food truck vendors, I heard narratives of accommodation, and a willingness to accept the current status of work. The vendors I conducted interviews with almost all cited the changing economy and their changing role in it as a reason why they opened a food truck. Whether it was a loss of work, or a change in the conditions of work that spurred it, nearly all the food truck vendors described both an interest in working for themselves and a lack of any viable options for employment elsewhere. Arnaud and Vanheule explain the allure of entrepreneurial action, writing, “Enterprise discourse cultivates signifiers (e.g. knowledge, creativity, and self-actualization) as if these were sublime objects that could be obtained...” (p. 363). With foreclosed possibilities in industries such as marketing and construction, the food truck vendors that I talked to found food trucks to be a viable employment opportunity within the range of acceptable economic activities and celebrated worker identities.

In the following examples, we can hear the ways that vendors are adopting discourses of entrepreneurship and incorporating them in their own vision of work and life success. Through the narration of food trucks as celebrated urban cultural features,

and in vendors' descriptions of their own labor, we can witness how work and discourses of laboring are changing as the economy is restructured. For example:

Interviewer: So how did you come to own a food truck at this point in your life? You talked about working in kitchens for twenty years, but can you talk about that transition?

Interviewee: Again, you know, it was more like ok, we can't open a restaurant...I don't have the money, the power to open a restaurant, or a storefront. Why don't we just start with a food truck? I want to start working for me, and see what it feels like. And just kind of build it, you know. And that's how it really started. We knew what we wanted it to do, what we wanted it to be... And we know that our food is good. And people started liking us. And people love us. And then, not only business wise, but promotional wise, it's gonna be good, which is what we have right now.

In this example, the vendor explains the limitations he is up against and narrates the food truck as the perfect entry point for someone without money or power. In the opening to this response, we can hear the vendor identifying as someone beaten down. In this discourse of no money and no power, we find a hero of an economic actor, one who will make something out of a food truck. The small business discourse of being one's own boss also figures prominently here, although grander visions of being someone else's boss usually prevail. In the transition from "people started liking us" to "people love us," the vendor narrates his success; from humble beginnings, the vendor has explained that his business venture has been worthwhile.

In another interview with a food truck vendor, we can hear an awareness of the changing economy. This time, the vendor offers analysis about the role he thinks food trucks are playing, which he describes as analogous to other fleeting business ventures.

Interviewee: I think people just think it's a fun thing, and I think the economy plays a role in that.

Interviewer: How so?

Interviewee: Well, people get laid off. Their job isn't as secure anymore. Whatever. And so "Let's open a food truck!?!". For a while it was "Let's open a dog grooming place" or "Let's open a cell phone store," here in Chicago at least. So I think food trucks became one of those things for a little bit. There's more opening up. I mean it's insane. There's like a lot more that are about to hit the streets, I think (laughs). Like, uh, on average, it's dwindled down a little but since the winter time, but for awhile I was getting like one to two calls a week from people that wanted to ask me about the business because they wanted to open a food truck.

This vendor explains how food trucks have become the economic activity of choice for people out of work, and even as he is part of this 'insanity,' he critiques its limitations as something that will likely only enjoy fleeting popularity. In this example, the vendor links the downturn of the economy with the 'fun' of food trucks. Owning a food truck appeals to people because they think it's a fun way to make money in an economy where no option is secure.

#### *Affective Value-Added*

The amount charged for the food at a food truck is not the cost of the ingredients plus the labor to prepare that food. Instead *value* is constructed on the perception of the food's worth, which is a production of the discourse of food, the imaginary of where the food is coming from, how it has been prepared, and who is serving it. Food is described as tasting better when the positive social relations of the food are narrated as part of its quality. The qualitative value of food is completely different than the aspects of it that can be quantitatively assessed, such as portion size. Emphasizing the qualitative aspects of food may seem far-fetched, but the commonly accepted adage that food that has been prepared with love, or is a labor of love tastes better, is another way to think about this. Of course, the hands and hearts that love us cannot always prepare the food we eat, so

where does the value of the food served at food trucks come from? I believe the chef, or food truck operator's presentation and personal style, as well as the style and form of the food truck, are what gives food from food trucks value. In this section, I will argue that the value of the food truck food resides in the subjectivity of the laborer and the way that laborer expresses their laboring.

The new food politics privileges food that allows the consumer to feel that they have an intimate, familiar relation to the farmer, cook, or even chicken that was part of the food chain. In the interviews I conducted, this was narrated as a "connection to the chef." The value of the food is assessed based on the positive social relations of the producer (or object being produced) to the consumer. In the following example, a food truck vendor explains value as it is expressed in his entrepreneurial presentation and creative performance on the streets of Chicago.

Interviewee: I recognized that I was at a higher price point, and one of the reasons people pay a higher price is, you know, service, knowledge from your server, that kind of thing. Who better to tell you about the food than the guy that makes it? And, yeah, it kinda sorted itself out. And I realized that was part of the show.

Interviewer: So, when I saw you recite the whole menu to every person in line-- is that a strategy?

Interviewee: Kind of. At first it was because I was too lazy to write the menu on the side of the truck. But again, I realized that it was part of the show. I'd pretend that I was irritated that I had to do. I'm like "Oh, my voice is so tired..." blah blah blah, but then I'd go through it, boom boom boom boom boom (snapping). And, yeah, it hits. Every time. They will buy something at that point, and I can get them to get a side because they are, you're right, their mouth is watering at that point.

In this example, we see that the vendor links the higher cost of his food with the show and service he is providing when customers are in line. The disconnect between the cost to produce the food, and the cost he is charging is made up by the value of his labor,



and the ability for consumers to discuss the food with him not only as knowledgeable vendor, but also as chef that carefully and passionately labored for them. Through this experience of waiting in line, interacting with the authority on what is being sold, and purchasing the food that preemptively made their mouths water, customers become pleased to spend their money on something that they have been convinced will not only be delicious, but was also a novel social interaction in a day where there are few opportunities beyond the banal office conversation.

Affective labor plays prominently in this example. The vendor is keenly aware of his own affective labor, and presents himself as a legible ‘entrepreneur’ or hip foodie to strategically add value to the food he is selling. This vendor willingly acknowledges the work his presence or identity presentation is doing, and amplifies that affect/effect through his intentional manipulation of his labor, which builds off of the meaning consumers are ascribing to his product. Clive Barnett (2008), in his writings on political affect in public space writes, “Affect, it turns out, is now engineered as a whole infrastructure of feeling that is deployed instrumentally for the pursuit of expanded commodification” (p. 191). Barnett’s call to understand the linkages between affect and commodification appear in a nominally positive way as the savvy entrepreneur serves the eager foodies what they want, and gets paid. While this vendor is able to successfully work the system of value that is contingent on his bodily presentation and way of being, most laborers, however, receive no credit for the qualitative value their ‘being’ adds to the work they are performing.

In another example, this time in a Craigslist ad posted for the position of Cupcake Food Truck Manager for the Chicago-based Flirty Cupcakes, we see how the identity of

the vendor-employee, and their presentation as a creative, entrepreneurial subject has become an acceptable prerequisite for employment on food trucks that are not solely operated by their owners. The online job posting reads:

You must have management experience, must be tenacious, friendly, organized, approachable, hip, and have a competitive nature to you, oh yes, and be an awesome driver and social media guru. (“Cupcake Food Truck Manager,” 2012).

The requirement that the applicant should be “hip” and a “social media guru”, articulates a particular vendor subject that constitutes and is constituted by the new generation of food trucks. The vendor’s performance in the truck—as a creative entrepreneur who has a passion to sell salted caramel cupcakes or braised short ribs, for example—is an essential part of the image of the new food truck. The requirement for a “competitive nature” goes unexplained, but one can guess that the competition is not within the truck or company, or turned towards customers, but only in the drive to out-sell other food trucks, specifically other sweets trucks. The entrepreneurial subject who is always selling oneself (Deresiewicz, 2011) is a discourse that vendors are subjected to and acting within. The idea that the vendor subject must be perfect for the market, and only use his or her skills for the good of the business and against competitors, expresses an idealized notion of the disciplined employee who is singularly minded in their dedication as a worker. In this job posting, the dream employee of any contemporary capitalist reveals him or herself as both an entrepreneurial subject, as well as a disciplined laborer.

The identity of a person who vends on the street, or in any public space rather than private, compartmentalized, formal, indoor spaces, has a specific imaginary associated with it, which I explored in the first chapter of this thesis. In summary, the good street vendor is the one who is regulated, ordered, clean, and represents the right

kind of uniqueness that makes the city more interesting, but not chaotic, disorganized, or ugly. The shift from a negative framing to a positive framing has hinged on the idea of entrepreneurship (Cross, 2000). Again, this confirms the work of discourse and representation to shape what is in place and what is out of place. In light of this campaign of perception, there are significant questions of class and race that can be interrogated in the consideration of what kind of street vendor is valued. In the case of other forms of labor (we can think here about street vendors in other iterations of mobile food vending) affect and commodification are inversely linked, such that bodily ways of being actually decrease value, or devalorize the product that is being produced. Indeed, the presentation of the vendor is not separate from the perception of their vending activities, the quality of their food, and the value of their offerings, both before the consumer and the law.

### ***Food Politics and the Foodie***

Thus far I have discussed affective labor, entrepreneurial capacities, and subjection in a time of waning subject potentialities vis-à-vis work. In this section of Chapter 3, I will examine how food, or habits and practices of eating, have the potential to be and actually are being used to stage new forms of economic, cultural, and political ways of being. Good and practices of eating have proven to be a useful site for reconfiguring meaning, and food trucks are no different from this.

Food has become a lifestyle, a politics, a broad topic for diverse organizing, and an everyday way to be “good” to ourselves--to know ourselves through what we put into our bodies, and to be “good” to our communities through supporting local food networks. Food, and I would add eating, need to be considered beyond their mundane framing as

necessary objects or processes. We can think about the significance of food through its persistent appearance in our daily lives. Of the ways we spend our hours, preparing food and eating takes a significant proportion of each day. Food's mundane, everyday necessity to our existence brings us into contact with it, its processes, and its meaning multiple times a day. In every interaction with cooking, eating, or sharing food, our lives are made and imbued with meaning.

Today, food and eating are narrated in terms of pleasures, leisure, desire, denial, or want, rather than in terms of survival or need. Eating as an mundane necessity is now an opportunities for daily indulgence. Discourses of reward through food have shifted the meaning of eating from something that once was thought of as an obligation to something that we look forward to, or use as a way to treat ourselves; as consuming subjects, we dream of satisfaction granted from a pumpkin spice latte, or a red velvet cupcake.. This deferred or displaced pleasure is what has positioned food as a way to soothe other needs that are not being satisfied. Indeed, many of the food trucks vendors explained that the opportunity to buy something from their truck functioned as a break for workers from their bland office lives in the form of a cupcake or opportunity to leave their cubicle for a bahn mi sandwich. Where a peanut butter and jelly once sufficed, lunchers are now looking for satisfaction with more expensive and nuanced indulgences. This has transformed meals into a time when nourishment is forgotten and pleasure is sought through daily consumption.

### *Foodie Consumers*

For thinking about food in terms of “taste” as a signifier for refinement and class, I turn to Roland Barthes (1997) who explains the signification of food through the ways

in which food is imbued with value as high or low brow. Barthes discusses how food choice is not only a maker of class, but an indicator that is enrolled in marking classed (and I would add racialized, and gendered) bodies through consumption. He writes,

...the changeover from ordinary bread to pain de mie involves a difference in what is signified: the former signifies day-to-day life, the latter a party. Similarly, in contemporary terms the changeover from white to brown bread corresponds to a change in what signified in social terms, because, paradoxically, brown bread has become a sign of refinement. We are therefore justified in considering the varieties of bread as units of signification...In other words, it would be a matter of separating the significant from the insignificant and then of reconstructing the differential system of signification by constructing, if I may be permitted to use such a metaphor, a veritable grammar of food. (1997, p. 22)

The act of buying and eating food from this 'new' generation of food trucks, then, has a grammar unto itself that should be considered. In response to my question about who eats from food trucks, a person who is in marketing and who launched a food truck tracker blog replied:

You know they're generally young professionals that are early adopters. Early adopters whether its something cultural or technological, they're kind of two steps ahead...they are the kind of people that would prefer to buy an old school cool car rather than a brand new Ford or something. They'd rather get a worn leather jacket from a vintage store than a brand new one off the shelf... A lot of people that go to food trucks don't really appreciate the food that comes from fast food chains. So even though they have those options at their ready, they are not snobbish about their food...they know what they like and they maintain kind of a high quality of ingredients. They don't want some piece of chicken that doesn't even look like chicken. Or, you know what I mean. They want to see the little bits of garlic and little bits of cilantro

The people who frequent food trucks are portrayed as having discerning and slightly off-beat tastes. They are said to be hip and interested in food, to prefer the vintage or authentic over the new, and to be technologically capable. They are framed as being on the cutting edge of trends, valuing attention to detail and demanding quality. When probed about this image of a food truck enthusiast, the interviewee pointed to the

demographic statistics on her website, to industry research, and to her extensive firsthand experience as a consumer in Chicago's food truck scene. This revises the conspicuous consumption of the early 2000s by reframing it in terms of a version of creativity as getting by, surviving, or innovating around difficult circumstances.

### *Food as a Site for Politics*

Food is a flexible signifier willing to be imbued with meaning. Roland Barthes (1997) writes,

What is food? It is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior. Information about food must be gathered wherever it can be found: by direct observation in the economy, in techniques, usages, and advertising; and by indirect observation in the mental life of a given society. And once these data are assembled, they should no doubt be subjected to an internal analysis that should try to establish what is significant about the way in which they have been assembled before any economic or even ideological determinism is brought into play (24)

In the above quote, Barthes calls attention to the need to study food for its multiple meanings, significations and uses. Food, then, is not simply the quantity of its calories, or the shape it takes on a plate, or the way you eat it, or the way it makes your body feel—it is all of these things, and as such, it has the capacity to communicate the setting, tone or meaning of any given situation. Food, then, is polysemic; the food itself can signify, the consumption space can signify, and shifts in the social can resignify food, remaking its meaning or its significance.

Following the novel work of Allison and Jessica Hayes-Conroy (2008) on 'the visceral' in taste cultivation and bodily and embodied feeling, I think here about food as politics, or the potential that food opens for new configurations of subjectivity through

different constellations of power. Following the Hayes-Conroys, and others, the potential for issues of gastronomy, or more simply, food growth, preparation, and consumption, or the practice of eating to be mobilized as a site for forming political subjects, and launching political movements is being realized, and needs further theorization. In their 2008 article, “Taking back taste: feminism, food and visceral politics” the Hayes-Conroys’ write:

Over two decades ago, Turner (1985) suggested that gastronomy – food, eating habits, and culinary culture – was at the center of an embodied reality of political subjecthood that remained under-utilized in social activism and under-examined in academic research. Today, in the midst of heightened activism in the agro-food sector and widespread ambivalence towards a North American diet culture, Turner’s call to appreciate the inter-relatedness of food and political subjectivity seems all the more relevant. His call echoes a persisting need to improve appreciation of the political significance of food (461).

The practice of eating—a necessary, visceral, and deeply material experience—has been the fulcrum from which an entire rethinking of our American lifestyle has been undertaken, and upon which new ideas about culture, subjectivity, and politics are being reinvented. From the scaffold of this new food movement, a new site for naturalizing the norms and values associated with contemporary capitalism has been erected. Alternative food movements—that is, food movements that are against the corporatization and homogenization of food—attempt to politicize the means and relations of food production and consumption. While the American public was once content with fast food, frozen dinners, and snack packs, the contemporary food movement denounces these forms of food in the name of contesting the speedy, bland and efficient expression of American modern life. Food, then, has become the site of a consumer-based

counterrevolution in the quaint staging of handmade and homemade meals, shared at communal tables with strangers and old friends.

Alternative food movements—that is, food movements that are against the corporatization and homogenization of food production—attempt to politicize the means and relations of food production and consumption. While these efforts are undertaken as an affront to capitalism and the corporatization and increasing specialization of life, they are also remaking the most egregious and alienating aspects of late capitalism, and providing a fertile ground for further neoliberalizing the city and the subject. More specifically, this interest in politics through consumption manifested in the local food movement, which urges consumers to purchase food grown, cooked, or packaged close to home. These alternative food politics demonstrate how food—as visceral, material, and everyday—is a site, or strategic point of inquiry, where ideologies are formed, contested, and remade.

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter, I have argued that food trucks are a site where political subjectivity is being reconfigured. I have considered how the embodied and affective laboring practices of food truck vendors require certain bodies and bodily ways of being to perform the creative entrepreneur and imbue the food with value and meaning. As part of this, I have investigated the neoliberal food truck entrepreneur as an economic super actor who is expected to ‘make do’ in an economy of little opportunity and in a time of perpetual crisis. In this chapter I have also discussed the significance of the food, and the ways that foodie politics



have been engaged to reconfigure subjectivity. I considered the meaning ascribed to the act of feeding and eating, and the ways that food has been put to work as a multifarious signifier.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### *Where has the moveable feast taken us?*

Street vending is an economic activity that, depending on how it is framed, who it is conducted by, and what economic and political logics are ascribed to its existence, has the potential to be championed by multiple and diverse actors. To conclude this thesis, I offer some final thoughts about the meaning of the emergence of food trucks, the campaign to change the mobile food vending ordinance in Chicago, and the formation of subjectivities in and through the site of the food truck. I aim to gesture at the overarching themes, persistent questions, and potential for alternatives in this brief conclusion.

Through my inquiry into the campaign to change the mobile food vending ordinance in Chicago, I have raised questions about economic deregulation, rights to the city, and livelihoods for some, but not all. I have attempted to show how the enthusiasm for this ‘new’ generation of food trucks has necessitated policy change after years of restrictive and overly burdensome regulations that were established to deter street vending in Chicago. Through arguments about the politics of difference, I have attempted to show the material and discursive strategies that have produced this form of street vending as desirable, while continuing to marginalize other forms of street vending. In my analysis I have attempted to highlight the ways that encouraging a food trucks scene is an incredible reversal of longstanding policy that is suggestive of particular economic and political commitments that, while not explicitly expressed, certainly undergird these processes.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) call attention to the way signifiers that have not been pinned down (freedom, for example) can be reconfigured to stage certain antagonisms. In

this thesis, I have attempted to show the ways that food trucks and mobile food vending more generally have been strategically resignified to stage antagonisms, reconfigure subjectivities, and implant certain cultural ideals in the service of neoliberal economic ideology. Through considering the discursive and representational strategies that were marshaled to make a case that these food trucks are different from previous forms of street vending, I sought to understand the economic and political commitments that animated this campaign. As I saw in Chicago—and as we are seeing in similar campaigns to create or amend mobile food vending policy in other cities in the US including Lexington, KY—campaigns to “free the food trucks” are increasingly waged through a superficial engagement with food to mobilize a population for the aims of deregulation, free enterprise, and normative economic liberty, which should not be confused for equality, equity, or justice.

In the food truck movement, we can see the way culture, politics, and economic ideologies converge to be productive of certain norms, ways of being, and futures. Food trucks have become the foundation upon which to launch a campaign with otherwise unrelated political motives. As designed and aestheticized cultural objects as well as valorized economic activities, food trucks are a useful coming together of cultural and economic interests. In *Governmentality*, Mitchell Dean writes,

Neo-liberal cultural critique would have little significance if cultural reform were not conceived as central to implanting the norms and values of the market and the forms of conduct to be derived from it in all spheres, including the institutions and instruments of government themselves (p. 190).

As a form of consumerism qua politics, this food truck movement has become the ideal consensus-oriented and consumer-led movement that actually forecloses opportunities for

reconfiguring power, while furthering processes of neoliberalization. This combination of culture and economy has made the food truck a very useful site for the post-political city.

As everyday practices become further intertwined with the political and economic ideologies that animate them, it will become ever more important to practice a scholarship that seeks to untangle these commitments to elucidate the macro processes, and structures that underpin them. That is, only when we question the *work* of seemingly ordinary elements, like food trucks, can we come to know our historic present and the very things that are *working* us.

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- Valentine, G. (1998). Food and the production of the civilised street. *Images of the street: Planning identity and control in public space*, edited by NR Fyfe, 192-204.
- Yatmo, Y. A. (2008). Street vendors as 'out of place' urban elements. *Journal of Urban Design*, 13(3), 387-402.

# Jessa Megan Loomis

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817 Patterson Office Tower | Lexington, KY 40506

## EDUCATION

### **MA, Geography**

University of Kentucky, May 2013

Advisor: Dr. Anna Secor

### **Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT)**

Clark University, May 2007

Advisor: Dr. James McDermott

### **BA, Geography, *Cum Laude***

Clark University, May 2006

Concentration: Urban Development and Social Change, Minor: History

Advisor: Dr. Susan Hanson

## AWARDS, GRANTS, AND HONORS

Research Grant: Barnhardt-Withington Fund, *University of Kentucky*, 2012 (\$885)

Graduate School Fellowship, *University of Kentucky*, 2011-2012 (\$15,000)

Alice Higgins Award for Service to Women and Girls, *Clark University*, 2006

Class of 2006 Community Service Award, *Clark University*, 2006

Gryphon and Pleiades Honor Society, *Clark University*, 2005-2006

Urban Development and Social Change Fellowship, *Clark University*, 2005 (\$2,500)

Ocean State Power Scholarship, 2002 (\$10,000)

## RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

April 2013. "Moveable feasts: Food trucks and urban policy mobilities", The Association of American Geographers Conference. Los Angeles, CA.

November 2012. "The right to food trucks: Changing Chicago's food vending ordinance", The Conference on Critical Geography. Chapel Hill, NC.

April 2006. (With R. Keeley) "College students and the city: How first and fourth year students perceive place in Worcester, MA" AAG Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL and Clark University, Worcester, MA.

September 2005. (With K. Cruickshank, D. Fialkov, and R. Small) "Assessing the impact of the Kilby-Gardner-Hammond revitalization project on social and economic conditions in the neighborhood" Clark University, Worcester, MA.

### **SESSIONS ORGANIZED**

April 2013. (With UK Critical Pedagogy Working Group) "Tales from the Neoliberal University" The Association of American Geographers Conference. Los Angeles, CA.

### **NON-REFEREED PUBLICATIONS**

August 2012. "My cell phone is my muddy boots, and Twitter is my shovel", Notes from the Field #2, for UK PEWG, available at [politicalecology.org](http://politicalecology.org)

### **UNIVERSITY SERVICE**

**Conference Organizer**, *Dimensions of Political Ecology Conference (DOPE)*, 2013  
Coordinated the Undergraduate Symposium, increased participation from 4 to 25 students from colleges across the US and Canada; pre-conference logistics and organizing from September-February; designed, distributed and analyzed evaluation reports in Qualtrics

**Chair**, *Geography Graduate Student Union*, August 2012-Present  
Facilitated meetings between the graduate student body and the department chair

**Organizer**, *AAG Pre-Conference Paper Presentations*, February 2012  
Coordinated two days of pre-conference presentations with the aim of improving the quality and professionalism of Kentucky representation at the AAG

**Co-Founder**, *UK Critical Pedagogy Working Group*, January 2012-Present  
Co-planned and facilitated a TA orientation about best practices in geography education; participated in bi-weekly reading group discussions, and reflected on teaching practice

**Session Chair**, *Dimensions of Political Ecology Conference*, April 2012  
Facilitated the Urban Political Ecology and Urban Inequalities sessions

**Graduate Student Liaison**, *Geography Undergrad Education Committee*, 2011-2012  
Served as a graduate student representative to both the Undergraduate Education Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee on Innovation in Undergraduate Education

## **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

### **Research Assistant, Dr. Matthew Wilson, Summer 2013**

Supported ongoing research on the data practices of community organizations in Lexington, KY; recruited and interviewed participants, transcribed interviews, synthesized themes, updated IRB protocols, assisted in grant writing

### **Evaluation Intern, Vermont Works for Women, Summer 2013**

Produced a report of with recommendations for the transitional jobs program using participant satisfaction survey, extended interviews, and program observations; engaged in conversations about financial literacy for women and girls; created participant profiles for use in outreach materials and funding applications

### **Teaching Assistant, UK Geography Department, Fall 2012 and Spring 2013**

Translated GIS labs into content for an online GIS course; recorded lab tutorials using Camtasia; attended lecture and led three discussion sections per week for an introductory world geography course

### **Program Assistant, WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies, Sept 2008-Sept 2010**

Worked with faculty throughout the California community college and state university systems as part of the California Department of Education's (DOE) Faculty Initiative Project; tracked \$500,000 project budget; oversaw the writing and production of DOE instructional support materials; managed the writing process and work flow of multiple off-site authors; tracked participant information and evaluation data; assembled status updates and reports to the DOE; coordinated 20 meetings annually throughout CA

### **English and History Teacher, Aspire Public Schools, July 2007- June 2008**

Collaborated to create a positive, "college for certain" environment for an underserved population in Oakland, CA; used data to enhance student achievement; community outreach and support; administrative responsibilities as lead educator

### **Conference Coordinator, The Student Leadership Training Program, 2004-2007**

Facilitated student leadership conferences for 80-400 youth; co-trained and managed a staff of 65 adult and student volunteers; presented and facilitated large group sessions; established and coordinated the regional alumni association; directed the inaugural year of the InterLead Conference; served as an appointed member of the organization's board

### **Student Teacher, The University Park Campus School, August 2006-May 2007**

Investigated best practices in urban education at a nationally recognized model for school reform; designed and taught a history curriculum to 10th and 11th grade students

**Writing Consultant**, *Clark University Writing Center*, September 2006-May 2007  
Improved writing in one-on-one sessions with undergraduate and graduate students in all academic disciplines; assisted with hiring; reflected on practice in weekly meetings

**Organizer**, *All Kinds of Girls Mentor Program*, September 2005-April 2006  
Co-coordinated the logistics of a weekly program for young girls; designed and facilitated the training program for college aged mentors; led weekly curriculum planning meetings; transitioned organization from director-led to committee-based leadership

### **SELECTED LEADERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERISM**

**Guide**, *San Francisco City Guides*, August 2009- September 2010  
Led monthly historical walking tours of San Francisco's Noe Valley neighborhood; attended four months of classes detailing San Francisco's architecture and social history

**Co-Founder**, *Women + Money Financial Literacy Group*, September 2006-Sept 2010  
Facilitated monthly meetings where 15 young professional women discussed personal finance; designed organizational structure and coordinated meeting logistics

**Writing Tutor**, *826 Valencia Writing Project*, January 2009- September 2010  
Supported children's exploration of reading and writing during one-on-one tutoring

**Community Mediator**, *Worcester County Small Claims Court*, Oct 2005-April 2006  
Certified mediator by the Worcester Community Action Council; facilitated dialogue between parties and drafted resolution agreements

### **TRAVEL**

**"Nation-building, Globalization, and Decolonizing the Mind,"** Namibia, South Africa and Zambia. Center for Global Education, Augsburg College, January-May 2005

**"Cultural Psychology of Urban Living,"** Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland and The Netherlands. Clark University May Term, May-June 2003

**Independent travel:** Germany, Spain, The Czech Republic, Poland, Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, and four cross-country trips through 44 States.