

THE PRACTICE OF SUPERMARKET SHOPPING:
ASSEMBLING THE EVERYDAY WITHIN A COERCIVE SPACE

by

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(Under the Direction of Hilda Kurtz)

ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at how decisions in the supermarket are shaped by the tensions between supermarket companies' persuading shoppers into making profitable purchases and shoppers' using food to perform their tastes and values. Using actor-network theory, this project brings the concepts of hegemony and prosumption to an analysis of supermarket space. Using a qualitative research design, data was generated by conducting ten walking interviews at six supermarkets in Athens, Georgia. By analyzing the way supermarkets use space to stabilize the hegemony of the Supermarket as a form of distribution, this thesis found that supermarkets continue to be depoliticized spaces despite growing concerns over food and food production. This project also finds that shoppers use foods in the supermarket as a way to perform a micro-politics of care. This is not a political strategy to create social change based on abstract values, but a deeply embodied politics grounded in material concerns.

INDEX WORDS: Supermarket, Actor-Network Theory, Walking Interview, Prosumption, Micro- Politics, Hegemony, Everyday Life, Embodied Values

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A BRIEF NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

In this thesis, the word supermarket is used to many different ways. To clear up some possible ambiguity the capitalized ‘Supermarket’ is used to refer to the form of selling and distributing foods that particular supermarket stores use. The word ‘supermarket’ in the lower case is used to refer to the store and/or the company that owns and managed many stores. When there is the possibility for slippage in meaning or when making this distinction clear is important the lower case ‘supermarket’ will be qualified to give precision to what is being discussing.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For many people in the United States, decisions about what to eat tonight, tomorrow, or throughout the week happen within the space of the supermarket (Shankar *et al.* 2011). Over 60 percent of all food sold in the United States moves through a supermarket (FMI 2010).

Supermarkets are not inert containers in which foods are placed; they are meticulously crafted spaces that are fashioned in the attempt to promote profitable patterns of consumption. Shopping in a supermarket confronts us with a dizzying array of choices that range from Hostess pudding pies to locally sourced organic kale. On top of this, almost every kind of food available has multiple derivations that all attempt to convince us why they are better for us to buy. The deliberation, repetition, and actions that take place as we decide what to put in our carts have broad implications for personal health, agricultural economics, social relationships, happiness, and our understanding of individual and social values. In order to understand why we make the decisions we do, it is critical to examine how our movements within a supermarket affect what we purchase and what about food is important to people beyond sustenance.

Rather than thinking in terms of production as material and consumption as symbolic, as is often the case in commodity studies (Dixon 1999), this project conceptualizes the processes of production and consumption as being co-constituted by networks of actual and virtual actors whose relationships mutually affect the actions of one another. Bringing production and consumption together in this way will bring into focus the sensory, emotional, creative, and aspirational aspects of food provisioning.

As consuming subjects walk the aisles of the supermarket, decisions are made that are affected by the experience of actually being in the store and the imagined satisfaction afforded by the foods within it. The interactions between supermarkets, commodified foods, and shoppers guides and shapes how, what, and why people eat the foods they do. The practice of supermarket shopping emerges from the tensions between the supermarket as a corporate-capitalist space produced through enactments of marketing strategies and the decisions people make in those spaces that are motivated by their attempts to enact their own, and others, tastes and values.

To understand the mutually affective interactions between supermarkets and shoppers, this project focuses on how people who shop at an alternative system of food distribution called Athens Locally Grown (ALG) also navigate the aisles of conventional supermarkets. By engaging with this group of consumers, it will be possible to illuminate how the tastes and values that motivate participation in alternative food networks shape their decisions in the supermarket, as well as the ways in which supermarkets actively coerce shoppers' in profitable purchases. The perspective of people who shop at Athens Locally Grown will enable an investigation of the complex space of the Supermarket.

Finding the Supermarket

Before I started to develop this research project, I had given very little thought to supermarkets. They were simply a part of my everyday life. They were the places I went to when I needed to buy food, when I was hungry and did not want to eat out, or where I went to gather foods to stock my kitchen. The supermarket was a seemingly normal, almost natural, space to buy food. The Supermarket as a form of distributing food just made sense. Most of the foods I wanted were in one store. It seemed simple to go in, gather a variety of foods to make it through the week, and go home.

When I first started to think about what I wanted to spend the next two years of my life focusing on I was motivated by trying to understand the inequalities produced by the modern industrial food system. I wanted to add in some way to the understanding of how, and why, food related health problems disproportionately affect people of color and low-income population (Cumming and Macintyre 2005). Over time, this project developed into focusing on how people involved in an alternative space of food provisions navigate the supermarket, this interest in understand inequalities in the food system led me to begin questioning the role of the Supermarket in everyday life. I started this process by reading literature on food deserts and critiques of the modern industrialized food system.

In part, this project emerged out of a frustration with the way supermarkets were treated in the literature on food deserts. In many of the articles on foods deserts, the lack of access to healthy food was nearly always defined as an area “devoid of a supermarket” (Walker *et al.* 2010, 876). This literature discussed supermarkets as the ideal, or normal, form of distribution that would be best for all locations, neighborhoods, communities, and people. I was troubled by the way supermarkets were rarely questioned and often taken for granted. There seemed to be an assumption that access to a supermarket would simply make people eat healthier. I found some inspiration to explore the Supermarket in more depth from a review of food desert literature that found supermarket access did not directly correspond with BMI (Boone-Heinonen *et al.* 2011). Further inspiration to pursue studying the supermarket came from Jerry Shannon’s 2014 article in which he argues that “research on food deserts normalizes the ‘foodscape’ of middle-class neighborhoods and thus makes a more systematic evaluation of the conventional food system more difficult” (259). Finding literature that questioned the idealization and normalization of supermarkets I began to think more critically about what actually goes on while people shop,

how do people actually make decision within a supermarket and what shapes these decisions?

The other aspect of this research projects developed out of a frustration with the lack of attention to supermarkets in literature that critiques the modern food system. Sarah Whatmore provides an excellent and concise review of the dominant themes in critical agro-food studies, characterizing the agro-food system as involving three overlapping problems,

“production which centers on the problems of surplus production and indebtedness amongst agricultural producers... *regulation*, resulting from the growing political and institutional tensions in a policy apparatus... [and] *legitimation*, which centers on the politicization of concerns about the consequences of industrialized agriculture for food security” (Whatmore 1995).

Although Whatmore, and other agro-food scholars, conceptualize food retailing as a part of the food industry, it is rarely the focus of analysis. I found that the topics dominating this literature involved the agri-technology industry, the farming industry, food manufactures, and regulatory agencies. Critical food scholars seems to implicitly presented food retailers as tertiary or seemingly unimportant. I found this position deeply unsatisfying. Supermarkets seemed to me to play a central role in how food was distributed. They dominated the way I thought about how to acquire food and the way I actually did. It seemed to me that supermarkets were the only point of contact I had with this problematic agro-food system that felt distant and almost abstract. It was from this point that a second central question emerged, what role supermarkets play in the agro-food system and how do they affect peoples’ everyday lives?

These larger questions animate this thesis and started my path towards thinking more critically about the space of the Supermarket, a space I had taken for granted for many years. As I began to think about these questions every time walked the aisles of the Kroger down the street from my apartment, I slowly began to notice the complexity and difficulty of shopping at a supermarket. I started to notice during each decision the many ways ‘my’ decisions were being

shaped by factors outside my control: the money I had to spend, the work I had to do, the necessity to nourish my body, my own tastes and the tastes of my partner, the potentially negative affects the food I ate had on others, and the food that was available to purchase. Supermarket shopping became a tricky process of navigating life while navigate the aisles.

The overarching goals of this thesis is to bring attention to supermarkets as powerful actors that shape what food is sold and how it is sold and as an important space to many peoples' everyday lives. This research seeks to understand how people actively make their own decisions about what to eat without losing sight of the way these decisions are heavily influence by the practices of supermarket companies. In the United States, the Supermarket has become a dominant form of distribution that mediates the interactions between people and food, but they do not determine this relationship.

Outlining this Thesis

Chapter Two details the history of the emergence of supermarkets. The Supermarket as a form of retail developed in specific historical conditions in the United States between 1910 and 1950. The first phase of this development was the transition from small independently owned grocers to chain grocery stores that actively implemented the economic logic of profit maximization and efficiency. During this period, the most fundamental shift in the way food was sold was the move towards self-service. Self-service involved moving foods from behind the counter to the middle of the store, where shoppers did the work of gathering the foods they purchased. By the late 1930s and into the 1940s, chain grocers began to face rapidly falling rates of profit. In the post-war years state sponsored suburbanization created new spaces for profit, where chain grocers could use the capital they accumulated in the pre-war years to build large-scale supermarkets. The Supermarket is a historically produced form of food distribution

designed for making profits in the middle-class white suburbs created in the post-war years. During the period prior to the rise of the supermarket food provisioning was at times a deeply political practice. As the Supermarket began to rise in prominence, supermarket companies and the state began to develop strategies to depoliticize food provisioning. Since the 1950s, supermarket companies rapidly expanded and by the 1970s accounted for the majority of retail food sold in the United States. Over the past 20 years, there has been an intense period of concentration of ownership and control in the supermarket industry, the top 4 retailers account for 40% of all retail food sold. What was once a diverse industry of local and regional chains has become dominated by a few exceptionally powerful corporate firms that have begun to exert a powerful influence over how, and what, food is produced and sold.

Chapter Three reviews the existing literature on the role of supermarkets in everyday life and explains the theoretical framework this project uses. While much of this literature focuses on supermarkets impacts on production, a small handful of scholars over the past five years have begun to look at the way supermarkets shape the everyday lives of the people who shop there and the decision they make within them. Drawing on this literature the theoretical framework for this project begins with an attempt to find ways to reconnect the divisions between production and consumption. Out of this discussion emerges a reconception of food shoppers as prosumers rather than passive consumers. The practice of food provisioning is presumptive because it involves moments of consumption that are used produce a future with meals that could, even if only partially, satisfy tastes and/or values. From here, this chapter moves into a discussion of actor-network theory. Actor-network theory is used as in attempt to develop an understanding of the way both supermarkets and the foods within them act on the actions and decisions prosumers make while in the store.

Chapter Four discusses the methods and methodology used in this research. My methods include qualitative data collection done through walking interviews with 12 participants at six different stores. Instead of doing either sit-down interviews or participant observations while people shop, the interviews took place during shopping trips. These methods is an attempt to put the theoretical framework into methodological practice by conducting the researching while participants actually interact with, and are affected by, foods and the marketing strategies of the store.

Chapter Five discusses the power of supermarkets to shape the decisions shoppers make while stabilizing their dominant economic position by creating moments of coerced consent. In a broad sense, supermarkets coerce people into shopping there by creating ‘local monopolies’ and taking advantage of economies of scale to drive down price. The physical space of the supermarket is designed to manage the movements of shoppers while forcing them to have unplanned encounters. The Supermarket is stabilized further by the focus on food and food production as *the* problem with the modern food system, making supermarkets unquestioned spaces taken as commonsense. This continues the legacy of depoliticizing food provisioning that began in the 1950s by supermarket companies and the state.

Chapter Six is an analysis of the ways people perform their tastes and values as they presumptively shop. This chapter begins with a discussion of how shoppers form associations with foods in order to ‘know’ them. The three common mediators that around which people perform networks of association are Organic labels, ingredient lists, and brands. These three mediators are flexible and unstable; rarely do these actors modify the associations people make with food in a coherent way. Through forming associations, shoppers’ decisions are modified by a particular foods capacity to be used to satisfy tastes and/or values. The tastes and values that

came out most prominently are health, convenience, pleasure, and care. These tastes and values are not abstract, but embodied by a materiality outside the space of the store or the temporality of the shopping trip.

Chapter seven provided a brief summary of the central arguments of this thesis. It then moves into a critical reflection on the successes and limitations of the empirics, methods, and theoretical framework used in this project. Concluding this chapter is a discussion of alternative ways to approach studying the supermarket and some of the implications for future research.

Making decisions in a supermarket is not a matter of autonomously choosing what to buy, nor are shoppers passively manipulated. The act of picking up a food, placing it in a cart, buying it, and bringing it home to eventually eat is not a simple or straightforward task. As people shop they make use of food to satisfying their tastes and value while assembling a purchase that fits with the other aspects of their lives that do not directly involve food. At the same time the space of a supermarket is meticulously crafted to subtly act on the actions of shoppers by coercing them into moments of consent that stabilize the Supermarket as a normal, proper, and profitable form of distribution.

CHAPTER 2

A HISTORY OF SUPERMARKET RISE TO DOMINANCE

In many ways, the ideal example of modern capitalism is not the factory, nor even the stock market, but the supermarket

-John P. Walsh 1994, 4

Modern supermarkets are generally corporately owned retail chains characterized by a diverse selection of groceries, produce, dairy, frozen foods, and meats gathered by shoppers as they walk through and around aisles and displays. Between 1910 and 2015, three historical periods have transformed food provisioning from a practice involving a network of diverse food retailers to one that is dominated by powerful supermarket corporations that play an increasingly central role in shaping how, and what, food is produced, purchased, and consumed. For many people in the United States, supermarkets have become the primary spaces within which decisions about what foods to bring home and eventually eat happen (Shankar *et al* 2011).

Before the 1910s, purchasing groceries, dry or canned non-perishables, was done by giving a list to one of the store employees who would gather and pack the foods for the customer (Brietbach 2007). These small independently owned grocery stores were deeply embedded in neighborhood social relationships (Deutsch 2010). Between 1914 and 1933 this model of food provisioning was destabilized. One of the most important changes occurred in 1916 when Clarence Saunders opened the full self-service food store in Memphis, Tennessee (Lawrence and Burch 2007). The move to self-service facilitated direct inspection and engagement with food prior to purchase, and with it developed a completely new understanding of retail space and the role of food itself in motivating sales (Shaw *et al* 2004). Alongside this was a shift towards an economic model of mass retailing, selling high volumes at a low price with small profit margins (Deutsch 2010). Retailers, with the assistance of trade publications, began to merge self-service

and mass retailing by developing strategies for utilizing the space of the store and the packaged products within it to maximize profit and efficiency by managing shoppers' movements and attention (Mayo 1993). As chains stores grew, so did anti-chain movements and consumer organizations' attempts to balance control over the foods within them.

By the 1950s, mass retailing self-service grocery chains grew in size as fierce competition led to the development of more complex and scientific marketing strategies. It was during this time that supermarkets became focused on “theories of shelf arrangement, store design, display techniques, ‘traffic’ flow, and the phenomenon of the ‘impulse buy’” (Humphrey 1998, 69). Riding the wave of post-war prosperity and suburbanization, grocery chains saw the emerging middle-class suburbs as spaces of potential profit. Supermarkets began targeting the suburbs in order to take advantage of their capacity to achieve economies of scale by building larger and fewer stores that were marketed as being respectable, glamorous, and convenient while remaining affordable to middle-class suburban women (Deutsch 2010).

As supermarkets played an increasingly prominent role in actual shopping practices, they also began to be marketed as integral aspects in the move toward 'progress' and modernization (ibid). Supermarket marketing narratives at this time focused on tying convenience and technological advances in food production to living a modern and happy life. They began to present themselves as pleasurable spaces where shoppers could satisfy their every desire. By the end of the 1970s, supermarkets had come to be understood by many people as apolitical spaces that symbolized the success of modern capitalism in the United States (Deutsch 2010).

With deregulation in the 1980s and a succession of takeovers and mergers in the 1990s, supermarket companies grew in size and influence as their numbers dwindled. Into the late 1980s a fragmented and diverse number of local, regional, and national chains competing for business

characterized food retailing. During the 1980s the general move toward neoliberalization of markets paved the way for a succession of mergers and takeovers that consolidated and concentrated food retailing in the 1990s (Koch 2012). By the end of the 1990s, the top 10 food retailers in the United States accounted for nearly 40 percent of the market (Seth and Randall 1999). This concentration has allowed large food retailers to assert more control over production and distribution (Lawrence and Burch 2007).

In the early 2000s, Wal-Mart revolutionized the use of point-of-sale data to integrate retail and supply chains as well as generate vast amounts of data on consumption practices that has now become standard practice in many corporate supermarkets (Seth and Randall 1999). Retail companies use this data in order to 'know the consumer' and try 'build relationships' with them. Using this data, marketing strategies focus on shaping the in-store experience so that people identify with and feel emotionally connected to the store (Chevalier 2014). Although there has been a proliferation of supercenters and smaller 'fresh format' supermarkets, they both are based on the Supermarket form of distribution. They are self-service chain stores with a diverse array of food departments that rely on in-store and out-of-store marketing strategies to draw in profitable and loyal customers.

The development of the Supermarket is a history of struggle and cooperation between retailers, manufactures, marketers, and consumers. Prior to World War II food retailing was composed of deeply politicized spaces where women shoppers worked to assert a rapidly eroding authority over what food was available, food prices, and its quality. As supermarkets began to dominate food retailing in the post war years they began to be presented as apolitical spaces that simply responded to demand and desire (Deutsch 2010, 217). The Supermarket as a form of food

distribution is a historical product that has come to dominate the way food in the United States is sold and shape how people interact with food as they acquire it (Mayo 1993).

The Growth of the Chain Store: 1910-1940

Although the Supermarket proper did not fully develop until after World War II, the expansion of chain grocery stores between 1910 and the 1940s set the foundation for its emergence. Prior to 1910 food provisioning was done by navigating a patchwork of public markets, mobile peddlers, butcher shops, and small independent grocers. “It was in these busy peddlers’ carts, market stalls, and grocers’ counters that the notion of women customers as demanding, assertive, and political was most powerfully forged” (Deutsch 2010, 23). Through personal interactions with small neighborhood retailers women haggled over prices, demanded quality, and organized to exert social pressure on male owned and operated stores. During this period food provisioning was understood as difficult, time-consuming, and important labor enmeshed in social tensions surrounding class, gender, and race (ibid). With the rise of chain stores and the erosion of independent retailers, food provisioning became a much more impersonal practice shaped around economic efficiency, profit maximization, promises of autonomy and independence, and attempts to manage shoppers’ moments and attention.

The corporate chain grocery store was an attempt to extend the economic logic of mass production to retail and distribution. Rather than relying on one or two stores, companies such as The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P), Kroger Co., Safeway Inc., Albertsons, Piggly Wiggly, and Publix began to build extensive networks of stores across cities and regions. These companies grew from having 7,723 stores in 1920 to operating 30,453 stores by the end of the decade (Mayo 1993). Most of these early chain stores were small establishments, between 1,000 and 3,000 square feet, which focused almost exclusively on the sale of mass produced

bulk, canned, and packaged foods. The basic economic motivation behind corporate chain retail was an attempt to maximize company-wide profitability through a dual process of minimizing costs while purchasing and selling large volumes of food at lower prices (Mayo 1993). To achieve this, chains began buying large volumes of goods directly from manufacturers for discounted prices. This allowed these chains to gain favorable wholesale prices that could not be obtained by smaller independent grocers (ibid). Creating economies of scale, introduced to food retailing by chain grocers, remains the underlying logic of food retailing in the United States into the 2000s (Walsh 1993; Koch 2012).

The early chain store, between 1910 and the 1920s, was an “economy store... designed as a factory assembly line for consumption” (Mayo 1993, 86). Chains adapted the scientific management principles of Taylorism to standardize stores in the pursuit of maximized labor productivity and product turnover. Chains did this by standardizing and rationalizing the design of stores, the placement of goods, how labor moved, and the activities of workers. The goal was to create a type of store designed to fit in anywhere, but remained in operation only where expected rates of return could be achieved (Mayo 1993). “The economy store has no place attachment to the local community as the mom and pop stores did. The economy store was purely a mobile factory for profit production” (ibid, 87). The economy store began the process of disembedding the grocer from neighborhood communities by working to eliminate management decisions made based on social interactions between the grocer and the shopper.

The shift from full-service to self-service introduced during this period fundamentally changed the relationship between retailers, shoppers, and food. As chains grocers began rapidly expanding during the 1920s, the standardized design of the economy store could no longer accommodate the increased volume of shoppers and sales. Clerks at stores using the traditional

counter-and-wall model, where shoppers would approach a grocer at a counter who would then fill their order from shelves behind the counter, were becoming quickly overwhelmed. The full-service model could no longer achieve the high turnover required for profitability. With falling rates of profit in the latter half of the 1920s and the successful implementation of self-service by Piggly Wiggly, chains grocers across the country began to view the transition to self-service as central to “stores’ financial and social strategies” (Deutsch 2010, 53). By the late 1930s nearly all chain grocers, independent grocery stores, and grocery store cooperatives had made the move to the self-service model (Peak and Peak 1977).

By moving food from behind the counter to the center of the store, chains were able to shift some of the labor previously done by grocery clerks onto shoppers and foods. Since shoppers were now gathering foods themselves, higher volumes of sales could be achieved with fewer workers and in less time. The work that had been done by paid labor was now being done by the free labor of the shopper. Skilled salesmen were replaced with low wage cashiers that could more easily be replaced. The role of the salesman to increase revenue and profit began to be achieved by packaging and the physical design of the store. Self-service created opportunities for the physicality of the store and the foods it contained to do the work that had once been done by waged workers.

For grocers, trade journals, brand manufacturers, and chain store managers, self-service was viewed as bringing with it a completely new set of marketing opportunities. These new self-service stores began marketing themselves as progressive and modern spaces where women could make informed decisions among a growing number of choices by spending time interacting with, learning about, and comparing different foods without the having to deal with the male gaze of a salesman (Deutsch 2010). During the 20s and 30s shoppers were

conceptualized as and repeatedly told that they were autonomous actors who could exert their authority through the mechanism of choice and social pressure (ibid). This understanding of shopping was (re)produced through advertising, consumer activist organizations, and retail trade journals.

In the self-service store *packaged* foods and the space of the store became seen as one of retailers' most powerful marketing tools, replacing personal interaction as the primary means of increasing sales (Humphrey 1998). Merchandisers and marketers by the late 1920s began to argue that generic goods, stored in bulk containers or purely functional packaging, were no longer adequate in the age of self-service (ibid). As one influential book from 1928, *Packages that Sell*, put it:

A modern grocery store interior. Everything is packaged in sanitary containers which are designed not only *to convey but also to sell* the products they contain. A merchandising revolution has taken place. (Franken and Larrabee 1928 quoted in Humphrey 1998).

Packaged foods sitting on the shelf of the self-service store were not inert objects. Rather, the 'revolution' in food merchandising brought on by self-service was that food products themselves could have a direct influence on the actions and decisions of shoppers as they walked through the store.

Guiding the rise of the self-service store was a shift in the way design, trade journals, chain grocers, and marketers understood to role of physical layout and displays. The grocery store was being transformed from a storehouse to a showroom. By the late 1920s the already influential trade magazine, *Progressive Grocer*, published a series entitled *How to Build a Display that Sells* (Cochoy 2010). Within these pages store models, cartoons, testimonials, and essays attempted to make the case that by building attractive stores the grocer could conditions shoppers decisions as well as manage their movements and attention (ibid; Bowlby 2001).

Although attention to design, layout, and display were only in its infancy during the 20s and 30s, these strategies quickly came to be central to building profitable stores. By 1930, the package and the store emerged as the essential mediums through which to communicate with and persuade shoppers.

The success of chain grocers between 1910 and 1930 led to attempts by the state, consumers, and manufacturers to control their growing economic and social power. By the early 1930s, self-service chain grocers “had gone from marginal features of urban life to central institutions, wielding enormous capital and enormous influence over the food that many Americans ate” (Deutsch 2010, 135). As the Great Depression began to sink in across the United States, dwindling incomes began to put pressure on food shoppers’ budgets. Although many people could cut back on whatever discretionary spending they once had, the cost of food was unavoidable. Drawing on the historical understanding of prices as being a negotiation between shoppers and the grocer, groups of women in cities began to organize boycotts and protests against large chains they saw as charging excessively high prices while no longer providing any services (ibid). Although generally unsuccessful on a large scale, these consumer movements became a way for women to assert themselves collectively as political actors engaged in struggles over how food was sold, distributed, and marketed. The grocery store in the late 1920s through the 1930s was an important space around which women challenged their exclusion from formal politics (Deutsch 2010).

Within the realm of formal politics in the mid-30s, anti-chain legislation was introduced as an attempt to mitigate uneven power relations between chains, manufactures, and independent grocerd. One of the earliest pieces of legislation enacted was the chain-store tax which imposed taxes on retailers based on the number of stores they operated (Mayo 1993). By the 1940s and

50s, this tax ended up incentivizing the elimination of many urban grocery stores and the construction of large supermarkets. The most influential and long lasting anti-chain legislation signed into law in 1939 was the Robinson-Patman Act. This law made it illegal for manufacturers to charge different prices for the same volume of goods to different retailers. Effectively, the Robinson-Patman act made it much more difficult for chain retailers to use their buying power as a way demand lower prices than were available to independent grocers (ibid).

Pressure from government regulation, consumer resistance, and a decade of economic depression began to destabilize the chain grocery store model by the end of the 1930s (Mayo 1993). Operating thousands of small retail outlets in densely populated urban areas that focused on selling a small range on mass produced goods was no longer profitable. As their rates of profit began shrinking, grocery chains began to search for new marketing strategies and new spaces that could be made profitable. Rather than investing in projects to make unprofitable stores economically stable, chain grocers throughout the 30s began to close down any store that was not turning a profit (Deutsch 2010).

The successful, problematic, and explicitly political space that was the urban chain grocery store between 1910 and 1940 was soon eliminated as retail companies investing in building suburban supermarkets. Through a combination of falling rates of profit in the urban core and the creation of new suburban spaces of potential profit, chain grocers began rapidly shifting their capital towards a new retail form called ‘the Supermarket’. In the 1950s, as supermarkets rose to prominence the narrative around food shopping shifted from one of autonomy and labor to one of aesthetic pleasure and satisfying demand.

The Emergence of the Supermarket: 1940-1980

By 1980, the Supermarket had become the dominant form of food retail and its sales techniques were the standard way of selling food regardless of format (Mayo 1993). The Supermarket is the retail form that consolidated the once disparate spaces of food provisioning. It imposes a logic of centralization on the selling of produce, meat, groceries, dairy, baked goods, household items, and frozen foods. The rise of the Supermarket was both swift and immense. Between 1946 and 1963 supermarkets went from being responsible for 28 percent of all retail food sales to 69 percent (Mayo 1993).

The growth and success of supermarkets relied on a combination of economic and social strategies. On the one hand, the Supermarket was a way for corporate food retailers to aggressively pursue greater economies of scale. On the other, the supermarket became embedded in post-war narratives around white middle-class suburban femininity, modernization, and progress (Deutsch 2010). In popular and business literature during this period, the Supermarket began to be discussed as an apolitical institution that simply supplied what was necessary to satisfy consumer demand (Peak and Peak 1977).

The development of the Supermarket relied on, and helped motivate, the emergence of marketing as a science. Drawing on quantitative techniques in social science and growing academic interest in human psychology, supermarket shoppers became the object of both knowledge and management. Supermarkets relied on scientific techniques to determine the most efficient and profitable location for new store, store design and layout, as well as shelf and product arrangement. The rise of the supermarket between 1940 and 1980 was also the rise of the science of supermarketing.

The modern supermarket is a uniquely American invention that was historically produced for the growing suburbs that developed following the end of World War II (Mayo 1993). State sponsored suburbanization after the war created spaces of potential profit for chain grocers to build large-scale stores by leveraging the capital they had accrued during the 1920s and 30s. In general, supermarkets during the early 40s and 50s were between 7,000 and 10,000 square feet, and as a rule had parking lots one-third the size of the store (Peak and Peak 1977). By 1960, the average supermarket grew to 15,000 square feet, and by the end of the 1970s supermarkets began to average 30,000 square feet (ibid). In a purely economic sense, the Supermarket was a way to increase profits by seeking to capture a larger percentage of more households' food expenditures than had been possible with small grocers. Although individual supermarkets had profit margins of only 1 to 2 percent, corporate supermarket chains as a whole could be made profitable by maximizing product turnover and taking advantage of economies of scale (Walsh 1993). As with the chain grocery store, maximizing volume and turnover continued to be overriding goals of supermarket retailers. The American suburb provided a space for this to be pursued.

With more of a firm's capital going into the building and operating of a single store, companies began to rely on geographical locational analysis as a way to determine the optimal location for maximizing sales volume. For a supermarket in the 1950s to succeed economically, it needed a building large enough to contain all of its food departments, a large parking lot, and people who were affluent enough to own cars and have enough pantry space to make large purchases (Mayo 1993). To determine the location for a new store, supermarket companies began developing statistical models for expected volume of sales that factored in variables such as social class, income, racial composition, lifestyle, and age (Peak and Peak 1977). Profitable locations were determined to be areas that were composed of racially and ethnically homogenous

middle-class families who were unlikely to move (ibid). Put another way, locational analysis guided corporate food retailers' decisions to move out of the city and begin building supermarkets in white middle-class suburbs. Locational analysis was the beginning of a shift towards positivist science as a means of creating knowledge about how to profitably sell food.

In addition to the spatial fix of moving to the suburbs, supermarket companies began heavily investing in technologies to both increase sales volume and externalize labor costs. During the 1950s, the shopping cart was introduced into stores as a way to eliminate the physical limitations of the hand-held basket. Gondola shelving, an adjustable shelving unit used to create aisles with food on both sides, was developed in order to maximize the amount of shelf space available for presenting merchandise. Coolers and refrigeration units made possible the mass retailing of frozen foods and packaged meats (Mayo 1993). Although not developed until the late 1970s, the implementation of the Universal Product Code (UPC) and scanners eliminated the time consuming work of labeling food with prices and typing them into a cash register. This assisted in the management of shopper traffic by speeding up checkout. As will be discussed in the next section, the UPC also fundamentally changed how supermarkets managed their supply chains and gathered marketing data on shoppers.

Technological changes also allowed supermarket companies to shift the cost of labor away from the retailer. Up until the mid-1960s supermarket meat departments were essentially butcher shops. They would purchase whole animals, store them in refrigeration units, and butcher them in house. With the invention of boxed beef and centralized meat processing in the 1960s, supermarkets quickly began to view centrally processed meat as a way to eliminate the costs associated with the storage and labor of a butcher (Walsh 1993). The introduction of boxed beef into mass retail reorganized labor within the supermarket, the independent butcher shop,

cattle farm, and abattoirs (Breitbach 2007). The case of centralized boxed beef production is emblematic of the way supermarket companies throughout their history have actively attempted and embraced a reorganization of production, processing, and retailing in the pursuit of profitability.

Alongside the growth of supermarkets was the emergence of the ‘science of supermarketing’ (Humphrey 1998, 70). Retailers and trade journals started to apply quantitative techniques from the social sciences and theories of human psychology to the design of stores, shelf management, aesthetic design, display techniques, and traffic-flow. Drawing on research methods of positivist social science marketing researchers started conducting large-scale shopper surveys, mapping out shoppers’ movements through the store while meticulously documenting every action, and conducting controlled experiments (Bowlby 2001). Through a process of recording and statistical analysis, supermarket companies attempted to “predict what changes in its environment would get [the shopper] to do more of what it was put in the supermarket world to do: buy” (ibid, 212). These measurement-based techniques were combined with “psychoanalytic theories of consumer desire. Durkheimian research into social types sat alongside Freudian theories of the pleasure-seeking, irrationally driven individual” (Humphrey 1998, 93). By applying 1950s psychology to supermarketing “customers [were] thought of as reacting in the same way to the same ‘stimuli’” (Bowlby 2001, 172). The supermarket industry conceptualized shoppers as simple stimulus response machines.

Using these theories and analytic techniques, supermarket firms and trade journals developed a wide range of ways to break shoppers into segmented groups, consumer typologies, who could be marketed to specifically. Supermarketing embraced the concept that by introducing the right stimuli to the right shoppers they would unconsciously sell to themselves (Bowlby

2001). By the 1950s, supermarket shoppers were not thought of as a purely rational actor, but one whose emotional and embodied connection to food could be used as a tool for selling more food. The food retail industry conceptualized supermarket shoppers as subject that could be known, defined, and manipulated. By embracing this ‘science of supermarketing’ the space of the supermarket and the shoppers that move within it began to be seen as something that could be engineered to maximize profit.

The physical design and layout of the store was a critical aspect of supermarketing strategies. Combining traffic-flow surveys, the mapping of shoppers’ movements and actions, with sales data from a wide variety of layouts, supermarket researchers developed a store design that remains the standard in 2015. In one supermarket management and merchandising textbook from 1977 external design, interior design, allocation of space for various department, location of departments, location of non-selling areas, and aisles placement are all discussed as key elements to boosting sales and profitability (Peak and Peak 1977). Peak and Peak proscribe the following: To maximize store visibility the building itself should be a rectangle with the front of the store facing the street and a sign that has black letters one foot tall for every 500 feet it is from the road. The interior of the store should use bright colors to accent or separate department, mellow wood tones to accentuate wine and liquor. Interior lighting should be installed crossways to the aisle rather than parallel and be used strategically to draw attention to certain foods. Interior signage and sales material should be dispersed throughout the store as a way to provide information to shoppers and promote certain product. “All of the ingredients of external and internal design must work together to promise a pleasant shopping experience to customers” (Peak and Peak 1977, 96).

Peak and Peak go on to argue that the size of a department within the supermarket should be directly proportional to its profitability. The location of departments throughout the store should guide shoppers in a counterclockwise movement starting at the right front corner of the store. Shoppers 'traffic-flow' should be managed by placing the produce, meat, and dairy departments around the perimeter of the store. The right side of the perimeter is the "ideal location for impulse purchase" and the most important location for creating the image of a store as fresh, clean, and inviting (ibid, 98). The rear perimeter, the back of the store, should contain the meat department as a way to "draw customers through the store, shopping as they go" (ibid, 99). On the left perimeter "it is good to use basic demand or powerful impulse items to maintain traffic flow... dairy or frozen foods" (ibid, 100). The center of the store should be restricted to groceries placed in aisles perpendicular to the back of the store. Checkout lanes should be along the front of the store, guiding shoppers towards the exit and the end of their shopping trip.

In the Peak and Peak textbook, marketing techniques for displays, shelving, ends of aisles, and item location all have their own detailed sections. In a broad sense, displays are a "silent salesman" that increase sales by reminding, catching attention, or appealing to "the impulsive nature of customers" (Peak and Peak 1977, 317). Shelves are the most important display locations in the supermarket. The arrangement of shelves, foods, and displays are all guided by an attempt to "help the customer make the right decision – that is, the decision to shop the aisle" (ibid 318). Within each aisle high demand items, basic foods commonly purchased, are used in order to pull the shopper into the aisle while impulse items located close by are meant to increase the likelihood of unplanned purchases. To take advantage of this strategy, marketers used sales data to develop complex ways to categorize foods as impulse, semi-impulse, demand, high-demand, and semi-demand. Much of this research focused on ways to determine what foods

fall into which categories and how to display them in ways that target the needs, attention, imagination, and desire of supermarket shoppers.

The rise of the supermarket in conjunction with the suburb was not only an economic project, but also a reconceptualization of food shopping and the consumer. During the post war years “firms moved towards building both strategies and new supermarkets around middle-class women and their normative desires” (Deutsch 2010, 134). Supermarkets shifted their marketing strategies toward a focus on glamour, convenience, modernity, and choice. Between 1940 and the mid-1970s, supermarkets had gone from offering around 4000 different foods to over 8000 (Humphrey 1998). Firms actively enrolled and reproduced a feminized narrative of the supermarket as a place where women could perform their ‘duty’ as ‘good housewives’ who took advantage of the modern convenience of packaged, prepared, canned, and frozen food (ibid). Supermarkets began to be viewed as spaces that replaced the hard labor of shopping with a pleasurable and easy one-stop-shop. As one retail handbook put it, “the impact of the supermarket, with its modern amenities and pleasant surroundings, was such that the housewife’s buying of her weekly food requirements was no longer a chore but an experience to look forward to” (Colesanco 1964 quoted in Humphrey 1998). In the pages of popular literature, trade journals, and supermarketing handbooks, discussions of autonomy, authority, and labor were replaced by choice, demand, and experience (Bowlby 2001).

By the late 1950s and 1960s, supermarkets were presented as apolitical spaces that exemplified the successes of modern capitalism. Proponents of the Supermarket retold the history of food retail as “an industry adapting to the needs of its customer” (Peak and Peak 1977, 1). The emergence of the Supermarket in this narrative was simply a response to the expanded demands of post-war consumers. Discussions of the supermarket as a space where politics

happened faded away. The supermarket became understood as a place dictated by ‘The Market’, those ‘invisible hands’ of supply and demand. Supermarkets were not presented as problematic spaces, but as celebratory ones. A particularly telling example of this are the images of supermarkets widely used by the state throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s as a way to represent the success of American capitalism and the failure of Soviet communism (Deutsch 2010). By translating the labor of shopping and the sometimes difficult decisions about what to buy into desire and demand, the dominant narrative surrounding supermarkets explicitly depoliticized food provisioning (Deutsch 2010).

Concentration of Ownership in the Supermarket Industry: 1980s - 2015

The 1980s and 1990s was a period of intense concentration alongside diversification in the food retail industry. During the 1990s, the top 10 food retailers went from capturing 20 percent of retail food expenditures to 40 percent (Seth and Randall 1999). By 2013 Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., Kroger Co., Safeway, and Publix Super Markets accounted for 40% of all retail food sold in the United States (ers.usda.gov 2015). Concentration in food retail was made possible during the 1980s and 1990s by the policies of the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations not to enforce many anti-trust laws (Seth and Randall 1999). Despite a general trend toward fewer firms controlling more of the market share, there is little agreement about the meaning of market concentration in the food retail industry. On the one hand, the fact that by 2004 the top 5 retailers captured approximately 48% of the national market has led some to argue that the industry is oligopolistic and becoming more so every year (Konefal *et al* 2007; Tropp 2008). Other industry analysts argue that since the top four firms nationally control only 40% there are still many different competitors vying for a share of the national retail food market (IBIS 2014; Richards and Pofahl 2013).

At the core of this disagreement is the fact that food retail concentration is highly regionalized. Nationally there are a diverse number of firms with small pieces of market share, but at the regional and urban scales concentration tends to be much higher (Seigert 2009). Although exact data on Athens, Georgia is unavailable it is clear that Kroger and Publix, two of the top 4 supermarket firms nationally, dominate food sales. Publix operates two 60,000 square foot stores. Kroger operates three stores over 60,000 square feet and a recently opened supercenter that has over 120,000 square feet of retail space. In the Athens area, these two food retailers alone have over twice as much sales area than all other food retailers combined.

The ability for new competitors to enter the industry is one of the key competitive pressures on food retailers (Senauer and Seltzer 2010). The ability for firms to enter food retailing is dependent on their current business practices and the scale at which they hope to operate. The food retail industry has a high minimum efficient scale, the smallest scale of operations necessary to achieve economies of scale. Entry into competition with large-scale retailers on the basis of price is extremely difficult, requiring complex business infrastructure and large capital investments. Already existing large retailers, such as Wal-Mart and Target, have successfully entered food retail and can compete with established firms. One important difference is that for these corporations the sale of food is almost exclusively a strategy designed to increase the volume of shoppers who frequently visit the store. Food in these stores is usually sold at a break-even point or at a loss (Senauer and Seltzer 2010). The purpose of selling food for large retailers is to get people into the store where they can then be subtly coerced into buying high-margin non-food products they were not planning on purchasing.

In order to compete in other ways than price, supermarket firms develop techniques to segment shoppers into categories so that they can position themselves to target specific groups of

people. One of the primary ways this happens is by researching which dimensions of ‘quality’ shoppers’ value beyond price, and developing strategies to present the store as satisfying shoppers’ values.

Initial capital costs of starting a small supermarket are relatively low. This is because labor costs in the industry are low, rent is often low, necessary technology is minimal, and compared to many other industries the primary input (food) is inexpensive (IBIS 2014). For reason detailed above, these small grocers cannot compete on price. Instead, they compete by differentiating themselves on the basis of ‘quality’. This is evident in the rapid growth of stores that cater to health conscious consumers who ‘demand’ fresh produce, less processed foods, and foods that are perceived as more natural (Beatty and Senauer 2012). These smaller stores seek to benefit from a closer connection and more intimate knowledge of the consumers they serve, allowing them to quickly and effectively respond to place specific ‘demands’ while attempting to build loyalty from the community they operate in (Shaw 2012). In the Athens area these stores include both Earth Fare, a regional chain started out of Asheville, NC, and Fresh Market, another small supermarket chain started in Greensboro, NC. This process of diversification by segmenting out a niche market and specifically targeting that population has been one of the key strategies supermarkets have begun to adopt since the 1990s. Although these regional supermarket chains are not as economically powerful as large national chains, and present themselves in significantly different ways, they all incorporate the basic strategies of the Supermarket developed during the post-war years.

As retailers have grown in size, a key economic strategy of large supermarket chains has been to reduce the bargaining power of food suppliers. Through data gathering and management technologies, retailers have begun to shift the burden of filling and processing orders in a timely

manner onto manufacturers and distributors (Senauar and Seltzer 2010). Point-of-sale data has been combined with programs known as efficient consumer response (ECR) so that when the inventory of a product gets to a certain level, an automatic order is sent to the manufacturer or distributor (Konefal 2007). Supply chain management using this technology has allowed the supermarket firms who can set up these capital-intensive infrastructures to reduce prices while increasing profit. This also facilitates competition over convenience, as the firms that can take advantage of these technologies can guarantee that the store will always have the products shoppers are looking for. Competition on the basis of price and convenience relies heavily on sophisticated management of supply chains.

The bargaining power of supplier with large retailers has also been reduced due to the near monopsony power of supermarket firms (Harvey 2007). In many of the highly concentrated markets large food retailers are the only channels food manufactures have for selling their goods at a large scale. In Athens, for example, manufacturers could not reach the majority of the market if they did not sell through Publix or Kroger. This has led to a variety of practices that allow retailers to compete on prices while increasing margins. Both Kroger and Publix often charge manufacturers fees for stocking and displaying their products, require manufacturers to pay for some of the cost of promotions, and force suppliers into contracts where they must buy back any unsold merchandise (Lawrence and Burch 2007).

Supermarket firms' monopsony power has led to the development of complex auditing and traceability programs. While the strategies outlined above focus on the relationship between retailers and manufacturers or distributors, these programs have made it possible for retailers to manage and control food production as well. Supermarket firms conduct private audits periodically to verify that producers are following the guidelines established by retailers. If

producers fail to pass audits, retailers will either immediately cease purchases or give a limited amount of time to fix violations (Friedberg 2007). Traceability initiatives are primarily done within the produce sector. Codes are printed on shipments so that retailers can have precise knowledge about exactly where products are coming from (PTI 2014). The producers incur the costs of implementing traceability programs designed solely to benefit the retailers. Private auditing, certification, and traceability are all important ways retailers have exerted their market power to manage production and distribution.

The increased bargaining power of buyers and the threat of substitution emerged as key factors shaping the conduct of food retailers' marketing strategies in the 1990s and 2000s. Although shoppers do not have direct bargaining power over prices, the ability for car owning shoppers to use their mobility to substitute one store for another facilitates a form of consumer power that affects the conduct of food retailers. It is for this reason that food retailers spend so much time, energy, and money on developing marketing strategies to create loyal consumers. This is especially important because large food retailers tend to operate on very low margins. Unpredictable shoppers or those are not loyal to a particular store are two of supermarket firms' deepest concerns (Campbell 2015).

Beginning in the 1980s, the supermarket industry started to reconceptualize shoppers. The passive consumer that mindlessly responded to stimuli was replaced. "Shopping psychologists today are still deploying a mechanical model, but now the customer as machine is highly intelligent" (Bowly 2001, 246). Supermarkets still see shoppers as something to be made profitable, but now view them as highly individualized and well informed. The overarching goal of food retailers in the current stage of the supermarketing has become an attempt creating consumer loyalty by developing ways to know what consumers value.

Store layout, atmosphere, and signage continue to be the primary ways supermarkets attempt to shape the experience of shoppers and build relationships with them. One clear example of this is a recent article in *Progressive Grocer* that discusses shelf-edge labels (Chevelier 2014). These labels hang down on the edge of a shelf beneath the white price label. These labels are not just there to communicate price, but are used strategically to “communicate needs and values to customers”, “make the shopping experience faster”, “influence consumer curiosity leading them to enter the center aisle”, and communicate quality information so that “shoppers can make smarter and more informed decisions” (ibid). This brief example clearly shows how retailers work to design the experience of shopping in ways that work towards responding to consumers’ ability to substitute one store for another.

In an attempt to boost profitability, reduce prices, and maintain the perception of quality, the most recent and impactful strategy supermarket firms have embraced is the development of private labels, or own-brands (Burch and Lawrence 2007). Retailers own these brands, but they are often times produced by contracted manufacturers. As private labels have become more successful, the largest supermarket firms, such as Kroger, are beginning to own and operate some of their own manufacturing and processing plants. Private brands have become a key part of 97.5% of food retailers’ merchandising and marketing strategies (Senauer and Seltzer 2010). Private labels cost 25% less than name brands for consumers, while also providing stores with around 30% higher margins (Burch and Lawrence 2007). Most stores use multi-tier strategies that allow for increased differentiation. For example, Kroger offers 10 different private label products that range from inexpensive to expensive luxury brands (Kroger 2014). Private labels have become an way for food retailers to attempt to differentiate themselves and compete on price and quality while increasing profits and seeking loyalty with consumers (Seigert 2009).

Shaping modern supermarketing is the increased sophistication of scientific techniques designed to know shoppers through the accumulation and analysis large amounts of point-of-sale data. The most prominent way this is done is through frequent shopper cards. Each one of these cards has a unique ID associated with it and whenever these cards are scanned the purchases that follow are incorporated with past purchases to create a profile for that specific shopper. Supermarkets then analyze this massive amount of sales data develop an understanding about what food are sold together and what type of consumer can potentially be sold specific goods (Coll 2010).

Traffic-flow research has recently started to use localized GPS devices attached to shopping carts as a way to map every movement, pause, slow down, stop, and speed up during a shopping trip (Sorensen 2003). New techniques for quantifying the relationship between space, movement, and sales have led one marketing researcher to argue that “85 percent of shoppers’ behavior is controlled by the geographic location of the shopper in the store, irrespective of what products may be around them, and only 15 percent of behavior is controlled by product interactions” (Sorensen 2009,80). Although the space of the store and the movements within it have always been central to supermarketing, in the past decade there has been an increased emphasis placed on creating spaces that sell. These two marketing research methods combined with the traditional quantitative shopper survey are the three primary ways the supermarket industry continued its pursuit to ‘know’ consumers and develop marketing strategies to sell to them.

Conclusion

The history of the Supermarket is also a history of depoliticizing spaces of food provisioning. Food provision before the 1950s was a practice around which women formed

movements to make political claims, expressed their autonomy and authority, and struggled against what they saw as unfair business practices. Beginning in the 1950s, as supermarkets rose to prominence, the narrative around food shopping shifted to one of aesthetic pleasure and satisfying demand (Duetsch 2010). As supermarket companies and the state began to actively present supermarkets as a space of freedom and successful of capitalism, shoppers' efforts to organize political movements to challenge supermarkets practices were thoroughly marginalized.

One of the most fundamental changes to the way food shopping is done was the introduction of self-service. By moving food into the center of the store chain grocers were able to shift labor they previous paid for onto the shopper. Self-service opened up new ways for retailers and manufacturers to develop marketing strategies that increased the total volume of sales. This change transformed the physical design of the store and the foods displayed within it into tools for marketing. Alongside the growth of large food retailers emerged new scientific techniques for studying the movements of shoppers and the things they valued. Using the 'science of supermarketing' firms developed complex typologies to segment the population and target specific 'types' of shoppers that were understood as profitable.

As enforcement of anti-trust law lessened towards the end of the 1980s the supermarket industry underwent and intense period of concentration. The diverse collection of local and regional supermarket companies began to merge into, or be acquired by, large corporations. This has led to a situation in which the four largest food retailers account for over 40% of all retail food sold in the United States. In local markets the concentration of market share tend to be much higher (Seigert 2009). As fewer corporate supermarket chains account for a larger proportion of market share and have accumulated greater amounts of capital they have begun to use their economic dominance to influence how, and what, food is produced and sold.

The Supermarket is a uniquely American form of food distribution built in white middle-class suburbs during the post-war years. State sponsored suburbanization in the 1950s created new spaces where the chain grocers facing falling rates of profit in the urban core could reinvest their capital. Since the 1950s, the Supermarket has rapidly become “the dominant store format” for distributing food in America (Mayo 1993, 199). As early as the 1970s, the Supermarket was the standard against which other forms of distribution were defined (ibid).

CHAPTER THREE

THE EVERYDAY PRACTICE OF SUPERMARKET SHOPPING: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

[T]o a rationalized, expansionist and at the same time centralized clamorous and spectacular production corresponds *another* production, called ‘consumption’...[that] insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by the dominant economic order.

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* xii-xiii

Viewing supermarkets as spaces of everyday practice is a relatively unexplored topic within academic research. Much of the research has focused on the ways supermarket companies shape production and supply chains or the ways they use production narratives as tools for marketing (Campbell and Le Heron 2007; Freidberg 2007; Richards *et al* 2013; Hollander 2003; Lyons 2007; Hughes 2007; Johnston *et al.* 2009). The understanding of supermarket shopping as an everyday embodied practice developed in this project draws on the work of Shelly Koch (2012) and Kim Humphrey (1998). Koch’s work argues that the tension between how people imagine they should shop and the forces that affect how they actually shop co-produce the everyday experience of supermarket shopping. Her primary focus is on critiquing the concept of ‘consumer sovereignty’, the idea that shoppers freely make choices that maximize utility, by articulating the ways shoppers are disciplined by decisions and activities far outside the space of a supermarket. Somewhat in tension with Koch’s arguments is Kim Humphrey’s (1998) critique of understanding consumers as passively manipulated by forces of production. Humphrey argues that in even moments when shopper are coerced into making certain decisions or shopping in certain spaces they are not simply tricked or duped. The theoretical framework developed in this chapter attempts to connect these two insights in order to understand supermarket shopping as

shaped by supermarkets and shoppers' attempts to make use of the foods available there for divergent end. The supermarket seeks to coerce people into making unplanned purchases and buying high-margin items. Shoppers seek to make use of the foods in the supermarket to create futures that coincide with their tastes and values.

The theoretical framework used in this project begins with a review of how food scholars have attempted to reconnect production- and consumption-centered approaches to studying the food system. Production-centered frameworks tend to conceptualize consumers as passively manipulated, while consumption-centered approaches often downplay the power of producers to direct consumption toward profit. The theoretical frameworks reviewed in this chapter bring into focus the role of knowing food and knowing shoppers, the tastes and values people bring into decisions about what to eat, and how food is used for more than satisfying the biological need to eat (Lockie and Kitto 2000; Dixon 1999; Goodman and DuPuis 2002; Guthman 2002). Although these three ideas are key aspects to this project, the frameworks these authors use to articulate them lack a clear explanation of how they influence people during the actual practice of food provisioning and they implicitly reproduce an understand consumers to be generally powerless.

To reconceptualize food consumers as active this project draws on a small body of scholarship that develops the concept of prosumption (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2012; Xie *et al* 2007; Zwick *et al* 2007; Campbell 2005; Lusch and Vargo 2006; Arvidsson 2006) . Prosumption is a way of understanding consumers as also productive. The production process is not the only way foods is given value, the ways people make use of food in their everyday lives also creates its value. Through the practice of gathering food in a supermarket, shoppers' work to create futures that can satisfy their tastes and values.

This project uses actor-network theory (ANT) to understand how people actively prosume without losing sight of the ways their actions and decisions are influenced by a supermarket's marketing strategies, the foods within the store, and the other aspects of people's that put pressures on their time and resources. ANT begins with the claim that both humans and non-humans are actors that express agency through their capacity to act on or modify one another, as this happens heterogeneous actors become part of a network of associations (Latour 2005). In ANT, power is dispersed amongst the actors in a network as they act on the actions of one another. This provides a conceptual openness in which shopper can have agency while actors outside their control are modifying their actions and decisions. To avoid flattening power relations this theoretical framework draws on Holifield's (2009) argument that ANT can incorporate the concept of hegemony to understand the ways coercion and consent stabilize and normalize dominant institutional forms.

Supermarkets are spaces of everyday life that exist between production and consumption. They are spaces that assemble for sale the products grown on farms, transported long distances, and manufactured in processing plant. They are also the spaces where people go to assemble the foods that sustain their lives each day. Practices of production, supermarket strategies to increase sales, and aspects of people's lives outside the store come together to shape the decisions shopper make. Shoppers also actively make use of the foods in a supermarket to try to create a future that can satisfy, at least partially, their tastes and values. The theoretical framework developed in this chapter provides the tool to unpack the seemingly simple, mundane, and everyday practice of going to the store to buy food.

Studying the Supermarket

Drawing on Friedland's (1981) work on Commodity Systems Analysis (CSA), much of the scholarship on the supermarket focuses on its growing influence as an institution that mediates the connections between production and consumption. Particular attention has been focused on the ways in which supermarkets shape agricultural practices by developing standards, conducting audits, and enforcing often unequal contracts with growers (Campbell and Le Heron 2007; Freidberg 2007; Richards *et al* 2013). Supermarkets have also exerted influence over manufacturing by developing increasingly successful high- and low-end own-brand products (Hattersly *et al* 2013; Burch and Lawrence 2007; Burch and Lawrence 2005). These strategies to control production have allowed supermarkets to firmly position themselves as 'food authorities' and by doing this, build trust with consumers (Dixon 2002; Friedberg 2007). When looking closely at how supermarkets attempt to influence consumption and the practice of shopping, a diversity of scholarship discusses the ways marketing strategies are used to create profitable relationships with consumers by creating connections between production practices and the meanings people associate with food (Burch and Lawrence 2007). This third focus of research most deeply influences this thesis and is the literature to which it contributes.

As peoples' understandings of the relationships between food, health, and social-environmental impacts of production have shifted over the past two decades, supermarkets' companies have attempted to find new and profitable ways to capitalize on changing values (Hollander 2003). In the case of sugar, for example, during the 1990sa growing discourse about the negative health impacts of sugar coupled with increased awareness of social and environmental harms of sugar production led to a crisis for US sugar manufacturers (*ibid*). Drawing from these new concerns, the sugar industry, with the help of supermarkets and

scientific institutions, undertook a campaign to 're-naturalize' sugar by constructing "supermarket narratives": stories that connect the concerns of consumers with place and production practices (Hollander 2003, 60). This entailed a proliferation of new less refined products, labeling and marketing strategies that emphasized the 'all-natural' purity of sugar, and in-store signs and labels promoting environmentally friendly sugar grown in the USA. This case clearly shows how shifting cultural valences can lead to changes in marketing practices that actively mediate consumers' decisions by enrolling narratives of production.

A similar shift towards 'supermarket narratives' has taken place in organic food and Fair Trade goods as both have become incorporated into the supply chains of large corporations (Lyons 2007; Hughes 2007). Supermarkets, and increasingly large scale corporate organic manufacturers, are using narratives of humble beginnings, small scale, local production, and commitments to communities, workers, and the environment to sell their products (Johnston *et al* 2009). Johnston *et al* argue that we should not view this as simply story of co-option, rather scholars should recognize "a dynamic relationship between market actors and social movements...[that] sees the corporate-organic foodscape as a hybrid entity drawing from movement themes while using market mechanism" (2009, 511). Supermarkets are key sites in the articulations between how shoppers value food and the practices involved in its production. Hollander and Johnston *et al* clearly show that supermarkets attempt to capitalize on alternative food discourses by infusing food products with social or ethical associations.

Supermarkets engage in a multitude of marketing practices that attempt to build relationships and motivate purchases through strategies of 'knowing the consumer'. Drawing on the 'science of supermarketing', supermarkets develop spatial strategies and demographic profiles that inform decisions about how to create spaces and products that specifically target

certain 'types' of consumers. Using technologies of knowing, supermarkets attempt to act as “cultural intermediaries, continuously mobilising, and converting between, cultural and economic capital” (Dixon 2007, 26). By utilizing these technologies of knowing the tastes and values of shoppers as well as how they move through the store, supermarket companies shape their stores topography and atmosphere to try to produce economic profits.

When thinking through the strategies of supermarkets, it is also critical to take into consideration the relationships people are trying to produce and maintain through their food purchases. The decisions people make in the supermarket are enactments of social, ethical, and personal values as well as embodiments of sensuous and emotional tastes. Shoppers also engage in the process of converting economic value into social value.

The lack of engagement with the practice of shopping in the literature outlined above leave gaps in our understanding of how people make use of and how supermarkets affect the decisions they actually make. They do not engage with the lived experience of shopping as it actually happens. Food provisioning is shaped by the relations among diverse elements that do not fall neatly into the production/consumption binary. to produce an experience that entices consumption by making shoppers feel like they are in a place where they want to shop and buy things that satisfy their tastes and values store layout and atmosphere are meticulously designed (Koch 2012; Ritzer 2005). At times, by people’s feelings about the supermarket as an institution and its role in the lives of individuals and communities as well as the imagined futures afforded by foods in a supermarket shape the embodied experiences people have within the supermarket (Dixon and Isaacs 2013).

Two scholars in particular have approached the supermarket as a site of embodied everyday practice (Koch 2012; Humphrey 1998). Koch argues that the practice of supermarket

shopping consists of the tensions and conflicts between what people imagine they should eat or feed their family, what type of shopper they feel they should be, and the other aspects of their lives, such as children or jobs, that pull their decisions in other directions (Koch 2012). In her ‘institutional ethnography’ of supermarket shopping, she convincingly shows how gendered discourses of nutrition, as well as being an efficient consumer play important roles in how people think about and do the work of food shopping. Moving between interview and textual data, Koch explicates shoppers’ internal struggles between the how they imagine they should be shopping and how they explain the ways they actually shop and prepare food. For example, she finds that as women have become more time-constrained, they have increasingly utilized the conveniences afforded by the supermarket to enact care for themselves and others despite anxieties that doing so is not in accordance with their ideals (Koch 2012).

Central to Koch’s study is a focus on “how people’s activities and practices are shaped by decisions and actions of other people in offices far away from the grocery store” (Koch 2012 106). Koch’s research is an active attempt to problematize the “ideology of consumer sovereignty that pervades economic thinking” (ibid 27). Consumer sovereignty is based on a market logic that understands shoppers as freely making rational choices that maximize benefits to them. This ideology does not leave room for thinking through the way supermarketing strategies actively seek to mediate the decisions people make. Shoppers do not simply make choices, they make decisions that are at times difficult, often only partially satisfying, and influenced by coercive supermarketing strategies.

This project attempts to push Koch’s argument further by embedding the research within the actual practice of shopping. In doing so, this project seeks to understand how the “decisions and actions” of others actually affect what shoppers do within the space of a supermarket. One of

the central problems with Koch's analysis is that she reifies an understanding of consumers as generally powerless, individuals whose actions are always produced by the external forces that discipline them. Acknowledging that shoppers decisions are mediated by actors outside their control does not mean that there should be a conceptual foreclosure of the possibility that shoppers' actively make use of what a supermarket offers in ways that do not conform to its attempts to shape purchases.

In Kim Humphrey's work on the history and everyday experience of Australians living through transition to supermarket shopping, she argues that "even the physical environments of everyday consumption, while they may be seen to either facilitate or delimit the enjoyments to be gained from shopping, do not have the power to simply dictate the content of that experience" (Humphrey 1998,192). Humphrey's interviews focus on asking people to reflect on their experiences of shopping and their ideas about consumption more broadly. She finds that shopping is a contradictory practice in which consent and coercion sit side by side. At times people spoke of the pleasure or enjoyment of shopping and the ability to use foods in the creative act of cooking. At other times, people expressed feeling of being forced into the supermarket aisle just to survive. Instead of being passively manipulated, Humphrey's participants acknowledged "that the desire to consume may come not simply from themselves but from forces outside them. Even when manipulated, then, people are not necessarily duped" (ibid, 199). Although the strategies of supermarkets shape and manage purchases, it is too simplistic to think of shoppers as duped or tricked. This is a more subtle process of coercive forces modifying particular acts of consumption that people actively consenting to making.

Alongside the tensions between coercion and consent, people actively create boundaries around their participation in consumption by invoking "both an *actual* and an *imaginary* outside"

(ibid, 202). Humphrey argues that people create limits around how shopping and products are incorporated into their everyday life. In her interviews activities like caring for family members, doing activities around the house, working, maintaining social relationships, going on vacations, and spending the day relaxing are all positioned as delimiting the meaning and value of doing shopping. Humphrey argues that for her participants shopping does not have the same importance as these other activities outside the store. These other practices come to be seen as separated from shopping, including shopping at supermarkets. Humphrey argues that by doing this people actively attempt to avoid becoming defined by their position as consumers or what a supermarket has to offer.

This project seeks to understand the porosity of this boundary between the practice of consumption and practices outside the space of food provisioning. The practice of supermarket shopping is not separate from the rest of everyday life, but actively enrolls these actual and imagined outsides. Food consumption does not actually happen in the supermarket; the supermarket is a space where people assemble possibilities for future activities that use food.

Although both Koch and Humphrey's texts are excellent and illuminate the everyday complexities of shopping, both authors acknowledge a weakness in their methodology. Sitting down with shoppers at their homes or in coffee shop creates a disjuncture between the interview and the practice being researched. Asking someone to recall and reflect on supermarket shopping "reorients, rather than simply reports, the meanings of past actions" (Humphrey 1998, 202). In these sit-down interviews about how people shop or think about shopping, there is always the possibility for memory to distort and transform the actual practice of shopping. These methodological issues are critical and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

Supermarkets do wield power in shaping production practice and shopper decisions about what to buy. The goal of this conceptual framework is to develop a more nuanced understanding of how people mobilize their powers to act on and satisfy their tastes and values, not as passive manipulated consumers, but as people striving as best they can to create the possibility of a 'better' everyday life for themselves and others. By developing a conceptual framework that links production and consumption, it can be possible to be building some of the tools necessary for understanding the tensions that shape supermarket shopping.

From Production-Consumption to Prosumption

Building the connections between production- and consumption-centered approaches can lead to fruitful discoveries of how both production and consumption are composed of “placed, material, imagined, connected and shifting series of cultural and economic processes” (Mansvelt 2005, 124). Much of the literature on industrial food production and retail food consumption has been fractured between a political economic framework that centers on production and ‘consumer culture’ framework that focuses on consumption (Lockie and Kitto 2000; Dixon 1999; Goodman and DuPuis 2002). Drawing on a Marxist tradition, production-centered approaches tend to focus on attempts to illuminate the powerful actors and relations that produce, distribute, and market fetishized commodities (Ritzer and Jugensen 2010). This political economic perspective tends to characterize consumers, if they are mentioned at all, as passively manipulated (Goodman and DuPuis 2002; Campbell 2005). From the cultural studies perspective, consumers are viewed as active agents that use consumption in ways that create and/or maintain social meanings and values. Although both perspectives acknowledge that production and consumption require one another, in most cases there is a bifurcation that leads to privileging the power of either production or consumption *a priori* (Dixon 1999).

As the 20th century ended, scholarship that re-conceptualized the relationship between production and consumption emerged in economic sociology and commodity studies. During the mid-1990s, Commodity System Analysis (CSA) and Systems of Provisioning (SOP) were starting to become entrenched as the dominant frameworks used to investigate the powerful political and economic actors involved in processes of food production (Dixon 1999). For food scholars, the CSA framework was used to focus on the “mutual interaction of production practices, grower organizations, labor, science and extension, and marketing and distribution systems on the production of agricultural commodities” (Guthman 2002, 296). The SOP approach builds on CSA, but brings the critical analysis to the life of a single commodified food, from seed to 'plate'. As with CSA, the framework of SOP is motivated by the attempt to explicate commodities' hidden social and material relations. In essence, they are projects to defetishize commodities using the tools of political economy, and as such, they continue the Marxist focus on production (Dixon 1999; Lockie and Kitto 2000).

In two early and influential papers, food scholars Jane Dixon (1999) as well as Lockie and Kitto (2000) push at the boundaries of CSA and SOP by arguing for frameworks that reconnect production and consumption as spheres of activity that can only be thought of in relation to one another. In Dixon's (1999) 'cultural economy' framework, she critiques CSA for not taking seriously enough the social life of food beyond purchase, and how the social meanings are folded back into production in complex ways. Lockie and Kitto (2000) reject the SOP approach as being limited by its reliance on the tools of political economy. In its place, they propose a framework using actor-network theory (ANT) to account for how consumption and production mutually shape each other.

Jane Dixon (1999) develops a 'cultural economy' approach to studying production-consumption by incorporating cultural meanings and identities associated with food and consumption into the CSA framework. Dixon argues that despite William Friedland's CSA approach being flawed because of its focus on production, it is “amenable to 'letting in' consumers and others responsible for the commodity's 'social life'” (Dixon 1999, 151). Instead of production and consumption as two distinct spheres of activity, she argues that we should view production, distribution and exchange, and consumption as interrelated, but distinguishable, processes that all include both economic and cultural elements (Dixon 1999). In doing this, Dixon does not privilege, or create a binary between, culture and economy or production and consumption. By focusing on the interrelationships between “economy, social identity, and politics”, Dixon's ‘cultural economy’ approach attempts to expand the CSA framework in a way that captures “how retailers and consumers construct value as much as describing how producers produce value” (Dixon 1999, 157).

Lockie and Kitto (2000, 2002) argue that linking production and consumption involves the way that meanings and values people imbue in food are translated into production practices and marketing strategies. Drawing from the arguments of ANT, Lockie and Kitto (2000) attempt to link production and consumption by looking at how networks of human and non-humans actors are formed, negotiated, and stabilized. Lockie and Kitto argue that producers, retailers, and consumers express agency “in more-or-less successful attempts to enroll other actants into networks through a process of 'translation' in which the interests of others are aligned and mobilized as a part of that network” (Lockie and Kitto 2000, 8). Lockie argues that this is enabled by “technologies of telecommunication, transport and inscription that allow the capture, preservation and transfer of knowledge and materials” (Lockie 2002, 282). Lockie (2002) utilizes

this framework to understand how the particular social meanings people associate with organic food are used to produce “knowledge of the 'organic consumer’”. Growers, marketers, and retailers then use this knowledge in attempts to target “particular people as organic consumers” in the pursuit of stabilizing profitable networks (Lockie 2002, 288).

In her contribution to the debate, Julie Guthman argues that tastes and values are ways of linking production-consumption in order to make it possible to understand the transformation of food into commodities that are profitable because they satisfying the needs and wants of consumers (Guthman 2005). Guthman argues that this process can be analyzed through the prism of “taste – arguably the gatekeeper of consumption, as both sensation and performance – and its ramifications in production and exchange” (Guthman 2002, 299). To understand how taste is translated into commodity and commodity into taste, Guthman mobilizes sociologist Alan Warde's concept of 'antinomies of taste' (Warde 1997). These are novelty and tradition, health and indulgence, economy and extravagance, convenience and care, and technics and nature. Warde (1997) argues that these taste-values develop due to anxieties people have about food and food production. Taste-values have material consequences in terms of actual sensations and bodily reproduction, but “also in the sense of the work it takes to provide food... reciprocally, the materiality of food production imbues food with meaning” (Guthman 2002, 106). The taste-values of consumers are appropriated by production in order to profit from the anxieties about food by incorporating them into commodities that can then be sold for higher profits.

Bring into focus the role of knowledge in linking production and consumption, Goodman and DuPuis (2002) think through the politics of food consumption by investigating the tensions between how consumers and producers 'know food' and 'grow food'. They argue that knowing constitutes the connective tissue between production and consumption. Power plays out as

consumers and producers, both alternative and conventional, struggle over the contested terrain of knowledge. Instead of being passive in this process, consumers are seen by producers as both “actual and potential actors” (Goodman and DuPuis 2002, 17). This is because the power of reflexive consumption is an expression of agency on the part of the consumer and “so constitutes a politics of food” (Goodman and DuPuis 2002, 18). Consumers and producers become politicized as they “exercise 'the capacity to act' in any way that affects the future” (Goodman and DuPuis, 18).

The research outlined above is important to this project because it calls attention to the role of knowing food and knowing consumers, the tastes and values people bring into decisions about what to eat, and how food is used for much more than satisfying the biological need to eat. Despite providing these insights, this literature does not push toward an explanation of how people’s tastes, values, and knowledge about food are performed and modified within the space of food provisioning. Nor does it directly address the role these spaces play in the practice of purchasing food. In addition, it continues the trend of conceptualizing consumers from the outset as generally powerless. Although consumers are understood as playing a role in the creation of value, the focus of these scholars continues to be exclusively on how producers make use of the ways people value food. In order to attend to some of these shortcomings, this project seeks to reconceptualize consumers, and the practice of consumption, by viewing ‘prosumers’ who are both active and productive. Consumers not only purchase food, but also they make use of these foods to assemble an important part of their everyday life.

Put simply, “prosumption involves *both* production and consumption rather than focusing on either one (production) or the other (consumption)” (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2012). Coined by Alvin Toffler in 1980, the term prosumer was not taken up in academic thought until Campbell's

2005 paper invigorated inquiry into the idea. Campbell uses the term prosumer to describe what he terms “the craft consumer”. The craft consumer is one “who typically takes any number of mass produced products and employs these as the 'raw materials' for the creation of a new 'product', one that is typically intended for self-consumption” (Campbell 2005, 28). Prosumption is a way of relating to commodities that position ‘consumers’ as active in the production of a commodities value and making use of commodities to create something new. The value of a commodity is not simply created by the actors that make, distribute, and market these 'raw materials'. By making use of commodities, those who purchase them are actively engaged in making them mean something and have value. Creating value is a process of co-production.

Guided by one exceptionally influential article, much of the literature on prosumption focuses on the way capitalist institutions “put consumers to work” (Ritzer and Jugenson 2010). This is process whereby the labor that businesses once paid for is shifted onto consumers. As discussed in Chapter Two, the emergence of self-service was an explicit attempt to expand profits by shifting who did the work of gathering food. Self-scan checkouts are a more recent example of supermarkets attempts to reduce cost, increase volume of sales, and manage ‘traffic-flow’ by putting shoppers to work (Driggs 2014). Shopping in a supermarket has always been a practice of doing the productive work that allowed supermarkets to emerge and makes their persistence possible.

Viewing consumers as prosumers can help articulate how marketing practices draw on and mobilize the tastes, meanings, and values shopper associate with foods. In marketing literature, prosumption has been defined as “value creation activities undertaken by the consumer that result in the production of a product they eventually consume and that becomes their consumption experiences” (Lusch and Vargo 2006, 284 cited in Xie *et al* 2007, 110).

Studying food preparation as prosumption, Xie *et al* argue that the prosumption perspective has important implications for marketing and consumer researchers because it leads them to think of commodities shaped by practices that people engage in as they try to create and maintain their values and goals. From a marketing perspective, “co-creation strategies are no longer designed to control demand in the traditional way...rather, the idea is for marketing to position itself as a mere facilitator and partner of consumer ingenuity and agency” (Zwick *et al* 2007, 173). By using technologies of 'knowing the consumer', free labor is translated into information that is used to create spaces designed to “set free [prosumers] in a controlled environment to engage in an act of co-creation” (Arvidsson 2006, 80 quoted in Zwick *et al* 2007, 177).

Prosumption focuses attention on the ways people (‘consumers’) make use of the products (‘foods’) they purchase, and the way supermarkets (‘producers’) make use of the way people shop. By making use of the products produced by capitalist institutions, prosumers create subjectively valuable experiences that go “beyond mundane economical gains” (Xie *et al*, 112). The value of a loaf of bread is not simply contained in the bread itself, it is also created by the uses prosumers can make of it. The act of using this bread and combining it with other foods to make a delicious bread pudding, for example, is an act of productive consumption. Within the space of a supermarket, shoppers make purchases as a way to creating potential futures that are valuable to them. As prosumers make use of foods, they imbue them with a value those foods did not have before. The supermarket provides many of the raw materials necessary for cooking, or having around the house to eat, but other actions by the users of foods are often necessary to make them edible. Food consumption always entails a production. This project seeks to understand how the everyday practice of supermarket shopping is composed of the interactions

between the marketing strategies of supermarkets and the ways shoppers make use of these spaces to assemble an everyday life that is nourished and, at least partially, satisfying.

Performing Actual-Virtual Actor Networks

Actor-network theory (ANT) begins with a commitment to understanding power and social organization by focusing on how people and things interact in ways that mediate action (Latour 2005; Law 1992). Broadly, actor-network theory argues that “*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor – or if it has no figuration yet, an actant” (Latour 2005, 71). These actor-networks are formed through heterogeneous associations “fashioned out of a diverse range of materials, relationships and activities which are constantly 'becoming' rather than already constituted” (Thrift 2000, 5 cited in Mansvelt 2005, 118). A network of actors is an assemblage of acting participants that mediate the actions of other actors. These mediating actors “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements [actors] are supposed to carry” (Latour 2005, 39). This happens when actors “authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, block, render possible, forbid, and so on” (Latour 2005, 72). As a shopper walks through the supermarket, their experience is mediated by their own enrollments of tastes, values, and ways of using even as they are becoming enrolled in supermarkets’ marketing strategies designed to coerce shoppers’ into making profitable purchases.

Actors, and the networks they form, are simultaneously actual and virtual. The actual and the virtual should not be thought of as two ontological categories in a relation of opposition, but as heterogeneous states of becoming that coexist in a continuous process of becoming the other (Deleuze and Parnet 1977). Bruce Braun summarizes the virtual as,

“a potentiality that is immanent in every object and in every situation. Unlike the ‘possible’, which is opposed to the real, the virtual *is* real, which is to say it exists

concretely in the present. It is immaterial yet real, abstract yet concrete, a ‘future to come’ that is already with us” (Braun 2007, 17)

The actual and the virtual, the actual becoming virtual and the virtual becoming actualized constitute the real. The virtual is the realm of the imagined, the potential, and the remembered (Massumi 2002; Bergson 1988; Deleuze 1988). Virtualities may be not yet realized futures that are always present within space (Lefebvre 2003). The actual is the present materiality that constitutes lived experience, but it is always layered with coexisting virtualities. The virtual is real and affects practices despite not being able to be touched, seen, smelled, or tasted. The materiality of the virtual exists elsewhere in time or space.

The actual practices of supermarket shopping, the movements, decisions and sensations, are always in relation to virtualities that mediate practice: the imagined, the potential, the remembered. This understanding of virtual actants brings to the foreground what Latour (2005) refers to as 'action at a distance'. Walking through the bread aisle in a supermarket calls forth imaginations of how that loaf could be used to make a quick sandwich to take to work, a deliciously greasy grilled cheese, or an egg in a basket that takes you back to your time in the English countryside. Although you do not usually purchase the artisanal bread, today it is on sale, smells freshly baked, so you think “why not”.

One of the critical arguments made by Latour (2005) is that ANT attempts to understand actor-networks as they are being continually shaped, destroyed, and stabilized. Rather than making assumption about which actors mediate the practice of supermarket shopping, ANT requires direct engagement with networks as they are being made. Shopping at a supermarket requires, on the one hand, the continual restocking of shelves and creation of displays by workers, but it also requires shoppers to move through the space making decisions about what to buy. ANT is not some strange physical science, but a way to understand how society is produced

by the day--to--day interactions between humans and non-human. An empty supermarket devoid of shoppers or workers becomes merely a collection of potential mediators. ANT requires a focus on the performances and actors who give form and texture to everyday life.

Actor-networks do not simply exist, but must be performed into being (Latour 1986; 2005). A performative approach to ANT “tries to understand the role of everything in a performance, people and objects alike” (Law and Singleton 2000). Gregson and Rose (2000), drawing on Judith Butler, define performance as “what individual subjects do, say, 'act-out'” and performativity as “the citational practices which reproduce and/or subvert discourse” either enabling or disciplining embodied subjects and their performances (Gregson and Rose 2000, 434). The performativity of a particular act exists in a not yet realized state which “requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced” (Butler 1988, 526). The performative exists as potential and imagined ways of acting that are only actualized as they are enrolled, and cited, in performances. Performativity situates the present act in the past and the future (Thrift 2005). Performance is the active construction of actor-networks during a practice.

Performance is central to understanding the way people ‘know foods’ by enrolling them in networks of association. When shoppers encounter a food in a supermarket they enroll other actors that they associate with a particular food. An organic label, for example, is an actor that modifies how shoppers understand production process involved in a particular food. Enrolled into association with the organic label is shoppers’ understandings of the chemicals used in food production and those chemicals impacts the environment, workers, and their own health. In this example, the organic label affects how a particular food acts on shoppers’ actions by calling forth particular networks of association. Through the performance of enrolling various actors in a network of association the capacity of food to satisfy shoppers’ tastes and values is shaped.

Performance is also critical for the way this project makes use of the concept of prosumption. Butler's theory of performance is not a passive reproduction of already existing ways of acting, but a creative process of both reproduction and production. In her discussion on gender Butler argues that, "there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (Butler 1988, 522). The performance of actions creates something that only exists because of those actions. Taking this in a different direction than Butler, as shoppers gather food in their carts for purchase, they perform actions and associations they create the potential for future ways of acting. Acts of prosumption in a supermarket are performative acts that enroll the not yet realized futures shopper actively seek to create through their decisions about what to bring home to cook and eat.

For a food to be useable, or unusable, by either shoppers or the supermarket it must have a capacity to act on the actions of users. Immanent to the actual loaf of bread is a wide range of potential uses. Because the actuality of the thing itself partially defines how it can be used, the bread we put in our cart is always already acting on our present and future actions. With no bread, the activity of making bread pudding dissolves. This is a capacity to affect. Spinoza defines *affectus* as "the modifications of the body by which the power of actions of the body is increased or diminished, aided or restrained" (*Ethics*. III, def. 3). Affect is a power to modify the capacity of others to act. The supermarket affects shopping by modifying how people move within its space and the encounters people can have. Shoppers' tastes, values, imaginations, memories, practical knowledge, work schedules, wealth, family also can modify supermarket shopping. Although this list of mediators could easily go on much longer, what really matters in

this project is looking at the particular actions and decisions people make and how the actors within and the actants outside the walls of a supermarket affect them.

ANT does not avoid the question of power, it seeks to explain how power functions rather than using power as an explanation (Latour 2005, 83). Instead of searching for overarching powers that dominate society, ANT looks at the “tiny conduits” through which power acts (ibid, 5). Actor-network theory is uniquely attuned to power as “a question of 'capacity',” the capacity of actors to “brings into play relations between individuals (or between groups)” (Foucault 2003, 135). A relation of power is one that “acts upon [others’] actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions” (Foucault 2003, 137). In this sense, power in actor-networks is about both what actors want to make happen and what networks of actors are actually formed (Barnett *et al* 2008). Actor-network theory is about the power of actors-in-relation to affect what other actors do, can do, and can not do (Goodman and Dupuis 2005). This approach shifts attention from identifying a few powerful actors toward an investigation of the networks of dispersed power relations that mutually shape the activity of walking through a supermarket and influence shoppers’ decisions about what to eat.

The dispersion of power does not mean that institutional forms of power, or unequal relations of power, should be left out of an ANT approach. Institutions are a particular form of assemblage, an established grouping of actors, which seek to act on actions of others as a way to achieve some ends. One of the most common critiques of actor-network theory is that it does not take into consideration unequal relations of power, that it 'flattens power' (Holifield 2009). Geographer Ryan Holifield argues that an ANT analysis seeks to understand how certain assemblages become stabilized and in some cases hegemonic (ibid, 647). Although the concept of hegemony has been widely used in political economy, “it lacks any clear sense of how consent

is actually secured, or any convincing account of how hegemonic projects are anchored at the level of everyday life” (Branett 2005, 9 cited in Holifield 2009). ANT can be used as way to ‘anchor’ hegemony by articulating how certain institutional forms of assemblages, such as the Supermarket, become stable, proper, unproblematic, or ‘common sense’ institutions through a dual process of coercion and consent. In the most basic sense, the Supermarket becomes stabilize through coercion by creating local monopolies on the distribution of a wide variety of food. The simple fact that someone might have to go to the supermarket to get certain foods is one of its more powerful ways of acting on people.

The concept of the prosumer is necessary for using the concept of hegemony to understand supermarket shopping. In the context of hegemony, consent is an active agreement to particular social relations between groups or a way of distributing goods and capital. Viewing consumers as passively manipulated by forces of production forecloses the possibility for them to give consent. Thinking of consumers as always-manipulated are always only coerced into acting a certain way. By conceptualizing shoppers are prosumers, it becomes possible to understand the dynamics of both coercion and consent. Supermarket subtly coerce shoppers into moments of consenting to purchases that are profitable for the supermarket as well as consenting to the Supermarket as proper forms of distribution. Prosumers give consent because supermarkets afford them opportunities to make use of foods to create everyday futures that coincide with their tastes and values.

Conclusion

The Supermarket, in the United States, is a dominant form of food distribution that is deeply entangled in the everyday lives of the people who shop there. The theoretical framework for this project uses actor-network theory conceptualize the agency of consumers to productively

make use of products without losing sight of the ways this agency is shaped by actors involved in production. Actor-network theory provides an openness to understand the ways foods, supermarket, and prosumers interact to shape decisions. Prosumption is a way of articulating the power shoppers to affect their own futures. Foods are actors that have power to modify actions by affording shoppers with the opportunities to be used to satisfy their tastes and values. The concept of hegemony brings attention to the supermarket as a dominant economic institution that has a great deal of power of to influence how prosumers and foods interact with one another. Hegemony brings into focus the way supermarkets, and the Supermarket, becomes stabilized by coercing prosumers into consenting to profitable purchases as well as to thinking about the Supermarket as a proper, or normalized, form of food distribution.

Tastes, values, and ways of using are central for understanding how decisions in the supermarkets are actively mediated while walking within its space. Tastes involve the sensuous, emotional, and embodied experience of food. Values are understood as the ways food becomes a means of enacting ones conception of being a good person and living a good life. The ways of using are the many potentialities afforded by these always already mediated foods. Tastes and values gives meaning to foods, works to alleviate anxieties surrounding food, and play an important role in motivating actions (Warde 1997). The performance of supermarket shopping involves actions that are mediated by enrollments of spatially and temporally heterogeneous actors that transform foods capacity to satisfy taste and values by modifying what shoppers associate with a particular food.

The space of a supermarket is produced by marketing strategies that attempt to imbue foods with the capability to facilitate the performance of taste and values in the pursuit of profitable consumption. As people shop, they make decision guided by their tastes, values, and

their knowledge of whether or not particular food can satisfy them. This is a presumptive practice of trying to create a better future for themselves, others, and at times the world. This process has to be performed, it is not inherent in the material but emerges out of the networks of association within which foods acquire the capacity to affect actions, change practices, and influence decisions (Hawkins 2013). Using an actor-network theory approach, this project seeks to elucidate how power-laden networks of actors are performed into being in ways that shape the practice of gathering food while walking through a supermarket.

CHAPTER FOUR

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE USING WALKING INTERVIEWS: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction – Walking within Space

The walking interview is a method of conducting interviews while informants move within space. This project uses the walking interview as a way to research the everyday practice of supermarket shopping. The development of the walking interview has been guided by theoretical insights into the ways everyday life is co-produced during the movements within space. Central to this interview method is the idea that in order to understand what people do to make sense of themselves and their actions, the researcher must situate the interview in the space produced by the performance of everyday practices. In this way, the walking interview attempts to grasp how peoples' concerns, desires, knowledge, memories, imaginings, and values are enrolled in the actual interactions that happen while moving. This method allows the researcher to contextualize how everyday life is constructed through interactions within spaces shaped by the 'science of marketing'. Embedding the interview in the movements of everyday embodied practices can allow for a study of how human and non-human actors enroll each other in relations of affect. Interviews conducted while walking with supermarket shoppers are used in this project in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

- 1. How do shoppers make use of the supermarket and the foods within it to prosume a 'good life' by performing decisions and associations that enroll tastes and values?**
- 2. Do supermarkets perform marketing strategies that assemble the actual space of a supermarket in ways that stabilize it as a hegemonic and profitable form of distribution?**
- 3. Do shoppers develop ways to actively evade supermarketing strategies?**

To answer these questions this research is designed as a qualitative case study of supermarket shopping performed by twelve participants at six different stores in Athens, Georgia. The empirics of this case study involve participants who supplement their supermarket purchases with food from Athens Locally Grown, an alternative site of food provisioning. Interview and observational data was generated through in-depth walking interviews. This chapter discusses the walking interview as a method of doing research that can put the theoretical considerations of Chapter Three into methodological practice. By discussing the development of the walking interview and the ways other researchers have used this method, it is possible to make an argument for using it to study supermarket shopping through the lens of actor-network theory. Following this will be a discussion of methods of analysis and a brief discussion of the ways this research attempted to avoid some of the practical difficulties with doing walking interviews.

The walking interview is a method that allows for inquiry into the supermarket as a space of practice produced by the interactions between supermarket strategies to create spaces where bodies and purchases can be managed, and shoppers' ways of making use of these spaces and the foods sold within them. Sheller and Urry's (2006) paper on the 'new mobilities paradigm' has guided much of the research using walking interviews. The walking interview is an attempt to make a method out of the idea that being in motion is a different type of engagement with the world than being sedentary (Hein *et al*). Sheller and Urry argue that modernity is characterized by movement. Attempts to understand social and material relations must question the sedentarism that "treats as normal stability, meaning, and place" (Sheller and Urry 2006, 208). Space owes "its character to the experiences it affords those spending time there, and shaped, in turn, by the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage" (Ingold 2000, quoted in Hall

576). In this way, we can think of space as “neither something seen, nor a way of seeing, but rather the... entwined materialities and sensibilities *with which* we act and sense” (Wylie 2005, 243 and 245, original emphasis). The walking interview is an attempt to understand everyday practice as a being *with* space, rather than a being *in* space.

The walking interview opens up possibilities for understanding the space of everyday supermarket shopping as being co-produced by strategies of using space to enroll people in profitable consumption and shoppers’ enrollments that extend beyond the confines of the store and its logic. Being within the space of a supermarket as shoppers feelings, desires, senses, knowledges, memories, identities, capabilities, and biological necessities are enrolled in the practice of shopping, is critical for understanding the ways supermarkets attempts to manage consumption succeed and are evaded. Chapter Two discussed some of ways supermarkets use the physicality of space as a tool for marketing. Music, lighting, tasters, placement of foods, store layout, signage, sales, and even scents are all used to varying degrees to try to generate more revenue by increasing the volume of sales. The marketing techniques of a supermarket do not simply manipulate passively receptive shoppers, but rely on the creating interactions between people, as prosumers, and the foods they make use of to satisfy their tastes and values. The supermarket is the interactional space where humans and non-humans act on the actions and movements of each other.

Research Design and Empirics

As a methodology for research design, a case study approach explores a “bounded system (case) through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes” (Cresswell 2007, 73). A bounded system, or case, is a specific setting, context, activity, or group that can allow the researcher to understand

the dynamics of a particular set of issues or questions (ibid). The empirics of this case study involve people that supplement their supermarket purchases with purchases from Athens Locally Grown and the six supermarkets the research participants chose to place their interview. The specific supermarkets that became study sites were Earth Fare, Fresh Market, Trader Joes, two different Kroger, and Publix. Although this is a large number of study sites for a project of this length, all of these stores share many similarities because they all are only slight modifications of the Supermarket form.

The participants interviewed for this research are all involved in Athens Locally Grown (ALG). AthensLocallyGrown.net is a website where people place orders online on Monday and Tuesday for locally produced foods that are then picked up on Thursday afternoon. This allowed the project to look directly at the various ways supermarkets attempt to mobilize tastes and values to mitigate the (potentially) uncomfortable necessity of shopping in a supermarket as well as to understand how concerns that motivated people to become involved in an alternative food networks affects the experience of supermarket shopping. One of the primary reasons for this decision was to purposefully sample a group of supermarket shoppers that were already critical of the modern food system in the United States. The goal was then to try to understand how some of the values that inform this position come to be enrolled in the dominant space of the supermarket. ALG, as with other alternative food spaces, are not just alternatives to conventional production, they are also alternatives to the supermarket. One of the central questions was then to understand whether the supermarket is problematized in the same way as industrial agriculture or are they understood as unproblematic spaces that sell problematic foods?

I generated list of potential participants by contacting Eric Wagoner, the owner and operator of ALG, who agreed to send out a recruitment material in ALGs weekly email newsletter. I also gathered more potential participants during four weeks of personal interactions with people at the ALG pickup site. From this long list of potential participants, twelve people agreed to participate in walking interviews during a single shopping trip of their choosing. Ten walking interviews were conducted with twelve individuals, two of the trips were with two shoppers, each interview ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours in length. I recorded and transcribed all of the interviews. Before this process began, all research procedures and materials were approved by an IRB reviewer at the University of Georgia – Athens. To protect anonymity, all the names of the research participants in Chapters Five and Six are pseudonyms.

Despite my attempts to get as diverse a group of participants as I could, all research participants were middle-class, white, and had at least a bachelor's degree. Of the twelve participants only three were men. Five were between the ages of 25 and 35, seven were over the age of 50. The younger group of participants estimated their household yearly income to be between \$20,000 and \$30,000. The older set of participants had annual household incomes of between \$50,000 and \$100,000. The everyday life discussed in the analysis of this project is an undeniably racialized, classed, and gendered one. Although it is not the objective of this project to understand the role of race, class, and gender in the performance of supermarket shopping, I would be remiss to not acknowledge them as important factors that shape people's lives, perspectives, positionality, and personal histories. Food provisioning has and continues to be a highly gendered practice done primarily by women. For excellent and detailed analyses of gender's role in supermarket history and the practice of supermarket shopping, see Deutsch (2012), Koch (2012), and Humphrey (1998).

I would like to make clear here that this project makes no claims that the experiences and performances of these participants are universal or generalizable for all people. Although the analysis will attempt to signal towards some potentially generalizable aspects of supermarket shopping, I recognize that many people likely shop in the supermarket in radically different ways and that supermarkets play very different roles in different people's lives. This project does not seek to explain some normal or universal way of provisioning food. Instead, it embraces the many ways different people shop. While conducting this research I found that even during a trip with one individual there are many inconsistencies in the way they shop and what is important to people often changes depending on what food they are contemplating purchasing. The group of participants interviewed for this research provides a thin glimpse into diverse ways people interact with and use the foods in a supermarket.

Why Walk?

In an early and influential paper, Kusenbach (2003) argues that the 'go-along', her broad term for a method in which the researcher moves with the research participant, combines the strengths of participant observations and sit-down interviews. She argues that by incorporating interviews with observation that walking interview is “a tool particularly suited to explore two key aspects of everyday lived experience: the constitutive role and the transcendent meaning of the physical environment, or place” (Kusenbach 2003, 458). Traditional forms of qualitative research separate what is being researched from the actual practice that is trying to be understood. As such, they are weak tools to understand 'lived spaces' of everyday practice (Lefebvre 1991).

In doing her research on how people perceive local problems, Kusenbach found that participant observation is limited “because people usually do not comment on 'what is going on' while acting in 'natural' environments, it is difficult to access their concurrent experiences and interpretations through a purely participant observational approach” (Kusenbach 2003, 459). When first starting her research she began as an outsider. Her observations of what was going on in the neighborhood were naive and guided by her own interpretations and understandings. Through the course of her work, she found that her initial observations had little to do with the how the residents actually perceived and interpreted their local environments. Even as her apprehension of local knowledge grew, Kusenbach “found that the detailed observation of well-immersed researchers similarly *emphasizes*, instead of *overcomes*, their independent reference points” (Kusenbach 2003, 460). Participant observation has its advantages, but when attempting to do research on how people make use of and enroll meanings in space, it seems to fall short. Instead of providing insight into how people create space through practice, participant observation is often highly mediated by the perceptions and understandings of the researcher.

On the other side of the methodological binary, sit-down interviews are used to try to gain some access to the ways people experience, think about, and know the world (Kusenbach 2003). Kusenbach argues that there are two limitations to using the interview method when attempting to understand research participants' lived experience of space. The first problem is that of awareness. When in the interview setting, participants are called on to discuss their lived experience based solely on recollection and prompts. Regardless of a participant's desire to productively collaborate, interviews invariably miss potentially important topics that either the research participant or the researcher is not actively aware of at the time of the interview. The second limitation of sit-down interviews is because it uses an interview format that is static and

highly structured, creating a situation that puts all the focus on talking. In doing so, sit-down interviews discourage “context-sensitive reactions of the interviewer and interviewee, they also magnify the dialectical relationship between the participant and the researcher instead of promoting a shared perspective and a more egalitarian connection” (Kusenbach 2003, 462).

The sit-down interview eliminates the active role of actually being within a space of practice. It relies solely on what research participants recall and are aware of in a setting that is distanced from the one they are called on to discuss. The sit-down interview can exacerbate the power dynamics between the researcher and the research participant, and discourage active co-production of knowledge. On the other side, participant observation retrenches the researcher as the distant ‘other’, a position that post-positivist qualitative research seeks to avoid. Kusenbach concludes that in order to get a grasp on the lived experience of space, the researcher must find a middle ground. The go-along method, including the walking interview, is between the binary of participant observation and sit-down interviews. Mobile methods, as a way of understanding everyday life, are theoretically grounded research methods that attempt to embrace complex interactions of actors as they mediate actions, decisions, and experience.

The Walking Interview as a Method that puts Theory into Practice

Broadly, the theoretical goal of mobile methods is to understanding of how everyday socio-spatial practices construct and are constructed by the movements of subjects within the lived environment. Hein *et al* (2008) argue that mobile methods take as a guiding premise the idea that experience is embodied and emplaced. They go on to argue that “people, things and even ideas are situated somewhere” in time and space, where a phenomenon takes place “is an essential determinant of its characteristics” (Hein *et al* 2008, 1269). These authors continue their argument for the importance of placing interviews by drawing on Elwood and Martin's 2000

paper “*Placing*” *Interviews*. The interview site produces what Elwood and Martin call 'micro-geographies' of social relations and meanings. The location of an interview provides a context in which participants are situated “with respect to other actors and to his or her own multiple identities and roles” (Elwood and Martin 200, 652, quoted in Hein *et al* 2008). The environments in which interviews are placed modifies how participants respond to the questions they are asked. The shifting social and material relations co-produce space, they produce these relations as they are produced by them. Drawing on the 'new mobilities paradigm' and the importance of placing interviews, Hein *et al* argue that mobile methods are a way to put spatial theory into practice.

The geographer Jon Anderson (2004) makes explicit the theoretical goals of the walking interview by articulating it as a way to make a method out of the idea that “the relationship between self and place is not just one of reciprocal influence...but also, more radically, of constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the being of the other. In effect, there is no place without self and no self without place.” (Casey 2001, 684, quoted in Anderson 2004, 255). Anderson goes on to argue that space is not the medium in which practice takes place. Instead, we must think of space as “producing and being produced through human practice” (Anderson 2004, 255). He argues that people cannot be regarded as separate from the spaces of everyday practice. Feelings, desires, senses, knowledges, memories, identities, capabilities, and biological needs become enmeshed in space as they are continually shaped by it. Similarly, Ross *et al* (2009) derive further insights into how the walking interview can operationalize theoretical commitments to co-production.

Starting from the arguments of the 'new mobilities paradigm', Ross *et al* state that “mobile research methods can be utilized to understand everyday experiences through embodied, multi-sensory research experiences” (Ross *et al* 2009, 606). Unlike Anderson, they focus on Casey's discussion of the 'place-world', analogous to Soja's (1996) term 'thirdspace', as being “a world that is not only perceived or conceived but also actively lived and receptively experienced” (Casey 2001 687, quoted in Ross 606). Continuing Casey's argument, Ross *et al* (2009) argue that the 'place-world' is enacted through a double movement in which an embodied subject encounters place, and traces of place are inscribed on the embodied subject. Ross *et al* embrace mobile methods, including the walking interview, as a way to understand how 'place-worlds' are experienced and how they affect experience.

Moles (2008) argues that walking as a method allows the researcher to engage with the actual lived experiences of the research participants, rather than their representations of experience. She claims that the walking interview is a method that engages with the 'thirdspace', first articulated by Soja (1996), that is actively constructed by interactions in and through space. For Moles, thirdspace is the space of “Lefebvre's lived spaces (1991), Foucault's heterotopias (1986), bell hooks' homeplaces and Bhabha's (1991) third space” (Moles 2008, 3.1). Moles argues that by situating the walking interview in 'thirdspace', binary relations can be brought together. Walking as a method “facilitates entry into a third space between theory and praxis, or theoryandpraxis, which allows a critical engagement with the space and our subjective self” (Moles 2008, 3.7). The walking interview brings theories of co-production, or coingredience, into methodological practice. Through using mobile methods, researchers can directly engage with a space that sedentary methods can only view from the side.

The Advantages of Walking Interviews

The advantages of the walking interview primarily fall along three themes. First, movements within space allow for the things people actually encounter during their everyday practice to become elicitation probes. These contextual and multi-sensory encounters, coupled with questions from the researcher, are the avenues through which produced interview data is collaboratively. Second, the walking interview changes the dynamics of the researcher-researched relationship in ways that allow for a comfortable and fluid interaction. Third, walking interviews are found to be especially suited for understanding how personal values, desires, narratives, memories, and knowledges are enrolled within spaces of everyday practice.

As a researcher walks with the research participant, unexpected encounters can elicit productive discussion that likely would have never come up in sit-down interviews and never be noticed through participant observations (Moles 2008). These encounters with the actual place of practices can change the data altogether. Ross *et al* (2009) found that “walks and interviews appeared to provide different, even contradictory information about young people's use and experience of place” (Trell *et al* 2010, 99). Actually being within a particular space can radically change the way people articulate their thoughts. Though guiding a researcher in a walking interview, research participants often stumble across things they didn't know and find that what they thought they knew was wrong altogether (Garcia *et al* 2012). When doing a sit-down interview these opportunities for discovery are not possible. The walking interview creates a methodological space in which the context plays an important role in the production of qualitative data. Walking interviews become a productive three-way conversation between the interviewer, interviewee, and the movements within space (Hall 2009, 582).

Across the literature, researchers have found that the walking interview alters the researcher-participant relationship in productive ways (Ross *et al* 2009; Carpiano 2009; Brown 2009; Hall 2009; Trell *et al* 2010; Gacia *et al* 2012). The act of walking itself not only allows for immediate interaction with the lived environment, but also provides a rhythm to the interview that makes room for the pauses and silences that are often uncomfortable in sit-down interviews (Ross *et al* 2009, 614). The rhythms of walking produce a dynamic type of interview in which both the participant as well as the researcher can form new connections and makes insights as the interview unfolds (Ross *et al* 2009). Walking imbues interviews with a fluidity and ease that makes the whole interaction feel more authentic and less forced (Garcia *et al* 2012, 1398). Moments that might be considered wasted during a sit-down interview become time for unscripted and emergent conversation, as the researcher and participant walk together the pressure constantly converse is eased (Hall 2009).

Walking interviews allow the interview to be much more dynamic and interactional, making it possible for qualitative data to emerge collaboratively rather than being extracted from 'informants' (Brown 2009). A large part of this is the way the walking interview itself is structured. By allowing the participants to determine the route and guide the researcher through their everyday practice, there tends to be a balancing of the power relationship between researcher and participant (Trell *et al* 2010; Brown 2009). The participant no longer feels the pressure to give the 'right' answer to questions. Participants in walking interviews are the experts of their own practice.

Walking with participants makes it possible for discussions to emerge through the interactions within space. By moving with people during their everyday practices “everyday locales trigger the sharing of narratives from the mundane to the intimate and significant”,

movements within the participant's everyday spaces created a context through which participants could share their personal stories and anxieties (Ross *et al* 2009, 614). The disruptions of the researcher-participant power relationship allow people to feel more comfortable sharing their personal information. Hall (2009) concludes his paper by writing that "moving with respondents through local space in this way has generated narratives of local life and change which are pedestrian and even rambling, which is to say lacking some of the clarity of plotted narratives performed in a sequence, but truer to life as such" (Hall 2009, 582). While these may not be the more sequenced and structured discussions of the sit-down interview, the discussions produced through the walking interview are ones that emerge through the everyday practices of being within space and are likely to never emerge during the sit-down interview (Moles 2008).

Degan and Rose (2012) argue that memories are not just meanings about the past. Remembrance is a process by which people make sense of experience and ascribe meaning to the past, present, and future. In this way, "the experiencing of the built environment in the present is overlaid with memories of how that same environment was encountered in the past" (Degan and Rose 2012, 3279). The walking interview is an exceptionally useful method for understanding the importance of memory to the experience of a place. Bringing together materiality and memory, they argue that through conducting walking interviews they have found "that sensory engagements with place are often mediated by memories of that environment as it used to be" (Degan and Rose 2012, 3280). The experience of the physical environments is a consequence of enrolling memories into the actual materiality of space.

The walking interview is an attempt to find a way for theory and method to intermingle in ways that can generate productive and insightful understandings of how people live and make meaning *with* space. It is a theoretically grounded approach to qualitative inquiry that generates

both text and observational data by placing the interview within the context of the case being studied. This thesis uses walking interviews move research beyond relying on representations of practice by engage it directly. Feelings, desires, senses, knowledges, memories, identities, capabilities, tastes, values, and needs are not simply applied to decisions in the supermarket; they are co-produced by in interactions between supermarkets, foods, and shoppers. The walking interview puts into practice the theory that everyday spaces are co-produced by the enrollments of actual actors and virtual actants in networks of association. The walking interview provides a method for investigating the ways active and creative shoppers make use of foods to assemble their everyday live, and, possibly, evade the marketing strategies of supermarkets. It also allows for an investigation of the way supermarketing strategies seek to shape the actual space of the store in ways that affect the decisions of shoppers.

The Walking Interview as an ANT Research Method

Central to the use of actor-network theory (ANT) in this project is a commitment to understanding space and practice as co-produced by the interactions between actual actors and virtual actants. As with the theoretical engagements that have shaped other scholars' use of the walking interview, ANT embraces co-production. While actor-network theory has garnered much attention and interest in the social sciences over the past decade, researchers have found it to be a difficult theory to put into practice. Latour suggests that researchers 'follow the actors' as they enroll each other in networks. He argues that by following actors it will be possible to trace the associations and mediations between human and non-human actors. The question remains: How does one 'follow the actors' in the pursuit of tracing associations? What is the appropriate method to grasp the fleeting associations forged between human and non-human actors? The walking interview is a method that can put ANT into practice.

Latour argues that “*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor” (Latour 2005, 71). These actors, through acting on the actions of each other, enroll each other in networks that stretch out through both time and space. The cases of bubbly soft drinks that line the shelves elicit memories and sensations of taste. Their carefully thought-through placement exactly at eye level as a shopper turns the corner of an aisle enrolls them in a marketing strategy that attempts to increase consumption. The cleanliness of the store and the carefully stacked oranges that seem to shine under the bright florescent lights may evoke a feeling of quality. The ‘2 for 1’ sale on rarely eaten snacks suggests that this might be the time to indulge. All of these are performances of association between the actual physicality of the store, memories, and imagined futures afforded by foods and drinks. They are examples of human actors and non-human actors coming into contact and acting on one another in the space of the supermarket.

The walking interview allows for a direct engagement with how associations are performed during peoples’ interactions and encounters within space. Since these enrollments are fleeting and their reconstruction after the fact is always mediated through memory, it is essential for researchers to generate data about actor-networks as they are being created. Instead of memory playing the central role in the reconstruction of associations, walking interviews provide a method through which the researcher can understand how memory plays an active role in constructing of new associations. The traces of past associations are enrolled into the making of new ones. The walking interview is a method that puts the theoretical considerations of ANT into methodological practice because it generates data out of spatially situated interactions between actors and actants. As the objects in, and characteristics of, space elicit reactions and responses by research participants, it can be possible to get a glimpse of how actors and actants continually

come together to co-produce the space of practice.

Walking and Talking within the Supermarket

Shopping for foods in a supermarket is ideally suited to the walking interview. Buying food is a practice that, in most cases, necessitates movement. In order to buy food you must first walk through the store and collect all the various items for purchase. The walking interview is the ideal method for studying the ways in which supermarkets, and the foods they contain, act on the actions of shoppers. As the supermarket, foods, and consumers interact with one another, walking through the supermarket becomes walking with the supermarket.

Supermarkets and food producers use a myriad of marketing strategies to influence food consumption by managing shoppers' movements and attention. The primary goal of nearly all in-store supermarketing strategies is to create encounters with foods that slows down a shopper's pace and persuades him or her to stop and contemplate making a purchase he or she had not planned on making. Supermarkets and marketing firms spend millions of dollars and thousands of hours studying the movements of shoppers in an attempt to develop ways to make that movement profitable. In the logic of supermarketing, movement creates opportunities for sales that can easily be lost without being 'properly' managed (Sorenson 2009). Walking is a fundamental aspect of the modern supermarket. The foods in a supermarket also enroll people in economic and political practices that support industrial food production, genetic modification, subsidization, the production of inexpensive calorie dense foods, and the proliferation of 'value-added' food products, to name a only a very few. These practices and their effects, often shape the anxieties surrounding food and the reason particular values come to be central to the decision making process. For some of the shoppers in this research, they are centrally involved in transforming food into a problem. The supermarket serves as a space within which people are

entangled in practices designed to use tastes, the biological necessity to eat, access to capital, and anxieties about the food system in order to profit.

By walking and talking with research participants as they do their shopping it is possible to approach an understanding of the interconnected relationship between cost, taste, imaginings, memories, and values that are cited in the performance of supermarket shopping. Drawing on memories it is possible to see the ways in which traces of past associations with food and eating become important processes in making decisions. The walking interview can be used to investigate the power of food and supermarkets to act on what, why, and how people consume by grasping the ways in which the actuality of food (packaging, brands, production, placement, cost, taste, etc.) is mediated by shoppers' enrollments (meanings, memories, values, tastes, imaginings, desires, needs, capabilities etc.). In this way, the walking interview can be used to understand supermarkets as spaces that seek to use marketing strategies as a way act on the actions that sustain and reproduce life as prosumers seek to use consumption to create futures.

Methods of Analysis

The text of the interviews and the observations made during the interviews were analyzed through the lens of the theoretical framework by drawing on Maxwell's (2012) "strategies for qualitative analysis" (Maxwell 2012, Kindle location 2351). Maxwell argues that qualitative analysis involves three important stages. The first stage involves multiple readings of field notes and interview transcriptions while making memos that begin to develop tentative idea about the important categories and relationships within the data. This process produced annotated transcripts. Second, is a process of categorizing, or coding, the data based on emic and/or etic categories to find similar themes within the data. The final stage of analysis involves identifying the influence and connections between the things categorized (Maxwell 2012). This final stage of

analysis is central to understanding how and why particular associations are performed and the affect those associations have on shoppers' decisions.

The iterative process of reading and making notes was central to weaving together the interview data and the observations made while conducting the interview. As I read the text, I made notes on what the participant was doing but not talking about. Throughout the interviews, for example, people would repeatedly look at the ingredient lists on foods, but often times only mentioned ingredient lists to me the first time they did this. Additionally, I highlighted passages of the text that were produced during moments when I observed shoppers encountering marketing strategies of supermarkets. For example, when the layout of the store determined the path a shopper had to take created unplanned encounters that influenced them to make purchases they had no intention of making when entering the store.

The second stage of the analysis involved coding the data by hand based on etic and emic categories. I developed the emic categories during the note taking stage. These categories primarily involve the specific actors that affected people decisions. These were actors that shopper used to perform associations with food in order to know them. The emic categories that came up repeatedly through the interviews were organic labels, ingredient lists, brands, memories, lists, and aspects of shopper's lives that did not directly involve shopping. This last category was quite broad and included jobs, family, leisure activities, school, and cooking.

The etic categories used to code the annotated interviews were based on Guthman's discussion of Warde's 'antinomies of taste', although for this project no *a priori* claim is made about their mutual exclusivity (Guthman 2002, 301). The coding schema went as follows:

- Novelty-tradition, foods that are rarely purchased to ones that are staples.
- Health-indulgence, how foods are perceived, or sold, as being good for the body-mind,

while indulgence involves the sensuousness and enjoyment of taste over health concerns.

- Economics-extravagance, refers to purchasing foods based on their economic value opposed to purchasing foods where other considerations overrides price completely.
- Convenience-care, a spectrum of foods that take less time/effort to prepare and the idea that food provisioning is an element in caring for one's self and others.
- Nature-technics, foods that are (de)valued for being 'real', 'natural', and 'fresh' to those that are (de)valued for their qualities that derive from scientific manipulation. The value of 'nature' also includes considerations about the impacts of food production on the environment. Technics also encompasses a wide range of activities from the addition of chemicals to preserve taste and color, to foods requiring extensive processing, to aspects of industrial farming.

In addition to these, another set of emic categories were derived through my reading of secondary research on the ways supermarkets use marketing strategies to coerce shoppers. These categories are sales, the physical layout of the store, and the placement of foods on shelves and displays. The categories used to code the annotated interviews point to the actors and actants that shape how people move within the supermarket and the decisions they make.

The final stage of analysis involved finding the connections between these categories in order to understand what affect they had on decisions. Primarily this involved how the actors and actants identified by these categories were brought into association with one another by shoppers and by supermarkets. When analyzing ingredient lists, for example, I began by looking for the way shoppers made use of the ingredient list to know whether or not a food could satisfy their tastes and/or values. By connecting multiple categories, I found that one way ingredient lists are used is to association what a food actually contains with with a set of production practices as

well as concerns about the effects of particular ingredients on health and the environment. As shoppers modify what the ingredients on the list mean through performing associations, the ingredient list modifies a food capacity to satisfy shoppers' values involving nature, technics, and health.

Reflections on Doing Walking Interviews in Supermarkets

The most important advantage of doing the walking interview was that it made it possible for the interviewee to guide me through their shopping. Before starting the shopping trip I had short conversations with participants about what I was looking for and what sort of activities they did to prepare to come shopping. As we began the shopping trip the interview lost this formal character, in which I questioned and was given responses. While we moved around the store, encountering foods people wanted to purchase or were thinking about purchasing, interview participants began to talk with me about the wide variety of things that motivate their decisions. This left room for brief open-ended questions that could direct the interview, rather than determine it. Walking interviews became an easy way for people to open up why they were making decisions because they were actually working through those decisions themselves.

The act of walking adds a new dimension to the interview that can present many practical difficulties. The most fundamental difficulty in doing a walking interview is how the researcher generates a record of the interview that ties together the spoken word with the multi-sensory environment within which it emerges. In doing the walking interview, the researcher is required to ask questions and listen to responses while trying to take into consideration ways the environment is affecting the interview itself. In essence, walking interviews ask the researcher to do two, if not more, tasks at once. In order to generate data that can be thoughtfully analyzed, the researcher must find a way to be able to locate where various parts of the interview actually

happened after the interview is over.

The overarching difficulty I faced while conducting walking interviews was trying to find a way to try to capture what was not said. The unfortunate fact was that after doing the interview I was left with imperfect representations of the interview. The interviews themselves were recorded and transcribed, but listening to audio and reading the text could not fully encapsulate all that transpired. Vague references were made to 'this' or 'that'. To help mitigate this it was critical for me to be explicit about what was being discussed as well as gather receipts as a way to document exactly what was purchased. The walking interview creates data that requires active reflection during the process of doing the research. It is not a methodology well- suited for doing analysis months or years after conducting the interview.

Finding a way to create some sort of useable data out of the visual and embodied aspects of the walking interview presented the most difficulty. To attempt deal with this I used three different tactics. Field notes were recorded following the interview to try to retain key moments that may have been quickly forgotten. Ideally, written field notes would have been created while the interview was being done, but that was simply too great a task for a single researcher. Photographs of displays, aisles, and foods were useful to recontextualize the audio/text. By being able to see where a discussion took place it was easier to understand the interactions between foods and what people said about them. In an attempt to further this contextualization, I spent a great deal of time back in the store listening to the audio as I retraced our steps. Although never perfect, these three tactics allowed me to avoid being undermined by some of the practical complexities of doing walking interviews.

Conclusion

Despite some practical difficulties, the walking interview proved to be an excellent method for this research project. No other method of conducting interviews that would have made possible a study of the vast array of actors that mediate decisions within the supermarket as they are enrolled in the practice of shopping. Rather than getting broad generalizations about how people try to shop or think of themselves as consumers, the walking interview provided insights into peoples' many uncertainties and contradictions. I found while doing this research that each decision involved a slightly different assemblages of actors. Some actors were common across all decisions while others only during a single purchase. At the beginning of a trip a shopper would make a decision that was mediated by an active rejection of a food's association with agro-industrial food production, while during other encounters, this association was lost as they consented to purchasing industrially produced food because it afforded an opportunity to have a delicious meal with friends and family. The walking interview allowed for a partial glimpse into the many ways people use food as a way to perform a mix of shifting tastes and values. The shoppers in this study did not follow rules while shopping, but made do with what they had in an attempt to create an everyday life they could live with. The walking interview is an excellent methodological tool for attempting to engage with the practices of everyday life and the fleeting networks that make it up.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUPERMARKETS STRATEGIES TO STABILIZE HEGEMONY

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the ways supermarkets use coercive strategies to stabilize their position as a normalized and profitable form of food distribution. To do this involves weaving together secondary sources with the interview and observational data generated by the walking interviews conducted during this research. Since this chapter deals much more with what people do than what they say, this insights in this chapter derived from interpreting observational data through secondary source. This chapter brings the conceptual tools of hegemony and actor-network theory to analyze how the strategies of supermarkets actually affect shoppers in ways that stabilize the profitability of supermarket companies and continue the legacy of depoliticizing the Supermarket that began in the 1950s.

Over the past 65 year in the United States, the Supermarket as a form of retail food distribution has become both dominant and normalized. Self-service food shopping at a single store that relies on the logic of high sales volume and low costs in order to maintain and expand profits is the form against which alternatives and inequalities are defined (Mayo 1993). Food desert scholars and state agencies who define areas with low-access as the lack of a supermarket reproduce its normalization (Walker 2010). The USDA criteria for a "food desert", is based on census tract poverty levels and “on the determination that at least 500 persons and/or at least 33% of the census tract's population live more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store” (USDA 2015). By defining areas as deficient because they lack a supermarket, the Supermarket is valorized as a proper and necessary form of food distribution. Normalizing the

Supermarket in this way delimits the possibly for questioning its coercive practices and renders is ahistorical. The supermarket is a historically middle-class form of food distribution created to profit in white suburbs, but has become the lens through which what is normal and proper is defined.

Although there was an expectation that the problems the people in this research associated with food would lead directly to a questioning of, and anxiety about, shopping in the supermarket, this was rarely the case. Alternative food movements often framed their goals in terms of rejecting conventional production without addressing the role of supermarkets in shaping and maintaining those production practices. Alternative sites of food distribution such as Athens Locally Grown, farmers markets, CSAs, and community gardens are alternatives to the Supermarket and are in a position to question and critique the supermarket, but rarely do they do so. By focusing attention almost exclusively on the problems related to food and food production, alternative food movements, critical food scholars and journalists, shoppers, and supermarket continue the depoliticization of supermarket space even as food becomes a site of political struggle.

This chapter engages with the ways supermarkets deploy strategies that act on the actions of shoppers in an attempt to understand how supermarkets are stabilized as both unproblematic and profitable institutions. Gramsci's concept of hegemony is a particularly useful tool for framing this analysis. Gramsci argues that hegemony is maintained by "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production" (Gramsci 1971, 12). The second important aspect of hegemony is that it

functions by making normal or 'common sense' a particular way of thinking and acting. In the conceptual language of this project, hegemony is a process of stabilizing institutional forms of actor-networks in an attempt to make them unquestioned or accepted as proper. Gramsci's definition of hegemony refers to a more general process of creating consent to an ideology and there are many complexities to the concept that cannot be addressed in the scope of this project. That being said, the central argument here is that dominant institutional forms, such as the Supermarket, can be understood as a hegemonies that are produced and maintained by the coercive strategies of supermarket companies.

The Supermarket can be understood as hegemonic because it is a historically produced form of food distribution that has come to dominate how food is sold by capitalizing on its position between production and consumption. The Supermarket as a form and particular supermarkets imposes a direction on life by shaping how supermarket shoppers interact with and acquire the foods they eat. Although coercion in Gramsci's text often focuses on the role of the state to enforce a way of life on people that do not consent to it, in this project the coercion of the supermarket is about the subtle way shoppers are persuaded into acting in ways that supermarkets wants them too. Supermarkets do not need to rely on a state apparatus for enforcing consent. At the most basic level, supermarkets relies of the coercive force of hunger. Yet hunger is not a sufficient condition for forcing people to shop at supermarkets. Layered on top of this are the strategies supermarkets deployed to coerce shoppers into moments of consent.

Hegemony in the framework of actor-network theory is about how dominant institutional forms, thought of as networks of actors themselves, are stabilized by "more-or-less successful attempts to enroll other [mediators] into networks through a process of 'translation' in which the interests of others are aligned and then are mobilized as a part of that network" (Lockie and Kitto

2000, 8). The Supermarket is a stabilized form of actor-network because of supermarkets attempts to aligning the interests of shopper with their interest in maximizing profit while remaining normalized. It is worth restating here that mediators are the actors and actants that “transform, translate, distort, and modify” the meanings of other mediators (Latour 2005, 39). Coercion, in this case, is a way supermarket actively use actors within their space to direct shoppers toward their interests. The coercive power of the supermarket is the ways it acts on the actions shopper can and do take, it is the power to affect what shopper can do and actually do within the space of the supermarket.

The concept of the prosumer is necessary for using the concept of hegemony to understand supermarket shopping because it makes possible conceptualizing ‘consumers’ as having the capacity to actively give consent. Prosumption calls attention to the ways people play an active role in producing the value of the products they consume by making use of them. Viewing shoppers as consumers that are passively manipulated by forces of production forecloses the possibility for them to give consent. By thinking of consumers as always-manipulated they are always only coerced into acting certain ways. By conceptualizing shoppers are prosumers, it becomes possible to bring the concept of hegemony to issues of ‘consumption’. Prosumers actively give consent because supermarkets afford them opportunities to make use of foods to create everyday futures that coincide with their tastes and values. Prosumers in a supermarket are not always coerced, but as this chapter shows, they often can be.

Nearly all supermarketing strategies have three overarching goals: to increase the volume of sales by creating unplanned purchases, to create ‘loyal shoppers’ in an attempt to “stop consumers from visiting multiple retailers”, and to direct shoppers towards buying foods with high profit margins (Campbell 2015). Supermarkets depend on achieving these goals because

individual stores are not very profitable. On average, for every dollar shoppers spend a particular supermarket makes 2 cents in profit (The Reinvestment Fund 2011, 10). The stability of the supermarket cannot simply be assured by its profitability. Although supermarkets rely on high volume sales, every purchase is important. It is for this reason that supermarketing strategies are central to the success of supermarket and that when shoppers' evade these strategies it does have an impact, even if it is a small one.

Supermarkets use their coercive power to act on the actions of shopper in four different ways. First, by using the convenience of the 'one-stop-shop' they transform other forms of retail into inconveniences or burdens (Bowlby 2001). Second, by using the mechanisms of pricing supermarkets modify transposing an economic understanding of food onto shoppers (Sorenson 2009). Third, by using techniques of 'Visual Merchandising', supermarkets seek to managing shoppers' movements and shape the way they encounter foods (McKeever 2009). Fourth, by directly enrolling what marketers 'know' about shoppers' tastes and values, supermarkets are presented as spaces where shoppers can avoid the foods they define as being a problem. As supermarkets coerce shopper into consenting to understanding a supermarket as part of the solution to problems created by the industrialized food system they become depoliticized and normalized. Through these four strategies, supermarkets attempt to create moments of coerced consent that stabilize the hegemony of the Supermarket.

As people encounter these strategies and at times become aware of the way their decisions are altered by the supermarket, they develop ways to evade them. In this research, people evade supermarkets strategies in two ways. First, they actively avoided supermarkets attempts to create unplanned purchases by using lists to guide their movements and actions. Second, people took advantage of their ability to access other spaces of food provisioning to

actively evade supermarkets attempts to coerce them into the one-stop-shop. Out of the everyday practice of supermarket shopping emerges tactics for evading its coercive power.

The One-stop-shop and the Power of Price

Throughout the interviews conducted for this research, shoppers expressed an ambivalence towards shopping at a supermarket, the shared sentiment was that “if I could get all this food without having to come here I probably would” (Matt). This ambivalence was not an outright rejection of the Supermarket, but a feeling that supermarkets sold many foods that could not purchase elsewhere, or if they could it would require some costly and unnecessary burden. The central issue this chapter investigates is about how the supermarket reinforces the idea that you *have* to go there.

The history of the Supermarket is one of dismantling a diverse and fragmentary system of food retail and replacing it with a centralized one. As supermarkets began to dominant food retail they destabilized a complex network of butchers, bakers, peddlers, open-air markets, dairy delivery services, and independently owned grocers. Supermarkets gathered the foods sold by these diverse retailers into a single space governed by a centralized corporate structure. By taking advantage of economies of scale and favorable agreements with manufactures, supermarket chain played a role in driving down their own costs as well as the retail price of food. Supermarkets were not alone in driving down price. Economies of scale, industrialization, and technological changes in agriculture and food manufacturing also put downward pressure on prices in food commodities markets and markets for finished products (Fitzgerald 2003). Additionally, during the 1950s Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz radically reengineered US food policy by replacing New Deal policies designed to manage aggregate consumption with food subsidies that incentivized over production (Solkoff 1985).

Using the capital chain grocers accumulated between the 1910s and 1930s, during the 1950s regional and national food retailers began moving into growing suburbs in order to profit by becoming the only local distributor. Through economic and locational advantages, corporate supermarket chains were able to build large stores with diverse foods at low prices that could capture large proportions of local market shares (Mayo 1993). Before the 1980s, the supermarket industry was composed of local and regional chains. Due to the relaxing of anti-trust enforcement over the past two decades, economically successful retailer have been able to merge and acquired smaller or faltering chains. This has led to a situation in which a few national supermarket chains often make up over 70% of the market share of retail food sold in local and regional areas (Seigert 2009). Although data is not available for Athens, Georgia, in metro Atlanta, for example, 96% of all retail food is sold at either Kroger, Publix, Wal-Mart, or Ingles (Nielsen 2008).

Although supermarkets have managed to overshadow other forms of food retail there still exists a wide diversity of places to buy food for at-home consumption. In Athens, Georgia there are convenience stores, supercenters, co-ops, supermercados, gas stations, dollar stores, bakeries, flea markets, farmers markets, CSAs, online grocers, and independent grocers. It is possible to sustain life without the supermarket. Despite this persistent diversity and the fact that the shoppers in this research regularly purchased food from other places than the supermarket, many of them still saw the supermarket as central to their overall food provisioning.

The power of the supermarket to position itself as central to people's lives who do not *need* to shop there comes from the way it coerces them into consenting to go there. Two of the ways supermarkets create consent are the one-stop-shop and the prices supermarket are able to offer and manipulate due to their economies of scale and supply chain management. The scale at

which retailers operate is directly related to food prices they are able to charge (USDA 2004). Large-scale supermarket companies have a much greater capacity to manipulate prices while maintaining profits than smaller independent or chain retailers.

The one-stop-shop was foundational to the supermarkets development and continues to be a key aspect in their attempt to create ‘loyal’ shoppers (Oberg 2015). The one-stop-shop was the shift toward gathering a diverse selection of foods within a single space in order to create convenience by reducing the amount of people time spent shopping. This was also a strategy to manage shopper ‘traffic-flow’ and boost the volume of sales per time spent shopping (Bowlby 2001). The aspects of people lives that put pressure on their time and energy come together with the convenience afforded by the supermarket to produce coerced consent.

In the theoretical framework of actor-network theory developed in this project, the convenience of the supermarket can be thought of as coercive because of the way it mediates peoples’ relationships to other spaces of provisioning and other aspects of their lives. For some of the participants in this research the convenience of a supermarket transformed other forms of food provisioning into being understood as more difficult or burdensome. For other retail forms to be valued in spite of their inconvenience, they must offer something unique that supermarkets do not. As one participant, Dan, put it,

Athens Locally Grown can at times be really difficult to do. Because of the rigid time schedule, maybe I have work, or I’m tired, or because I just forget I don’t order food. I mean, I love ALG but when I run out of food or need to stock up its just so much easier to run down to the Publix or Kroger (Dan).

By transforming other spaces of food provisioning into inconveniences, supermarkets direct people toward their goal of increasing sales volume. As shoppers consent to making use of the convenience of the one-stop-shop they are enrolled in a marketing strategy designed to direct their actions towards profit and stability. This stabilizes the Supermarket by positioning it having

advantages that other retail formats lack, thus making it seem, at least at times, a proper and better way of distributing food. The coercive power of the supermarket, in this sense, relies on mediating people's relations with other space and activities in order to make convenience valuable.

One of the most powerful actors used by supermarkets to direct shoppers towards profitable purchases is price, or more precisely the price tag. Market relations of exchange do not solely determine the price of food in a supermarket. Supermarkets actively manipulate prices, and use price tags, to coerce people into making profitable and unplanned purchases. Supermarkets do this through relative pricing models and promotional pricing (Sorenson 2009). Supermarket's promotional pricing primarily involves in-store sales and coupons. Relative pricing works because price is not stable, but it is mediator always in relation to the price of similar products either within a single store or between different stores. One example of this is that supermarkets will place two foods next to one another that they know, through their marketing research, are often viewed by shoppers as equivalents to one another. Supermarkets use this marketing strategy this in order to subtly persuade shoppers to purchase items that have higher profit margins (Nierop 2008). This is a widely used strategy to promote the sale of supermarkets privately owned brands (McKeever 2015).

Although price clearly had a more powerful influence on shoppers have less personal wealth or lower incomes, across the interviews in this research price nearly always played some role in affecting some decisions. Jennifer and Mary were the most financially constrained participants in this study and for this reason navigated the supermarket in a constant attempt to keep their costs down. They almost exclusively purchased items that were on sale, or they had a coupon for, or that had an equivalent that less expensive than the promotionally priced item.

Although this was the most extreme case of the coercive force of price, in other interviews supermarkets' use of price created unplanned purchases, directed shoppers toward buying private-label items, and persuaded them to make purchases from the bulk section.

By using the power to modify price supermarket seek to shape the actual decisions people make during a single shopping trip and the future actions of people in their home and the next time they go shopping. As the shoppers in this research scanned the shelf and contemplated making a purchase sales tags often times directed their attention. Bob, a shopper who was in general not too concerned with price, explains the power of sale prices when he says that, "sometimes we'll look at something and then if it's on sale we'll go, ok, let's just try it and see if we like it, so we'll experiment". This experimentation is an act of consenting to making an unplanned purchase. The sales tag, in this instance, is a coercive actor that creates the purchase by directing vision and providing a temporary discount that transforms a food into something more valuable.

Foods sold in bulk and supermarket branded products are two of the most profitable categories of food for supermarkets, with gross profit margins of 40% and 30% respectively. When asked why people prefer to buy certain foods in bulk as opposed to packaged alternatives it was not the packaging that mattered, but the price. This was similarly the case when shoppers compared private-label products with national brands, private-label goods cost on average 25% less than the lowest priced national brand in the same product category (Burch and Lawrence 2007). When the shoppers in this study thought of two foods as having no qualitative differences, price became the deciding actor.

During the interviews conducted during this research, private labels were most often purchased as Kroger, Publix, and Trader Joes. Kroger and Publix are two of the larger supermarket firms and thus have the capital and market share to aggressively promote their private labeled products. Trader Joes, on the other hand, is a much smaller retailer, but its whole business strategy based around the profitability of private labels. Although private labels played only a marginal role in the supermarket at the turn of the 21st century, by 2008 97.5% of retailers surveyed by the Food Marketing Institute indicated private labels as a key part of their growth strategies (Senauer and Seltzer 2010). The success of private labels has begun to make it possible for supermarkets to increase profitability while eliminating products produced by companies that do not capture a large portion of market share in a specific category (Dalley 2014). When Dalley interviewed a few of the manufacturers and supplier whose products has been pushed out of supermarket shelves to make room for supermarket brands, she found that large supermarkets are sometimes “reducing the third-, fourth- and fifth-most popular products” in a product category (ibid). Exemplifying the power of large supermarket firms over manufactures, the people Dalley interviewed requested anonymity “citing fear of retribution from the supermarket” (Dalley 2014).

Private labels are making it possible for supermarket companies to consolidate their control over what is produced and sold by giving them the capability to determine which companies get their manufacturing contracts and nearly eliminating the possibility for small-scale food producers to be stocked on supermarket shelves. Private labels allow supermarket to generate larger profits while simultaneous pushing other manufactures that compete with their private label foods but do generate much profit for the supermarket. Through private labeled products, supermarket firms with large market shares are beginning to have greater control over

what gets produced, what gets sold, and who profits off the foods sold in their stores. Although private labels have only recently emerged as an important supermarket strategy, there are already making it possible for large supermarket companies to play an increasingly dominant role in shaping food production and consumption. Private labels stabilizing and increase supermarkets dominance.

Through the mechanism of price, the economic logic of high volume and low cost that the supermarket depends on is transposed onto shoppers. When price acts on decisions in the supermarket it reinforces the conception of food as a commodity, transforming the decision making process into a purely economic one. The clearest example of this is when identical products are sold in different sizes. During these moments shoppers often calculated, or if available, looked at the price per unit of weight to figure out which product was the more economically rational one to purchase. In some cases, the shopper in this study explicitly valued the supermarket because it offered them with opportunities to purchase larger quantities of food at lower prices. As Matt said, “I tend to buy most of the things I eat regularly here at Kroger because I can get a lot of it for a lot cheaper than other places”. Price imposes an economic understanding of food onto people as they perform food shopping. This in turn stabilizes the Supermarket because supermarket firms can use its economies of scale and supply chain management to distribute foods at lower prices than its alternatives.

Managing Movements, Creating Encounters

Supermarkets use a strategy called ‘Visual Merchandising’ in an attempt to manage the way shoppers move within the store while creating encounters with high-margin foods. Karl McKeever, brand director for a leading UK supermarketing firm called Visual Thinking, defines Visual Merchandising (VM) as

an indispensable retail discipline, consisting of a series of practical selling tools that are used to influence what and how much consumers buy. Successful retailers -- supermarkets in particular -- can employ effective and integrated VM practices as part of the retail experience and overall brand delivery, to successfully maximize sales and profits in-store -- essentially, it's a silent selling service of sales-driving levers and tools (McKeever 2009)

Two of VMs 'selling tools' that were observed repeatedly throughout the interviews conducted during this research. First, by meticulously designing the physical layout of the store, supermarkets manage how shoppers move and force them to encounter foods they would not have otherwise. For supermarkets, every item shoppers do not encounter is a lost opportunity to make a sale happen (Sorenson 2009). The second 'selling tool' is an ambiguously named set of techniques McKeever (2009) calls VM 'sales techniques'. By analyzing data on cost, selling price, profit margin, and rate of sales, supermarkets determine the optimal location to place products on the shelves, in relation to one another, and around the store. VM 'sales techniques' involves the strategic placement of food.

Visual Merchandising is a set of techniques designed as an attempt by retailers to "spend customers' money for them!" (McKeever 2009). Supermarkets accomplish this by using what they know about shoppers to subtly coerce them into consenting to making profitable purchases. By performing these marketing strategies, supermarkets use the physicality of space as a way to act on the actions of the shoppers as they move and encounter foods. This form of supermarket power is embedded in their capacity to modify the way shoppers physically interact with foods.

Throughout the history of supermarkets, the 'science of supermarketing' has been deeply involved in mapping shoppers' movements within the store (Peak and Peak 1977). Initially, researchers did this by close observation of shoppers while meticulously tracing what they did on the paths they followed. More recently, supermarketing researchers have begun to use geographic information systems (GIS) to produce detailed maps of the paths shoppers take, the

variable speeds at which they walk in different locations, the sites in the store that have the highest density of traffic, and in some cases they use optical devices to record exactly where people look as they shop (Sorenson 2009). This all is done with a single question in mind, how can the physical space of a supermarket be more effectively and efficiently shaped in order to maximize the dollars people spend per second while in the store (ibid)? Using this technique to ‘know shoppers’, as well as sales data analysis and shopper surveys, supermarkets enroll what they ‘know’ about shoppers into the strategies they use to coerce them. By doing this, supermarkets attempt to predict what shoppers will do, and what is important to them, in an attempt to maximize the volume of sales. As shoppers’ decisions are affected by the strategies designed to manage their movement, they are enrolled in and reproduce the strategies that seek to control their actions.

The goal of supermarket design is to maximize the square footage of the store that shoppers walk regardless of what they went in to buy. The basic design of nearly all supermarkets is to have a single entrance that moves shoppers directly into the produce aisle at the front right of the store. Produce is often placed in this location because it is used as a way to create an aesthetically pleasing store, it is one of the most commonly purchased foods per shopping trip, it is thought of as having ‘impulse power’, and it is one of the most profitable product categories if sold before spoilage (Peak and Peak 1977; Major 2014; Campbell 2015). A wide outer ring surrounds a set of aisles in the center of the store where grocery and household items are shelved. These center aisles contain foods that are often purchased less frequently and tend have lower profit margins (Walsh 1993). Meat is placed in the back right corner, dairy in the back left corner, and medicines are in the front left corner. Although the exact placement may vary from store to store, all the supermarkets visited in this research use this basic principle of

supermarket design, the kinds of foods with the highest rate of sale are placed along the outer ring of the store. Additionally, supermarkets use strategically placed displays to put foods in the path of shoppers as they walk within the store (Sorenson 2009).

The management of bodies through the planning of space is not purely manipulative, it is a form of coerced consent. Although these unplanned purchases have been framed as ‘impulsive’, they are not performed unreflectively or automatically. As Sally and I reached the penultimate aisle of Trader Joe’s, she referred back to her list. The last item she was at the store to purchase was some cheese for making a weekly meal of pizza. The aisle we had just finished walking down led us to the front of the store. The strategically placed dairy section in the back left corner of the store, forced us to go down the snack and drink aisle. As we moved down the aisle Sally told me that, “sometimes I get snacks, but I’m trying to get away from that. But I do stop and look sometimes”. As our pace slowed while Sally scanned over the assortment of crackers and chips, we suddenly stopped. “These pita chips are really good because my daughter is teething, they’re hard so she can gnaw on them. I didn’t plan on getting these, they were an add-in, because I saw them. My husband likes crackers and snacks too, so, those are just whatever looks good”.

In this short sequence of events, the capacity of store design to force shoppers’ to move past foods they did not plan on purchasing, can coerce shoppers into spontaneously reflecting on how they could make use of the food they were forced to encounter. In this case, the hard pita chips become a way for Sally to soothe her young daughter’s pain, and the box of crackers to express care for her husband’s tastes. Sally did not seek out these items, but was moved towards them by the materiality of the supermarket. Even as supermarkets marketing strategies coerce

shoppers, they are not passively manipulated actors. The encounters supermarkets create are powerful because they create potential opportunities for ‘spontaneous consent’.

Supermarkets create encounters by placing foods on the paths they force shoppers to take. The placement of foods in shoppers’ paths can be found throughout the outer ring of the store and on the ends of aisles, but the entrance and exit of the store are the most valuable locations in the supermarket. Regardless of how shoppers navigate the store, the supermarket has absolute control over how shoppers enter and exit. These two sites maximize the exposure to the foods the supermarket is actively trying to sell.

As Diane and I began our trip through Earth Fare she told me that she “just happened to see” some kiwis in a small refrigerated shelf at the front of the produce section. The only way to get into the rest of the store is through the produce section, this small shelf faces directly towards shoppers as they enter. This shelf is not always stocked with the same items, in the many times I visited Earth Fare throughout this research different fruits and vegetables were regularly rotated through. The power of this small and seemingly unassuming refrigerated shelf is that it forces foods into shoppers’ field of vision. Just by seeing a food while entering the store an encounter is produced that can coerce shoppers into consenting to an unplanned purchase. As Diane explained to me while looking at which kiwis to buy,

I don’t eat a lot of fruit in the winter, but I just decided I want to get some of these kiwis. I saw them when I came in here. I don’t eat kiwis very often, this is a total impulse. I might take some to work with me to give to my friends, so I’ll get ten.

The hidden coercion behind this purchase is that Diane did not actually “just happen” to see these kiwis. They were purposefully placed in this strategically positioned cooler as an attempt to direct attention towards them.

Supermarkets make use of their capacity to design space and determine the placement of foods to create unplanned and potentially coercive encounters. Creating encounters is an attempt by supermarkets to enroll particular foods in shoppers' decisions and actions that would not otherwise be mediators, because they would not otherwise modify the actions of a shopper. These strategies succeed because food shopping is an active process of imagining and producing futures, in the cases above, caring for a child and spouse or sharing a delicious fruit with friends at work. The power of supermarkets to direct the foods people eat towards their goals come from coercing shoppers into making enrollments of the way they can use food to satisfy their tastes and values. In this way, supermarkets subtly coerce shoppers into spontaneous moments of consent that enroll them into strategies designed to maximize profit.

Stabilizing the Supermarket by Focusing on Food

Supermarkets have remained stable and generally unquestioned institutions despite growing concerns surrounding food production. At the start of this project, there was an expectation that the research participants would feel anxiety or discomfort with having to shop at a supermarket because of their involvement with Athens Locally Grown. Instead, this research discovered that while people shop in a supermarket, the supermarket was almost never discussed as part of the problem that motivated them to purchase from ALG. Often, supermarkets were understood as unproblematic spaces that sold problematic foods. As supermarkets are presented to shoppers as spaces where some of the problems they associate with foods can be avoided, supermarkets actively avoid being directly identified as part of the problem. This is the most powerful way that supermarkets stabilize and normalize the Supermarket as a proper form of food distribution. This is the key way in which the Supermarket maintains its hegemony.

By defining food and how it is produced as *the* problem with the modern industrialized food system, supermarkets get depoliticized. As Chapter Six details, some of the problems shoppers' associate with the dominant food system include the concentration of ownership, inequalities created by intensified accumulation of capital towards corporations, negative impacts on people and the environment due to chemical use in production, the prevalence of unhealthy foods, and the incorporation of unknown ingredients in food processing. Supermarkets over the past 10 years have actively embraced and marketed foods associated with being healthier, less processed, organic, and 'fresher'. In doing so they work to create an image of providing shoppers with options to purchase foods that are not part of harmful practices while distancing themselves from a system of production and practices that they depend on and reproduce.

Earth Fare is the clearest example of the way supermarket companies market their stores as solutions to, rather than a part of, what shoppers define as problems. The slogan on the front of the store is "Earth Fare: The Healthy Supermarket". Throughout the store and on their website a 'food philosophy' is promoted. This 'philosophy' is a list of banned ingredients that include artificial fats, artificial flavors, preservatives, artificial sweetener, as well as high-fructose corn syrup, synthetic growth hormones, and bleached flour. In this 'philosophy' Earth Fare designates particular ingredients that some shoppers associate with negative health impacts. This is not unique to Earth Fare, Kroger has begun creating 'stores within the stores' they have named the 'live naturally' section. Publix actively promotes 'healthy', 'simple', 'natural', and organic foods throughout the aisles. Throughout a single shopping trip to these supermarkets shoppers repeatedly encounter language that emphasizes and directs attention towards the health and environmental concerns surrounding food. Such marketing strategies present the supermarket as

a neutral and informative space that helps shoppers avoid and find the foods they want. While doing this they subvert attention away from being understood as spaces that actively direct shoppers towards profitable purchases.

Every participant in this research conceptualized the concentration of ownership and capital as a problem, but it was nearly always focused on food manufacturers and agricultural. Beginning in the 1950s, supermarkets used large volume purchasing as a way to reduce costs and compete on price. This made them increasingly reliant on large manufacturers while simultaneously increasing manufacturers' revenues (Walsh 1993). Small-scale manufactures that cannot reliably fill the large volume orders demanded by supermarkets were often times simply eliminated from supermarket shelves. As supermarket ownership became increasingly consolidated during the late 1980s and into the 1990s, large-scale manufacturers and supermarkets were able to cooperate to boost profitability by capturing greater proportions of food dollars spent (Humphrey 1998).

As a handful of supermarket chains consolidated, they developed new techniques to shift costs onto manufactures, making it a capital-intensive endeavor to get on the shelves at a supermarket. For manufactures to get a new product onto supermarket shelves nationally, it costs between \$1.5 and \$2 million, to get a product into a single supermarket can cost between \$3,000 and \$20,000 (FTC 2003). On top of these slotting fees, many supermarkets require manufactures to have a supply chain infrastructure in place that allows for automating purchase orders and transactions between suppliers, retailers, and financial institutions (Konefal 2007). More recently, the success of private-label products has put pressure on manufactures by limiting the amount of shelf space available for other foods. Intense price competition between supermarkets has created further pressures on food producers and manufactures to find ways to cut cost and

reduce the prices supermarkets pay. In a nationwide survey of supermarkets, researchers found that in the top 25 product categories by sales volume between two and four companies make up over 90% of the market share (Food and Water Watch 2013).

Of the stores visited during this research, Publix and Kroger are the two that have been instrumental in making food retail more capital intensive for manufactures. While in these spaces with research participants, large food producers such as Kellogg, Unilever, and Kraft were often associated by shoppers with the problem of concentration in the food industry, but supermarket companies did not face a similar scrutiny. This is especially surprising given the massive disparity in revenue between Kroger and these manufactures. In 2014 the annual revenue for Kroger Co. was \$108 billion (ir.kroger.com 2014). Kellogg's net revenue during this same time period was \$14.5 billion, Unilever reported revenues of \$54 billion, and Kraft's net revenue was \$18.2 billion (investor.kellogg.com 2014; unilever.com 2014; ir.kraftfoodsgroup.com 2014). Kroger dwarfs these three manufacturers in terms of capital accumulation. If the concentration of capital and ownership is to be considered a problem in the food industry, large supermarket companies are central to this problem.

The concentration of capital in food retail is not exclusive to Publix and Kroger, Earth Fare's ownership structure is hidden from shoppers as they move through the store. Earth Fare started as a small regional chain in Asheville, North Carolina. On its website and in the store, shoppers are informed that Earth Fare is headquartered in Asheville. Information in the section of Earth Fare's website titled "Our Company" is not about the company at all, but a vague statement about their vision to be the "most trusted organic and natural food market in the country - a place where healthy decisions are easy" (Earth Fare.com 2015). Earth Fare is marketed as being a small regional supermarket that cares about communities and people's

health, but since 2012 has been owned and governed by a multi-billion dollar private equity firm called Oak Hill Capital Partners that has holdings in 51 different companies (oakhill.com/portfolio 2015).

When shoppers were making decisions to buy or avoid particular brands of food, those brands were often associated with the practices of the companies that owned them. This association did not seem to carry over to Earth Fare, primarily because its ownership remained hidden from shoppers. While a few of the Earth Fare shoppers were aware that a larger company had recently purchased it, they were never specific about who this company was. This was especially surprising because when shoppers did not know which company owned a brand, they still expressed some skepticism about whether it was actually as different as the packaging made it appear. This same level of uncertainty and skepticism did not lead the shoppers in this study to question Earth Fare's ownership structure in the same way they questions the ownership structure of brands.

This focus on food and food production is reinforced in both popular and academic critiques of the modern industrialized food system. In Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma*, supermarkets are only discussed as a way to express the problem of corn being contained in nearly everything on the shelves, and the issues surrounding 'big organic'. In films such as *Farmageddon* and *Food Inc.*, the food system is presented as a network of agribusinesses, farmers, manufacturers, and government agencies. The few scenes that deal with the supermarket use it only as starting point to then engage the 'real problems' involved in food production and regulation. In Marion Nestle's widely cited book, *Food Politics*, present an excellent critique of the way the food industry relentlessly pursues profit with little concern for the health impacts. While making this argument Nestle does not engage supermarkets, making it seem as though the

supermarket is not a part of the food industry that warrants questioning. Although supermarkets role in shaping production and consumption have begun to be discussed by a handful of academics, the dominant critique of the modern industrial food system remains focused on food itself and how it is produced. This further depoliticizes the supermarket, stabilizing its hegemony as an unproblematic form of distribution.

Trying to Evade Supermarkets Power with Lists and Mobility

“Sometimes I come out of the supermarket and think, what did I even get” - Francis

Some of the shopping in this study used there are active awareness of the ways they were being coerced within a supermarket to develop tactics to evade these strategies. Shopping lists are actors that aid shoppers in evading supermarket strategies to create unplanned purchases. Lists are actors that shoppers use to act on their own actions from a position outside the supermarket. Betty explained her use of lists by saying “I don’t usually buy stuff off the list because I’m always trying to lose weight unsuccessfully and so I try not to be tempted by to many things”. Counteracting the coercive power of the supermarkets with lists is not an act of outright resistance. Rather, it is a way to navigate the store while dodging around its attempt to create moments of spontaneous consent.

Although lists are evasive in some ways, the coercive power of the supermarket can follow us home in the form of the foods we buy. A single unplanned purchase created by a strategically placed display or a sale has the power to affect the lists people make at home. An experiment with a food that just looked tasty can develop in habits and regular purchases. The power of the supermarket to modify decisions is so exceptionally strong because of its dispersion, not in spite of it. The supermarket has power because it has control over other actors

that also have power. The foods we buy do not sit idling in the store; they come home with us and continue to influence our actions and potentially our future decisions.

Making use of the capability to drive and access multiple retailers is a means of evading supermarkets attempts to create 'loyal' shoppers that rely on the one-stop-shop. Janet used her mobility to consciously reject "the last 20 years of marketing that has tried to make a kind of American consumer that feels like it's easier to get everything from one place". During this shopping trip with Janet we visited a local coffee roaster, a small supermercado, a co-op, a locally owned bakery, Earth Fare, and Kroger. The primary reason Janet explained for doing this was to "spread out my spending as much as possible". It is an everyday tactic Janet developed in an attempt to support a decentralization of capital accumulation in the supermarket industry and a diversification of retail forms. Janet was the one shopper in this study that direct critiques the Supermarkets hegemony.

Although supermarkets are the dominant form of retail in the United States, their extremely low levels of profitability make evasion a potentially destabilizing practice. Supermarkets "success hinges on the ability to protect existing customers from turnover, and at the same time attract more 'outside' customers" (Rhee and Bell 2002, 225). For a supermarket to profit it must actively seek out ways to persuade shoppers not to use mobility. One example of the potentially destabilizing impact of mobility is in the case of produce. Produce can be one of the supermarkets most profitable products, but due to spoilage can easily create losses (Major 2009). By acquiring fruits and vegetables from Athens Locally Grown, or growing them at home, people engage in everyday practices that deny supermarkets a source of profitability that destabilizes their hegemony. In an often unarticulated way, these actions question the supermarket as the proper place for food provisioning. Even though farmers markets, co-ops,

ALG, and small independent retailers reproduce the market logic of food distribution, they destabilize the institutional hegemony of the supermarket as the proper form of distribution.

Conclusion

The strategies supermarkets use to shape the everyday practice of food provisioning stabilize the hegemony of the Supermarket form of distribution. In this way, Supermarket hegemony is grounded in everyday life. By using the convenience of the one-stop-shop, supermarkets transform other forms of retail into being more burdensome or difficult. The mechanism of price transposes an economic rationalization of food is onto the decisions shoppers make. This allow supermarket to use their economies of scale to take advantage of their capacity to reduce and manipulating price. By planning their physical space and strategically placing foods in the paths of shopper, supermarkets manage bodies and create encounters to direct people towards high-margin item and unplanned purchases. As supermarkets focus shoppers attention on the problems involved in food they present themselves as solutions to, rather than a part of, the problems associated with the modern food system. This continues the legacy of depoliticizing spaces of food provisioning begun in the 1950s. Through these everyday strategies of coercion, supermarkets stabilize the Supermarket as proper and normal.

CHAPTER SIX

PROSUMING EVERYDAY LIFE

Everyday life is what we are given every day (or what is willed to us), what presses us, even oppresses us, because there does not exist an oppression of the present. Every morning, what we take up again, *on awakening*, is the weight of life, the difficulty of living, or of living in a certain condition...

-Paul Leuilliot, *A History of Everyday Life in 19th Century Nivernais* xi-xii

Introduction

This chapter attempts to engage and explain a thin slice of how people perform their tastes and values in the supermarket. First, will be a discussion of the ways people perform associations with foods to understand whether they can be used to, at least partially, satisfy tastes and values. This is central to the question of how people ‘know’, or understand, the food they are contemplating purchasing. Across the walking interviews conducted for this research, there were a wide range of interrelated actors that modify the capacity for foods to be used as a means of satisfying tastes and values. This chapter focuses on three of these in particular, organic labels, ingredient lists, and brands. By creating the possibility for shoppers’ to make particular associations, these actors modify decisions by transforming what a particular food means to the shopper interacting with it.

The second section of this chapter draws on the concept of taste-values to address more directly how considerations of health, indulgence, convenience, and care influences decisions. Broadly, taste-values, for the rest of this chapter referred to simply as values, are what people take to be meaningful or important for creating a good life. In the attempt to make decisions that create a potential future that may satisfy these values, shoppers enroll people, spaces, and actions

outside the supermarket. As people shop, they make use of the foods produced by others and distributed by the supermarket as a way to create a future that they can feel a little bit better about and where the necessity of eating fits with the other aspects of their lives that require time and energy. The values shoppers enroll in the decisions they make are not grounded in metaphysical or ethical principles. Instead, values involve embodied concerns about the material effects of food on themselves, others, and the world.

This chapter uses the conceptual tools of prosumption and actor-network theory to understand how packaged foods affect the decisions people make, and how shoppers make use of foods productively. Prosumption is a reconceptualization of consumers as also involved in productive acts through the ways they make use of products to create something that has more value than it did before. Actors-network theory is used here to rethink packaged foods as networks of actors and actants that all have the capacity to act on shoppers' actions. Both foods and people express agency and power through a relation of affect, or modification. As actors and actants modify one another, they become mediators enrolled in networks of associations that change the way people understand the individual actors and actants that are a part of that network. Mediators are the actors and actants that that "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they [or others] are supposed to carry" (Latour 2005, 39). Actors are the actual things in the present materiality of space, while actants are the virtualities that exist materially as something remembered, potential, imagined, or elsewhere.

The brand, ingredients, and labels on a food's packaging change what other actors and actants can and do associate with that food. The actual materiality of food defines how it can be tasted and the ways it can be used to create meals. The mediators enrolled in the supermarket do not passively manipulate shoppers. Shoppers are prosumers that are actively involved in the

process of making new associations that transform the meaning of the foods they interact with and the ways they can use it.

For the participants in this study, supermarket shopping is an attempt to navigate the tension between trying to mitigate being involved in harmful production practices while also taking into consideration the other aspects of their lives outside the supermarket. The practice of supermarket shopping is not separated from aspects of shopper's lives outside of it, as Humphrey (1998) argues. Supermarket shopping is performed within an actual space textured by the enrollments of virtual actants whose materiality exists elsewhere in time and space but affect the actual actions people take within it. The boundaries between what is outside the supermarket and inside it become intimately entangled as soon we step through its doors.

Taste Mediates Every Decision

How foods taste is one of the most powerful ways food affects nearly every purchase in the supermarket. The capacity of foods in the supermarket to modify the decisions made there involves imagining flavor and texture by enrolling memories of eating a particular product or one similar to it. The aesthetics of tastes play a central role in how food influences decisions; people often purchase foods simply because they look good. There was not a single purchase during the shopping trips in this study that did not involve the sensuousness of taste. While this chapter explores the many other ways foods affect actions, taste is always a part of every decision.

Taste exemplifies the central dynamic of a shopping trip--the relationship between the actual food and potentiality of that food to be satisfying. As one participant put it during the end of a shopping trip, "I tell people I do what I call 'the visioning process'. I imagine how it's going to taste. Not just how it's going to taste, but the textures, how it's going to feel in your mouth" (Bob). As foods sit on the shelves people enroll the tastes they associated with the actual food in

order to imagine how it can be used to provide an enjoyable sensuous experience. People perform their tastes while shopping as a way to produce a better future, in this case, one that is more pleasurable.

Although understanding why people enjoy the tastes they do involves physiological factors outside the boundaries of this study, during the interviews almost everyone explained their tastes in relation to their past. Personal histories can solidify tastes for certain foods that people would not buy otherwise. Although Francis and Bob, a couple interviewed during their trip to Earth Fare, avoided metal cans due to health concerns associated with Bisphenol A (BPA) they purchased two cans of Le Sueur Young Sweet Peas because,

there are some things that we just like. They are leftovers from childhood. That's what it is. I doubt this can is not BPA. It's probably a BPA can. There are a few things that we just revert to. I ate these as a child, my mother bought them all the time.

This quote clearly articulates the way memories modify tastes, but it also shows the complexity and many inconsistencies involved in a single shopping trip. In this single decision, brand, memories of childhood, taste, and a chemical resin used in industrial canning come together to form an assemblage of actors that mediate the purchase. These types of purchases are ones people often define as 'guilty pleasure' or compromises, foods that are in many ways contradictory to the other values that are important to them. As the people in this study shopped, they often followed a set of loose guidelines, but individual decisions were complicated because they involve "a whole bunch of factors. What is important changes for each item, depending" (Matt).

Isolating a particular set of factors that are important to people as they shop neglects the messiness of this everyday practice. Not only is there a wide diversity in what is important to different people, but as individuals move around the store what is important changes depending

on the particular food they encounter. For the participants in this study, there is rarely an overarching cohesion to a shopping trip. Rather, a shopping trip is a string of encounters that enroll both similar and different actors. At the start of the aisle when looking at soup Francis and Bob only buy boxes as a way to avoid the potential health risks associated with BPA, but as they reach the end of the aisle these mediators fade away as childhood memories emerge.

Performing Associations: Understanding and Uncertainty

I try to consume in a way I think is good, or at least I can live with, but I can never really know for certain how the things I buy affect others and the world. It's not so much that I think I'm going to change the world by buying certain things. It's really about, how can I avoid being part of a food system that I think is unfair and harmful to many while still being able to eat things I enjoy and make me feel good? (Dan)

In the aisles of a supermarket, foods are hidden behind their packaging, and the conditions of production are obscured by distance. In this self-service space, packaging and signage become the primary way in which shoppers engage with food products. By inspecting packages, shoppers seek to know food by associating what is on the package with actants and their imagined effects. Imaging effects does not marginalize the potential for actants to have unseen material consequences elsewhere. Rather, it highlights the pervasive uncertainty involved in supermarket shopping. Knowing food in the aisles is not about determining the truth; it is about making use of what is often vague information in order for shoppers to understand the networks they become a part of as they make purchases. This uncertainty can at times create moments of deception that mislead shoppers, but, at other times, uncertainty creates moments of skepticism where shoppers critically reflect on their own everyday practice.

Blurring the Dichotomy of Organic/Conventional Production

In every interview conducted for this research, the United States Department of Agriculture organic label modified how people associated particular foods with health and production practices. The USDA both defines the production practices necessary for a producer to use the organic label and conducts the certification process that allows them to use it. Guthman (2007) argues, “[l]abels tell stories about what makes the commodities behind them important”. In this paper, Guthman critiques organic labeling as yet another way for corporate food producers to add-value to products as a way to boost profitability by transforming ethical values into exchange values (Guthman 2007). In this process, labels are used to actively misrepresent production as a way to persuade shoppers into profitable acts of purchase (Trauger and Murphy 2012). While both of these critiques speak to the way labeling is used by producers to profit, they say very little about how shoppers actually make use of organic labels in practice. The central argument in this section is that the people who value the ‘stories’ organic labels tell do not uncritically accept them. Even people who define themselves as ‘organic shoppers’ do not simply accept that organically labeled food is always better.

Both Guthman (2007) and Trauger and Murphy (2012) make assumptions about the meanings shopper associate with organic labels based on how organic foods are marketed and how they are discussed by the literature produced by alternative food movements. Drawing on these sources, they criticize organic shopping as a largely futile attempt to create broad public benefit, when what is really going on is the creation of new opportunities for capital accumulation. These critiques disempower people and mischaracterized consumers as uncritically accepting of organic as better food, reifying the conception of consumers as passively manipulated and incapable of formulating everyday critiques. By placing the

interviews conducted during this research within the space of practice, it became possible to understand how shoppers actually make use of and understand the organic label. Conceptualizing shoppers as prosumers opens up the possibility for discovering the ways they critically engage organic labels.

The association of organic food with better production practices often comes out most powerfully as people shop for meat. Although Jennifer and Mary rarely buy organic due to financial constraints, when they first moved to Georgia it became

difficult for us to buy chicken in particular, because in Michigan the animals are all shipped in containers that are not visible, and in Georgia you can see the chickens being moved around on trucks. It's very upsetting. Some of them are still alive, some are dead. Just imagining how terrible that is... I really like to buy organic chicken, I just imagine they're happier chickens.

Enrolling the emotional experience of seeing how animals are treated during part of the production process transforms the meaning of a decision. Organic foods come to be imagined as a different form of production that is potentially better. For Jennifer and Mary, organic labels are not associated with abstract principles, but with a deeply embodied and visceral experience that shapes the meaning of organic chicken. This memory is enrolled in their decision as an actant that modifies their decision by creating feelings of deep discomfort with eating an animal they imagine to have suffered throughout its life. Valuing organic chicken, for them, is about not wanting to be a part of a system of production that perpetuates that suffering.

Shoppers in this study often used organic labels as a way to know the potential effects food has on themselves, others, and the environment because of how it was grown.

I really believe that we don't need all these chemicals that they use on foods. I totally believe it's not good for us. I don't like it and I don't support that in our environment. I don't support any of that, GMOs or Monsanto, none of that.
(Diane)

The wide array of complexities contained within the USDA Organic guidelines matter very little to people as they shop. For shoppers that felt strongly about eating organic food, organic primarily means a reduction of the use of chemicals on farms and the potential for foods to contain pesticide residues. In this way, the organic label modifies a food's capacity to be understood as healthy for or harmful to eaters, laborers, and the environment. It affects shoppers decisions by making certain associations possible that cannot be enrolled in conventionally produced food. Centrally, organic labels are about exposure to chemicals.

In the last sentence of the interview text quoted above, it can be seen how organic labels become a way to understand the level of scientific manipulation and corporate capital that is involved in production. The recent incursion of large-scale food producers into the organic market has destabilized this last association for many of the shoppers in this study. Matt summarizes this critique of large scale organic when he says, "I'm not too much of an organic shopper at Kroger. Just, big organic agriculture I don't really think... if you have a conventional one and an organic one there's no difference". Organic labels are not something people accept regardless of the actors involved in production. Rather, the organic label is, and can be, critiqued through shoppers' enrollments of other mediators that destabilize a straightforward association of 'organic as good food'.

An organic label is not a stable mediator, but one whose meaning shifts depending on the person shopping and the particular food they are contemplating purchasing. Even for shoppers who identified themselves as 'organic shoppers', as we walked and talked I quickly discovered that this was an oversimplified self-identification. At times this typology made sense and organic labels were indeed one of the most powerful actors determining a decision, while at other times during the same trip the organic label receded as the meaning of an organically or conventionally

produced food was transformed by other mediators. As Muriel puts it, “see I’m picky about getting fruit that’s organic because fruit is high in pesticides if it’s not organic. The worst are peaches, pears, grapes, and strawberries. Bananas are not as important”. Although organic labeling creates a dichotomy between foods in the supermarket, the organic/conventional boundary is often crossed, dissolved, and critiqued during the practice of supermarket shopping.

Although organic labels can be powerful mediators, as shoppers perform the association of ‘organic as good food’ they are also critical of it. As Diane and I continued through the produce section, the influence of organic labels on her decision began to be mediated by external sources of information. As Diane looked over the avocados, pressing them gently to determine their ripeness, she enrolled “a group called the Environmental Working Group that does research on what produce is most and least likely to hold pesticide residues. They have a list called the clean fifteen and the dirty dozen. Avocados are some of least likely to have residues”. The Environmental Working Group (EWG) is an organization that uses USDA testing of produce to generate easily accessible information for consumers. Diane used this group’s research during her shopping trip as a way to think critically about what organic labels means. The organic avocados, sold for twice the price in the basket next to the conventionally produced ones, became understood as a devious attempt to charge more for something with very little actual difference. In the aisles of the supermarket the dichotomy of organic and conventional creates apparent distinctions, variety, and choices, but “because they have variety you have to spend time figuring out if it is actually a variety” (Janet). As the meaning of the organic label is modified by other enrollments, this division between organic and conventionally produced food dissolved.

Organic labels are one of the actors in the supermarket that affect shoppers' actions by modifying the associations they make with the particular food. Organic labels are one of the actors some shoppers use to try to know whether a food might have the capacity to satisfy concerns around the effects of chemical exposure on their own health, the health of agricultural workers, and the environment. Although, during some decisions, for some people organic labels made possible a performance of these values, people do not simply purchase organic foods uncritically. Organic labeling is used to boost profitability for manufactures and supermarkets, but it does not simply trick or manipulate people into passively accepting organic as better. As people purchase organic food, they do not express some grandiose idea of consumption as political practice. For the shoppers in this study, there was no assumption that their individual decisions about what to buy were changing the world. Instead, buying organic was about making some effort, regardless of how small, to try and support a different way of doing things. A way to try to mitigate their own involvement in production practices they associated with harm, pain, and environmental degradation. As one participant in this study put it while reflecting on his purchasing of organic food,

[e]ven if what I do only mitigates a little bit of the harm the food I eat causes for a single person it's better than nothing. I may not be able to do much, but if I don't try at all it's like I'm just giving up completely on my values. I mean, I realize that organic is being used by big companies now as just another way to make more money, but it's like, would I rather they profit by totally screwing people over or by mostly screwing people over? It's kind of a 'Sophie's choice' I suppose. (Dan)

From Nutritional Facts to Ingredient Lists

I just printed off something the other day that is a whole list of some chemical and all these different names it goes by. It's like, ok, great, what am I stuffing into my body? (Bob)

Nutritional facts, and the science of nutrition more broadly, have gotten a great deal of attention for the ways they influence consumption by transforming the qualitative aspects of food into something with quantifiable (Mudry 2009). As Shelly Koch (2012) argues in her book on supermarket shopping, for many people nutrition plays a central role as people navigate the aisles. In the interview data generated during this project, shoppers often mentioned in passing the fat content, sodium, protein, carbs, and vitamins contained within foods. Nutrition does play a role, but it was ingredient lists on the back of packages, much more than nutritional facts, that were enrolled in the process of 'knowing food'.

When inspecting a package, the first thing a shopper often did was turn the package around and look at the ingredient list. Foods on shelves, refrigerators, and displays appear simple, singular, and similar. From a distance, two containers of cottage cheese may appear identical, but upon inspection, this apparent similarity is complicated. One cottage cheese is only salt, cultures, and milk product while the other contains additional ingredients such as maltodextrine, guar gum, potassium sorbate, and locust bean gum. Additional ingredients such as these are almost exclusively used in large-scale industrial manufacturing as a way to preserve shelf life and reduce costs. Maltodextrine, for example, is manufactured from the starches in corn and is used as an inexpensive thickening agent. Maltodextrine is one of the many ways that genetically modified corn comes to be an often times hidden part of the food people eat.

Ingredient lists describe, albeit in an often times obscured ways, what is actually contained within food. Although ingredient lists provide a great deal of information, it is extremely difficult to keep track of and understand what each scientifically named ingredient is.

For this reason, the shoppers in this study perform a very practical association when deciding between similar foods. The shoppers in this research often looked for “the least amount of ingredients possible. If I can’t pronounce it I don’t want it” (Sally). Ingredient lists, and each ingredient on that list, become actors that affect decisions by being associated with the transformation of food into a scientific process that supports the incorporation of chemicals into people’s food, lives, and bodies. Diane sums this up nicely when she says that “fewer ingredients is better. I don’t like words that I don’t know what they mean. Like chemicals, I realize that doesn’t mean they are bad but it’s harder to know”. While ingredient lists contain a fair amount of uncertainty, they also clear up some of the uncertainty people have about what is actually in the packaged foods in a supermarket.

In many ways, ingredient lists are enrolled in decisions to create an understanding of whether a food is ‘real’. In each moment of inspection, shoppers bring with them an expectation of what should and should not be a part of the food they eat. Ingredient lists are a way to associate what is hidden within the food with these expectations. Ingredient lists introduce a new set of actors that modify the capacity to affect decisions. During some decisions in the supermarket, a short list of known ingredients transforms a food into something ‘good’ and valuable while a lengthy list of obscure chemicals transforms food into something unknown and potentially harmful.

Ingredient lists mediate decisions as single, or multiple, ingredient(s) on that list are enrolled in networks of association to transform the meaning of a food. Each one of these particular ingredients has the potential to call forth enrollments of production practice, the effects of those practices, and the health effects of ingesting particular ingredients. The two ingredients that came up multiple times throughout the interviews in this research were soybean oil and palm

oil. Both of these oils are pervasive throughout the foods in a supermarket, and any food processed using oil may possibly contains one of these oils. They are widely used because of how versatile they are and because they are the two least expensive oils for manufacturers to purchase (World Bank 2015). Both of the oils are used in large-scale food production. Soybean and palm oil are the two least expensive oils traded on commodity markets. Over the past five years, palm oil has gone from trading at 1,200 to 600 dollars. It is currently the least expensive oil on global commodity markets and manufacturers have increasingly incorporated it into manufacturing.

When reading the words ‘palm oil’ or ‘soybean oil’ on an ingredient list, that part of the food becomes an actor that shoppers can, and often do, associate with other actants. These actants include production practices that involve deforestation, the death of animals, use of pesticides, and the concentration of ownership by large agri-businesses. These are all mediators that transform how a food is understood by associating that food with a network of material effects that shape shoppers’ actual decisions from a distance. A single ingredient contained within the actual food on a supermarket shelf can radically alter what shoppers associate with that food. In this way, the ingredient has the power to act on the actions of shoppers by delimiting what can be associated with that food. Through a process of enrolling ingredients in networks of production, the value of a particular food is, or can be, transformed.

Although organic and nutrition labels have gotten attention from scholars because of how producers use them to influence peoples’ decision (Nestle 2002; Koch 2012; Guthman 2007; Mudry 2009), ingredient lists have rarely been discussed. By doing walking interviews, framed by prosumption and actor-network theory, the ingredient list emerged as one of the most important ways that people know food and create its value.

Brand - "Who even owns this?"

Brands mediate decisions in primarily two ways. First, over time people develop personal attachments and conditioned tastes for a particular brand. Janet, a shopper who actively attempts to avoid packaging and purchasing foods owned by large corporations, and who makes everything she can at home still buys "a jar of Duke's mayonnaise, the only real mayonnaise. Hellmann's is just salad dressing". Second, and more important to this project, is that brands are used by shoppers in an attempt to know which company actually owns and manufactures the food they are contemplating purchasing. By associating brands with the larger companies that own them, the activities and practices that companies are involved in are enrolled in the food and affect the decision people make. At the same time, brands are also use by large food manufacturers to seek profit through diversification and disassociation.

The way brands are used to understand ownership was perhaps best put by Francis as we walked down the cereal aisle at Earth Fare:

I'll look at brands, if I know a brand is tied to a company that is using GMOs or stuff like that then I'll skip the brand. That is very hard to keep track of. Like Kashi just got bought by Kellogg. I have a chart in my car. I just try to read it and look over it, and sort of just make a mental file. See it says non-GMO on that Kashi but, the company that makes it is still involved in all of those practices. I was reading about all these GMO labeling initiatives in other states and these companies were spending millions of dollars to influence those votes. So even though it's a non-GMO, ok that's fine, but how much money did your company spend to keep the GMO labeling off of other products in a referendum in another state. Unless you can really find the source of who owns a brand, it's really hard to keep up with. So, I do my best. I try, I don't hit the mark every time by any means, but I try. (Francis)

The problem of GMOs, which came up very often during the interviews, is a shorthand for the broader issues of the concentration of control over production and manufacturing by large corporations. Repeatedly people expressed their concerns about the way food corporations use their capital to pressure farmers into growing crops and using chemicals in the pursuit of profit

with little concern for people, animals, or the environment. Shoppers directly associated the poverty faced by small-scale American farmers and the increasing rates of food-related health problems with large-scale industrialized agri-businesses, such as Monsanto, and food manufacturers, such as Kellogg. Shoppers often articulated the problems with food in America in terms of the companies involved in production. As discussed in Chapter Five, the focus on food, and food producers, as *the* problem is one of the key ways that supermarkets get normalized. The shoppers in this study did not politicize supermarkets even while they politicized the food industry.

Knowing ownership is one of the most elusive and difficult things to do in the supermarket. It is extremely rare for parent companies to put their name on a package with a different brand name. Companies hide behind brands as if the ownership structure should not matter to shoppers. This strategy of brand diversification is one of the primary ways that food manufactures translate shoppers' values into profit through deception. Companies would seem to present their brands as self-contained, associated only with a particular set of practices in an attempt to disassociate that brand from any negative associations with the parent company. As with organic labels and ingredients, brands become a way to know food even while they also create uncertainty, "[i]t's like, who even owns this?" (Muriel).

Rejecting and avoiding foods owned by large corporations is not so much about 'voting with your dollars' as it is about a feeling of deep discomfort with supporting institutions that are perceived to cause harm to others. Acts of consumption are not so much about radically changing the world, but finding small moments in which people can try to support a different way of doing things -- opportunities for farmers to make a living wage, reducing the amount of garbage thrown away, reducing cases of sickness caused by the use of pesticides, reducing carbon emissions

created from long distance transportation, or producing meat humanely. The many problems related to food in America and the impacts of individual acts of purchase was articulated quite succinctly by Janet,

[i]t's one of those Pandora boxes, the more you know the more you can drive yourself crazy thinking. There is no perfect consuming, but I want it to be something I can live with. I don't know if I'm making a difference, I'm just trying to find some sort of balance of whatever I spend, trying to make it something I can live with. That doesn't always happen...

Trying to Prosume a 'Good Life' within the Supermarket

Each decision is really about weighing what is more important at the time. I'm aware some things are compromises. I think it's "do the best you can at the time".
(Janet)

The concept of prosumption is grounded in an argument that through the labor of consumption, people assemble products in order to create something valuable. In the case of food, this is most clearly apparent in the act of cooking. Supermarket are spaces where foods are purchased that are rarely eaten without the additional time and effort required to make foods into meals. As people cut, sauté, boil, mix, serve, and eat the foods combined to make meal, production and consumption become enmeshed in one another. Prosumption shifts production away from being solely about the creation of actual products with economic value. Through the lens of prosumption, productive activities are also about the work of creating an everyday life that is manageable and fulfilling. Supermarket shopping is not a passive activity, but an active attempt to shape our lives out of the foods produced and sold by others.

The values of health, indulgence, care, and convenience that people bring into shopping and try to enact through their decisions are not metaphysical or abstract principles, but deeply embodied concerns whose materiality exists elsewhere in time or space. Shaping these values are people, places, activities, and experiences that extend outside the supermarket. Other aspects of

peoples' everyday lives can put pressures on them as shoppers, creating anxieties, and imposing limits to what they can do. At the same time, they can also provide opportunities for food to be used to express care for others, find small pleasures in cooking, make a body feel good or ready for another day, and fill an empty stomach after and during a long day at work. The outside is always present within but cannot be found on any shelf or in an aisle. We are never truly alone in the supermarket even when we are by ourselves. Making decisions about what to buy always involves enrolling our hungry bodies in a not yet realized future. In the simplest sense, consumption in the supermarket always involves producing a future where hunger can be satiated. Food provisioning is always an act of prosumption. Assembling a shopping cart full of food involves the creation of a potential future that people can feel good. These are futures where what is important to people, the things they value, can be at least partially satisfied.

Health and Indulgence

Health is one of the most central values people enroll while shopping. Food is often seen as a way to maintain a healthy and nourished body and mind. Valuing health in the aisles, however, goes beyond sustaining a medically healthy body or becoming healthier. Concerns about health also involve the way decisions are modified by past illnesses, potentially deadly allergies, and attempts to simply feel good from day to day.

For many of the shoppers who participated in this research, especially those over the age of 50, past illness plays a key role in mediating decisions. As Muriel, a woman in her early 60s, inspects packaged of Gala apples she explains the role her own illness plays in the decisions she makes in the following way:

I have a chronic condition called interstitial cystitis. It was caused by a drug I had to take one time. It feels like you have a bladder infection, but you don't. It's a chronic pain thing, I've learned over the years how to deal with it and what food flares it up and what doesn't. Anything real acidic can be a problem, the Gala

apples are less acidic. These are just things I've learned from experience and research.

Interstitial cystitis has no medical cure, so for Muriel food has become one of the primary ways to manage the pain she feels nearly every day. For Muriel, a drug taken 10 years ago is always a actant in nearly every decision she makes in the supermarket. For some shoppers, making decisions about what to eat is not just about staying medically healthy. These decisions are about finding a way to use food as means to create a future with a little less everyday pain and discomfort. Other participants in this research used food as a way to deal with the digestive problems they developed later in life, the constant nausea of undergoing chemotherapy, and a lack of appetite caused by menopause.

In her early 50s, Diane's hormone level dropped dramatically with the onset of menopause. This caused severe digestive issues and a constant feeling of her body being cold. Over time food became one the most important ways Diane was able affect how her body felt. By enrolling the teaching of Ayurvedic medicine and the practice of mindful awareness, Diane began trying to eat seasonally and pay close attention to the way different food affect her body.

I don't know that my way is right, there's all kinds of eating theories out there. So I try to make it experiential. I try to make it how I feel, and how it works for my digestion and how much energy I have.

Illness, sickness, and changes in the way peoples' bodies process food powerfully transform the value of food. As past experiences of the way a food effected how someone's body felt are remembered and enrolled in decisions, they mediate the way particular foods can be used to create a future that feels good. For many people in this study, what is important is not only feeling good about the decisions they make, but also making decisions that make their bodies feel good throughout the day.

For two of the interview participants, allergies played a key role in shaping their decisions in the supermarket. Although not quite as common, allergies are particularly important because of the potentially catastrophic consequences they can have. Sally has an 18th month old child with a peanut allergy. This creates a level of anxiety enrolled in nearly every decision she made. Ingredient lists and knowing about how a food was processed is increasingly important for shoppers dealing with allergies. Sally had to be aware of the conditions of manufacturing for a final product as well as which ingredients might have been contaminated with allergens during transportation and processing. Allergies create an additional layer of difficulty to the work of supermarket shopping. Avoiding future of stress and hospital visits entailed close inspections of nearly every package or calls to supermarkets and emails to manufacturers to get allergy information.

Purchasing and eating food involves attempts to navigate issues of health, but food is also a source of pleasure. Indulgence, in the framework of taste-values, is about the way food is valued for the pleasures it affords. In this simplest sense, this is about the enjoyment of how food tastes: its texture, smell, flavor, and aesthetic qualities. More broadly, people interviewed during this research used food as way to create moments and experiences within everyday life that could enjoyable, make them happy, relieve some of their stress, and provide a sense of accomplishment that did not involve their jobs. During every interview, people purchased some foods for no other reason than the pleasure of taste. At other times during the interviews, the shoppers in the study made use of food as a way to create a future full of enjoyable social interactions and the pleasures of cooking.

The future pleasures afforded by foods often become the primary mediator transforming the meaning of food and how it can be used. At times, this creates frictions between the way

people try to shop and how they actually do. Jennifer and Mary's weekly game night with friends transforms a bag of candy from an unhealthy temptation to a delicious treat to be shared with others during an evening of fun. Janet's Sunday dinner with her two children, who recently left home for the university, transforms a bunch of Peruvian asparagus from something "terrible", because of issues surround transportation and the exploitation of farmers, to something that "will make the meal really nice". Food plays an important role in creating a nice meal where families and friends can come together and enjoy each other's company. These transformations are not about selfishness or hedonism, but about how people make use of what is available to try to create moments of happiness for ourselves and for others. On the one hand, many shoppers interviewed in this study expressed deep concerns about the food system, but as Dan put it, "to be constantly worried about every potential harm caused by the food I buy is really debilitating and creates a lot of anxiety. Sometimes I just accept that what I'm buying is part of a shitty system. If I didn't, I don't know if I could ever really enjoy food" (Dan). In an attempt to not be overwhelmed by the problems involved in the modern food system, Dan, as well as other shoppers in this study, consented to a system they find deeply troubling. For Dan, consent was an important part of being able to use food to create moments of pleasure.

The pleasures of food come not only from the consumption of it, but the physical act of creation involved in cooking. At times cooking and preparing food at home were discussed as being about getting food on the table and satisfying hunger. At other times during these shopping interviews, people explained that when they had to time to cook, it was a source of creativity and enjoyment. Although these are only the words of a few, they neatly encapsulate the pleasure of cooking that nearly everyone expressed:

I like the physical act of chopping and the ability to put stuff together in a way that is tasty. It's really pleasant. I like doing stuff with my hands and I don't get a chance to do that a lot (Betty)

I really like the whole process of cooking. Creating that end product you can really enjoy (Paula)

I value cooking. It has provided a lot of "familiness" to our family over the years (Janet)

For these people, acts of prosumption within the supermarket were, at times, a way to make possible the pleasurable practice of cooking. Shopping became about gathering the 'materials' that can be combined with future labor to create something new and valuable that did not exist before. Cooking and food shopping are productive forms of labor, even though it is not labor directed towards the production of economic value.

There is a sense of accomplishment in the creativity of cooking that many people do not find in the other aspects of their everyday lives. Cooking can be at times a production of something whose only purpose is to be enjoyed with the other people in our lives that we care about and love. Supermarkets are not just spaces within which we gather food to sustain life; they are also spaces where we assemble some of the things that can be used to make everyday life good.

Convenience

Food that can be prepared more easily and in less time is guide shoppers decisions because they make possible, or less onerous, other activities that require energy and time. Although many people valued spending time cooking, nobody felt as though they were able make every meal they ate 'from scratch'. Many expressed mixed feelings about the role of more convenient foods, often talking around the issues of convenience without directly acknowledging it as such. Many alternative food movements have built their whole narratives around a demonization of convenience. The manifesto *Slow Food*, for example, directly associates

convenience with a degradation and mechanization of life that pervades modern society and “enslaves” us to the ideology of productivity (Portinari 1989). Although convenience is often not something people often feel comfortable with, it plays an important role in supermarket shopping.

Everyday life in modern capitalist society can be defined as a tension between the need to work to eat and the need to eat to work. The social relations of capitalism coupled with the commodification of food trap people in a cycle of having to sell time to survive. While shopping in the supermarket, the future obligations people have to their jobs make convenience valuable. This is not so much about an incessant pursuit of productivity, but managing the tension between two dependent historically produced necessities. One such enrollment of work took place as Bob and Francis discussed whether they wanted to purchase uncooked chicken breast stuffed with a variety of vegetables that had been prepared in the meat department. Bob explained to me why he first tried one of these the week before by saying, “Well, I was super super busy and I needed something I could stick in the oven and turn on the timer, and it would tell me when it was time to eat so I could get back to work”. In this way paid labor modified the value of convenience. This semi-prepared meal was used as a way to manage time and make possible the completion of work. For other shoppers, convenience became valuable because they knew there would be times throughout the week when they simply would not have the energy to cut, cook, and clean.

Convenience is also valued because it reduces the amount of time required for the necessity of eating, making possible other activities that are important to people. Betty, a professor who spends an hour and a half commuting to work every day, explained that on days when she works late, meals that are quick to prepare give her time to “exercise or walk”. For

Dan, having foods around the house that can be quickly assembled into a meal is important because,

it means I don't really have to spend a bunch of time and effort making something when all I really want to do is spend some time doing something that I don't feel like I **have to** do. Often I feel like my life is defined by what I have to do, eating included. I mean, I like cooking, but it's also nice to just not think about what I'm going to make, making it, and cleaning up.

Although cooking at times is a great source of pleasure, at other times, it can be yet another demand on the limited time and energy people have during the day. Conveniences affect decisions in the supermarket because they can be used to create a future where eating does not have to be a time consuming burden. Making use of convenience allows for creating a future in which it is possible to engage in activities that do not revolve around obligation and responsibility. The convenience, afforded by particular foods, acts on shoppers by affecting what they imagine as possible. It creates opportunities for prosumers to use foods to create futures that may not otherwise be possible.

Conclusion – A Micro-Politics of Care in the Aisle of the Supermarket

This chapter has attempted to explore the ways people try to care for themselves, others, and the environment by making use of the foods created by systems of production that are understood as harmful. By enrolling actual actors within the supermarket with virtual actants 'outside' of it, shoppers work to produce a future through consumption that can satisfy taste and values. Food provisioning is a presumptive practice during which the value of food is co-produced by shoppers', supermarkets, agricultural labor, manufactures, agri-businesses, state agencies, regulatory apparatuses, and food marketers. Although the focus of this chapter was centrally on shoppers' contribution to the production of value, the actors and actants they enroll are also active making food valuable. The reason these mediators can be enrolled in the networks

of associations people perform is because that all have some material effect on the food a shopper interacts with. Although no longer actual, every actor that plays a role in getting a food onto the shelf of a supermarket as well as the shoppers that buy them co-produce value. Act of purchase based on shoppers' values has widely been defined as "ethical consumption", decisions based on ethical or moral principles (Craig Thompson 2011). As Pennington (2005) argues, 'ethical consumption' is a politicized consumption practice based on the neoliberal idea that the marketplace is the most efficient and effective way for individuals to affect social change. Critics of 'ethical consumption' have argued that a consumption-based micro-politics limits "the ultimate horizon of our ability to intervene in problems of ecological depredation and the exploitation of labour" (Stacy Thompson 2012, 895). These critiques make assumptions about what values are and what people seek to do with their purchases that the empirics of this research undermine.

The values shoppers enroll in making decisions are not based on abstract moral or ethical principles, but are deeply embodied concerns about the material effects of food and food production on themselves, others, animals, and the environment. A shopping trip to the supermarket, for the shoppers in this study, was not some grand political strategy to use the market to affect broad social change. Rather, supermarket shopping is a micro-politics of care, in which people attempt to use food provisioning to find a way to live a 'good' life that is a little less imbricated in practices that can or do cause harm to others.

The micro-politics of everyday life may seem insignificant or unimportant, but it is one of the important ways people express care on a day-to-day basis. It is an aspect of how people care for themselves and for those they love. It is how people try to transform the necessity of eating into something more meaningful than biological sustenance. The micro-politics of care is a

struggle to carve out small moments of pleasure in a life full of work, responsibility, stress, and anxiety. The micro-politics care in everyday life is important not because it leads us to some revolutionary politics, but because it highlights the hard work of making life a little more fulfilling and satisfying.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

Empirical Findings

The values shoppers perform are not abstract principles, but deeply embodied by a materiality that exists elsewhere in time or space. The single value shoppers in this study nearly always tried to perform was care, care for one's self, care for the people they feed, care for the environment, and care for people who worked to produce the food being bought. All the other values that mediated shoppers decision were involved in the performance of care. Performing the value of health was often less about quantitative nutrition, and more about eating foods that made people's bodies feel better throughout the day. The ways food could be used to create moments of pleasure was important to every shopper in this study. The value of pleasure included the creative aspects of cooking, making a meal to share with friends or family, or simply the pleasures of taste. Foods that afforded convenience were valued because of the way they made possible having time engage in activities that people felt they had to do. Basing decisions on an attempt to perform values was not a grand political strategy to use consumption to affect social change, but an everyday micro-politics of care.

Many actors in a supermarket modify the associations shoppers enroll in foods. The three that came out most clearly in this research were organic labels, the ingredient lists, and brands. Although, at times, shoppers made similar associations, the meaning of these mediators and the way they transformed how shoppers valued particular foods was unstable and often criticized. The practices organic foods were associated with were subtly different for each person and often shifted during a single shopping trip. Even though brands were an important mediator for

everyone, they did not influence decisions in a coherent way. At times brands were associated with memories of enjoyment, at other times associated with harmful practices of large-scale food manufacturing. It was only in the case of ingredient lists that a single mediator affected shoppers' decisions in the same way. For each participant, the ingredient list was the central way he or she could know what a food was actually made from. The ingredient list provided shopper with many different potential mediators that they could use to approach an understanding a foods effects on health, the environment, animals, and other people.

One of the central findings of this project is that there is no single, or coherent, rationale shoppers follow while navigating the space of the supermarket. Often times what is important shifts from one decision to the next. There are many different ways people make use of the foods in a supermarket during their everyday lives: food is used to quickly fill an empty stomach while making time for other activities, to create meals that can be shared between family and friends, to find small pleasure in an everyday life that at times can feel oppressively monotonous, to maintain a healthy body, to avoid feeling bad throughout the day, to avoid potentially deadly allergies, and at times to contribute in some small way to mitigating negative impacts of production. These are only a small slice of the many different roles food plays in everyday life and the considerations that are incorporating into decisions. Simplifying them into categories or a set of categories erases this complexity, transforming food provisioning into something it is not. To understand why people consume the foods they do it is necessary to understand how they make use of food in their everyday lives.

The Supermarket is a hegemonic form of food distribution that is stabilized through strategies of creating coerced consent. Supermarkets power extends into both production and consumption. On the side of production, large corporate supermarket chains have begun to use

their dominant position in the retail market to shift costs onto manufactures and agricultural producers. With private-label brands accounting for a greater share of foods in the store, supermarket companies are beginning to more directly shape what is made as well as how it is sold. The power of supermarkets on the side of consumption comes from their capacity to shape the space within which shoppers encounter foods. By mapping shoppers' movements and developing strategies to force them to have unplanned encounters, supermarkets seek to increase profits by increasing the volume of sales.

Even though the Supermarket is a recent historical production developed as a white, middle-class, suburban form of food distribution, it has become conceptualized as normal, proper, and commonsense. In everyday life, in food desert literature, and in popular and academic critiques of the food system, the Supermarket as a form of distribution, and large supermarket companies, are rarely questioned. Despite growing market dominance in the United States, the normalization of the Supermarket continues the legacy of depoliticizing spaces of food provisioning that began in the post-war years. By defining *the* problems with the modern food industry as involving only production and the effects of food on health, the role of retailers in this system is stabilized and remains unquestioned. The goal of this thesis is to add to a small body of recent scholarship that has only just started to question the role of supermarkets in everyday life.

Broader Findings and Intellectual Merit

Values are not abstract or metaphysical, but deeply embodied by material concerns. Although the materiality of these non-economic values exists elsewhere in time and space, they no less material than the labor involved in production. When researching commodities, there is a tendency to think of material value as being purely economic. The values that people hold are

often conceptualized as ungrounded in material effects, they are symbolic, ethical, or moral or. By weaving together taste-values, presumption, and actor-network theory to understand the empirics of supermarket shopping an understanding of non-economic values as also material emerged.

The central contribution of this project to actor-network theory is the distinction between actual and virtual mediators. Although Latour emphasizes the concept that some actors act at a distance, he does not provide a clear argument about what differentiates these distant mediators. The category of the virtual is a way to make a clear delineation between the actors that physically mediate and the actants that mediate through a materiality that is distant in time and space. This ontological distinction maintains ANT's strong commitment to materialism while being able to incorporate actants that are enrolled as mediators without being seen, touched, heard, smelt, felt, or tasted.

One of the broader contributions of this thesis is that it brings attention to the way everyday life can stabilize dominant institutions and provide material for creating everyday critiques. Historically produced structures and institutions maintain their power by shaping everyday life, but they do not have the power to determine its texture. Hegemonic projects are grounded in the everyday activities that are often taken for granted or viewed as 'mundane' and unimportant. Human agency, the capacity to act in ways that are affected but not determine by others, is limited by hegemonic power structures. By making use of hegemonies, or the material artefacts they produce or distribute, in creative and inventive ways it is possible to evade and critique their dominance within the practices of everyday life they shape.

The walking interview is a qualitative method ideally suited for geographic research. At the most basic level, it is a method grounded in the idea that space matters. The walking

interview brings theoretical understandings of space as a socio-material production methodological practice. Not only is it theoretically rich, but it is also a method with many practical advantages. It allows a researcher to generate interview data and observational data simultaneously. It provides a rhythm and flow that eases the power dynamic between participant and researcher. The walking interview is a method that could easily be incorporated into qualitative researchers' methodological toolbox. It is not a radically different method, but it does opens new research opportunities with only a slight modification of already existing methods.

Reflections on connecting Theory and Methods

Actor-network theory is a theory of everyday life. Although rarely framed this way, ANT is a theoretically rich approach to understanding how the practices of everyday life are formed out of the interactions between humans and non-humans. ANT is about the networks, actors, and actants that shape everyday life. On the one hand, the mediators that people make use of and interact with are produced by historical structures outside their control. On the other hand, people actively create the life they live by manipulating and transforming the mediators they interact with every day. ANT takes seriously the way individuals' agency is always restricted and shaped by the agency of others, without washing it away completely.

The walking interview is exceptionally well suited for engaging questions about the practices of everyday life. By situating the interview within the practices being studied, it is possible to more fully understand how these practices are shaped by the spatiality within which they take place. Walking interviews allow qualitative data to be produced as the things they encounter are actively affecting people. By using this interview method, the researcher is able to generate data that emerges out of the everyday practice itself rather than relying on participants' recollections.

Actor-network theory allows for exploratory research that makes it possible to discover what is important in the process of doing the research. Instead of coming in to a project with a set of categories or prior understanding of what is important to people, ANT allows for actors and actants to become important as they mediate the practice being studied. ANT provides a strong theoretical basis for doing open-ended qualitative research that embraces diversity, complexity, and surprises. ANT can be used in projects that seek to explore the range of mediators that influence peoples' everyday life, calling attention towards particular ones that can then be analyzed in greater depth.

The walking interview can be used as a methodological tool for doing exploratory research. Since the research participant is guiding the interview, what becomes important for the researcher is what is important to the participant. Walking interviews generate data that is open to the unexpected. Unexpected encounter can elicit unplanned discussions and questions. The walking interview is co-produced by the interactions between the participant, the researcher, and the things they encounter as the interview unfolds. The interviews generated often touch on a diverse set of topics, they contain what can be lengthy tangents, and at times shift focus quickly leaving some ideas only partially discuss. Although this can create some difficulties it allows for interviews to more accurately represent the incongruity, meanderings, and mundanity of everyday life.

Some Reflections on Limitations

Empirics

The sample of participants in this research was quite limited. This research involved only thirteen participants and six different supermarkets in Athens, Georgia. Since all the participants were white, middle-class, and highly educated. All the participants in this study were relatively

privileged. Socially marginalized and economically disadvantaged groups may interact with supermarkets in specific ways that this project cannot speak to. This thesis only touches on a very thin slice of what goes on while people shop at a supermarket.

Supermarket shopping involves creating a livable future while navigating the aspects of people's lives that pull them in many directions and restrict their capacities to act in various ways. For this reason, people that have distinctly different work lives, childcare responsibilities, wealth, familiarity with cooking, access to mobility, and personal backgrounds are likely to navigate the supermarket aisles in very different ways. The small and limited sample size in this project could never hope to say anything about this vast diversity. To do this, more research must be done that involves other groups of people positioned differently in society.

Theory and Methods

One of the biggest difficulties, and potential limitations, of actor-network theory is its tendency towards description rather than critique. While I tried throughout this thesis to find ways to engage in critical analysis, ANT focus on dense description made this quite difficult. While this does not necessarily undermine ANT, it does mean that for ANT to be strengthened as a useful theoretical framework there must be clear argument about how detailed description can be used to strengthen critique. Although outside the scope of this thesis, there may be an argument that the more descriptive aspects of ANT can be used to explain how a particular way of dogmatic or taken for granted understanding is flawed or intentionally constructed to mislead. One way that this project has attempted this is by positioning the analysis in Chapter Six against a way of understanding consumers as passively manipulated by forces of production. While I do not propose to have a solution to this problem with ANT here, it seems clear that the future of ANT depends on finding ways to build the connections between description and critique.

ANT's commitment to the multitude of actors that mediate practice as all being important did, at times, steer research away from a more focused analysis of couple important actors. Since actors influence the way other actors mediate actions it becomes difficult to justify leaving anything out, but when trying to make a concise and compelling analysis that does not bore readers with endless tedium, leaving some actors out is necessary. ANT create difficulties between what the theory maintains as important and the practical considerations when writing.

In some ways, the walking interview asks a single researcher to do too much. This research method could be enhanced in a variety of ways for future projects seeking to utilize its strengths. Walking interviews done by multiple researchers in a collaborative project could make it possible to create a more detailed documentation of the interviews. As one researcher talks with the participant, the other could focus their attention on observing, writing field notes, or video recording. Integrating a video recording of the interviews with the audio/text data could more faithfully records the various movements and actions that take place during walking interviews. Additionally, much of the ambiguity about what is being discussed could be mitigated by having a visual record of the interview.

Areas for Future Research

Moving this Project Forward

This project makes an argument for the necessity of building connections between production and consumption. This thesis began to lean towards the side of consumption due to the methodological commitments this research took on as it developed, restrictions on page length, and what I saw as a lack of engagement with how people 'consume' in the supermarket. In order to embrace this reconnection, more research and analysis could be done that directly focuses on the side of production.

One way to start doing this is to conduct interviews with store managers and waged workers. These two groups of people are often the ones who make the decisions about what to sell, and do the work of assembling the foods within the store in a way that sells. By interviewing store managers, it may be possible to get a more detailed understanding of the marketing strategies a particular store uses. Additionally, this would provide specific details on how supermarket firms are structured and how decisions about what foods to sell and how to sell them are made. By interviewing the waged workers in the store it may be possible to extend this research into questioning the ways large supermarket firms affect the lives of the people that stock the shelves, operate the registers, and build the ‘displays that sell’.

To bring food production more clearly into focus, the supply chains of a few specific foods could be analyzed in detail. By retracing the movements of a particular food from the production of its ingredients, to manufacturing, to distribution, to sale, what Cook calls “following the commodity” (Cook *et al.* 2006). By doing this, it would be possible to understand how the ways shoppers know food coincides with or diverges from how it was actually produced.

Another Approach to Studying Supermarkets - Biopower and Biopolitics

Foucault’s articulation of biopower could bring more precision to the form of power within supermarkets. Broadly, biopower is a form of power that takes “the capacities of bodies and the conduct of individuals as their concern” (Braun 2007, 8). Biopolitics involves “political struggle over norms, conventions, and techniques of managing population health” (Kurtz 2015, 2). As detailed in Chapter Two and Chapter Six, although without using the language of biopower language, during the rise of self-service, the chain grocer, and eventually supermarkets strategies have been used to manage the bodies and conduct of individuals.

Through the framework of biopower, research could highlight the way the supermarket plays a role in shaping policies and regulations surrounding food. Although “recent scholarship highlights the play of biopower in and through policies and practices shaping food systems (Brooks 2005; Herring 2007; Paxson 2008; Schlosser 2008; Nally 2011; Speake 2011; Holloway and Morris 2012)” (Kurtz 2015, 2), none of this research focuses or comments on the role of supermarkets in this process. As this thesis has shown, the Supermarket as a form of food retail and large supermarket corporations are increasingly powerful actors in the modern US food system, yet, they continue to evade being critiqued by critical food scholars in the United States. If we are to approach a more detailed understanding of how the health of the population in the US is managed, there must be more focus on supermarkets.

Biopolitics thought of as the struggles over how the health of a population is managed, could focus on framing supermarkets as a politicized spaces. A repoliticization of the Supermarket is central to developing challenges and critiques of its hegemony. By framing supermarkets as biopolitical spaces where food regulations and policies are enacted and given material form, it may be possible to articulate detailed critiques of the way these regulations and policies actually affect people as they make decisions about what to buy.

Implications and Questions for Future Research

Future research that seeks to understand how changes in the US food system are affecting both labor and consumers would be strengthened by incorporating the Supermarket into the analysis. Research could focus on questioning how the practices of supermarket companies are directly, or indirectly, affecting labor conditions for agricultural, manufacturing, and retail workers.

There is a great deal more research that could be done on the way dominant institutions potentially delimit ways of solving problems by shaping everyday life. In the case of inequalities in food distribution, research could focus on whether the dominance of market-based distribution within peoples' everyday life shapes what they can imagine as possible alternatives. One possible research question could be, does the hegemony of the Supermarket delimit our capacity to find and implement more equitable models of food distribution?

Research that seeks to understand how food related health problems grow and persist must understand how decisions about what to buy are actually made within specific spatial contexts. Although questions surrounding access are important, they do not tell the whole story. All of the participants in this research could easily access multiple supermarkets and other sites of food provisioning, but that did not make shopping a straightforward or simple task. Shopping for food is a complicated everyday practice that involves a wide range of different actors and actants that all simultaneously modify the decisions people make. Tastes, food budgets, values, cooking experience, work, children, and marketing strategies are only a few of the many potential mediators that shoppers navigate and enroll as they work to presume a livable future.

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