



Media, Film and
Communication

MFCO Working Paper Series

SPECIAL ISSUE: ENVIRONMENTS, SPACES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Taking (intra-) action: Alternative food initiatives doing differently to transform our food future

Emma L Sharp
University of Auckland

Abstract: This paper explores alternative food initiatives (AFIs) and their relational ontological forms. Demonstrations of pervasive and dynamic ‘intra-actions’ in the urban foodscape can offer possibility and hope for a transformation away from the disenfranchisement often associated with the conventional food system, despite the challenge of unequal dispositions of different actors and activities involved. This participatory ethnographic study engages, in particular, the work of Barad to understand how a more socially just food system can be materialised through new articulations of relationships in participants’ following of and engagement in AFI materialisms of work to be done. Here, several case studies of AFIs in Auckland, New Zealand will: highlight the abundance, prominence and dynamism of these models of alternative food; explore how doing differently is regularly and actively embodied by actors in the alternative foodscape, and how these novel expressions of alternative food can enact new potentials in the urban food landscape through their intra-action.

Introduction

The transformation of our foodscape can take place through everyday, mundane connections and linkages. It is proposed here that individual participants of superficially discrete but subcutaneously complex and tangled AFIs, collectively have the means to navigate a new food future focused on ethical, socio-ecological 'capital' by the sharing of effort, experience, skills and information. The relational materialities of these AFIs appear to enable a cohesive and impactful network with significant transformative potential for our current unscrupulous food system. The AFI case-studies provided in the following sections highlight several interrelated foci of this paper: 1) a view of the alternative foodscape as an inextricable entanglement of discrete individuals in their articulation with AFIs; 2) the perpetual changes in these relationships and connections based on 3) the new spaces of ethical and socially embedded practices created as different connections are regularly made and remade; and, 4) the resultant potential for change of our dominant food system given constant changes in and new potentials of relationships and intra-action.

Modern-day conventional systems typically disconnect consumers from food production. Often there is a void of information around how, where and by whom it was produced, distributed and finally the context in which it was consumed. This disengagement seems unnatural given the entanglement of food ontologies, epistemologies, and ethics bound up in the processes of provisioning ourselves. Through the notion of intra-action, our normative view of the conventional food system can be problematized. Diverse 'ontologies' of human interactions can be seen as relational and cooperative, embedding intricate social entanglements instead of disembodied and disembodied rational economic actors. This has the affect of destabilising conventional knowledge of the ways of assembling such mechanistic human systems. Presuppositions that conventional food supply chains are made up of these individually constituted agents or entities that fit neatly into process-diagrams of food production logistics can be challenged. Rather than accepting our food system as discretely determinate units of efficiency, this paper offers the lens of intra-action to view an alternative food system composed of initiatives understood as a 'mutual constitution of entangled agencies' (Barad 2007, p. 33).

Further, this perspective of intra-action has no initial presuppositions of difference. It instead explores how differences are perpetually and iteratively recreated. Alternative food initiatives (AFIs) can be seen to offer diversity and difference in their processes of dynamically (re)creating food 'phenomena' as juxtaposed against a hegemonically and unnaturally stable industrialised mass food production, procurement and consumption 'system'. The vast majority of AFIs and their participants are in favour of disturbing disenfranchising associations of a dominant food system. AFIs portray a diversity of novel food enactments to engender the aforementioned politics of difference to discover, and enable practices that are not regularly considered as part of, a valid food space. The intention of this paper is not to present AFIs in terms of relative 'success', which I argue cannot be measured through their longevity or their size. Rather this paper explores the what and how of AFIs, to reveal their emergence. I look to AFIs of farmers' markets, food boxes, community and guerrilla gardening as well as initiatives such as raw milk collectives, backyard chicken farmers, and dumpster divers in Auckland, New Zealand, to understand the potential for transformation of a food system subject to entanglements of ethical impoverishment. Gibson-Graham (2008) have offered us an heuristic for considering modern-day performance of trade, their diverse-economies making visible new imaginaries of economic activity that prioritise social-wellbeing instead of the uncompromising aspects of our conventional, industrialised food structures. Latouche (1993, p. 49) has previously asserted that these types of economic alternatives are 'stagnant, marginal, residual, weak ... existing only in the margins and scattered across the economic landscape'. This paper will challenge this claim, to explore how enacting food differently is regularly and actively embodied by actors intra-acting in the alternative foodscape. It will consider how their performance can escape the dominance of a destructive arrangement to enable a new dynamic future for food production, distribution and consumption through regular connections, networks, sharing of knowledge, skills and information.

Relational Ontological Forms: an intra-active approach

This paper is theoretically located in geography and its spatiality is explored through 'processes that occur across space and over time, and are integrally related to social relations – not by cause and effect ... but rather by being inextricably bound up in one another' (Ettlinger 2004, p. 30). The critical disposition of Barad and sympathetic

commentators explores the spatiality of intra-action, and its connections to individual and collective practices. Karen Barad's take on 'how matter comes to matter' also invokes an appreciation of the world as made of relations rather than discrete things or objects. Barad advocates for matter being non-static, without clear boundaries and rather as phenomena, perpetually changing based on new encounters of 'agential intra-action' (Barad, 2003). I apply this lens to my own understanding of AFIs, and notice the nature of their boundedness, and types of associations they and their components have between them. These AFIs do demonstrate their relationality in that 'it is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the components [or participants] of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts [or political projects that they pursue] become meaningful' (Barad 2003, p. 815). One should consider for whom these concepts are meaningful. Barad's perspective argues for the inseparability of the observer and observed, knower and known, and this perspective is also given some attention here by 'locating' this research through positionality.

My interpretation of our interconnections in the food space is through overlapping lenses. My understanding of the world through a post-structuralist, feminist lens highlights a concern for marginalisation or obscurity of diverse socially and ethically valuable food activity and actors. I also consider the world through a diverse-economic lens, which reveals hidden aspects of these under-acknowledged food practices (Gibson Graham 2008) and also a lens of transgression of binaries and boundaries to do the same (Butler 1990, 1997; Jenks 2003). The participatory ethnography of this study was employed with the above perspectives in mind. It incorporated following the AFIs and doing as the participants do, to best understand and interpret the interrelations and connections of the actors and assemblages within the constraints of my own subjectivities. This method itself contributes to new practices of performing research and of enacting food. This echoes Barad's theories of diffraction, as ethico-onto-epistemological entanglement rather than only disturbance. As Haraway (1997) describes, diffraction simultaneously creates difference while recording interactions, interference, and reinforcement. This distinction is significant as it highlights the performance of knowing as an embodied engagement with matter. According to van der Tuin diffraction is '... meant to disrupt linear and fixed causalities' to work toward 'more promising interference patterns' (2011, p. 26). Diffraction requires 'a cutting together-apart,

where cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility' (Dolphijn & van der Tuin 2012). Knowing is proximate by nature of the entanglement between subject and object, which Barad terms a 'phenomenon'. And instead of being about offering a perfect reflection of one's encounters, objectivity is seen as accountable 'to marks on bodies, and responsibility to the entanglements of which we are a part' (Dolphijn & van der Tuin 2012). Responsibility and more authentic reflection, I argue, holds potential for change.

AFIs are proposed to demonstrate connection, participation and a means to effect change. The materials of food and participants in food are not just passive objects but materials with agency as they create ideas and perform practices. It is important to note that participants in AFIs and the material food exchanged do not and cannot possess agency *per se*, as in this trajectory of thinking they do not pre-exist their intra-actions. Rather, 'agency is an enactment ... and is a matter of iterative changes to practices through intra-acting and enfolding' (Dolphijn & van Tuin 2012). 'Agency is about the possibilities and accountability entailed in refiguring material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production, including the boundary articulations and exclusions that are marked by those practices' (Barad 2001, p. 93). As material configurations of an ethical foodscape, these phenomena are produced through agential intra-action as a result of specific exclusionary food practices embodying human and non-human wellbeing and as a way of shaping bodies (and the world) in becoming (Dolphijn & van Tuin 2012; Haraway 2008).

Features and potentials of a particular intersection, in this case between participants and AFIs, can be ascribed to the types of interactions encircling the organisms in question, while the relations themselves are receptive to transformation. In this framing, the AFI only becomes alternative because of its position relative to a dominant conventional food system. It is even more apparent in some examples of AFIs where the alternative activity is dependent on conventional production, distribution or consumption of food, to be able to exist. This also presents a challenge to the novelty of a different and transformative food network, where it cannot be ignored that there is potential for the usurping of these chains of equivalence to mainstream the alternative. Some understandings of alternative food initiatives and their place in global relations suggest that they generate similar neoliberal partisanship to the ones that they challenge. While urban AFIs are inextricably linked to

participants of other AFIs and their larger AFI phenomena, they are also undeniably entangled with conventional, and capitalist systems, related spatially beyond the urban, to rural activities, to national and international regulations and longer and larger supply chains which are enfolded into this system. Commentators have a tendency to generalise, by comprehensively stating that by articulating with conventional systems AFIs are endangering their 'progress'. This is to limit our understanding of AFIs' potential for transformation. What undermines new potentials is the mutual articulation of AFIs with (typically conventional, but *also* non-conventional) systems that sacrifice human and nonhuman wellbeing for their own overarching (capitalist *or* non-capitalist) agenda. The problem is of consumers' disconnection with the production of their food, and a reliance on food system that has a web of relations (on multiple scales) that typically do not subscribe to social and ethical values. Therefore relationships that foster cooperation, democracy and mutual inter-action are of interest, rather than concern with capitalocentric competition or not. Elements of efficiency in the hegemonic food system would be welcome, if they did not link to exploitative practices. What is clear is a need to recognise, create and perform something different. Gibson-Graham argues for this 'reading for difference rather than dominance' (2006, xxxi), as well as for hopefulness and potential (2008).

Enacting this Research

Netnography yielded a first harvest of more than 100 AFIs in Auckland, and more projects were added to this list using the appropriately interconnected method of snowball sampling. These elicited a broad overview of AFI respondent (founders' and coordinators') reflections on any connectivity and links existing with other AFIs.

Of the 23 AFIs questioned about their links to other AFIs, 16 reported at least one link to another AFI or facilitating institution (such as a local government body or council) through sharing of information and resources for either one-off partnerships or through ongoing relationships. However, this figure appeared under-representative given side conversations I had with research participants that suggested abundant linkages and interactions between AFIs and individual participants. Richer evidence was sought using qualitative, ethnographic methods of interviews and participatory observation.

Alternative food entanglements, connections and relations

One suburban Auckland farmers' market set up their project out of a gardening-cum-Transition Town group initiative, because they 'wanted to do something' - to do differently. Before settling on a local market, they floated other ideas for how to create community with their mutual concern for ethics, and human and environmental wellbeing: ideas like a gardening tool co-operative, collective electricity production or water storage and transport initiatives, but it was the food that gained community interest and support at public meetings and consultative stages. The farmers' market piqued people's imagination and enthusiasm, 'not necessarily [for] the food, but a sense of a focus and what some people call a "bumping place"'.¹ It is this sense of creating connections and relationships, and strengthening bonds between actors and agents through repeated 'bumps' that Jim Diers (see Diers 2014), a renowned community empowerment facilitator, suggests leads to positive community change. Stallholders were also there not just for sales but also for exposure as local, or environmentally or socially sustainable NZ businesses or projects, and some alternative food enterprises certainly utilised the market as a local business incubation opportunity. In my own performance as a stallholder there, I observed a space where people encountered each other and shared their regular, weekend narratives about families, pets, schools, hobbies and their food. These connections and occasions to intersect can be seen in a number of different relations between AFIs in Auckland's urban and suburban spaces. Intersections are not only relational in their production of new associations but their connection evidently also extends to existing conventional and dominant institutions: for example the aforementioned ideological family institutions² (as interpreted by Foucault) or schools (as read by Bourdieu). This connection reveals the potential to enact change in the spaces where AFIs and the institutions articulate together, therefore not limiting the opportunity for intra-action with potential non-AFI agents.

City Council appears to play a role in many initiatives' existence, both in terms of funding and networking of bodies. One community garden coordinator suggested that a number of community gardens are 'sort of linked by the Council'. In recent months Auckland Council has facilitated a number of 'Visioning our Food Future' area workshops in order to bring together leaders interested and engaged in food initiatives. In an interactive mind mapping exercise, participants were invited to imagine their ideal food system, with a

graphic facilitator creating this food utopia on paper. Not only was diffraction or rippling of ideas evident, but the food vision was created based on fluid and dynamic conversation, instantaneous encounters and overlapping of different ideas together in the same space, often between participants that were previously unknown to each other. Their relations appeared not to have pre-existed their encounter. But based on their relationality to a larger political project, and mutual workings towards a different food future, it can be argued that the smallest material units that Barad (2003) calls phenomena (in this case the relationality of actors or participants that form an AFI) come to matter through the process of continuous intra-activity.

In participating in and observing the South, West and Central (incl. East) Auckland discussions of 'Visioning Auckland's Food Futures' organised by Auckland Council, it was clear that different AFIs had various financial, operational, logistical and informational needs that could be answered by other initiatives' capabilities and capacities. Just one example is of community gardens that offer opportunities for participants undertaking alcohol and drug treatment through the legal courts to up-skill in garden production and growing their own food. Their skills in construction and labouring are often highly valued by other community garden projects or food initiatives, and were stated in one workshop to be hard to find. Other community gardens remarked how sometimes invested people have begun to build the scaffolding for a different food future by, for example, planting fruit trees, but then do not have (or have not been able to pass on) the knowledge on how to use that food, or how to prevent waste. For example, essential knowledge includes knowing when fruit is ready to pick rather than wasting under- or over-ripe produce, and an awareness of food availability throughout the year, where there is a perception by one AFI participant that we have 'lost the rhythm of the seasons'. Intra-action with other agents with similar motivations provided invaluable connections that catalysed the creation of new connections, galvanised previously peripheral political projects, and led to the co-production of new AFIs through diffraction post-encounter, where new-to-each-other components came together to form new phenomena – a transformation in action.

In another example, a community gardening initiative representative that I surveyed as part of the initial information gathering for this research suggested: 'occasionally we have a glut of produce, and when this happens we take it down to the local farmers' market and

sell it'. This shows some awareness of different avenues to consumption that the community garden could be connected to aside from their usual subsistence growing, revaluing their produce and their practices. The act of occasionally selling their produce shows that this AFI is self-determining their terms of engagement and in this way, enacting differently the industrialised food system by connecting, and honestly valorising and sharing information, skills of growing, and produce with another initiative. It is also an act towards sustainability, to reduce waste, and step outside of the industrial food system, which does not invest actively in social and environmental sustainability – often quite the opposite.

The format of one well-patronised guerrilla gardening initiative is to run shorter projects or events, such as rooftop gardening developments, urban foliage art, and collective meals provided by urban growers. This guerrilla gardening group deliberately engages volunteer participants in low commitment, short-term, memorable and impactful activities to encourage the growing of food crops in the city. This is a counter movement to the marginalisation of food production to the periphery of the city or even further afield. It aims to disturb the conventional practices of unconventional actors, encouraging them to get their hands dirty to connect biologically, physically and sensorily with their food, as well as promoting food democracy by offering anyone the skills to grow food (even in a small space: apartment balconies for example). There is evidence in this AFI of many different connections to exchange information, skills and knowledge. Important agents - those with the know-how - often voluntarily venture from other initiatives to temporarily join this one, to contribute their skills and knowledge in being a part of one of these diverse projects. The coordinator of this guerrilla gardening initiative comments on the variety of connections they have with other AFIs in the Auckland's urban space: '[with AFI A, I] have had a good relationship and open dialogue on opportunities to collaborate since inception [with AFI B, I have had] network meetings [and] worked together on a community garden project that didn't end up going ahead, [and with AFI C they were a] collaborator on [recent project]'. In practice, new food doings were evident in the assembling of a collective meal hosted at an urban site. Seedlings of different produce to be grown were farmed out to interested participants, many of whom were new to domestic food growing, and therefore became new agents of urban food production. Upon fruition the produce were then delivered back to a common urban site weeks later for the meal preparation. My own participation

involved time investment in growing tomatoes that would join dozens more, along with other produce to be carefully integrated and assembled into a meal for scores of urban dwellers - the process of which neatly embodies the assembling of agents, of the becoming of agency, of AFI phenomena, who do food differently and provide a geography of hope through their transformative capacity.

Connection through mentorship and the facilitation of enduring relationships is visible in these urban AFIs. The abovementioned guerrilla gardening initiative coordinator has a 'personal connection to [the] Auckland coordinator of [another AFI], [with] ongoing communication' to share information and experience. Through observation there is mentorship provided, despite the slightly differing political projects of these two initiatives. At the 'Visioning Auckland's Food Future' workshops, one workshop participant imagined in their food future, a gardening mentor who would 'connect 10 - 20 houses'. A number of community gardens surveyed reported connections to a broader project such as the 'Gardens 4 Health' project, which 'facilitates community gardens and provides mentors for home gardening' (Grow Together 2014). This highlights not just the spatial linkages but also the temporal relationalities that run through AFIs and their participants. Further, 'Hand Over a Hundy', another gardening skills AFI, purposefully match-makes prospective domestic gardeners with tangible resources, and an experienced mentor to educate and encourage seed saving and domestic food growing and harvesting, with their mantra, 'leaving knowledge to the next generation'.

Some AFIs reported no definite inter- or intra- linkages in their survey responses. These initiatives tended to be small, covert, or subsistence in nature, and included raw milk collectives, backyard chicken farmers, and dumpster divers. However, in considering for example the latter activity, this somewhat subversive alternative initiative, premised on 'rescuing' conventional discarded food from the waste stream, is dependent on typically industrialised production, distribution or consumption of food, to be able to exist. It is arguable therefore, that the dumpster divers are implicitly connected to the supermarkets at which they dive for free food, though these are not alternative. The dumpster diver interviewed here did also suggest that he participated on online forums and previously on social media sites where other divers would congregate, so there are clear associations between participants despite an independent and seemingly isolated activity. This dumpster

diver discussed the practical advantage of knowledge sharing online where ‘updates for potential issues, such as new locks or good new spots [to dive] ... [as well as] health scares or positive experiences’ were accessible. This type of information is shared in person too. Before observation of his activity, the dumpster diver I interviewed shared with me a kit list of things to bring, for the uninitiated: gloves, bags, torch. When parking my car at the site, I asked about ‘protocol’ assuming a covert mission. My interviewee (/fellow transgressor/ knowledge co-producer/ mentor/ subject/ agent of change) forewarned me about the potential for surveillance by the supermarket management, as indicated on a sticker on the dumpster. He pointed out the bin bags with the highest potential for fruitfulness on our mission. These pieces of information were all instructional, educational and introduced me as a new component of the dumpster diving AFI phenomenon, with agency in my own enactment.

Being and Knowing

Using this preliminary evidence I sought to understand what these frequent and pervasive connections mean for the way that AFIs seem to overlap and share information, resources and experiences and what that means for their creation, evolution and endurance.

AFIs’ epistemological and ontological form appears to be contingent on porous boundaries and a diversity of form of its participants. It is interesting to observe that relational actors within AFIs (to form phenomena, in Barad’s terms) regularly appear to transgress the perforated bounds of their own AFIs, and move through these spaces of diffraction to be momentarily reallocated to other AFIs. But agency as an enactment, as a possibility for reconfiguring entanglements, exists beyond the immediate, porous boundaries of individual AFIs. Consequently, identity for actors (participants) cannot be specifically tied to discrete AFIs, given the incalculable entanglement and the constellation of relations influencing participants. This reflects Barad’s understanding of relational actors or participants intra-acting to form and re-form as phenomena or AFIs. In Barad’s (2007) terms, these encounters or diffractions in the spaces between initiatives, leading to intra-action of individuals, of combination, overlapping and the experience of obstruction. In this space is considered to be the creation of new ontological entities. To wit, AFIs do not pre-exist their interaction; rather they emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-

relating (Barad 2007) and generate diffraction - transformational effects that ripple out into the foodscape.

As individuals continually intra-act within and between initiatives, they follow work to be done and often perform this work to create new value. This is evidenced where actors in one AFI context adjoin another AFI and then return, but in economic terms, with interest. Having practiced and performed in other contexts with other AFIs, individuals are constantly being remade with new skills, knowledge and experience, which in turn continues to remake the AFI with which the individual is in contact or communication. Every encounter is a re-creation of the participant and the AFI and therefore of their value for all actors. This includes digital or virtual encounters such as those highlighted by more socially isolated AFI activity, which link AFIs and provide access for less mobile participants, enabling a form of democracy in connectivity.

All of the case studies re-enacted here demonstrated some form of performance, in their embodiment of doing food differently, and doing other in the world. They provide a way of materialising the transformation of our food system into a space that reflects food politics by creating networks between individuals and groups that aspire towards a more ethical food future. Performance of politics is seen in the creation of a community meal made of ingredients grown by (often new to the practice) urban gardeners. It is seen in the subversive activity of dumpster diving or bringing concerned people together to envision their ideal food future. It is also seen in the mentorship and co-production of knowledge involved in new urban and domestic gardening projects, to preserve existing seeds and skills into the future and also introduce and create new knowledges and opportunities. These constructive performances only emphasise the idea that any understanding of the world is going to be informed by lived experiences and material practices (Carolan 2011). It is through these enactments performed by AFI actors, that doing and creating can re-make our food system. And through the potential of a dynamic and diffracting series of connections we can see the potential for transformation. Indeed Barad (2001 p. 90) states 'materiality itself is a factor in materialisation'. These practices were responses that democratized the process of knowledge-making, for they were responses to a world-in-the-making/-in-the-unfolding where Barad argues that ethics and justice are located.

They create, as Feenstra (2002, p. 102) describes it:

opportunities ... for diverse people in communities to come together to talk, listen to each others' concerns and views, plan together, problem- solve, question, argue, and come to agreement, compromise, learn another's language and how to speak so someone else can hear you, and get to know and trust one another in the context of a common purpose or vision.

Geographies of hope and difference

This paper refutes Latouche's (1993) assertion that economic alternatives are 'stagnant, marginal, residual, weak'. Their potential is measured through their demonstration and enaction of something different in the foodscape through their dynamic and constantly changing forms. Their possibilities are also seen in their abundance, with potential for significant impact for urban political projects through their continual doing and emerging. While their longevity as phenomena has little consequence for their existence, their shared liveliness and continuous reinvention offers a collective endurance in the re-imagination of the urban. As we configure and navigate our world and its various systems through our seeing of it, we can think of diffraction as not just moderating what is visible, but also assembling an embodied practice in food with potential to do differently (Haraway 1997).

It is therefore important for AFIs to be sharing their practices, their knowledge and their actors, in order to widen the possible scope of change. From observation and participation of scores of AFIs in Auckland throughout 2013-2014, it is clear that Auckland's AFIs are connected organically. No formal or official overarching body (yet) exists for the purpose of bringing these initiatives together for sharing of collective value or values. Other cities in the global north have been working on food hubs, food policy councils and collectives to attract the range of experience and learning to a central point, and some key examples have been recorded in Ontario, Canada (Ballamingie & Walker 2013; Campbell & McRae 2013; and Blay-Palmer et al 2013) throughout the US (Sommer 2013; Matson et al 2012; Fox 2010), the UK (Sustain: Alliance For Better Food and Farming 2005); and, Australia (Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance 2013). Typical challenges to land access by community actors and potential agents can be significantly reduced as seen in Christchurch, NZ, in planners' reimagination of the city after devastating earthquakes. There, council and

consenting agencies are actively lubricating intersections and intra-actions between public and institutional bodies by eliminating obstructive policies that restrict land access, to make a genuine commitment to their community vision via a 'Food Resilience Policy and Action' plan. They aim to create community space with abundant public community gardens and urban foraging forests as the catalyst (and fresh produce as the by-product) (Radio New Zealand National 2014). There have been few assessments as to the potential of institutional or visioning frameworks in Auckland, though there have been research theses written on the potential for such infrastructure in Auckland (for example, Durham 2013). The sharing of ideas and the formation of connections in our food space has been recently invigorated by institutional and grassroots, private and public influences alike. Auckland Council has recently hosted multiple food hui, and have been working with local food leaders on food-futures visioning in 2014. Rallying efforts have come from the social enterprise 'The Sustainable Business Network', in a series of events to highlight ways to 'restore New Zealand's food system' (Sustainable Business Network 2014). Local initiative 'Out of Our Own Backyard' (OOOBY) has also shown leadership in assembling New Zealand (the majority of which are customer-base-local) smallholders into social enterprise networks, working in a fair trade-like arrangement with backyard growers. Its success and resonance with a socially conscious patronage has seen its expansion beyond Auckland to discrete local operations in Hamilton, NZ, Sydney, Australia and seeds have been sown in the US for inception there. These collaborations in the urban space highlight the reforming of ontological boundaries for the potential transformation of our current conventional food system.

Conclusion

To quote David Harvey, '[h]ow we represent space and time in theory matters, because it affects how we and others interpret and then act with respect to the world' (1989, p. 205). AFIs' epistemological and ontological form appears to be contingent on porous boundaries and a diversity of forms of their participants. Identity for participants cannot be specifically tied to discrete AFIs, given inherent relations connecting them together. Encounters between actors are disturbances in the spaces between initiatives, leading to 'intra-action' of individuals, where new ontological entities are created, and knowledges are remade. Further, every encounter is a re-creation of the participant and the AFI and therefore of

their value for all actors. This includes digital or virtual encounters which link AFIs and provide access for less mobile or otherwise marginalised potential participants. There are opportunities for knowledge creation and value-adding. It is within and in-between the permeable boundaries where human capital is shared and remade.

I challenge Latouche's statement that economic 'alternatives' are 'stagnant, marginal, residual, weak ... existing only in the margins and scattered across the economic landscape' (1993, p. 49). With the above evidence of perpetual change and reinvention I would argue that Auckland's AFIs are actually profuse and pervasive in their potential for change. They appear to be lively, politically empowered and in Auckland's foodscape with much possibility to challenge urban food politics. To ground this theory, it appears that as part of these newly emerging networks, agents actively reshape their relations with different stages of the food system and start revaluing the (social, cultural, environmental) meanings of food beyond mere commodities and objects of exchange.

Doing differently is regularly and actively embodied by actors in the alternative foodscape, and their performance can escape the dominance of a destructive econo-centric food system to enable a new, lively future for food production, distribution and consumption through regular connections, networks and sharing of knowledge, skills and information. The very nature of production is reconsidered as intra-active, and creates not just commodities, but subjects and structures too. A geography of hope is intimately connected to the structural and material dispositions of the various related and intra-acting actors. However, there is vast potential for a food movement to both acknowledge the existing system and its unevenness, and capitalise on novel connections (articulating with and beyond the dominant system) of dynamic AFIs to allow them to flourish and renegotiate the path for our common food future.

Biography

Emma is a PhD student in the School of Environment at Auckland University. Her research is driven by a desire for social justice and reflects on connections between politics and human and non-human ethics, particularly in a food context. She completed her MSc in Physical Geography at Auckland University in 2004, and before embarking on her PhD worked in government, consultancy, and the 3rd sector in New Zealand and the UK on environmental,

education and international aid projects. In 2010 she returned to Auckland University, and has since been teaching on Foundation, Stage II and III Geography courses.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the thoughtful input of the reviewing panel, my colleague Linda Madden and participants of the MFCO Early Career-Graduate Conference in Dunedin, 2014.

Endnotes

1. Popularised by Jim Diers, 'bumping places', otherwise called 'bumping spots' created through place making, are spaces where people can come together and create relationships.
2. Both families and schools have been interpreted by Foucault and Bourdieu as dominant, conventional institutions, through processes of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) and through the concentration and dispersal of power (Foucault 1988).

References

Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance 2013, *People's food plan: A common sense approach to a fair, sustainable and resilient food system*, viewed 20 June, 2014, <http://www.australianfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/PFP-policy-august13.pdf>

Ballamingie, P & Walker, SML 2013, 'Field of dreams: Just food's proposal to create a community food and sustainable agriculture hub in Ottawa, Ontario', *Local Environment*, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 529-542.

Barad, K 2001, 'Re(con)figuring space time and matter', in M DeKoven (ed), *Feminist locations: Global and local, theory and practice*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick.

— 2003, 'Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 801-831.

— 2007, *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*, Duke University Press, London.

Blay-Palmer, A, Landman, K, Knezevic, I & Hayhurst, R 2013, 'Constructing resilient, transformative communities through sustainable "food hubs"', *Local Environment*, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 521-528.

Bourdieu, P & Passeron, JC 1990, *Reproduction in education, society and culture*, Sage, London.

Butler, J 1990, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*, Routledge, New York.

— 1997 *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*, Stanford University Press Stanford.

Campbell, AM & MacRae, R 2013, 'Local food plus: The connective tissue in local/sustainable supply chain development', *Local Environment*, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 557-566.

Carolan, M 2011, *Embodied food politics*, Ashgate, Farnham.

Diers, J 2014, 'Neighbour power', viewed 21 July, 2014, <http://neighborpower.org>

Dolphijn, R & van der Tuin, I 2012, 'Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers', *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, viewed 10 October, 2014, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/ohp.11515701.0001.001>

Durham, K 2013, 'An examination of the barriers and opportunities for the establishment of a food policy council in Auckland', *BPlan thesis*, University of Auckland, Auckland.

Ettlinger, N 2004, 'Toward a critical theory of untidy geographies: The spatiality of emotions consumption and production', *Feminist Economics*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 21-54.

Feenstra, G 2002, 'Creating space for sustainable food systems: Lessons from the field', *Agriculture and Human Values*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 99-106.

Foucault, M 1988, 'Critical theory/intellectual theory, interview with Gerard Raulet', in L Kritzman (ed), *Michel Foucault: Politics, philosophy, culture: Interviews and other writings, 1977-1984*, Routledge, London.

Fox, C 2010, *Food policy councils: Innovations in democratic governance for a sustainable and equitable food system*, Los Angeles Food Policy Task Force, Los Angeles.

Gibson-Graham, JK 2006, *A postcapitalist politics*, University of Minnesota Press, London.

— 2008, 'Diverse economics: Performative practices for "other worlds"', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 35, no. 5, pp. 613–632.

Grow Together 2014, viewed 7 July 2014 <http://www.growtogether.org.nz>

Haraway, D 1997, *Modest_witness@second_millennium.FemaleMan[@]_meets_Onco Mouse™ : feminism and technoscience*, Routledge, London.

— 2008, *When species meet*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis.

Harvey, D 1989, *The condition of postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*, Blackwell, Cambridge, MA.

Jenks, C 2003, *Transgression*, Routledge, London.

Latouche, S 1993, *In the wake of affluent society: An exploration of post-development*, Zed, London.

Matson, J, Sullins, M & Cook, C 2012, 'Creating a roadmap for food hub development', *Rural Cooperatives*, vol. 79, no. 4, pp. 18-21.

Radio New Zealand National 2014, '[Garden city aims to be world's best edible garden city](#)', *Morning Report*, 3 November, 2014,

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/morningreport/audio/20155693/garden-city-aims-to-be-world's-best-edible-garden-city>

Sommer, M 2013, 'New Food Policy Council takes on problems in local food system', *Buffalo News*, 23 October 2013, viewed 18 November, 2013,

<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE|A346593746&v=2.1&u=learn&it=r&p=ITOF&sw=w&asid=637e74d3265fe5cb21da2681baaa5502>

Sustain: Alliance for Better Food and Farming 2005, *London Sustainable Food Hub: Opportunities for a Sustainable Food Logistics Hub in London*. London, viewed 20 June, 2014, http://www.sustainweb.org/pdf/sustain_food_booklet.pdf

Sustainable Business Network 2014, 'Restoring New Zealand's food system', viewed 21 July, 2014, <http://sustainable.org.nz/what-we-do/transformation-areas/restoring-new-zealands-food-system/>