Spaces of difference, spaces of possibility? An exploration of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) in the austerity foodscape of the United Kingdom

Jonathan David Beacham

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

September 2018

Department of Sociology
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Lancaster University

Abstract

The primary, original contribution to knowledge of this thesis lies in understanding Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) as central in the ongoing reconfiguration of 'civil society' in the enduring period of austerity following the 2007-8 global financial crisis. Drawing on a qualitative research study in Lancashire, I show how the conceptual 'austerity foodscape' of the United Kingdom that has developed following the financial crisis plays host to complex geographies of food, with organisations within AFNs positioned in relation to capitalist political economy, as well as the interrelated entrenchment of austerity, in diverse ways. The theoretical framework underpinning this thesis therefore draws primarily on the diverse economies approach of J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006b; 2006a), developing a productive dialogue with Marxian 'food regime' theory (see, notably, Friedmann and McMichael, 1989). Whilst these two approaches have often shared little in terms of dialogue, I suggest that taken together they help us to make sense of the varied aims of AFNs. As attempts to 'do' food differently (Dowler et al., 2010) when contrasted against the mainstream, many accounts continue to narrowly interpret AFNs, painting them simply as oppositional and reactive against hegemonic political-economic structures. A more contextually-aware interpretation (following Calvário and Kallis, 2017) helps us to understand the ways in which AFNs are not merely 'against' capitalism and/or austerity, but themselves generative of diverse economic logics and practices, altering wider relationships to food. These are theoretical and empirical gaps that, both within the United Kingdom context and AFN research more broadly, remain underexplored. Given these complex geographies, I argue that whilst some organisations within AFNs have been conditioned by austerity, they retain a generative capacity. Consequently, I broaden the understanding of 'alternative' to capture a wide range of food provisioning models that have proliferated from within 'civil society' post-2008, most notably in practices of food banking and food waste initiatives. I argue that this broader conceptualisation of alternatives within a contextually-aware analysis reveals the powerful role that AFNs can play in articulating more positive relationships to food, and with it wider reconfigurations of both civil society and the foodscape beyond the austere here-and-now.

Keywords

Thesis word count

85,677

Note

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

In accordance with section PR 2.7.2 of the Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures (MARP) of Lancaster University, please note that themes and sections of Chapter Four and Five have been published as:

Beacham, J. 2018. Organising food differently: towards a more-than-human ethics of care for the Anthropocene. *Organization*. **25**(4),pp.533–549.

Martindale, L., Matacena, R. and Beacham, J. 2018. Varieties of Alterity: Alternative Food Networks in the UK, Italy and China. *Sociologia Urbana e Rurale*. **115(S1)**,pp.27–41.

Table of contents

Acknowledgements

To say that the PhD process has been a journey of highs and lows is something of an understatement. It was only the friendship, emotional support and continued encouragement of many, both in and beyond Lancaster, that meant this eventually came together.

Most importantly, I thank my supervisors, Anne Cronin and Bron Szerszynski, both for putting up with me and for their encouragement, generous input, and influence in shaping this research over the past few years. Even at the points where I was struggling the most, they managed to reignite my drive to get this finished, insisting that I was capable of getting there… even if I didn't really believe them at the time. Many thanks, additionally, to Richard Tutton for his enormously constructive comments on the research as an external reviewer on three annual panels.

Before all of this, I completed my first degree at the University of Leeds. Tom Campbell and Mark Davis (and the wider Bauman Institute) provided many stimulating academic discussions in the time I spent there. Their advice and encouragement was instrumental in my decision to continue with postgraduate study, also helping me to navigate the funding terrain in the process. Even if these conversations have not been as regular as I might have liked over the past couple of years, I hope they can nonetheless continue—and thank you.

At Lancaster, a huge thanks to Imogen Tyler and Celia Roberts for getting me here in the first place in their capacity as doctoral directors. Friends and colleagues across the university (and Lancaster as a sort-of 'home' for a few years) provided an invaluable support network. There are too many names, many of whom have come and gone over the years, to list in full. However, and in no particular order, special thanks to Stephen Jackson, Andy Yuille, Becky Willis, Cath Hill, Cosmin Popan, Sarah Becklake, Peter Fuzesi, Laura Clancy, Michael Greaves, Holly Duffy, Jake Lawson, João Almeida, Lindsay Youansamouth, Joe Coooper, and the Thurnham crew. Georgia Newmarch's friendship has been a particularly positive development in my life. Marwan Bukhari, thank you for all the Malbec. One for the road?

Of course, I could not have done this without the love and support of my partner, Alicia, who has stuck by me when I needed it the most. My parents, Julie and Simon, have continually supported me in many ways throughout these endeavours. I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, Jane, who sadly passed away as I was writing this up. I am sure she would have been proud of me to see it completed.

Finally, and last but not least, a huge thanks to Professor David Evans and Dr Rebecca Whittle for their encouraging, generous and sustained engagement with this research in their role as external and internal examiners respectively. I am endlessly grateful for their input and advice.

List of figures

List of tables

Chapter One

Introduction: thinking about how we 'do' food, austerity, and the contributions of the thesis

Food is an unusual phenomenon. Whilst in one sense a basic biological need providing us with sustenance and energy required to live—therefore anthropologically universalisable—it also carries a variety of more abstract meanings, connotations and symbolic dimensions. As Winson (1993) has commented, food therefore confers a special status as an 'intimate commodity' that we ingest into our bodies, perhaps the richest example of something that is both material and symbolic. Given this status, Power (2003) also suggests that food is a matrix which can be used to consider everything from embodied, lived experiences to the wider political and economic structures underpinning capitalism. If anything, these perspectives remind us that relationships to, and understandings of, food are always contingent and open to change. Indeed, the decade following the global financial crisis of 2007-8—the United Kingdom's 'age of austerity'—has played host to significant shifts within the foodscape (Evans, 2011b).[1] In this period, many have faced the tightening of household budgets, particularly for food (Dowler and Lambie-Mumford, 2015). The retail climate has subsequently shifted, with 'budget' supermarkets now occupying increasingly prevalent positions. Beyond the supermarkets, charitable food provisioning models such as food banks have proliferated (Garthwaite, 2016a). Initiatives such as these have emerged

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[1] I appropriate the term *foodscape* throughout this thesis from a range of food scholars (see, for example, Johnston and Goodman, 2015; Goodman, 2016; Carolan, 2014; Psarikidou and Szerszynski, 2012a) who have expanded the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's (1996) framework. For Appadurai, who attempts to understand globalisation through five interconnected *–scapes* (ethno, media, techno, finance, ideo), this suffix "allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes […]. [T]he common suffix *–scape* also indicate[s] that these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs" (Appadurai, 1996: 33). Whereas Appadurai however understands these *–scapes* as highlighting the various disjunctures of globalisation, Potter and Westall (2013) productively argue that they might instead illuminate continuities between divergent relations. The 'austerity foodscape' that I employ here helps us to make sense of the continuities between the programme of austerity following the financial crisis and the shifting political economy of food.

from within 'civil society' as a response to the austere here-and-now, providing a vital lifeline for many in the process. As a non-exhaustive list, I understand these shifts—as well as other epiphenomenal changes to be considered as the discussion continues—as constituting the *austerity foodscape* of the United Kingdom.

Amidst these shifts, a growing body of sociological and geographical literature has developed around the concept of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs). Broadly understood as attempts to 'do' food differently (Dowler et al., 2010) in ways that are antithetical to those engendered by mainstream supermarkets, this label covers a broad range of food provisioning models, for example Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), food co-operatives and direct-to-door delivery schemes. Though I will expand on the concept of AFNs in depth in Chapter Two, they have been argued to represent attempts to spur different, more positive relationships with food and everything that it broadly encompasses (Harris, 2009). Many have argued that they carry with them a range of potential social, economic and environmental benefits (Sarmiento, 2017). Of course, this is not to suggest that the mainstream is devoid of these potentially positive developments, and the alternative/mainstream distinction is liminal, defined relationally. Today, even a mundane trip to the supermarket, whilst largely constituted through habitual and routinised consumption (see Warde, 2005), prompts us to consider whether we ought to buy organic, 'fairly' traded, green, sustainable, 'ethical' food and so on. But as opposed to focusing on the gradual reform of these corporate entities— which Littler suggests may amount to little more than the "consumer-oriented greenwash[ing]" (Littler, 2009: 2) of capitalism—AFNs can instead be seen as symptomatic of what Goodman *et al.* understands as various "'new wave[s]' of social activism" (Goodman et al., 2012: 3) following the turn of the Millennium. With it, Harris (2009) suggests that they emphasise an experimental 'politics of the possible', of what *might be*, loaded with transformative and generative potential.

Perhaps surprisingly, AFN scholarship has had little to say on the dynamics of the austerity foodscape and the shifts it confers (Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017; Goodman, 2016). Those writing on the relationship between food and austerity have tended to speak past AFN scholarship, and vice versa. In bridging the gap between these two bodies of literature, I argue in this thesis that AFNs (broadly defined) are driving the ongoing reconfiguration between civil society and capitalist political economy in the enduring period of austerity following the 2007-8 global financial crisis. As such, the research questions that guided this thesis are as follows:

1. What kinds of organisations can be identified within the AFNs of Lancashire?

2. How can these organisations be understood as 'alternative' when contrasted against mainstream tendencies in the…
   a. Production of food?
   b. Distribution of food?
   c. Consumption of food?

3. Has austerity served to alter wider values and everyday practices around food, and if so, how?

4. To what extent can these AFNs be understood as…
   a. Existing *despite* austerity?
   b. Existing *in response to* austerity?
   c. A broader expression of the shifting relationship between civil society and capitalist political economy?

With these research questions in mind, and to extend the discussion offered so far in this Introduction, the original contribution to knowledge that this thesis offers is developed across three interconnected strands:

1. The first contribution revolves around the theoretical framework which informs the thesis as a whole. In offering a creative dialogue between Marxian food regime theory (see, primarily, Friedmann and McMichael, 1989) and the diverse economies framework of J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006a; 2006b), I bridge two approaches which have often found little in the way of common ground. Food regime theory, with its roots in political economy approaches, most notably Marxian regulation theory (see Aglietta, 2000), has provided influential and important insights into the intricate relationship between global patterns of capitalist political economy and the production, distribution and consumption of food. Whilst I offer a full review of Friedmann and McMichael's work in Chapter Two, they articulate the present as the *third* historical food regime, which is increasingly characterised by resistance and a drive towards developing viable alternatives to the vicissitudes of the mainstream—hence the growing interest in AFNs. Yet I suggest that the structuralist emphasis of their approach has served to narrowly articulate the potential aims of AFNs as solely oppositional to capitalist political economy. Conversely, the diverse economies framework has argued for the plurality and heterogeneity of social and economic worlds, seeing capitalism as "just one particular set of economic relations situated in a vast sea of economic activity" (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: 70). Though the diverse economies framework has latterly been critiqued by Marxian perspectives for a potentially evasive engagement with the central logics of capitalism, I argue that these two approaches can find greater convergence than previously theorised, contributing to understandings of both approaches. Whilst food regime theory is deeply important in situating and making sense of the rise of alternatives, I argue that the diverse economies framework can enhance our understanding of the potential of AFNs by pushing us towards situated, contextually-aware analyses.

2. The second contribution is to AFN scholarship more directly. Again emphasising the contextually-specific nature of this research, I further this growing body of scholarship by bringing it into a productive dialogue with the dynamics of the *austerity foodscape* of the United Kingdom. I argue that an implicit moralising tendency within AFN scholarship has led to the field tending to be being concerned with a well-worn tract of alternatives that have been widely celebrated in the AFN literature. Celebrating them as intrinsically 'good' fails to "reflexive[ly] […] [allow] a certain critical distance" (Goodman et al., 2012: 4) from them and, whilst important, these organisational forms are not the whole story. Paying attention to the contextual dynamics of the austerity foodscape reveals a proliferation of other alternatives emerging out of civil society (Crouch, 2013). These are encapsulated in previously mentioned practices around food banking, but also in, for example, food waste initiatives and community cafés. These represent increasingly important modes of food provision within the austerity foodscape, yet AFN research has had little to say with regards to these other alternatives, leaving their analysis to a separate, distinct body of literature which has developed concerning them (see, for example, Garthwaite, 2016a). I argue that AFN scholarship can benefit significantly from the incorporation of these 'other' alternatives within analyses, illuminating their complex geographies versus accounts that thinly read them as conservative and reformist reactions to the vicissitudes of the austerity foodscape.

3. The third contribution builds on the second. Given the contextualisation of this study, and the illumination of other alternatives that I offer, I argue that recurring binaries around the potential for AFNs to transform values and practices around food—e.g. as either 'radical' or 'reformist' (see Beacham, 2018) entities which might either be critiqued or celebrated—are unhelpfully narrow. The contextually-aware conceptualisation of AFNs that I offer here instead

recognises them as open-ended, often experimental spaces of economic difference. Given that these recurring binaries often cloud analyses, a more modest understanding of AFNs—which refuses to judge them on projective pre-existing criteria to, say, entirely re-imagine a global food system from the ground up—illuminates a hopeful range of workings within them. I argue that our embodied, visceral and affective relations to food are of crucial importance in this account, seeing these relations as central in articulating the potentiality of AFNs and not as merely superfluous factors.

With the original contributions that the thesis makes now outlined, it is worth expanding on my motivations for writing this, considering my own positionality within the research in the process.

The historical legacies of this research

The complex geographies of the austerity foodscape alluded to thus far became clear to me in 2011. At that point, I was living in Leeds, a city with a profoundly mixed economic geography. The area that I was living in was economically deprived when compared to surrounding areas, and it played host to a large, transient student population, including myself. Served by several 24-hour supermarkets, one of them had been the subject of local controversy. As something that was at the time receiving growing media attention across the country, an increasing number of so-called 'freegans' or (at least in the United States) 'dumpster divers' had been making the most of the easily accessible bins in the car park to the rear of the supermarket from which 'wasted' food could be reclaimed (see Eikenberry and Smith, 2005). In one instance which attracted significant media attention, three freegans in Kentish Town, London narrowly avoided prosecution after criminal charges were dropped by the supermarket chain Iceland (see Thomas, 2010). From a legal point of view, the case against freeganism lies in supermarkets potentially being liable for damages should someone get ill from eating the reclaimed food. In the case of the supermarket near where I was

living, the radical solution was not to simply lock the bins, but to erect razor wire-topped fencing around them, plastered in signs threatening intruders with criminal charges and potential prosecution should they try to access them. Further, and as I witnessed, staff at the supermarket were ordered to douse the food with dyed bleach to ensure that it the food was made completely inedible despite, if one was to ignore the 'use by' date, often being perfectly safe to eat (Swaffield et al., 2018).

That a supermarket would go to such effort to stop people from reclaiming edible food (even when framed as 'waste') may seem absurd, but it did not surprise me. A few months after the supermarket discussed above had transformed its bin store into a defensive fortress, I got a part-time job at a different supermarket closer to the university where I was studying. Many of the evenings that I spent working there involved methodically opening packaged sandwiches that had not been sold, depositing the plastic packaging into one bin bag and the contents into another. This, we were told, was because the bins remained accessible to anyone and the management wanted to discourage the freegan practices that were becoming 'a problem' across the city. As if, from another point of view, what we were doing was itself unproblematic.

Beyond this, I noticed other changes were occurring. Less than a mile away from my house, a new food bank was being established by a local church to cope with growing food insecurity in the area. As recognised in other analyses (see, for example, Purdam et al., 2015), a growing number of people (and for reasons that will be discussed later in the thesis, particularly in Chapter Six) were struggling to access affordable food. Though food banks have long and complex histories in the United Kingdom, in the years following the global financial crisis they have proliferated as a charitable mode of food provisioning from within civil society that has come to characterise life for many in contemporary society (Garthwaite, 2016a). Around the same time as the food bank being established, I received a leaflet through my front door advertising a new monthly 'community café' at a community centre around the corner from my house. As

a new initiative arranged by volunteers, it operated on a 'pay-as-you-feel' model: those who could afford to were encouraged to donate towards the cost of their meal, covering those who may otherwise be socioeconomically excluded.

These contradictory, often jarring, experiences all contributed to my academic interest in the geographies of food and desire to write this thesis. Whilst the substantial focus of this thesis is AFNs, these experiences highlighted to me the profound contradictions that we can identify in the austerity foodscape. How could it be that so much effort in certain models of food provisioning was directed at making food inedible, throwing it away and making it scarce, whilst in relative proximity actors were putting in significant amounts of time, money and effort to making food accessible to otherwise disenfranchised groups, and often for little personal reward? Of course, these ruminations and personal experiences emerge out of a wider recognition that the way in which we 'do' food (see Dowler et al., 2010) at a societal level carries a variety of social, economic and environmental consequences which are becoming increasingly impossible to ignore.[2] The substantial growth of 'ethical' consumption schemes after the turn of the Millennium such as FairTrade (see Wheeler, 2012) is one such phenomenon that has attempted to mitigate the worst of these dynamics. Yet, as Berlan and Dolan (2014) critically note, FairTrade has over time been 'conventionalised', incorporated into the fabric of everyday food consumption. That is, FairTrade produce (primarily coffee, tea and bananas) has become so commonplace that it is often difficult to *not* buy FairTrade. Considering its development, however, FairTrade was initially premised on the consumer 'choosing' to buy 'fairly' in aiding distant producers, recognising an attached price premium versus non-FairTrade produce. For Berlan and Dolan, FairTrade's conventionalisation raises questions about its ability to enact wider positive change, instead potentially acting as little more than a salve on the ills of

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[2] This is particularly prescient given the many worrying linkages between food and processes of Anthropogenic climate change. Relationships to food are both generative of these problems, as well as being subsequently affected by them (McMichael, 2016; Wittman, 2009). This discussion continues below.

globalised capitalism (Carrington et al., 2016). Whilst I expand briefly on the phenomenon of ethical consumption in Chapter Two, the abundance of critical perspectives such as Berlan and Dolan's encourages us to go beyond these 'ethical' certification schemes and think more broadly, recognising other (and potentially more progressive) transformations in the world of food in the process. AFNs, I suggest, reside in this more fertile territory. In the next section, I focus on the benefits derived from thinking of them through the intersection of sociological and geographical perspectives.

Why think about AFNs sociologically?

This research—whilst making an important contribution to gaps in the literature—necessarily has wide implications for a variety of disciplinary framings. After all, my conceptual framework brings together perspectives from sociology, political economy, economic geography, organisation studies, marketing and human geography, often with a historically-informed inflection. As an admittedly brief discussion of a topic that may well be more extensive, it is worth clarifying why this topic ought to be approached through a thoroughly sociological imagination (see Mills, 1959) and the benefits that such a framing may bring.

Given Power's (2003) aforementioned theorising of food as a matrix, Goodman and Sage (2014a) rightly argue that food does not simply cross various disciplinary boundaries, but that it actively *transgresses* them. Different disciplines consider food at different levels and scales, therefore these accounts are always partial. That is, the 'accessing' of these levels and scales is more or less congruent with the differing epistemologies across disciplines. For example, a historical political economy perspective (as we will encounter in Chapter Two's discussion of food regimes), may favour an analysis focusing on its dynamics as a commodity over time. Anthropologically-inflected human geography perspectives, by comparison, may instead emphasise the importance of accounting for lived experiences around food as an embodied, visceral phenomenon. Yet, crucially, sociology's manifestation as

discipline, in offering less a defined field of study and more a range of ways of 'optics' to view the world (see Bauman and May, 2001) has many implications for thinking about how we access these scales. It has led to both sociology's awkward position within academia (see Davis, 2016: 7) as well as an ability to illuminate continuities between these otherwise seemingly divergent epistemologies. As C. Wright Mills succinctly summarises, "the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society" (Mills, 1959: 6), envisioning the sociological imagination as necessarily synthetic.

Whilst emphasising the potential of the sociological imagination, this morsel also reveals how Mills' understanding developed within a historical epoch which saw sociology as concerned with *human* society. Yet much like the way in which human geography has become (significantly) more open to questions of culture (Cox, 2012), sociological perspectives have broadened their gaze to consider distinctly 'non-human' or 'more-than-human' elements of our daily lives (Whatmore, 2008). This is something which is crucial in developing a sufficient understanding of a phenomenon such as food. As Foster (1999) has noted, classical accounts within sociology—in order to legitimise itself as a distinct discipline—often had to emphasise the *sui generis* nature of the social.[3] Émile Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method* ([1895] 1982) formulated the discipline as being first and foremost concerned with the study of 'social facts'. As a distinct field, this formulation was necessary to distinguish it from the individualist philosophies underpinning biology and psychology, with Foster (1999) arguing that for many commentators this led to sociology being complicit in reinforcing a problematic society/nature dualism (see Murdoch, 1997). As Foster (1999) however warns, sociology's ability to make sense of supposedly 'natural' phenomena such as food can diametrically be read into its foundations: Marx, for example, dedicates much of his unfinished third volume of *Capital* (1976) to concerns about socio-ecological relations.

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[3] *Sui generis* as 'of its own kind'.

Weber wrote extensively on agricultural and agrarian history (Honigsheim, 1949) and Simmel wrote on the 'sociology of the meal' (Simmel, 1997; see also Symons, 1994).

Despite these initial anxieties around sociology's disciplinary formulation, its contribution to understanding food has developed substantially over time. Often drawing on an eclectic range of perspectives—a legacy which this thesis continues—sociology, as Carolan (2016) argues, arms us with an imagination which helps us to see food not as a object (i.e. a noun) but as a verb. His point is not dissimilar to Power's (2003) understanding of food as a matrix. For Carolan, whilst we can talk of food as a necessarily broad category, this is never fixed and it is always something which is *done*. It is something that we act upon, reflect on, intervene in, and we often find our relationship with food changing for the most unexpected of reasons. These are relations which are not *a priori* the social contexts in which we exist (Poulain, 2017) and are hence contingent. Yet the sociological imagination, highlighting the historical underpinnings of many phenomena that we often consider 'normal' or 'natural'—rather than temporary crystallisations—allows us to go beyond these biographical factors and consider them in dialogue with these wider histories.

Though something that does not receive any great attention within this thesis due limitations of scope, it seems fair to suggest that the insights that might be generated through this sociological perspective will only grow in importance as problematic dimensions of global relationships with food continue to proliferate. Doyle's (2011) account, for example, highlights the important insights that a sociology of food may provide in relation to the biophysical crises of anthropogenic climate change. As a point that I will return to and expand upon, the 'other side' of contemporary patterns of Western dietary fragmentation—partly spurred by environmental concerns—is the explosion of meat and dairy consumption in developing economies such as India and China, hallmarks of a growing 'middle class' diet (Hoelle, 2017). Framing this as a purely ecological matter ignores the sociological content underpinning these

developments, with dimensions of class, political-economic transformation and differing cultural politics all amalgamating at scales as modest as the household. It is only through a thoroughly sociological understanding of these complex developments that they can be fully understood. Of course, if we follow Carolan's processual emphasis in seeing food as a verb, then we ought not to forget the more positive developments emerging out of these changes. AFNs can, in varying ways, be seen both as responding to these ills and as developing more hopeful prospects of significantly altered relationships to food. Given that these relations necessarily confer rich sociological content, it seems fair to suggest that the eclectic disciplinary framework underpinning the sociological imagination can play an important role in analysing AFNs within wider foodscapes.

Drawing the debate back in to considering *this* thesis specifically, a sociological imagination also allows sufficient flexibility in addressing important gaps in disciplinary approaches. In doing so, I recognise the need instead for *inter*disciplinary approaches favoured by food scholars such as David Evans (2011b; 2012; 2018b; 2018a; see also Evans et al., 2017), Michael Goodman (2004; 2016; see also Goodman et al., 2010; Goodman and Sage, 2014a; Goodman et al., 2012; Hinton and Goodman, 2010) and Michael Carolan (2006; 2008; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; see also Stock et al., 2015b). This is particularly important given the United Kingdom context of this research, in which the sociology of food remains largely wedded to Bourdieusian and practice-based approaches to consumption (see, for example, Warde, 2016; see also Evans, 2018b). By comparison, Anglo-American AFN research, with its more geographical inflection, has largely focused on the political economy of food production (Cox, 2012). Whilst the influences of these respective orthodoxies are never *too* distant, I hold them at a careful distance. As a result, the framework that I develop productively synthesises a range of approaches whilst remaining thoroughly sociological throughout.

Where next, and why? The structure of the thesis

As this Introduction has so far shown, given how many different aspects of our lives can be touched upon when considering food, it is worth clarifying the structure that the rest of thesis will take. In the chapter that follows, Chapter Two, I revisit themes touched upon here in offering a more substantive review of the literature. This is therefore structured in such a way to achieve three interrelated aims: (1) to firstly offer a critical engagement with the political economy perspective of Marxian food regime theory in order to situate the emergence of AFNs as an analytical category; (2) to provide a thorough review of AFN scholarship in theorising the 'varieties of alterity' against mainstream ways of doing food—with it introducing more comprehensively the diverse economies framework that largely underpins this thesis; (3) lastly, to expand on my conceptualisation of the United Kingdom's austerity foodscape (and its various contradictory, complex dynamics) in which this study is situated. I conclude this review—bringing together these three interrelated strands—by arguing that whilst food regime theory importantly helps us to make sense of the emergence of AFNs, it offers a narrow and overly prescriptive account of what AFNs encompass and they might aim to achieve in the foodscape. Instead, I argue that AFNs are processual rather than teleological, emerging in different ways across space and time, and therefore must be made sense of within a contextually-aware analysis (developing Jarosz, 2008).

Following on from this literature review, Chapter Three explores the methodological approach that I employed for the empirical dimension of this research. To do this, it first traces how the research design changed over time and the subsequent need to reassess the methods used in the data collection to successfully address the research questions outlined above. I then discuss the multiple qualitative methods that I employed. The primary method was 31 semi-structured interviews with various actors in AFNs in a geographically-bounded case study of AFNs in Lancashire in the north-west of England. Alongside the interviews, I also completed a week-long photographic food diary (and subsequent follow-up interview) with seven of the interviewees. Finally, I undertook ethnographic fieldwork at three of the sites over the course of six

months, which helped to make sense of practices around food as they occurred. As I will discuss, this combination (conceptualised as a 'bricolage') of multiple qualitative methods enabled the research to successfully address the different dimensions of the research questions, which I here reiterate to trace the trajectory of the subsequent empirical chapters. In the final act of 'scene setting' I outline the various organisations and participants involved in the research.

In the first empirical chapter, Chapter Four, I focus on the alternative possibilities that productive spaces within AFNs might aim towards beyond the problematic dynamics of the austerity foodscape. Given the alternative/mainstream distinction risks glossing over complexities within either of these labels, I begin this chapter by recognising the ways in which different organisations enmeshed within the logics of the austerity foodscape in a variety of ways. Indeed, some organisations in this research had struggled commercially in the decade that followed the financial crisis. Explanations for this revolved around an abstracted, discursively constructed figure of 'the consumer' who, following the financial crisis, altered their consumption practices. In adopting increasingly thrifty, sometimes frugal consumption practices, these abstracted consumers abandoned AFNs as they were either no longer able (or, as I suggest, often no longer *willing*) to accommodate the price premium they conferred versus the mainstream. Yet, in expanding on the diverse economies framework, I argue that the sphere of market exchange was one of many economies at work in these spaces. Using this pessimistic account of the austerity foodscape as a springboard, I continue this chapter by arguing that these productive spaces also serve more positively to produce hopeful 'worlds of difference' in the foodscape. Focusing on the organisation and operation of these spaces, and drawing on Latour's (2004) work on the nature of critique, I argue that this difference served to articulate food not as a matter of *fact* but a matter of *concern*, pointing to a wide range of possibilities that AFNs may help to enact beyond the limited framing of market-exchange (see also Hill, 2015).

Continuing this account, Chapter Five turns more explicitly to a consideration of consumption within AFNs. Rather than seeing AFNs as reproducing certain consumerist subjectivities—thereby entrenching existing relationships around food—I instead deploy the concept of attunement to make sense of the complex ways that values and practices around food alter both away from as well as towards alternatives (J. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013). Having already recognised the diverse economic logics and practices at work in AFNs, I draw on these contemporary feminist geographies in suggesting that reading the austerity foodscape as a material phenomenon instrumentally serving to rearticulate practices is overly simplistic. Other exchanges (e.g. of knowledge, feelings, affects) points to the multiplicity of ways in which we come to be attuned to alternative food. As such, whilst this attunement necessarily operates in an embodied, visceral way, I am not here suggesting that alternatives lead to 'pure' or uncorrupted relationships to food in contrast with the mainstream in a teleological fashion. Rather, attunement highlights the ways in which changing consumption habits were to a large degree irreducible solely to material judgements (echoing the previous chapter) but involved a complex range of judgements and considerations. I argue that as opposed to operating in separation from one another, the concept of attunement is helpful in illuminating the various linkages between visceral, embodied relationships to food, affective responses to food, and wider political-economic transformations. With it, we can see the body not simply as superfluous in any consideration of AFNs, but central to their prospect of 'doing' of food differently and enacting change in the foodscape.

Given this critically optimistic account, Chapter Six argues that analytical tendencies within AFN scholarship have tended to implicitly further a focus on 'good' alternatives, coalescing around a narrow range of organisations and food provisioning models. Yet, as noted previously, the austerity foodscape has also played host to a variety of other shifts which have received insufficient attention from within AFN scholarship. The archetypal organisation of the austerity foodscape is the food bank, and I also consider

a food waste initiative and a community café. Whilst readings that see them as conservative, apologist entities to the mainstream may be in some ways fair, I question whether these are the only readings that we can offer, and whether more positive lessons may be discerned from them. In seeing these other alternatives as their own 'spaces of care' in the foodscape, I argue that reading them 'for difference' rather than 'for sameness' (Gibson-Graham, 2006b) reveals a complex range of moral and affective geographies within them, coalescing around attempts to enact more just foodscapes beyond the austere here-and-now. Though I recognise that we ought not to lose sight of the material dynamics that led to their existence in the first instance, I argue that these other alternatives provide important insights into how change is enacted within foodscapes, rather than seeing positive developments as always situated on distant horizons. Taken as a whole, these three empirical chapters highlight the driving force played by AFNs in the ongoing reconfiguration between civil society and capitalist political economy.

Chapter Seven serves as an overall conclusion to the thesis. Here I reaffirm the importance of reading the austerity foodscape for difference in line with the diverse economies framework, seeing AFNs as critically optimistic spaces of possibility carrying with them a broad, and often indeterminate, range of aims and potential transformations. I re-emphasise that to read austerity as a solely material force, rearticulating food practices in line with decreased budgets leads to a thin, economistic and overly pessimistic analysis. With it, it fails to take stock of the generative potential of AFNs, which continue both *despite* austerity and in many cases proliferate as a *response* to austerity. Whilst the effects of decreased budgets are undeniably empirically verifiable in certain contexts (see the beginning of Chapter Four), the other side of the story is more complex, and often more hopeful. AFNs, as well as the other alternatives of Chapter Six, may always be read differently, and positive change is not as distant as we may tend to think. Finally, emphasising the context-specific nature of this study, I also use this overall conclusion to pose some timely provocations

surrounding upcoming potential shifts in the foodscape (and civil society more broadly) coming from other directions—particularly Brexit (see Lang et al., 2017)—in considering future research agendas in AFN scholarship.

Chapter Two

Conceptualising AFNs in the austerity foodscape: continuities, ruptures and transformations

Introduction

As a substantive review of the literature, the aims of this chapter are multiple. Firstly, I argue for the need to situate AFNs as an analytical category within a world-historical tracing. To do this, I critically engage with Marxian 'food regime' theory (Friedmann, 1987; McMichael, 2009b; Friedmann and McMichael, 1989). I suggest that 'alternatives' are a relational phenomenon, only making sense when contrasted against their mainstreams (Leyshon et al., 2003), and are increasingly important in today's *third* food regime. As a regime-in-progress, Burch and Lawrence (2009) suggest that the ways in which "this will eventually unfold [are] not yet clear" (Burch and Lawrence, 2009: 277).

Spurred by the contingency of the third regime, I secondly consider the various ways in which AFNs have been conceptualised. Primarily, I suggest that AFNs have been generally theorised as expressions of an increasingly *post-productivist* foodscape, transcending the productivist focus of maximising yields characteristic of the post-World War II context (Watts et al., 2005; Cox, 2012; Renting et al., 2003). I question the utility of these analytical binaries through an exploration of the diverse economies framework of J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006a; 2006b; 2014; 2005; 2008; see also Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). I argue that food regime theory framed AFNs as merely oppositional to a coherent and totalised system of capitalism. By comparison, the diverse economies framework problematises what Gibson-Graham describe as these *capitalocentric* tendencies which serve to understand complex phenomena solely through their relation to capitalist political economy. Capitalocentrism shores up the discursive power of capital, and the diverse economies framework instead encourages us to read it as one social relation of many, and that we have to constantly reproduce (see Katz, 2001). Whilst AFN research has benefitted heavily from incorporating the

diverse economies framework (see Sarmiento, 2017), I suggest that this framework ought to be seen as augmenting the lessons derived from food regime theory. With it, it can provide more specific and contextually-aware understandings for the emergence of AFNs within diverse economic worlds that are not solely—and thereby unidirectionally and capitalocentrically—orientated towards the 'goal' of capital accumulation.

Thirdly, given this contextually-aware conceptualisation of AFNs, I situate AFNs within the wider dynamics of the austerity foodscape of the United Kingdom. Whilst I have already touched upon some dynamics of the austerity foodscape in the main Introduction, a more thorough engagement is necessary here. This builds towards the discussion in the empirical discussion of Chapters Four to Six. Here I suggest that relationship between the entrenchment of austerity and food can be understood in multiple ways, and too many accounts have understood austerity in an overly economistic way, concerned with access to material resources (i.e. the amount of money in one's pocket). Broadening our understanding, I suggest that we can read it as a phenomenon with multiple dimensions that are ultimately *lived* (following Hitchen, 2016). In this way, the latter sections of this literature review show how overly economistic understandings of 'the economy' separate it from the social world, when they are inseparable.[4] This conceptualisation of austerity helps to frame the many shifts in the foodscape post-2008, which cannot solely be explained in material terms. As I detail, this decade has played host to other important shifts, including various significant food scandals and the proliferation of 'civil society' organisations in food provisioning

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[4] As Granovetter (1985) argues, economic theory has problematically facilitated an ontological separation of 'society' and 'economy'. These "became much more autonomous with modernization. This view sees the economy as an increasingly separate, differentiated sphere in modern society, with economic transactions defined no longer by the social or kinship obligations of those transactions but by rational calculations of individual gain. […] [I]nstead of economic life being submerged in social relations, these relations become an epiphenomenon of the market" (Granovetter, 1985: 482). Congruent with the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis, Granovetter offers 'embeddedness' as a concept to capture the thicker, more diverse and anthropologically rich relations we have with economy, rejecting the bifurcation of society on the one hand and 'the' economy on the other.

(see Crouch, 2013). Making sense of these various shifts are important if we are to see economies as spaces of active intervention, and with it consider the potential for AFNs to enact different foodscapes. First, I turn to food regime theory.

Tracing today's food regime… and the rise of 'alternatives'

Regulation theory, food regimes and the emergence of the first

The theory of food regimes was developed in the late 1980s by Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael and has gained significant theoretical traction for its explanatory potential (Friedmann, 2017). This world-historical perspective, taking a *longue dureé* approach (thereby informing more recent perspectives such as Moore, 2010; 2015; Patel and Moore, 2017), draws principally on the 'regulation theory' particularly associated with Aglietta (2000; see also Aglietta and Bai, 2014). For Aglietta, regulation theory involves an "effort to develop a theory of the regulation of capitalism which isolates the conditions, rhythms and forms of its social transformations. […] This analysis […] produce[s] general laws that are socially determinate, precisely specifying the historical conditions of their validity" (Aglietta, 2000: 15). Thereby adopting a Marxian, dialectical standpoint, Aglietta's focus—and of the school of regulation theory more broadly (see Tickell and Peck, 1995)—lies in interpreting capitalism's stability and paths to crisis in any given context; and thus the ways in which it facilitates the possibilities for continued capital accumulation (Jessop, 2001). As Skrypietz fairly notes, regulation theory is critical on two primary fronts. Firstly, it "opposes a-historical, determinist or static interpretations" (Skrypietz, 2003: 170) that has haunted some Marxian perspectives, understanding capitalism as constantly changing across time (historically) and space (geographically). Secondly, it also "rejects neo-classical economic theory on the basis of its premises and general assumptions: rational acting individuals, transparency of markets and, especially, the self-regulation of 'pure markets' towards a general equilibrium" (Skrypietz, 2003: 170-1). The promise of regulation theory for the food regime approach was, as Campbell (2009) discusses, developed at least partly in Friedmann's earlier work, particularly her doctoral research.

Importantly, however, Friedmann (2017) has suggested that regulation theory "was altered considerably to rid it of its hyper-structuralist as well as its statist elements" (Friedmann, 2017: 260) when adopted within food regime theory (c.f. Goodman and Watts, 1994). As I will show in this discussion, the extent to which food regime theory frees itself from these structuralist tendencies remains up for debate.

Beyond this earlier work, it was Friedmann and McMichael's co-authored work that led to widespread interest in food regime theory and its incorporation of strands of regulation theory. Of particular importance is a widely-discussed article published in *Sociologia Ruralis* in 1989 which aimed to examine the changing role of the state in agricultural activities (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989). Here, directly citing the influence of Aglietta, Friedmann and McMichael clearly develop the rubric of food regime theory. At its most fundamental, it "links international relations of food production and consumption to forms of accumulation broadly distinguishing periods of capitalist transformation since 1870" (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989: 95). Making 1870 the starting point for their analysis, Friedmann and McMichael theorise the existence of three specific regimes, which are worthy of consideration given their distinct characteristics within the lineage that they trace.

Given their approach favours a *longue dureé* viewpoint, it may seem surprising that 1870 is their starting point. Many considerations of agriculture precede this time (e.g. Denham et al., 2009). Yet regimes are concerned with stability, and general patterns of capital accumulation. The backdrop of this regime lies in the imperialism of European countries such as the United Kingdom, Spain and France. This point marks the "culmination of the colonial organization of precapitalist regions" (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989: 95), in contrast with accounts that focus on the initial tendrils of colonisation (c.f. Wallerstein, 2011). By 1870, colonial trading monopolies had been gradually broken down, and the 'world economy' was transforming into a more modern 'international economy' constituted by independent nation states (Atkins and Bowler,

2001). In this food regime, the internationalised economy developed through the export of 'wage foods'—i.e. wheat and meat—from colonised countries to the rapidly industrialising—and with it, urbanising—countries of Western Europe.

Importantly, food regimes do not end neatly, and hangovers linger (Pritchard, 2009). The growing need for these 'wage foods' in the first regime led to increasingly specialised production methods, particularly synthetic fertilisers (McMichael, 2010; 2011) and the plantation mode of production. Atkins and Bowler (2001) argue that the rangelands of South America today operate as quasi-plantations, albeit largely under the control of agribusiness corporations, growing 'cash crops' such as soy and palm oil, as well as cattle ranching (Kirby et al., 2006; Hoelle, 2017). Arguably one of the key strengths of food regime theory therefore lies in illuminating the continuities within the political economy of food and agriculture across divergent historical epochs.

Returning to the tracing of Friedmann and McMichael's food regimes, the first regime endured by their account for approaching half a century, ending with the onset of World War I in 1914. Given their reliance on regulation theory—which emphasises the need for historical precision within its approach—it is surprising that the reasons for the crisis of this food regime remain largely underexplored in their analysis (Bernstein, 2016). Though the international upheaval signalled by the World War is of course significant, and ought not to be dismissed as a central explanatory factor, it seems imprecise to use this as a catch-all explanation. Bernstein states that Friedmann and McMichael, disappointingly, leave us only with "a more general list of factors absorbed within" the "demise of the British-centred world economy" (Bernstein, 2016: 618). Bernstein even draws on McMichael's (2013a) more recent work to point to the ways in which the demise of the first food regime is never sufficiently clarified. For example, McMichael has recently suggested that this demise resulted from

national and imperial conflict among European states and the collapse of the gold standard. Economic depression and urban unemployment following World War I, in addition to a broad agricultural crisis in Europe resulting from cheap overseas grains, resulted in widespread protectionism. Economic nationalism in Europe and the ecological disaster of the American dust bowl sealed the fate of the frontier model of soil mining and the liberal trade of the first regime. (McMichael, 2013a: 31-2)

Though drawing on epiphenomenal dimensions of the first food regime, it is not clear why 1914 remains an obvious historical juncture for Friedmann and McMichael to choose as marking the end of the first regime. After all, the American 'dust bowl' phenomenon that McMichael cites—in which the industrialisation of agriculture, combined with drought, led to the rapid wind erosion of soil in the Southern prairies and devastating dust storms—occurred in the 1930s (Worster, 2004; Bernstein, 2016). Though 1914 is symbolic for its marking of the beginning of World War I, we might instead conceptualise the first regime as petering out more gradually over the turbulent decades that followed. Magnan (2012), for example, suggests the first regime declined between 1925 to 1945, tracing it against the falling global price of grain. But identifying when a food regime begins and ends is important. If we accept their account, there is no coherent food regime until after the end of World War II, when the second regime begins. If the three decades between the demise of the first regime and the beginning of the second is markedly solely by flux, then food regime theory can have little to say on what occurred between them. At the same time, McMichael's above recognition of dust bowls shows that events in the meantime were clearly significant. Despite these unresolved problems, and the recognition that the period spanning the two World Wars may be more important than Friedmann and McMichael consider, their analysis once again flourishes with their elucidation of the second regime.

The second regime in a post-1945 context

If the first food regime can be traced against Britain's position in the world, the second concerns American geopolitical hegemony following World War II. Continuities with the first regime remained, and the second must be understood as bringing global food production further in line with the logics of industrialised capitalism. But there were crucial differences. It was marked by divergent fates for the global North and global South (Bernstein, 2016) and the role of the state changed drastically in this regime. Compared to the first, the second saw strong state support for agricultural activities, and problems of overproduction were dealt with through international food aid directed towards the global South. This combination, however, created many problems and for brevity I consider the most important elements of the second regime.

If this regime is underpinned by American hegemony, it also emerged against a backdrop of problems facing American agriculture. The overproduction of food was a significant problem. This had implications both for farm incomes as well as for those tasked with implementing policies to mitigate it. The second regime therefore marked a significant change in approach from a governance standpoint. Rather than designing policies to decrease levels of production, the American response conversely entrenched the logic of *productivism*, emphasising gradual increases in productivity, and thus the quantity of food produced.[5] Situated in a time of rapid technological development—leading to the extensive mechanisation of food production—American agricultural policy supported the price of food through direct subsidies.[6] Protecting farm incomes

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[5] For example, mandatory policies introduced by the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1988 compensated farmers for 'setting-aside' land in agricultural production. This was hoped to increase biodiversity and soil health (Ward, 1993; Sotherton, 1998; Van Buskirk and Willi, 2004).

[6] This period was later labelled as the 'Green Revolution'. As Farmer (1986) states, the Green Revolution's productivist emphasis led to the wider introduction of "new, high-yielding varieties (HYVs) of cereals, especially dwarf wheats and rices, in association with chemical fertilizers and agro-chemicals, and with controlled water-supply (usually involving irrigation) and new methods of cultivation, including mechanization" (Farmer, 1986: 175-6). Despite the name, the Green Revolution carried a variety of social and ecological costs, demonstrated here (see also Shiva, 2016; Horlings and Marsden, 2011).

in this way partly overcame the problems of excessive supply, at least with regards to ensuring the commercial viability of American agriculture. But (and unsurprisingly) this policy led to further overproduction, and the other conundrum to be solved was what to do with all the surplus food itself. Legislation passed in America in 1948 and 1953 redirected these surpluses both to post-war Europe and the global South under the banner of 'food aid' (Bernstein, 2016). Elsewhere, the second regime has been dubbed the *surplus regime* (see Pechlaner and Otero, 2010): ironically, the central problem of this regime was what to do with *too much food*.

Though more comprehensive overviews of food aid have been offered elsewhere (see Singer et al., 1987), Uvin (1992) notes that these programmes have historically been enacted with self-interest of the aiding nation in mind. In the American case, their distribution of surplus was met with open arms by many governments in the global South. After all, there was no reason to turn down these offerings. The unintended consequence of this, however, was "at the cost of their domestic food [production]" (Bernstein, 2016: 620), facilitating relations of dependency (Vengroff, 1982; Friedmann, 1982; Holt Giménez and Shattuck, 2011).[7] Though food regime theory has been argued to have little to say with regards to agrarian change in these newly import-dependent areas of the global South, the second regime revealed the geographically uneven nature of historical agricultural development (Marsden et al., 1992).[8] This increasingly discordant relationship between the global North and South has had longstanding effects (McMichael, 2009b).

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[7] There are important exceptions to this tendency, for example India (see Friedmann, 2009).

[8] The global South has become increasingly contentious in food regime theory in recent years. Spurred partly by Araghi's (1995) wider discussion of global (de)peasantisation, McMichael (2008) has attempted to bring in the (largely invisible) peasant class to food regime theory, later critiqued by Bernstein (2014) and responded to by McMichael (2015).

The final dimension I consider relates to the demise of this regime. As Atkins and Bowler consider, the second food regime played host to the extensive "restructuring of agricultural sectors by agro-food capitals to supply mass markets" (Atkins and Bowler, 2001: 27), which is key in the move to the third regime. Contradictorily, protectionist US agricultural policy came to be contrasted against the increasing liberalisation of trade and globalising flows of capital. Indeed, processes of globalisation allowed for the emergence of transnational agro-food complexes (McMichael and Myhre, 1991). As Friedmann and McMichael note, agriculture in the first food regime "provid[ed] raw materials to industries doing minimal processing ([e.g.] flour mills, meat preservation)" (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989: 102). By comparison, the second regime played host to the "increasing separation and mediation by capital of each stage between raw material inputs and final consumption" (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989: 113). These 'stages' increasingly framed agriculture as providing a series of 'inputs' for 'value added' processing (Arce and Marsden, 1993). Therefore, these complexes coalesced in various, subtly differentiated ways in Friedmann and McMichael's original formulation: as an "intensive meat complex", a "meat/soy/maize complex"; a "durable […] foods complex" (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989: 106-8) substituting "tropical sugars and vegetable oils [for] sweeteners made from grain and soy oil respectively" (Bernstein, 2016: 619), continuing to today's 'biofuel complex' (Borras et al., 2010; see also McMichael, 2009a; 2010; 2012a; Otero, 2012; Dixon, 2009; Richards and Lyons, 2016). These complexes tie together seemingly distinct commodities.

Considering the demise of the second regime, we could do worse than revisiting Friedmann's (1993) subsequent account. Compared with the first, the second regime receives a more satisfactory theorisation, and its defining moment lies in what Friedmann terms "the Atlantic pivot" where "the corporate organization of a transnational agro-food complex [came to be] centred on the Atlantic economy" (Friedmann, 1993: 36, cited in Berstein, 2016: 620). With these transnational linkages now solidified in agro-food complexes, a "fault line" (Bernstein, 2016: 621) developed

between national economies and these globalised flows of capital. Other events of the early 1970s signalled the death knell of the second regime, ringing more loudly and clearly than any causal factor in the demise of the first. Grain deals struck between the US and USSR in the early to mid-1970s were particularly important. The USSR behaved unexpectedly in these deals, buying much more wheat than predicted, causing the price of American wheat to skyrocket by 195% within a year (Eckstein and Heien, 1978). The entrenchment of agro-food 'complexes' discussed above meant that the price of other crops also increased drastically, raising meat prices (Luttrell, 1973).

Though American agricultural policy had attempted to protect farmers throughout this period, these rising prices led to a range of irreconcilable tensions. Farm debt rose drastically throughout the 1970s, and agriculture gradually lost its central position within US trade policy (Friedmann, 1993). Rising oil prices also caused state debt around the world to grow in the 1970s. This lead to the abandonment of state support programmes for agriculture (Hooks, 1990).[9] At the same time, competition from NACs—"New Agricultural Countries […] in world markets [such as] Brazil" (Bernstein, 2016: 622) eroded US hegemony. As Friedmann recognises, these NACs "*replicated and modernized* the US model of state organized agrofood production" (Friedmann, 1993: 46, emphasis in original). Therefore, the later stages of the second regime (akin, ironically, to the first) are characterised by growing competition amongst a range of export-driven countries. Many elements of the second regime continue today: for example, the export of cheap poultry from NACs (e.g. Brazil) to Europe continues to intensify (Constance and Heffernan, 1991; Hoelle, 2017). More generally, a productivist ethic continues to undergird much contemporary agriculture (and

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[9] The role of supranational institutions in promoting trade liberalisation is also significant: for example the development of the General Agreement on Tariffs (GATT) in a post-war context, and latterly the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995 (Bernstein, 2016: 623). Though the establishment of the WTO postdates Friedmann and McMichael's (1989) analysis, this has been considered in greater depth in recent accounts (see, for example, van der Ploeg, 2010).

agricultural policy) around the world (Lawrence et al., 2013), which I consider in greater depth later in this chapter.

The development of the third regime

With nation states "wind[ing] down […] support for agriculture" (Atkins and Bowler, 2001: 29) as the 1970s progressed, Friedmann and McMichael's original formulation is concluded rather tentatively. They trace the regimes through an "overriding shift […] from state to capital as the dominant structuring force" (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989: 112), as well as seeing a growing incoherence. Rather opaquely, they suggest that "not only is agriculture no longer a coherent sector, but even food is not" (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989: 112). We are left in this original formulation on a theoretical cliff-hanger as to the path the next food regime may take.

It is therefore only in later food regime analysis that the dynamics of the third regime have received a more substantive theorisation (e.g. Friedmann, 2005a; McMichael, 2010). They cite the late 1980s as the point where the third regime coalesced, enduring to the present day. McMichael (2009b) has remained wary of imbuing this regime with the same degree of primacy as the previous two. Pointing to its contested status, McMichael tellingly asks "whether this [regime] is actually a full-fledged, or incipient food regime, or simply a hangover from the previous regime" (McMichael, 2009b: 142). By comparison, Friedmann asserts the legitimacy of the third regime, suggesting "that a *corporate-environmental food regime* is emerging as part of a larger restructuring of capitalism" (Friedmann, 2005b: 229, emphasis mine). Though I will consider why Friedmann labels the third regime as such, what is important for the time being is recognising this regime's contested status (Levidow, 2015).

Elsewhere, McMichael is more assertive on the specificity of the third regime. However, he prefers the simplified label of a *corporate food regime* (McMichael, 2012b; 2013b; see also Goodman and Sage, 2014b; Holt Giménez and Shattuck, 2011;

Hill, 2015). In emphasising the power of corporate agri-business within the foodscape (Bové and Dufour, 2001), this crystallises earlier discussions of increasing trade liberalisation. Scrinis, by comparison, subtly adjusts this in theorising it as a "techno-corporate" (Scrinis, 2007: 131) regime, emphasising the increasing role of biotechnology, notably Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), in the foodscape. Though biotechnology is clearly significant, it is not clear how Scrinis' imprecise prefix augments our analysis. After all, the incorporation of technological advancements (broadly defined) into food production is nothing new, and certainly not specific to this regime. Indeed, we might suggest that the 'techno' descriptor is in fact more fundamental to the Green Revolution of the second regime.

To complicate matters, others have eschewed this label in favour of the *neoliberal food regime* (Otero, 2012; Pechlaner and Otero, 2008; 2010; Wolf and Bonanno, 2014; Potter and Tilzey, 2005; Potter and Westall, 2013; McMichael, 2009c; 2016). Though the 'corporate' and 'neoliberal' elements of today's food regime are interrelated (Alkon and Guthman, 2017), they ought not be conflated. On the one hand, the corporate food regime captures the increasingly vertically-integrated nature of monopolised global food supply chains by agribusiness (Holt Giménez and Altieri, 2012). The neoliberal food regime, on the other, captures the changing policy and regulatory atmosphere conferred by shifts in the political and economic organisation of many societies around the world in the mid-1980s, interrelated with the increasingly financialised nature of globalised capitalism—tendencies that food itself has not escaped (Field, 2016; Russi, 2013). These complexities further highlight the contested status of the third regime.

In terms of Friedmann and McMichael's development of the third regime, only a few years after their original work Friedmann suggests that agrofood corporations have "now outgrown the regime that spawned them" (Friedmann, 1993: 52). Giants such as Monsanto, Syngenta and Bayer who dominate the global agrofood landscape had become more powerful than the states that played such a profound role in the second

regime, now representing key actors in patterns of capital accumulation. Yet a closer look at the operations of these corporations reveals a growing chasm between 'agriculture' and 'food' as two distinct categories. In terms of agriculture, Friedmann paints a gloomy picture: "farmers have declined in numbers and unity, and workers have lost some of their bargaining power with agrofood corporations" (Friedmann, 1993: 54). It is only those producers who have managed to successfully 'scale up' their operations who can survive—taking advantage of economies of scale—as well as a restructured labour market, exemplified in an increasing reliance on migrant labour. Developing a previous point, relationships to food itself also shift. Taking a leaf out of the Frankfurt School's book (see Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997), Friedmann suggests that "consumers in the [third] food regime have been constructed by agrifood corporations to desire first standard foods, and then exotic foods from the entire globe" (Friedmann, 1993: 54). As May (1996) argues, the introduction of 'exotic' foods from other cultures into everyday life—primarily as a result of technological developments in supply chain logistics—placates the critique of the otherwise banal standardisation of food in the third regime by these agrofood corporations (see also Cook and Crang, 1996; Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007). This highlights another important dynamic of the third regime: growing consumer fragmentation and dietary change amidst pluralising "strateg[ies] of cultural distinction" (May, 1996: 61; see also Bourdieu, 2010).

To summarise, we can theorise the third regime as being distinct from the second regime on five interrelated points: (1) increasingly globalised food supply chains; (2) growing power disparities between the state, its regulatory mechanisms and transnational agrofood/agribusiness corporations; (3) capital as gravitating ever further towards food over agriculture; (4) the emergence of biotechnology such as GMOs; (5) as per the above availability of 'exotic' food, dietary change (often carrying extensive ecological costs through carbon-intensive supply chains (Urry, 2010)). Yet one crucial piece of the puzzle remains, which is critical both for our understanding of food regime theory, as

well as the framing of this thesis: where are 'alternatives' in this account, and how ought we conceptualise them? We can take Friedmann's labelling of the third regime as a corporate-environmental regime as a springboard to consider this.

Given the pessimistic outlook that so far circulates around the third food regime, the consideration of alternatives offers a more hopeful rejoinder. Alternatives can, very broadly, be understood here as attempts to enact different relationships to food (Dowler et al., 2010). As Campbell and Dixon (2009) note, food regime theory partly derives from a theoretical tradition which has tended to further a "culture of pessimism […] [in the face of] the broader structural forces of capitalism" (Campbell and Dixon, 2009: 264). For them, the growing theoretical space provided to alternatives in the third food regime by Friedmann and McMichael—as well as those that draw upon their work—highlights a more optimistic orientation.[10] As they elucidate, food regime theory

> [S]how[s] that *the system can change*—that is, the key structuring relationships at the heart of a food regime can be reset, inverted or emerge in totally new forms. While the second food regime has unarguably rendered as many injustices as the first, it equally unarguably generated sufficient countervailing forces to reinforce the possibility that the politics of contemporary food regimes and the transitions between them are still contingent, contested and politically open to multiple potential outcomes. (Campbell and Dixon, 2009: 264, emphasis in original)

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[10] It is worth recognising that Friedmann and McMichael's (1989) conceptualisation of the second regime is almost entirely blind to the existence of social movements given their focus on the state. By comparison, numerous accounts have noted the presence of social movements during the height of the second regime (see, for example, Buttel, 2001; Belasco, 2006; Haydu, 2011; Haydu and Skotnicki, 2016; Smith, 2006). This critique does not serve to discredit Friedmann and McMichael's conceptualisation of the differing regimes entirely, but we can understand the increasing focus on alternatives in the third regime as an *intensification* of processes that have longer lineages than they initially posit.

This perspective helps us to make sense of Friedmann's understanding of the third regime as a corporate-environmental regime. For her, whilst the corporatisation of the food supply is one clearly recognisable dimension, the 'countervailing forces' that Campbell and Dixon discuss are articulating more positive elements within this regime. As she suggests:

> A new round of accumulation appears to be emerging in the agrofood sector, based on selective appropriation of demands by environmental movements, and including issues pressed by fair trade, consumer health, and animal welfare activists. […] [Ultimately] a green environmental regime, and thus green capitalism, arises as a response to pressures by social movements. (Friedmann, 2005b: 228-30)

For Friedmann, the pressure enacted by these social movements re-articulates capital accumulation. This perspective echoes what Polanyi (1944) theorises as a 'double movement, whereby the extension of free markets is dialectically met with growing resistance from social movements. Friedmann is therefore surprisingly optimistic around capitalism's ability to operate free of these ills, whilst for others—including McMichael (see, in particular, 2012b) and other more Marxian perspectives (Patel and Moore, 2017)—these are a necessary condition of its operation. Indeed, for Jason W. Moore (2015), continued capital accumulation is only possible if these 'bads' remain externalised, removed from balance sheets and absorbed in geographically uneven—and ecologically destructive—ways. On a similarly sceptical note, the brief discussion of conventionalisation in the main Introduction shows how capitalism can co-opt, and thereby negate, these critiques at a surface level (Latour, 2004) whilst continuing to foster deeply destructive tendencies elsewhere (see, for example, Hoelle's (2017) consideration of cattle ranching in the Amazon rainforest).

Though Friedmann may suggest that the corporate-environmental regime has not quite yet manifested, the neat incorporation of all pro-'environmental' critiques into a new regime of capital accumulation does not explain the persistent attempts to enact alternatives. Whilst we ought not to dismiss the progression of food regimes in more positive directions, Friedmann's articulation is ultimately misguided. Instead, we must develop a theoretical position that avoids both framing capitalism as all-powerful, whilst also recognising its systemic ability to co-opt and incorporate critiques. The next section of this literature review treads this delicate line in developing our understanding of AFNs. Through providing important historical insight, food regime theory's structuralist tendencies have led to relatively narrow conceptualisations of what AFNs aim towards (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). Expanding their remit, and following Martindale *et al.*'s (2018) call to see *varieties of alterity* in AFNs, I use this discussion as a way in to introducing the diverse economies framework most notably associated with the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006b). I argue that the diverse economies framework can augment food regime theory, recognising the intricate relations between capitalism and political economies of food without descending into deterministic and totalising framings of capitalism's logics.

Making sense of varieties of alterity in AFNs

As discussed so far, though attempts to 'do' food differently gain greater traction in the third regime, what is it that more precisely casts them out as 'alternative'? What do we mean by 'food' here, and in what way ought we understand their 'networked' dimension? These are questions that I intend to answer here, as well as considering what AFNs are not. However, a brief overview of literature review reveals subtle differences between AFNs, Alternative Food Initiatives (AFIs), Alternative Agro-Food Networks (AAFNs), Local Food Networks (LFNs), Local Food Systems (LFS), Community Food Systems (CFS) (see variously D. Goodman, 2004; Levkoe, 2011; Martinez, 2010; Blay-Palmer et al., 2016; Psarikidou and Szerszynski, 2012a). Given this proliferation, I make some generalisations for the sake of brevity, otherwise a much longer review

would be required. Firstly, I trace the emergence of an alternative/conventional distinction in agriculture, which primarily emerged not from food regime theory but instead out of American sociology of the environment. From then on, I consider the influence of French economic sociology in Actor-Network Theory (ANT) on AFNs.

American environmental thought, emerging primarily in the 1960s, has had significant (if implicit) influence on the development of AFN scholarship. As responses both to the Green Revolution and American geopolitical hegemony, texts such as Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) led to a step-change in public opinion on pesticides, particularly the widespread usage of DDT in crop production, whilst Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* (1971) argued the environmental case for the uptake of vegetarianism. Perspectives such as these were bolstered by predictions for the future in this period—notably the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* (see Meadows et al., 1972) report—which emphasised that 'business as usual' was no longer an option. Humanity was rapidly exhausting the resources of the planet which sustains its existence. Academic developments of this era mirrored these critical perspectives. Of particular relevance when considering a tracing of AFN scholarship is the work of William Catton and Riley Dunlap (Catton and Dunlap, 1978a; 1980; Dunlap and Catton, 1994b; 1994a; see also Catton, 1982; Dunlap, 2002), who together argued that an 'environmental sociology' represented a new paradigm of scholarship (Catton and Dunlap, 1978b). Central to their theorisation was a distinction between what they termed the Human Exemptionalist Paradigm (HEP) of thought, and the need to develop a New Ecological Paradigm (NEP). For them, the HEP had long inflected Western thought, giving humans a unique status in the world as 'exempt' from irrational ecological forces which were the concern of lesser beings (a Judeo-Christian notion, see Catton and Dunlap, 1978a). Indeed, Catton and Dunlap saw the abundance the West was enjoying in this period as emblematic of the HEP, "fueled both by New World resources and new technologies providing access to the earth's seemingly vast supply of fossil fuels" (Catton and

Dunlap, 1980: 17; see also Malm, 2016). Not only are these relations violent, they are ultimately finite.

Though these earlier works remained broad in their remit, Dunlap himself, though as a secondary co-author, published an article in 1990 which confronted 'conventional' and 'alternative' paradigms of agriculture (Beus and Dunlap, 1990). For them, alternatives are understood as paradigmatically different, diametrically opposed to conventional tendencies. Though the authors recognise that "defining [alternatives] […] is difficult due to the tremendous diversity of this group" (Beus and Dunlap, 1990: 594), they identify a range of agricultures which occupy this position. These include, but are not limited to, "organic agriculture, sustainable agriculture, regenerative agriculture, ecoagriculture, permaculture, bio-dynamics, agroecology, natural farming, low-input agriculture, and others" (Beus and Dunlap, 1990: 594). As a diverse category, they recognise that whilst differing in their approaches, they "nonetheless appear to have much in common including a shared underlying philosophy" (Beus and Dunlap, 1990: 594). This must be understood with reference to the HEP/NEP dualism. For them, the HEP allowed for the proliferation of agriculture in the second food regime around the "core values of economic growth and domination of nature" (Beus and Dunlap, 1990: 592), whilst alternatives are conversely understood as congruent with the NEP—in doing so "reject[ing] the idea that nature exists primarily for human use" (Beus and Dunlap, 1990: 592) as an inert 'resource' (see also Ingold, 2000; Mukerji, 2002; Katz, 1992).

Though rural sociology and political economy perspectives had, at that point, already contributed to analyses of agriculture, the lack of any substantive references to 'alternatives' in the reference list of Beus and Dunlap's work (with the sole exception of Lockeretz, 1986) suggests that they were treading new ground. Instead, their primary influences lie in environmental philosophy (see Aiken, 1984; Drengson, 1985; Conviser, 1984). Therefore whilst food regime theory see alternatives as emerging as

oppositional political-economic formations, Beus and Dunlap take a more philosophical and ethically-orientated viewpoint. Framed through the HEP/NEP paradigms—"prominent worldview[s] […] through which […] a society interpret[s] the meaning of the external world" (Pirages and Ehrlich, 1974: 43; see also Kuhn, 1970)—alternatives here develop idealistically (rather than purely materially), forging their own paradigm of agriculture. Indeed, Beus and Dunlap contrast these two paradigms through five different criteria, which are summarised in Table 1.

	Mainstream agriculture	Alternative agriculture
Centralisation and decentralisation of agricultural production	• Transnational production, enabled through lengthy food supply chains. 'Food from nowhere' (see Bové and Dufour, 2001) • Concentration of producers • Concentration of control over land, resources and capital	• Shorter food supply chains, often more localised production (though see discussion later in chapter). 'Food from somewhere' (Bové and Dufour, 2001) • Dispersion of producers • Dispersion of land, resources and capital
Dependence and independence	• Large-scale production • Capital, energy and input-intensive • Strong orientation to, and dependence on, market-exchange • Reliance on 'expert' specialised scientific knowledge, dislocated from settings in which it is applied	• Small-scale production • Reduced reliance on capital, energy and inputs • Pluralisation of economic logics, e.g. 'economies of regard' (Lee, 2000), though rarely entirely separate from/outside of market-exchange • Pluralisation of knowledges, embracing local/tacit/lay forms, as well as drive towards reversing historical processes of deskilling in agriculture (see Jaffe and Gertler, 2006)
Competition and community	• Self-interest; farming as a business • Traditions and rural community an anachronism • Minimisation of labour inputs desirable	• Emphasis on co-operation; business as a means to other ends • Preservation of traditions; farming as a way of life • Agricultural labour as important, meaningful, non-

	• *Productivist* emphasis: speed, quantity/yields, profit	alienated (Myers and Sbicca, 2015) • *Post-productivist* emphasis: slowness, quality, community
Relationship with nature	• Humans as separate from, and superior over, nature • Nature as a series of resources to be exploited • 'Metabolic rift' of geographical energy flows between site of production and consumption (see Foster, 1999) • Production sustained by synthetic inputs, i.e. pesticides and fertilisers • Processed, nutrient-fortified food	• Humans as part of nature, a co-constituting relationship • Nature valued for its own sake • Attempts to mitigate metabolic rift of geographical energy flows • Natural ecosystems imitated, reducing inputs and seeing natural forces as something to be worked with as opposed to manipulated • Minimal processing of food, naturally nutritious
Specialisation and diversity	• Narrow genetic base, crops grown in monocultures • Arable/pastoral distinction • Standardised production systems	• Broad genetic base, crops grown on rotation in polycultures • Mixed production systems, arable/pastoral distinction less present • Locally adapted production systems, see above with reference to emphasis on different knowledges across mainstream/alternative paradigms

(Table 1, adapted and modified from Beus and Dunlap, 1990: 598)

Beus and Dunlap's outlining is helpful, and with extensive breadth. However, moving this discussion forward, their account is problematic on two fronts. Firstly, their focus is on agriculture rather than food. As I have already noted, these are irreducible to one another. Consequently, Beus and Dunlap's position unwittingly furthers this division, thereby bypassing any engagement with a growing body of anthropologically-inflected sociology of consumption literature engaging with food, such as Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* ([1984] 2010). Indeed, it took a surprisingly long time for AFN research to bridge these important theoretical gaps (Tovey, 1997). Secondly, it is worth

emphasising that in Beus and Dunlap's account they do not go beyond 'alternatives'. The conceptual AFN label is only developed in later scholarship, following productive encounters with Actor-Network Theory (ANT) in the 1990s, to which my attention now turns.

From alternatives to AFNs: the primacy of the network

The progression from the paradigmatic conceptualisation of alternatives and mainstreams (as static, opposing framings) to the AFN as a networked entity is an important step. After all, why ought we understand AFNs as networks rather than, for example, *systems*, as in the CFS label? To understand this, we must trace the influence of ANT (see Latour and Woolgar, 1986; Callon et al., 1986; Law and Mol, 2002; Castells, 2000; Mol et al., 2010) on AFN scholarship.

Of particular note in this incorporation of ANT was Whatmore and Thorne's (1997) influential work, which frames AFNs as 'nourishing networks'. By comparison to the structuralist Marxian political economy of food regime theory, this ANT-informed perspective instead sees a world constituted by ontologically flattened *networks*. This ontological, as well as methodological, understanding aims to avoid prioritising certain 'actants' as possessing greater agency than any other. In doing so, ANT destabilises anthropocentric tendencies in social theory that sees the human as the only being with agency in the world. Instead, ANT sees agency as distributed amongst these networks, with it shifting understandings of power away from the verticalist (top-down) conceptualisations of Marxian perspectives. As they explain, this

> involves the elaboration of a *topological* spatial imagination concerned with tracing points of connection and lines of flow, as opposed to reiterating fixed surfaces and boundaries. […] [This approach therefore] elaborate[s] an understanding of global networks as performative orderings (always in the

making), rather than as systemic entities (always already constituted). (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997: 212, emphasis in original)

Hence we can see an important distinction emerging between networks as continually in-the-making versus static, pre-formed systems. Whatmore and Thorne take inspiration from Latour's suggestion that "the two extremes, local and global, are much less interesting than the intermediary arrangements that we are calling networks" (Latour, 2002: 122). Thinking with networks therefore encourages an analysis operating at the *meso* level, an 'in between' space prioritising the connections between the micro and the macro (Tregear, 2011). In lingering in this flattened ontology, this meso-level emphasis breaks down the "geography of surfaces" (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997: 214) characterising the Marxian worldview. In moving away from understandings that see fixed relations at the macro level, they instead shift towards a "geography of flows" (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997: 214). This understanding has been particularly influential in Cook's 'follow the thing' approach (see Cook *et al*, 2004), which attempts to follow specific commodities (e.g. papaya, Cook's original focus, later broadened (see Cook *et al*, 2006; 2017; Cook and Harrison, 2007)) through food supply chains to see how these chains are consistently performed and thereby reproduced. In 'following the thing', this approach highlights the complex array of actants involved in these chains: not just human, but variously material, technological and legal. This is an approach that Evans (2018a) argues can, but has so far failed to be, productively applied in more intimate contexts such as the household. More generally, however, this important move from surfaces to flows via ANT in the conceptualisation of AFNs helps to avoid a reductive analysis that sees power as something 'held' in one location and instead envisages networks as involving a mass of multidimensional currents; constituted by flows with varying degrees of permanence and stability. With it, this viewpoint sees food supply chains not as monolithic entities but only sustained by the ongoing, and always contingent, 'in process' orchestration of various actants.

The visibility of the legacy of ANT varies throughout the AFN literature, though it continues to be productively applied. For example, Hopkinson (2017) traces the way in which markets come to be 'made' for certain foods (versus economistic accounts that erroneously paint markets as 'natural' (see Callon, 1999)) explicitly embracing these influences. Importantly, as Hopkinson argues, ANT encourages us to see the relational boundary dividing alternatives and their mainstreams as always open to change: in this sense, it does not make sense to speak of either without recognising their co-constitution. Hence, for her, seeing conventional and alternatives as paradigmatically distinct (as in Beus and Dunlap) is unhelpful. By way of example, her study of 'rose veal'—meat from male dairy calves which would have previously been slaughtered at birth—in a British context reveals the various actors that must coalesce to create viable commercial markets for certain foodstuffs. Hopkinson therefore understands all relationships to food as involving "continuous processes of alternativisation and mainstreaming" (Hopkinson, 2017: 19) within specific contexts. Whilst the market for rose veal had to be created in a British context, in much of continental Europe it has longer histories as a significantly more mainstream foodstuff. Further, given this discussion, it is also worth noting how contemporary ANT-informed AFN scholarship is more comfortable in discussing relationships to food than is the case in Beus and Dunlap's work, which offers a more agricultural focus.

Given the focus on topological networked flows in ANT, its broad understanding of who (or what) has agency—and how it comes to do so—is both its greatest strength and weakness. Without devolving to anthropocentrism, Carolan (2011) argues that ANT must be synthetically (and sympathetically) combined with other theoretical viewpoints in conceptualising AFNs. After all, for Carolan, in these accounts "one is often hard-pressed to hear from *actual* bodies, in terms of how they think and feel" (Carolan, 2011: 9, emphasis in original). Returning to Hopkinson's consideration of rose veal, there is little to no understanding in this account of our visceral bodies and affective responses to certain foods. Yet as the visceral geographies approach—developed particularly by

Jessica Hayes-Conroy and Allison Hayes-Conroy (2010; 2013), and expanded upon in detail in Chapter Five—recognises, the body plays a crucial role in mediating all relationships to food (hence food's aforementioned reasonably unique status as an 'intimate commodity' (Winson, 1993)). Indeed, for Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, and in congruence with Carolan's above critique of ANT, diets and what we take as 'normal', 'good' or 'bad' food (a non-exhaustive list of adjectives) is not only a question of culture but is irrevocably linked to wider political economies. As they argue (particularly in J. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013), the visceral body becomes *attuned* to certain political economies of food, seeing our relationship to any given food as (bio-)socially mediated, i.e. an amalgamation of biological, sociological and historical forces, belying these divergent disciplinary epistemologies. As Chapter Five suggests, the body ought never to be treated as a mere afterthought in shifting political economies of food, instead key in understanding these processes and of wider changes in relationships to food.

(Post-)productivism, the 'quality turn' and the politics of scale

Whilst ANT-informed conceptualisations of AFNs in the late 1990s furthered many of these debates considerably, ANT has not been without its critics beyond the problem of embodiment discussed above. More fundamentally, its contested relationship with critique itself is drawn to the fore in Whittle and Spicer's (2008) account. For them, "ANT is first and foremost a call for close empirical study of associations" (Whittle and Spicer, 2008: 623), echoed in Latour's own assertion that it is fundamentally a 'sociology of associations' (see Latour, 2005). As a result, Whittle and Spicer are critical of the ability of ANT to offer any critique at all, though recognise its utility as a theoretical approach.

Yet important debates emerging after the turn of the Millennium revealed the limits of ANT within AFN scholarship. ANT, as in Whatmore and Thorne's (1997) previously discussed formulation, importantly recognised that the 'nourishing networks' of AFNs

tended to operate through shorter supply chains. 'Shorter' can here be understood in two ways: both geographically (i.e. spatially) and in terms of the number of actors involved (i.e. 'points' or 'nodes' in the network) in food reaching end consumers from its point of production. Yet ANT's contribution to understanding a general, historical shift within the literature from what was understood as an important move from productivism to the slippery notion of *post-productivism* (see, in particular, Shucksmith, 1993) seemed limited. Indeed, there was a resurgence of more heavily political-economic accounts attempting to understand the historical shift from productivism (as aligned to the second food regime, focusing on quantity over quality, operating at an expansive scale) to post-productivism in the third regime and its proliferation of alternatives operating at smaller scales.

In rejecting some of the central tenets of the second regime, the diagnosis of post-productivism was closely aligned to other accounts that saw an emergent 'quality turn' in relationships to food (Goodman, 2003; Watts et al., 2005; Parrott et al., 2002; Morris and Kirwan, 2011). As Hughes summarises, the quality turn was deployed to capture a newly found "re-emphasis on quality and trust [being] visible […] [in] the exchange and distribution of food" (Hughes, 2005: 498). At least in the United Kingdom, this 'turn' can be understood through important contextual factors. For example, public health concerns around the safety of meat (following bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or 'mad cow' disease, crises) and outbreaks of 'foot and mouth' disease in the early 2000s had enormous impacts on many farmers and for rural economies more broadly (Winter, 2003). The quality turn was therefore simultaneously a response to the vicissitudes of the mainstream, as well as a call to support local, rural, as well as regional economies (Maye and Ilbery, 2006; Hjelmar, 2011). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this triad of post-productivism, quality and locality became analytically indistinct in many accounts amidst a growing interest in the empowerment of these economies (for example, Feagan, 2007; Seyfang, 2006; Sims, 2009; Tregear, 2011). Often, as in Parrott *et al.*'s (2002) account, 'local' becomes directly equated with

45

'quality', inculcated within a wider recognition of post-productivist foodscapes. Given the limited space that I have here, I do not pretend to offer an account which considers the many ways in which these labels came to be combined in this period, instead recognising the many resonances between them (Evans et al., 2002).

If improved 'quality' goes hand-in-hand with smaller-scale, and localised, patterns of production within these post-productivist framings, these debates also served to bring to the fore the contested politics of scale itself. Whilst not discussing food specifically, Pickerill and Chatterton argue that the issue of scale in any attempt to enact alternatives remains a distinctly "thorny issue" (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 486). That is, and echoing previous discussions of processes of 'conventionalisation' (Fonte, 2008), the 'scaling up' of alternatives risks them becoming more closely aligned to the mainstream (Beckie et al., 2012; Sage, 2003). Critical perspectives have suggested (for example Wilson, 2013) that alternatives are always destined to remain operating at a smaller scale in this post-productivist fashion, then questions must be raised about their ability to enact any substantive change in relations to food. Of course, post-productivism attempted to capture more—such as the diversification of farm activities and extensification of production (Atkins and Bowler, 2001)—but it become something of a byword for a changing relationship with scale.

Whilst deeply important, responses to the productivist/post-productivist binary within AFN literature have varied. Many accounts have adopted the post-productivist label in characterising AFNs, though others have recognised its empirical limitations (e.g. Evans et al., 2002; Wilson and Rigg, 2003). After all, these binaries struggle to capture the complexities of empirical reality. Short and Winter (1999) therefore conversely suggest tendencies towards geographically 'constrained productivism', problematising a simplistic binary of productivism and (a linear transition towards) post-productivism. Indeed, within today's third food regime, we can identify many modes of agriculture that might fairly be described as productivist, though these are complemented by

smaller, post-productivist efforts. Additionally, Wilson and Rigg (2003) suggest that the productivist/post-productivist debate is deeply Eurocentric, with limited theoretical and empirical traction in other areas including much, if not all, of the global South (see also Argent, 2002).

Others have seeked to defend post-productivism. Mather *et al*. (2006) warn against dismissing it outright, suggesting that it fairly "characteris[es] rural land use at the end of the 20th century in parts of the developed world" (Mather et al., 2006: 441). Crucially, the crux of Mather *et al*.'s point lies in recognising the situated nature of these understandings. Also emphasising geographical variability, Maye and Ilbery suggest in their study of the Scottish—English border region that "local specialist producers have created 'niche spaces' *within* the overall food system […] [entailing that] any rigid distinction between alternative and conventional economies is thus problematic" (Maye and Ilbery, 2006: 338, emphasis in original). Again, such a perspective is important in highlighting contextual specificities and the diversity of economies. Therefore, whilst these theoretical developments have been deeply important in shaping AFN literature, we must avoid narrowly re-reading empirical detail through these overly generalising, and consequently problematic, binaries. To do this, I turn my attention to the diverse economies framework, which is crucial in underpinning the argument I outline across Chapters Four to Six.

Thinking economy differently

Through recognising the variety of alterity in AFNs—i.e. that what gives AFNs their 'alternative' character itself varies—I have problematised food regime theory's tendency to capitalocentrically conceptualise AFNs as occupying a purely oppositional position. With this critique in mind, it is worth introducing the diverse economies framework. This has developed out of the work by Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson under their shared pen name J.K. Gibson-Graham (most notably in 2006b). I suggest that this framework further pluralises AFNs, both as phenomena that engage *with*

capitalism alongside other, qualitatively different economies in the social world. As Yang (2000) suggests, capitalism does not simply 'penetrate' the world and structure it in line with its logic autonomously, and perspectives from within economic anthropology have long drawn our attention to the multiple, general economies at work in the world (Bataille, 2008).

Central to the diverse economies framework is the tactic (adopted from poststructuralist and post-Marxian queer theory) of 'reading for difference', which is contrasted from reading 'for sameness' and repeating familiar narratives of domination. As Iveson suggests, reading for difference can therefore be understood as "a project of theorising nascent formations in order to make their practices and promises visible" (Iveson, 2010: 436-7). This tactic encourages us to recognise diversity and act "as subjects who can imagine and enact a new economic politics" (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: xxviii) rather than repeat problematically capitalocentric readings of sameness. To expand on the previous definition of capitalocentrism, these "tendenc[ies] [serve] to represent economy as a space of invariant logics and automatic unfolding that offered no field for intervention"; by contrast the diverse economies framework encourages us to see not a "singular capitalist system or space [but] rather [...] a zone of cohabitation and contestation among multiple economic forms" (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: xi). Gibson-Graham highlight this particularly powerfully with reference to the discursive power of neoliberalism, which some food regime theorists see as central to today's food regime (e.g. Pechlaner and Otero, 2008). As they suggest

> 'neoliberalism' is an approach to economic regulation that emerges from a single economic tradition, presenting a *particular* understanding of the economy, presuming a *particular* economic subject, and focusing on enhancing *particular* types of economic practices—capitalist market practices, to be precise. As a hegemonic particularity, it has set the global regulatory agenda for the past decade or more, obscuring and often destroying local economic

practices devalued as traditional or parochial, or invisible as nonmarket and noncapitalist. (Gibson-Graham, 2003a: 52, emphases in original)

This framework encourages us to recognise *particular* (rather than general or universal) market-driven relations that underpin capitalist political economy, including its contemporary neoliberal variants, as only one subset of broader economic relations. In doing so, it prompts us to think about how we might 'value' devalued or marginalised economic practices beyond narrow the narrow goal of capital accumulation. Of course, the point is not to use this framework to romanticise and/or uncritically celebrate 'traditional' practices, but instead seeing potentially positive possibilities within practices that do not fit the narrow mould conferred by capitalism. With this in mind, Sarmiento (2017) notes the extensive influence of the diverse economies framework on AFN research, summarising this wonderfully. For Sarmiento, the framework encourages us to read

AFNs not as isolated aberrations, non-capitalist islands in a sea of '*the* economy' viewed as monolithically capitalist, but as ongoing experiments in (potentially) ethical economic relations scattered across a landscape that is already economically heterogeneous, in terms of what might broadly be called relations of production. (Sarmiento, 2017: 486, emphasis in original)

In this way, much of the analysis offered by Gibson-Graham (2006b) focuses on what is done with surplus. Whilst Marx's classical account of the critique of political economy (Marx, 1992) has been central in elucidating the production of so-called 'surplus value' from alienated wage labour under capitalism, Gibson-Graham see surplus as being potentially distributed in numerous ways amidst a variety of economic logics. Hence they use the 'iceberg metaphor' to show that "capitalist relations are a visible, yet small portion of economic life" (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: 70; see also Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016). Table 2 (below) emphasises the range of widely

encountered economic practices in the world, raising questions around capitalism's ability to colonise our 'lifeworlds' (Schutz, 1967). These diverse practices are therefore articulated through five classes of practices: enterprise, labour relations, property, transactions and finance. Whilst some these practices are morally dubious or worthy of condemnation (e.g. slavery), recognising other more positive *possibilities*—and not simply *probabilities*—in economy is critical (Harris, 2009). That is, Gibson-Graham ultimately see economy as active, a space of intervention and (ethical) experimentation intertwined within social worlds and our senses of agency. I return to the theme of surplus, broadly defined, in Chapter Six.

	Capitalist	Alternative capitalist	Non-capitalist
Enterprise	Capitalist	State-owned, environmentally responsible, socially responsible, non-profit	Worker cooperatives, sole proprietorships, community enterprise, feudal, slave
	Capitalist	**Alternative paid**	**Unpaid**
Labour	Waged	Self-employed, reciprocal labour, in-kind, work for welfare	Housework, volunteering, self-provisioning, slave labour
	Capitalist	**Alternative private**	**Open access**
Property	Private	State-managed assets, customary (clan) land, community land trusts, indigenous knowledge (intellectual property)	Atmosphere, international waters, open source intellectual property, outer space
	Capitalist	**Alternative market**[11]	**Non-market**
Transactions	Market	FairTrade, alternative currencies, underground market, barter	Household sharing, gift giving, hunting/fishing/gathering, theft/piracy/poaching
	Capitalist	**Alternative market**	**Non-market**

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[11] As I have cautioned already, we may question the extent to which FairTrade can still be assimilated into this category post-conventionalisation.

Finance	Mainstream market	Cooperative banks, credit unions, community-based financial institutions, micro-finance	Sweat equity, family lending, donations, interest-free loans

(Table 2, adapted and modified from Gibson-Graham, 2010: 226)

The diverse economies framework has been subjected to critical analyses from more traditionally Marxian perspectives. Theorists such as Harvey (2000) have been critical of the it for potentially evading a head-on confrontation with capitalism, risking allowing it to continue unabated (see also Castree, 1999). In reading for difference, this framework risks only ever offering a glancing blow against forces that Gibson-Graham's perspective acknowledges as powerful on numerous fronts. Others suggest that a focus on 'alternatives' through the diverse economies framework risks reproducing alternative/mainstream binaries discussed previously in this chapter (see particularly Fuller and Jonas, 2003), though seeing alternatives and mainstreams as relational negates this critique somewhat. Sharpe (2014) also notes Gibson-Graham's own uneasy relationship with key terms such as 'mainstream', recognising the way in which the politics of language constrains our ability to represent the world. Fuller and Jonas' (2003) critique, with this in mind, may be seen as unsympathetic. On a more productive note, Lee (2010) suggests that any discussion of alternatives and diverse economies ought to remain aware of the contexts from which they emerge from, taking Gibson-Graham's theory back down a more Marxian, material slant which contrasts against their more poststructuralist inflections. Gritzas and Kavoulakos (2016) similarly suggest that many considerations of alternatives within diverse economies need to engage more carefully with ideas of scale, which as I have already noted remains a contested topic for much AFN research. That is, whilst Gibson-Graham (2008) advocate a 'microscopic' lens in getting to grips with diverse economic practices, questions remain as to whether a perspective that is *overly* microscopic ends up recognising "difference for its own sake" (Pollard et al., 2009: 139). Yet Gibson-Graham also push back against accusations of idealised utopianism in their account, making it clear that

their project aims towards very real, significant changes in the world through the emergence of 'community economies' collectives (see Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009). They are not simply interested in seeing difference as an intrinsic good in economies, but in what this difference might affirm.

Despite these important critiques, the diverse economies framework remains fruitful in AFN research. There are two central implications of the framework both for the discussion here and this research more broadly. Firstly, it problematises the applicability of various binaries discussed previously in this chapter (e.g. productivism/post-productivism) in encouraging a microscopic gaze. Secondly, it encourages a more hopeful, critically optimistic reading compared with food regime theory, instead focusing on possibilities devolved from suppressed, emergent and marginal economic practices (Gibson-Graham, 2003b). That is, AFNs ought not be seen solely as reactive and oppositional 'against' capitalism, but engaging in heterogeneous ways with capitalism as one subset of broader configurations of political and economic relations (Smith and Jehlička, 2013). Emphasising this, Hill's (2015) analysis focuses on the ways in which community economies have come to be organised around banana production in the Philippines. This illuminates how certain economic practices need not remain forever marginal, but can come to act as a locus upon which "possibilities for growing economic worlds in the community arena" (Hill, 2015: 556) are enacted. Certainly, positive possibilities are never as far away as we often think.

Whilst I apply the diverse economies framework in the empirical Chapters Four to Six, the exploration here broadens our understanding of economy. With it, economy productively becomes something that is lived and experienced; full of affective relations and the potential for active intervention (Goodman, 2016; Sharpe, 2014). AFNs, from this perspective, illuminate a potentially critically optimistic position. Whilst this ought not lead to a blasé attitude to the power of capitalist social relations, it avoids seeing

capitalism as monolithic and inescapable. I will go on to develop this with the discussion of austerity later in this chapter.

The task of tracing alternatives

As I have shown, the development of AFN scholarship has a complex history, intermingling with numerous theoretical debates. Whilst sometimes epistemologically juxtaposed (e.g. between Marxian food regime theory and ANT-informed AFN scholarship) the above account has illuminated many theoretical synergies across this terrain, revealing AFNs as expressive of their own varieties of alterity. That is, AFNs are themselves 'in process' and geographically varied, rather than representing a fixed analytical category (Jarosz, 2008). At the same time, this account also recognises what AFNs are not, which is important given how difficult reaching a satisfactory definition might be. For example, whilst there is some clear interrelation between AFNs and 'ethical' consumption such as FairTrade—see Shaw *et al.* (2005) for a consideration of the values underpinning these latter practices—they are not entirely equivalent to one another. The ethical consumption literature (see, for example, Park, 2018; Brough et al., 2016; Basu and Hicks, 2008; Pecoraro and Uusitalo, 2014) remains primarily concerned with the 'act' of consumption and its consequences (Barnett et al., 2011), particularly with reference to a tension between 'values' (as in ethics) and 'value' (as in cost) that consumers are faced with (Lang, 2010; Alkon, 2008). AFNs are situated in a much more synthetic terrain, with the scope of the literature going far beyond the 'act' of consumption. Similarly, there are many resonances between AFN scholarship and work on 'local' food (see Sims, 2009; Morris and Buller, 2003; Little et al., 2009; Marsden and Franklin, 2013; Halweil et al., 2002), but again they are not equivalent. In this case, the local food literature is primarily concerned with scale and (local) economic empowerment (Born and Purcell, 2006). Whilst important, and topics that AFN research inevitably touches upon, the varieties of alterity at work in AFNs means that these topics will bear greater relevance only in certain geographical contexts (again, see the overriding concern with safety and trust in Chinese AFNs, where any reference to 'the

local' is entirely absent—despite safety and locality possessing important connotations in Western AFNs (Martindale et al., 2018)).

Though challenging to conclude such a necessarily broad discussion, I suggest that most centrally the theoretical debates I discuss are often in need of a more reflexive take on their own relationship to scale and the framing of their discussion, which is sometimes painfully absent. For example, to disregard food regime theory entirely would be to disregard an approach which world-historically has offered an enormous contribution in terms of positioning the emergence of alternatives and AFNs in historical trajectories of agricultural change. Yet as an analysis largely focused on macro-level relationships, its understanding of AFNs is overly thin, contextually-unaware and overly prescriptive. Equally, ANT-heavy understandings of AFNs focus too heavily on the ongoing constitution of these networks, thereby fostering an uneasy relationship with critique (c.f. Whittle and Spicer, 2008). That is, these perspectives fail to make sense of the various normative positions that lead to the development of AFNs, especially their relationship with wider political economies—a position that via the diverse economies framework I argue ought not automatically lead to problematic capitalocentrism. Conversely, I suggest that accounting for these dynamics is important in offering a *contextually-aware* interpretation of AFNs. In the next section, I consider in greater depth the conceptual austerity foodscape of the United Kingdom. This is an important step in setting the scene for Chapters Four to Six, which whilst in dialogue with the wider AFN literature, emphasises the situated nature of this research and the lessons that can be drawn from it.

Conceptualising the austerity foodscape of the United Kingdom

To conceptualise the austerity foodscape, I first interrogate the concept of austerity directly, situating it as a response to the financial crisis of 2007-8. Whilst ultimately political-economic, it carries with it a variety of other dimensions (following Hitchen, 2016). Primarily, I suggest that the entrenchment of austerity can be understood as

rearticulating the relationship between 'civil society' and capitalist political economy. In this way, austerity ought not to be understood as a passive, nor innocuous background to the rest of the discussion, but something that serves a more active role in articulating our lived experiences in multiple, unpredictable ways (Potter and Westall, 2013; Hall, 2018). With this conceptualisation of austerity in mind, I then turn the discussion back to food, considering various shifts in the foodscape in the decade following the financial crisis.

What is austerity?

Given its centrality to this thesis, it is worth considering what austerity *is*. After all, whilst I have hinted so far as to its multiple dimensions, and warned of the dangers of capitalocentrically viewing capitalism as a cogent actor on its own terms via the diverse economies framework, austerity itself deserves greater elucidation. Further, in this section I show how austerity can be used a springboard to develop a more coherent understanding of the idea of 'civil society', which underpins the entirety of this thesis and yet is surprisingly complex when confronted directly. I begin by expanding on austerity, conceptualising it historically as a response to the global financial crisis of 2007-8.

As De Cock *et al.* (2013) provocatively suggest, the first question that we ought to ask revolves around to what kind of crisis the 'global financial crisis' was. From one perspective, the events of 2007-8 can be understood as a catastrophic consequence of certain modes of capital accumulation, strongly evoking historical comparisons to the Great Depression of the 1920s. In the contemporary epoch, it was this increasingly financialised nature of capitalism which facilitated the crisis, with particular reference to the central role played by subprime mortgages. Though more specific accounts of subprime mortgages have been offered elsewhere (see, for example, Zestos, 2016), broadly we can understand them through these processes of financialisation. Financialisation destabilises the Marxian understanding of the circuit of capital

accumulation, which Marx theorised through the M-C-M' model (see Marx, 1992). In this model, money (M) is invested as capital in the production of a commodity (C). The labour process (and the exploitative nature of alienating wage labour) allows for the extraction of surplus value, producing money *plus surplus* (M') when the commodity is sold. This money plus surplus is then rationally reinvested, restarting the circuit and allowing for the continued accumulation of capital. After all, capital is just money in motion (Brenner, 1998).

Classically, this circuit hinges around the production of a physical or in a sense 'real' commodity, for example a table. Though many 'real' commodities are of course still produced under financialised capitalism, the emphasis of much capital accumulation shifts. The circuit of capital accumulation skips this middle commodity (C) stage, instead producing money plus surplus out of money (M-M'). As Marazzi (2011) argues, this does not mean that financial capitalism ought to be construed as an aberration or pathological, but instead a purification of these pre-existing logics. Value is increasingly created out of financial transactions conducted at greater speeds than human sensibilities can comprehend, enabled through a web of microprocessors, algorithms and enormously complex 'derivatives'. The latter is particularly important in getting to grips with the roots of the crisis in subprime mortgages: derivatives allow assets (commodities, securities, bonds) to be traded based on expected future returns. Mortgages, amidst the wider financialisation of housing (García-Lamarca and Kaika, 2016), played a central role in these to the tune of billions of dollars, though the bursting of the housing price bubble—combined with numerous other contextual and epiphenomenal factors—meant that these debts became toxic as homeowners were no longer able to repay them. As such, we can understand this form of financial capitalism as being increasingly reliant on what Marx originally theorises in *Capital* ([1867] 1992) as *speculative* capital: that is, capital that is invested based on the occurrence of certain events, primarily the paying back of debts. Of course, when these events do not occur, and when they are enmeshed in these webs of financial transactions (primarily through

derivatives) then the prospect of capital accumulation disappears. The effects of these defaults ripple outwards, in this case requiring extensive state intervention to prop up financial institutions around the world that became 'too big to fail' (Morrison, 2011).

Whilst the subprime mortgage fiasco may seem like a crisis by any traditional understanding of the term, crisis and capitalist political economy are hardly antithetical. As Schumpeter (1942) infamously theorised, capitalism operates through a process of 'creative destruction', constantly requiring the conditions of the here-and-now to be renewed such that capital accumulation can continue when rates of profit are continuously destined to fall. In this sense, De Cock *et al.* suggest that

> It is the irresolvable contradictions of capitalism, fuelling a perpetual expansion and accumulation, which define its essence. The GFC [Global Financial Crisis] then is not an aberration or an exception, but rather the purest expression of that dynamic of capitalism which devours itself, which abolishes the market by means of the market itself. Therefore the assertions that capitalism is 'in crisis' are misleading in that they seem to suggest this is an exceptional state for capitalism. (De Cock et al., 2013: 402)

Far from the events of 2007-8 representing historical anomalies, De Cock *et al.*'s argument lies in there being no fundamental crisis of capitalism. Indeed, much political discourse in the aftermath of the financial crisis served to situate austerity as a self-evident response from a governmental standpoint around the world (Fumagalli and Lucarelli, 2015; Konzelmann, 2014). As Blyth (2013) notes, austerity was particularly visible across the Eurozone—especially in Spain and Greece (Davies and Blanco, 2017; Calvário and Kallis, 2017)—though a similar programme was also deployed in countries such as the United States despite it being noticeably less prominent within political discourse. In the United Kingdom, Liam Stanley (2014a; 2014b) has wonderfully argued from a Gramscian viewpoint that austerity was represented by the

opposition Conservative party in the 2010 General Election as a 'common sense' response to the ills of the crisis and rising national debt, framed firmly as the fault of the incumbent Labour Party and its fiscal irresponsibility (see also Clarke and Newman, 2012). Cameron's rhetoric was ultimately successful in the election, with these ideas finding remarkable traction amongst the electorate, despite being fundamentally flawed (Bramall et al., 2016). Perspectives from within modern monetary theory (see Murphy, 2011; 2016) have noted that if a country retains sovereign control of the money supply (as in the United Kingdom), it simply cannot 'run out of money', which was central to the Conservative campaign. Hence, as Blyth (2013) notes, austerity can be defined in multiple ways and is not a singular, coherent concept, but first and foremost it is grounded in a political-economic ethic of fiscal restraint and responsibility. Given that the money had supposedly 'run out' under Labour, the Conservative coalition government oversaw enormous cuts to public services which were now deemed unaffordable luxuries (Jessop, 2015). Many of these public services have either been privatised, cut entirely, or replaced by (unremunerated) volunteer-led provision as part of a 'Big Society' narrative (Forkert, 2016; Levitas, 2012; Williams et al., 2014). Emphasising its multifaceted dynamics, austerity also took on temporal inflections as a short-term, painful fix that would eventually lead to better futures (Coleman, 2016), though it now endures with no end in sight, oscillating in and out of political discourse. It was also goal-orientated, with Conservative rhetoric suggesting that such measures were necessary to address both national debt and a growing deficit, eventually returning the country to a working surplus (which aforementioned modern monetary theorists, as well as neo-Keynesian political economists, have been unified in attacking as a seemingly desirable end goal (see particularly Krugman, 2013)). These schools both instead favour strong state investment, suggesting that the goal of a governmental surplus via austerity policies is grounded in a fundamental misunderstanding of macroeconomics—as if the country were a household.

Recent perspectives from sociology and human geography have latched on to austerity as a multiple phenomenon, problematising accounts that frame it in an overly economistic fashion, i.e. solely as this macroeconomic project of fiscal restraint. As Sarah Marie Hall (2018) powerfully argues, whilst austerity is ultimately political-economic in its orientation, its "policies bleed into the very fabric of everyday geographies—the spaces in which people live, meet, work, play—in different ways and at a range of magnitudes" (Hall, 2018: 2). Hence, austerity as a political-economic phenomenon ought not trump austerity as *lived*, seeing these dimensions as profoundly intertwined. Austerity is simultaneously "economic, financial and urban, lived, felt and personal" (Hall, 2018: 15). Though not engaging with the diverse economies framework, Hall's argument resonates with its theoretical thrust, capturing the sense in which economies are always qualitatively lived and experienced, and not a quantitatively measurable object. In focusing on family, friendships and intimacy in this 'everyday austerity', Hall's focus is subtly differentiated from other perspectives such as Hitchen (2016). Taking her cue instead from affect theory (see particularly Anderson, 2006a; 2009; 2014; see also Wetherell, 2013), Hitchen prefers to identify "the presence of austerity through atmosphere" which "involves exploring the *moments* in which austerity surfaces from the background into the foreground of everyday life" (Hitchen, 2016: 105, emphasis in original). If Hall therefore sees austerity as a *relation* against which the everyday is increasingly mediated, Hitchen sees it as both an *atmosphere*, unpredictably erupting into the foreground of the everyday, as well as a (pessimistic, presentist) *mood* (see also Coleman, 2016; Flatley, 2017; Highmore, 2016; Anderson, 2015). Using the examples of low-income families and the volunteer-led provision of public services such as libraries, Hitchen valuably brings the "affective nuances [of austerity] to the fore, in turn moving the debate beyond the 'economic-ness' of austerity" (Hitchen, 2016: 118). Finally, complicating the picture further, Bramall (2011; 2013; 2015; 2017) prefers to understand austerity through the framing of memory studies and its intrinsic cultural politics. For her, the 'lived' dimension of austerity rests heavily on an economy of nostalgia, as in ideas of 'back to the land' self-

sufficiency and 'making do' with less in these austere times. Notably, this is expressed through the resurgence of wartime propaganda, urging us to 'keep calm and carry on', whilst historical events such as rationing are not simply to be comprehended but opportunities to be evoked and learnt from in the present (Potter and Westall, 2013). Contrasted with Hall and Hitchen, Bramall's focus is important in recognising the historical roots of these many relations with austerity, which have extensive legacies today, and have not emerged *tabula rasa* following the events of 2007-8. At the same time, we ought to be cautious of reading the idiosyncrasies of the present back through these historical lessons, risking reading too heavily into fundamentally different past contexts.

Whilst all in their own ways making significant contributions to problematising, as Hitchen (2016) puts it, the 'economic-ness' of austerity, their accounts taken together raise other questions. Though a generalisation, they all focus on the ways in which economy (and thus austerity) is diversely lived and experienced by different actors— for example, Coleman (2016) notes that austerity has had disproportionate effects on young people and women. These effects are not simply material (e.g. growing income inequalities or unpalatable trajectories of the labour market), but impacting one's subjectivity—i.e. our very sense of being and orientation to the world (Lazzarato, 2012). Yet where these accounts leave a little more to be desired is in the question of responses to austerity. If we accept their lessons—that austerity profoundly shapes lived experience—where do we go from there? Hitchen (2016), for example, sees these efforts as contributing to a "multi-tonal counter politics of austerity" (Hitchen, 2016: 118), full of radical yet ethereal promise. It would be unfair to critique her, or any of the other perspectives discussed, for their inability to provide a blueprint carving a 'way out' of the austere here-and-now. None of them pretend to offer such a thing. But their interpretivist slants sees them using idiographic, often individualised, experiences of specific actors to explore a range of broader sociological processes. Ironically, this minimises their ability to consider responses to austerity at a societal level. Of course,

this is not to suggest that their perspectives are simply *wrong*, but whether other framings might be more fruitful here.

Situating civil society

Offering one such framing, Crouch (2013) argues for the conceptual importance of 'civil society' in understanding societal responses to austerity (see also Clark et al., 2017; Ehrenberg, 2018; Gramsci, 1971). As a notoriously slippery concept (Munck, 2006), Crouch differentiates civil society from the *polis*, which captures something different. As deeply interrelated concepts, the polis—central to Aristotelian thought— is a conceptual public space where questions of government, values and markets are mediated.[12] The polis therefore incorporates, if not envelops, the state. Yet as the city-states of antiquity developed into larger nation states, 'civil society' served to update the now less relevant concept of the polis (c.f. Bauman, 1999). In aiming towards a working definition of civil society, Crouch suggests that this

> includes, though extends further than, the voluntary sector. It defines all those extensions of the scope of human action beyond the private that lack recourse to the primary contemporary means of exercising power: the state and the firm. (Crouch, 2013: 153)

For Crouch, civil society must therefore be understood in a necessarily broad way, but ultimately as existing beyond (or outside) the reach of the state or the firm. This definition also helps us to contrast it against the polis, which as noted above, *incorporates* the state, and speaks to a time prior to the political-economic phenomenon of 'the firm'. Yet Crouch's understanding of civil society is itself situated in a specific context, and Cohen and Arato (1999) note its geographical variances. For example, it has been framed as weaker in some contexts compared with others (Clark et al., 2017),

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[12] Interestingly, Crouch (2013) notes that *societas civilis* first emerged from a Latin translation of *polis*.

and in the East it long "rel[ied] on the strengths of new autonomous forms of discourse, associations, and solidarity […] [to challenge] statist dictatorships" (Cohen and Arato, 1999: viii), occupying a more oppositional capacity. Whilst civil society is not (at least for the time being) drawn against monolithic statist dictatorships in the West, it still retains an oppositional capacity in Crouch's definition. As Cohen and Arato suggest, in the West "the spontaneous forces of the capitalist market economy can represent as great a danger to social solidarity, social justice, and even autonomy as the administrative power of the modern state" (Cohen and Arato, 1999: viii).[13] Certainly the events of 2007-8 are testament to this danger (Anheier et al., 2011; McDaniel, 2016; Westra et al., 2017; Fioramonti and Thümler, 2014). However, these events are also testament to paying attention to the linkages between the 'capitalist market economy' and 'modern state', which Cohen and Arato erroneously treat as distinct. As Marazzi (2011) argues, despite neoliberalism's ideological drive towards smaller states and *laissez-faire* regulation, today the state has never been more powerful (as evidenced by the response to the financial crisis), actively supporting financialised accumulation and growing wealth concentration (De Cock et al., 2013). At best, this situation raises fundamental questions around democratic accountability (Pianta, 2013).

Given the theoretical importance of civil society in understanding responses to austerity, it is surprising how few accounts have engaged with it (Fioramonti and Thümler, 2013). In this capacity, Hall, Hitchen and Bramall's accounts considered above are far from alone or anomalous. For Pianta (2013), it represents a fertile terrain in enacting a

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[13] Given Cohen and Arato's definition, it is unsurprising that—as Edwards (2009) notes—civil society retains a conservative inflection in some accounts. For example, the Big Society narrative mixed a renewed communitarianism with a strong, voluntaristic civil society (Levitas, 2012) in adapting to the status quo following the financial crisis. Hence civil society might be deployed to humanise the violence of financial capitalism and its catastrophic psychosocial impacts (Marazzi, 2011; Berardi, 2015). At the same time, we ought to remain critical of these (ab)uses of conceptual 'civil society' in retaining a more hopeful understanding of it, focused instead on its intrinsic possibilities in bringing about better societies (Gramsci, 1971; Kaldor, 2003; Falk, 1998).

'bottom-up' politics, citing the global 'Occupy' movement and the Spanish anti-austerity *Indignados* Movement as two key examples in a "new wave of […] struggle[s] for redefining the meaning and practice of democracy" (Pianta, 2013: 158). In this way, whilst these movements were spurred into existence by the financial crisis and a broadly anti-austerity sentiment, they are imbued with a generative potential which extends beyond a purely reactionary position (c.f. Hardt, 1995). Holt Giménez and Shattuck (2011), following Polanyi (1944), cautiously warn that the reform brought about by historical civil society movements has not always been positive: after all, it can be used to explain the rise of Nazism in Germany. Nonetheless, they refuse to disregard it despite this, with their position resonating with Pianta in recognising the conceptual utility of 'civil society' as a site of cultural and ideological struggle in bringing about different societies (Gramsci, 1971).

Within this research, Holt Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) account is doubly important for its discussion of a wide range of civil society food movements that they outline around the world.[14] Though not attempting to cover the entirety of their argument, against a neoliberal backdrop they distinguish *reformist* food movements (such as conventionalised FairTrade and Slow Food) from what they see as *progressive* and in some cases *radical* civil society movements and initiatives (see also Holt Giménez and Altieri, 2012). Many of the (Western) food movements discussed in a thesis such as this fall under their 'progressive' diagnosis, citing AFNs and community-led initiatives as empowering communities in the search for food justice. Though necessarily generalising, radical movements are understood in this typology as aiming for food sovereignty, drawing on many Latin American struggles such as those fought by *La Via Campesina* and other agrarian, peasant-led movements (see also Wittman, 2009; Roman-Alcalá, 2017). For Holt Giménez and Shattuck, these radical movements do not only aim towards the breakdown of corporate power, but on rest on fundamentally

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[14] See particularly the typology they develop across pages 117-8.

redistributive hopes given the imperialist violence these parts of the world have been subject to over many centuries (Harvey, 2009).

At the same time, the epistemological underpinnings of an account such as Holt Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) is congruent with food regime theory, leading to it suffer similar theoretical drawbacks. Though an enormously wide-reaching and impressive overview of civil society movements across global foodscapes, their diagnostic framing inevitably leads them to make generalisations that are problematised by the more microscopic focus of the diverse economies framework and its attention to possibilities and potentialities. Put another way, if perspectives such as these are diagnostic and concerned with historical explanations of the present, they are less interested in a prognosis of what these movements might eventually bring about (Gibson-Graham, 2008). Additionally, their generalising, macro-level perspective encourages us to move to more specific contextual framings, and I now consider the United Kingdom in which this research is situated.

Situating civil society within the austerity foodscape of the United Kingdom

The foodscape of the United Kingdom has shifted drastically since the financial crisis and the onset of austerity (Caplan, 2016). Here I consider three distinct, important phenomena—food banking, food scandals and food waste—and respective responses from civil society which have played important roles in characterising this 'austerity foodscape'. With it, it sets the scene for a more thorough consideration of the linkages between alternatives and civil society which underpins much of the discussion across the empirical chapters Four to Six. In this way, the account I offer is synthetic, going beyond the economic-ness of austerity in highlighting the ways in which civil society has responded to austerity as a profoundly multiple phenomenon. Further, it encourages us to think about what the AFN label captures, and whether this might be productively broadened out to account for more optimistic trajectories in the foodscape. The wager, which I return to in the overall conclusion of the thesis, is the extent to which these

shifts from within civil society in the austerity foodscape may be contributing to a new food regime.

Firstly, let us consider food banking. Whilst not a new phenomenon, and not specific to the United Kingdom's foodscape, food banking as a practice has proliferated in the decade following the financial crisis and now represents an increasingly important mode of food provisioning for many (Purdam et al., 2015).[15] The largest network of food banks in the United Kingdom, The Trussell Trust, is a charitable organisation founded with Christian values (though they, as Garthwaite (2016a) notes, are not a directly faith-based organisation) who have expanded from distributing 25,899 emergency food parcels in 2008-09 to 1,182,954 in 2016-17 (The Trussell Trust, 2018).[16] Perhaps unsurprisingly, much academic research on food banking has been articulated through a social policy lens and, as Cloke, May and Williams (2016) suggest, many accounts see the institutionalisation of food banking in the United Kingdom as a result of wider shifts in the "depoliticiz[ation] of [food] poverty […] [instead seeing it] as deserving of charitable emergency aid rather than collectivist welfare entitlements" (Cloke et al., 2016: 2). Whilst not wishing to discredit such a perspective in its entirety, Cloke, May and Williams argue that such a narrow reading of food banking "obscure[s] some of the more progressive possibilities arising in and through [these] spaces" (Cloke et al., 2016: 2). Though arguably risking legitimising the position of food banking in the United Kingdom, this insistence of the need to read these spaces for more positive perspectives is important for this research. Further, recognising the complex (moral) geographies of food banking allows us to broaden out disciplinary perspectives and

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[15] See various analyses that have examined the phenomenon of food banking in Australia (Booth and Whelan, 2014), Canada (Tarasuk et al., 2014), Greece (Rakopoulos, 2014) and Spain (González-Torre and Coque, 2016) amongst many others (Gentilini, 2013).

[16] The Trussell Trust defines an emergency food parcel as enough food to feed an individual or family for three days. It can, at a food bank's discretion, include non-essential household items and operates through a voucher referral system via trusted gatekeepers such as local government officials and social workers (Garthwaite, 2016a). The discussion of food banking is expanded in Chapter Seven.

links, which is important given the significant role that food banking plays in the austerity foodscape. Whilst it is worth reiterating that the core topic of this thesis is not food banking, it is picked up latterly in the thesis as an 'alternative' of a different calibre for many today. Spaces of food banking in the United Kingdom rarely, if ever, feature in the AFN literature, I arguably due to the 'alternative' designation often being conferred as synonymous for 'good', with food banking occupying a normatively negative status. Despite this, food banking and other forms of non-monetary, charity-based provision can be read as profoundly 'alternative' if diffracted against 'conventional' market-based logics that dominate many of our day-to-day encounters with food. Further, the proliferation of food banking practices raises questions about civil society and its position in the foodscape, a fine example not of the Big Society 'in action' but of the ways in which civil society might "introduce values other than those of neoliberal capitalism as a response to the austere conditions of the here and now" (Cloke et al., 2016: 2). Though again wary of uncritically legitimising (and further cementing) food banking, it is now too important within the austerity foodscape to ignore and merely condemning their existence will not address the multiple sociological, political and economic reasons of their emergence in the first instance—as well as the paths they might trace out of this mess.

Secondly, scandals around food fraud are another lens through which to view the austerity foodscape. This is perhaps surprising given the (general) lack of reference to food safety in Western AFN literature. Though food scandals have complex histories and develop in different ways in different contexts (see, for example, Berg's (2004) comparative discussion of dioxines and BSE across Europe), it was 2013 that saw the 'horsemeat scandal' hit the United Kingdom. As Abbots and Coles (2013) suggest, the awkwardly termed 'horsemeat-gate' involved routinised testing detecting low quality meats (unsurprisingly, mostly horse) being substituted for the advertised product, often beef, in pre-processed foods. Though an irony of the scandal being that horse is widely eaten in many countries around the world—if anything highlighting that what can (or

cannot) be considered as 'food' is anthropologically contingent (Mintz and Du Bois, 2002)—it was another instance raising questions around the governance and regulation of lengthy, industrialised, mainstream food supply chains. With globalised flows of (particularly pre-processed) foods travelling through numerous, often invisible, intermediary actors on their way to the point of end consumption, Abbots and Coles (2013) argue that such scandals are mediated through various discursively constructed 'failings' throughout these supply chains. Marxian perspectives (see e.g. Holt Giménez and Shattuck, 2011; McMichael, 2009b) argue, conversely, that it is the concentration of power and capital in agro-industrial corporate food complexes which leads to corruption and degraded relationships to 'food from nowhere' (Bové and Dufour, 2001) with its geographical origins hidden, if not obfuscated entirely. Problematically, however, Abbots and Coles' discursive framing seems to eschew important questions around the political economy of food, whilst the Marxian perspective unsatisfyingly often fails to see beyond a totalising capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 2006a). AFNs have long been argued to both resocialise and/or relocalise (Seyfang, 2006) shortened food supply chains such that these ills (discursive 'failings' or the veil of commodity fetishism) are avoided, embedding food within a geographically identifiable 'place' and ensuring trustworthiness (Sims, 2009). Nonetheless, recurring anxieties around food fraud have become an familiar hallmark of the United Kingdom's austerity foodscape (Jackson, 2010; Fuentes and Fuentes, 2015).[17] Tellingly, given decreasing household budgets for food (Erbe Healy, 2014), sales of organic food—primarily on health grounds (Aschemann-Witzel and Zielke, 2017)—have remained strong since the financial crisis (The Soil Association, 2018), emphasising the complex consequences of these perceptions around food. This discussion is particularly important for Chapters Four and Five.

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[17] The latest notable scandal in the United Kingdom came to light in late 2017, with the 2 Sisters Food Group—a wholesale processor of meat, supplying many major supermarkets—fraudulently applying false slaughter dates to chicken to extend shelf life (Goodley, 2017).

The final nascent controversy that is briefly worth of attention revolves around food waste. Though for a long time receiving comparatively little attention (Campbell et al., 2017), recent campaigns have brought waste to the forefront of the austerity foodscape. Political economy perspectives such as Patel (2008) have pointed to the severe inequities that afflict the global geographies of food, perversely resulting today in a 'stuffed' global North and a 'starved' South. Yet the problem is not merely excessive consumption in this stuffed North, but where food ends up that is not eaten. Within the United Kingdom, research estimates that the country produces 15 million tonnes of food waste annually, approximately a quarter of the total food distributed in the country, the majority of which is created at a household level (Facchini et al., 2017). Government-funded initiatives such as the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) and their *Love Food Hate Waste* campaign have targeted this household level, arguably with some success (Evans et al., 2012). Recent high-profile television programmes such as Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's *War on Waste* have, conversely, largely focused on the role of supermarkets in this debate and French legislation, notably, has made food waste from supermarkets illegal (Mourad, 2016). Though not wishing to get side-tracked by complex debates around what is or is not 'waste'—after all, 'waste' is not an epistemologically or politically neutral category (Caplan, 2017)—the question of what to do with food waste is attracting increasing attention and redistribution schemes have been argued to offer many potential opportunities (Midgley, 2014). These benefits are both environmental—reducing methane emissions from food that would otherwise be sent to landfill—but also address socioeconomic problems around rising food prices and "austerity-conditioned […] access [to food]" (Goodman, 2016: 264; see also Moore, 2015 on the reversing of trends towards ever cheaper food). Though not hoping to reframe the debate around food waste in its entirety, the topic recurs as an analytical theme throughout the rest of the thesis—particularly Chapter Six—helping to further probe undertheorised links between AFNs and waste, which deserve greater consideration (Forssell and Lankoski, 2015). Further, these discussions are a fertile opportunity to consider how civil society responds to the 'problem' of waste in the

foodscape, arriving at a particularly prescient time given the austerity-conditioning that Goodman recognises above.

Ultimately, the brief consideration of these three interrelated topics aims to highlight that the austerity foodscape ought not be framed purely as a material question of how much people spend on food, and how austerity might be changing these patterns. Instead, it operates with its own moral economy, incorporating other complex dynamics and highly mediated events. Though the above is not a finite list, and the topics are considered again at various points in the thesis, the austerity foodscape has, in a comparatively short period of time, played host to a variety of crises and controversies that suggest that 'business as usual' in the food system is shifting, with many dynamics bringing it into question. At risk of self-aggrandisement, alternative ways of organising food, broadly conceptualised, seem more worthy of consideration than ever before (Goodman and Sage, 2014b).

Chapter conclusion

This literature review has had several important, interrelated aims. Firstly, it has explored food regime theory. As my discussion of the three historical regimes showed, the variance between them is extensive, and global relationships to food have altered drastically over the previous century and a half. Yet even if many of these changes are for the worse—with costs, broadly defined, borne socially, economically and ecologically in varied ways around the world—food regime theory shows how these relationships are historically contingent and can be changed. Even if the epistemological underpinnings of food regime theory tends towards offering a pessimistic perspective, this contingency must always remain recognised. As I noted, the rise of AFNs in the third regime is testament to this ability to enact different relationships to food, potentially revealing fragments of a new regime in the process (something I revisit in the overall Conclusion, Chapter Seven). Moving this review on, I then explored AFN scholarship. Showing how the conceptual AFN label has enduring legacies in both

American environmental and French economic sociology, I suggest that the aims of AFNs are multiple, and must be considered with reference to specific contexts. This provides us with a more nuanced perspective: rather than seeing AFNs as merely oppositional, they emerge for a variety of reasons which cannot be prescriptively and generically determined. To develop this perspective, I introduced Gibson-Graham's diverse economies framework, which encourages us to avoid the capitalocentric tendencies of food regime theory. The diverse economies framework provides an important, fertile perspective in theorising the various possibilities that AFNs might aim towards in the foodscape. As they remind us, economy is not a passive, quantitative construct but something that we can actively intervene in, shape and perform differently.

Finally, and to finish setting the scene for the empirical discussion in Chapters Four to Six, I expanded on the conceptual austerity foodscape of the United Kingdom. Tracing how we ought to understand austerity in multiple ways, I suggested that the austerity foodscape is equally multifaceted. Rather than seeing austerity economistically as solely impacting budgets for food, the post-2008 context confers a variety of changes within deeply complex geographies of food. I drew our attention to some of these notable dynamics, which have been all but bypassed in the AFN literature. With it, I suggest that we can see AFNs, broadly understood, as playing a central, generative role in the ongoing reconfigurations of civil society, potentially bringing about better foodscapes in the process. With this more hopeful, critically optimistic understanding of AFNs in mind, in the next section I discuss the methodological approach which I developed in the empirical phase of this research.

Chapter Three

Research design and methodology

Introduction

This chapter considers the research design employed in this study, as well as the research methods which were subsequently utilised in collecting the empirical data. Firstly, I revisit the research questions that guided this research and, with these in mind, I chart the various ways in which this research developed over time and the methodological implications that this had. As I will discuss, the focus of this research shifted significantly, entailing changes in how I approached the empirical data collection. Following this, I discuss the reasons for—alongside the positives and negatives of—the three qualitative methods that I employed. Though these methods were all piloted prior to beginning the main study, I draw attention to the ways in which my usage of these methods changed over time. The drawbacks and benefits of the differing methods became apparent in different ways across the data collection process. In addition to this, I note the various implications of each method with regards to accessing participants and subsequent ethical implications. Nonetheless, I argue that the combination of these methods taken together was the most suitable way to successfully answer the research questions that guided the study, productively complicating findings and providing greater nuance. To remind ourselves of these research questions, it is worth repeating them here:

1. What kinds of organisations can be identified within the AFNs of Lancashire?

2. How can these organisations be understood as 'alternative' when contrasted against mainstream tendencies in the…
    a. Production of food?
    b. Distribution of food?
    c. Consumption of food?

71

3. Has austerity served to alter wider values and everyday practices around food, and if so, how?

4. To what extent can these AFNs be understood as…

    a. Existing *despite* austerity?

    b. Existing *in response to* austerity?

    c. A broader expression of the shifting relationship between civil society and capitalist political economy?

Finally, I introduce the participants (and organisations) that were involved, grouped through the categories of small-scale producers, CSA schemes, alternative and 'local' food promoters, and food bank and food waste initiatives. This section therefore serves an important role in setting the scene for the empirical chapters which follow.

Developing the research approach and methodological implications

The shifting focus of this research in its early stages had consequences for the approach taken due to methodological, as well as epistemological, implications. Initially devised as a study of 'ethical' consumption in the context of austerity through a mixed methods approach, a brief review of the literature made it clear that this broad category needed refining. The proliferation of studies around ethical consumption—encompassing everything from food to fashion, tourism, energy, investments and beyond (see Lewis and Potter, 2010 for an overview)—necessitated a clearer framing. As the main Introduction to this thesis noted, with a growing awareness of the various ills around food globally across sociological and geographical perspectives, this seemed like a productive area to focus on. As Pottinger (2013) argues, a benefit of situating this research within broader AFN scholarship lies in the potential to incorporate elements of the ethical consumption literature, finding equivalences and differences which may be probed further. Yet as previously noted, a growing body of critical AFN scholarship

has pointed to other avenues which may be explored beyond consumption alone (see, for example, Carolan, 2016; Sarmiento, 2017). Themes from these perspectives contributed to the development of the empirical analysis that I offer here.

This change of focus from ethical consumption to AFNs (and now with more precisely developed research questions) necessitated a change in epistemological approach. Crucially, the quantitative dimension of the mixed methods approach could no longer be incorporated, and a solely qualitative approach was adopted. Whilst some quantitative data was available concerning the ethical implications of food consumption practices and whether this might be changing (for example, see Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2011; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2016; The Co-operative, 2012), the analysis of this quantitative data now offered little in terms of this study. Though we ought not to dismiss the potentials of entire paradigms outright—indeed, the perspective that I offer in this thesis ought to be read as one way in which we might approach the analysis of food as a multifaceted phenomenon—it is also worth remaining cautious around the promises of mixed methods approaches. As Giddings (2006) has argued, the growing interest in mixed methods studies raises important questions around whether it can deliver the "best of both worlds" (Giddings, 2006: 196) in bridging quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. Giddings conversely suggests that, in practice, mixed method studies tend towards reproducing pragmatic, positivistically-orientated worldviews which belie the complexities of social phenomena. By instead working through a qualitative framework, the broadly—sometimes loosely—interpretivist standpoint that I proceeded from helped to more successfully tease out the various complexities of the research questions.

With the development of this research in its early stages contextualised, I now turn our attention to the differing research methods utilised empirically within this qualitative framework. I begin by discussing the primary method of semi-structured interviews.

Outlining the research methods

Semi-structured interviews

Methodological approach

As Bryman fairly summarises, "the interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research" (Bryman, 2012: 466). Indeed, interviews have been widely used in research on AFNs (see, for example, Trobe, 2001; Sumner et al., 2010; Jarosz, 2008; Clarke et al., 2008) and the research questions here meant that this study was also well suited to employ them. Of course, not all interviews are the same—at all levels from design to the actual 'doing' of them—and the specifically semi-structured approach that was employed here ought to be recognised. Nonetheless, as Rubin and Rubin (2012) outline, there are some important basic assumptions around what kinds of research questions interviews can be used to answer, as well as the data that we derive out of them:

> When using in-depth qualitative interviewing, […] researchers talk to those who have knowledge of or experience with the problem of interest. Through such interviews, researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own. […] By putting together descriptions from separate interviewees, researchers create portraits of complicated processes. (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 3)

Interviews, in attempting to interpret the perspective of our interviewees, can therefore be conceptualised as existing on a spectrum. They range from "highly structured, standardized, quantitatively oriented survey interviews" to "free-flowing informational exchanges" (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 2). Whilst the former, structured interview may try to minimise the number of opportunities for interviewees to discuss what *they* deem to be important, the latter unstructured approach is more open to meandering, exploratory conversations. As a result, these two methods might be deemed to be more

or less apt based not only on the research questions but also the context of the interview. For example, structured interviews may prove helpful to inexperienced researchers lacking confidence (Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000), especially when the interviewer is an 'outsider' to the participants involved in the research. Indeed, this 'outsider' status—where the interviewer remains emotionally and personally detached from those being researched (see Mullings, 1999; Wiederhold, 2015 for an expanded discussion on the insider/outsider dynamic within research)—may prove helpful in getting participants to divulge information that they might otherwise be unwilling to reveal if the interviewer was an 'insider' (see also Fonow and Cook, 1991). By comparison, unstructured interviews have been argued to work best when meetings with participants are repeated, informal, based around building rapport and the insider/outsider status of the researcher is not a concern (Douglas, 1985; DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Goulding and Shankar, 2004).

Semi-structured interviews occupy an important 'middle ground' between these two approaches. As with much doctoral research, numerous pragmatic limitations meant that their benefits quickly became clear to me. In this case, a limited budget for fieldwork, combined with a reliance on sporadic public transport to reach participants meant that semi-structured interviews provided a degree of flexibility in the discussion (against the overly constraining format of structured interviews) whilst not necessitating repeated, potentially long, interviews (which may have been necessary if unstructured and not sufficiently 'guided'). Beyond this, the necessary degree of formality inherent to the interview process enabled a sense of professionalism to the develop where appropriate (Van de Ven, 2007) whilst "allow[ing] respondents to be the experts and to inform the research" (Leech, 2002: 668). At one stage I considered new communication technologies such as Skype for repeat interviews, though Deakin and Wakefield (2014) note challenges involved with this, warning against their usage in many research contexts. "In the[se] disembodied interview[s], all subtle visual, non-verbal cues that can help to contextualise the interviewee in a face-to-face scenario are lost" and the

"opportunity [for the researcher] to create a positive interview ambience" (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014: 605) is limited. Aside from the brief usage of these technologies for arranging interviews, I therefore did not use these for the purposes of data collection.

As a result, I decided that I would aim to undertake 30 face-to-face semi-structured interviews. 30, though to some degree an arbitrary number, is deemed to be a sufficient number to identify key themes and reached a degree of saturation in the data (Mason, 2010). These were planned to last around one hour. Repeat interviews would not be actively pursued, expect in the instance where participants were latterly recruited for the photographic food diaries discussed later in this chapter.

Piloting the study

Before beginning the full study, I conducted two pilot interviews with fellow doctoral researchers. These participants were recruited based on previous conversations that I had with them, aware that they had extensive interests in food and had even been involved in the organisation of the now defunct Wholefood Campus Co-operative (introduced more formally towards the end of this chapter). This initiative sold a range of ethically-certified food at a weekly 'farmer's market' on a university campus. Though it had since been incorporated into another venture, formally dissolving it, Sarah and Matthew's personal interest in food nonetheless meant that they were well positioned in relation to subsequent participants that I am aimed to recruit. As noted by Silverman (2013), the piloting of interviews provided three main benefits. Firstly, it allowed me to practice my interview technique, at that stage having little first-hand experience with empirical data collection. Secondly, it allowed me to provisionally explore potential themes that might recur in later interviews. Finally, they helped me to develop—and, in the process, largely rewrite—my interview schedules. Some questions were deemed to be redundant, emerging organically from other questions, whilst others required significant clarification. For example, Q2 in the interview schedule was initially framed as

Can you say a bit about what things do you feel are important to you about food when you are producing/distributing/consuming it (as applicable)? For example, origin of the food, production methods, ethical principles e.g. vegan/vegetarian, distribution…

In practice, my pilot study participants found this question vague and difficult to answer, indirectly drawing attention to the messy nature of the social world (Law, 2004) and with it the analytical inadequacies of these typifications (producer/distributor/consumer). Though I had framed them as 'consumers' of alternative food, their prior experiences with the Wholefood Campus Co-operative meant they had more to offer than merely being 'consumers'. Because of these problems, I branched the question out in the rewritten schedules:

Can you tell me a bit about what is important to you about food when you are (as applicable) producing/distributing/consuming it?

a) Following this, are there any specific production methods (e.g. organic) that you would prefer or avoid?
b) Is the origin of food important to you?
c) Is there anything else that you'd consider important that we haven't discussed already?
d) What would you say is most important aspect overall for you out of those that we have discussed?

Branching the question out in this way enabled participants to reflect more broadly on their perceptions from various viewpoints, whilst the semi-structured approach enabled us to revisit and expand on other aspects of the question later. Open-ended questions ("Is there anything else that you'd consider important that we haven't discussed

already?") also provided an important juncture where participants could identify themes that were important to them (Patton, 2002) that the original framing of the question did not provide space for.

I also modified the start of the interview, which latterly proved to be crucial in building rapport with unfamiliar participants. Initially, the pilot study interview began with the following question:

> So—to get things started. Can you tell me a little bit about food in your typical day-to-day life? For example, where you normally buy food, if you eat out and about much or tend to eat home cooked meals, what kind of food you like eating, whether you are say vegetarian/vegan or anything else that springs to mind for you…

On reflection, this question proved almost impossible to answer, with both Sarah and Matthew saying they struggled to know where to begin in answering it. Unfocused questions such as this proved impenetrable (Patton, 2002) and it required restructuring. Taking inspiration from Spradley's (1979) account of 'grand tour' questions which "ask respondents to give a verbal tour of something they know well" (Leech, 2002: 667), I restructured the start of the interview, opening instead with

> Can you tell me a bit about your experience of food when you were growing up and anything that particularly stands out for you in your memory?

Whilst open-ended, this question enabled participants to draw on their own biographical experiences of food in their lives. Though some participants were surprised that the interview started in this way, it provided a productive avenue by which to make participants more comfortable for the questions which followed. As Witzel suggests, questions framed in this way as a "form of reflection [work] to break down the

artificialness of a research situation" (Witzel, 2000: para. 4). In doing so, this rich biographical detail may help to "avoid the pitfalls of the question—answer schema of interviewing" (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 62) and avoid what van Teijlingen and Hundley (2002) understand as the 'local politics' of the interview process. For example, in the initial framing of this question, I asked the pilot study participants whether they followed principles such as vegetarianism or veganism. Whilst neither Sarah nor Matthew were strictly vegetarian, their awkward response to this question revealed complex ambivalences around eating meat, as well as of the usage of animal products in food more broadly. In evoking the 'local politics' of eating meat, there was a danger that my interview may be seen as accusatory or moralising, risking the loss of rapport and, with it, less informative discussions (Leech, 2002). By comparison, opening with a biographical question allowed these 'local politics' to emerge in a more organic way within the discussion, and on the participants' terms rather than my own.

Whilst pilot studies can never wholly guarantee that an interview schedule is flawless (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002), this process caused me to reflect extensively on the best way to frame questions within the context of the full study. The rewritten interview schedules are contained in Appendix 1.

Access, sampling and gatekeepers

The process of gaining access to participants for the interview process proved to be more challenging than I had initially expected. As a result, gathering data in this way took significantly longer than planned. Access is often a significant hurdle to overcome in the process of 'doing' research and yet it "is often treated as unproblematic" in presenting it either as a "fait accompli or […] [by] sanitiz[ing] the whole process" (Sixsmith et al., 2003: 578). As recent methodological literature has been keen to highlight, gaining access to research participants often involves significant emotional labour (Blix and Wettergren, 2015) as well as an ability to recognise one's own (shifting) positionality in the research as a whole (Wiederhold, 2015).

Because of these challenges, participants were recruited in a variety of ways. Food producers, growers and retailers were accessed primarily through the snowballing of contacts from other participants. Even from the initial pilot interviews with Sarah and Matthew—highlighting the many connections within AFNs—contacts were regularly shared with me. Beyond this, I made use of an online 'local food directory' set up by Sustainable Lifestyles (also introduced more formally later). As a freely accessible resource, this directory included commercially-orientated cafés, restaurants and pubs, though I felt that many of these were too derivative to answer the research questions. As a result, I restricted the recruitment of participants through this resource to organisations directly involved in growing, producing, distributing and retailing food. Though it is self-evident that, for example, commercially-orientated restaurants 'retail food' to consumers in a certain way, this broad criterion meant that I could focus my energies on initiatives that had more links within AFNs as opposed to solely sourcing produce from them. This mix of snowballing and purposeful sampling (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007) allowed me to recruit participants from a range of organisations, which I detail towards the end of this chapter.

Despite this, the move from finding research participants to securing interviews presented many challenges. Where possible, I first emailed potential participants as this provided greater opportunities to debrief participants on the focus of the study and their role in it compared with a telephone call (Hewson, 2016). Two barriers, however, quickly became clear. Unsurprisingly, many of the production sites were rural, and limited public transport links made many of them difficult (sometimes near impossible) to access without a car. Though I offered to pay the petrol costs for anyone to meet in a more convenient location, only one participant agreed to this, with the others being understandably unwilling to travel. Thankfully, by the time the data collection was complete I had managed to collect a sufficient range of perspectives across rural, peri-urban and urban sites, thereby not unwittingly privileging a certain area. Another barrier

to recruiting participants via these routes was the low response rate characteristic of electronic communication (Jones and Pitt, 1999). Whilst follow-up emails were sent as appropriate, securing interviews often took weeks, and in some cases months, of careful negotiation.

Interviews as fieldwork

Having completed my pilot study in the office spaces of my department, I looked forward to beginning the interviews across a range of spaces and locations. It seemed that, from common convention, cafés and other 'neutral' spaces were the best settings to meet participants as they were informal and this helped to create a relaxed atmosphere (Herzog, 2005). Yet, as Herzog notes, "the choice of interview location (who chooses and what place is chosen) is not just a technical matter of convenience and comfort" (Herzog, 2005: 25). The location of the interview is not the 'neutral' backdrop that many accounts tacitly frame them as, but it plays a more substantive role in the process of data collection. Our interactions are always shaped by the 'place' in which we find ourselves. As Elwood and Martin (2000) suggest, the interview site "itself produces 'micro-geographies' of spatial relations and meaning, where multiple scales of social relations intersect in the research interview" (Elwood and Martin, 2000: 649). These micro-geographies are reflective both of the kind of relationship that the interviewer and interviewee has as well as the "broader sociocultural context that affects both researcher and participant" (Elwood and Martin, 2000: 650; see also Sin, 2003).

These micro-geographies became apparent at unexpected moments, prompting serious reflection on how best to conduct the interview process. For example, I arranged to meet Trish, my oldest participant in her mid-60s, in a local café one morning. Whilst I felt perfectly comfortable here—it was somewhere I came regularly—Trish was less so, and on her arrival she noted that she did not come here often as she found the seating uncomfortable and it was quite loud. Whilst part of my decision to meet participants here was that it struck me as a space that had always attracted a wide range of people,

Trish did not feel the same way. Looking round that morning, the age of the other customers in the café did seem particularly young and the background music was indeed loud. Having failed to offer Trish a preferred alternative when we arranged the interview, I felt a responsibility to broaden the options available to future participants. Such an instance shows how interview sites do not simply serve to bring participants and researchers together in a physical sense, but can potentially serve to divide them or reflect wider social and cultural differences (Longhurst, 2010).

Other interviews, where possible, were conducted *in situ* of the respective organisation. This provided opportunities for making sense of practices as they played out on-the-ground, as well as gathering other research material such as photographs. In many cases—particularly spaces of food production—it also allowed for the possibility of walking interviews with participants. This proved to be a particularly powerful tool in traversing these sites and asking further probing questions (Jones et al., 2008). Whilst travelling to these sites was often expensive and time consuming, as noted above, much of the time this was the only way to secure face-to-face interviews. Though I deal with the topic more substantively in Chapter Six, the micro-geographies of certain sites (notably the food banks) were at points difficult to manage and required the extensive negotiation of my own position as a 'researcher'. Despite this, these experiences of undertaking interviews across a variety of locations raises questions around the extent to which a 'neutral' backdrop is either epistemologically plausible and/or methodologically desirable. Recognising the dynamics of these micro-geographies, I argue, may even benefit the insights gained from the interview process.

Once I had collected the interviews—31 in total—they were transcribed verbatim. I then coded these transcripts using ATLAS.ti, a software package designed to aid the analysis of qualitative data (Friese, 2014).

Ethical issues

Several ethical dilemmas arose whilst undertaking the interviews which are worthy of discussion. Primarily, these revolved around questions of confidentiality. As Silverman (2013) notes, good ethical research is premised on ensuring the confidentiality of the discussion between researcher and participant. As noted in the participant information sheet contained in Appendix 2, this involved some basic procedures such as keeping documentation securely stored. Further, audio recordings of interviews were encrypted and stored on the university filestore, with all names (both of organisations and people) anonymised with a pseudonym. Whilst all important components of conducting ethical research, confidentiality was significantly harder to manage in the field whilst conducting these interviews.

The geographically-bounded nature of this study meant that it was unsurprising that many participants knew, or at least knew of, each other. As a result, being asked who I had already spoken to for research purposes by my participants was a regular occurrence. Though many were simply inquisitive, it was inevitable that I would have to reveal some (admittedly minimal) details that I had stated would remain entirely confidential. When I was first asked this, I responded by saying that I could not say for reasons of confidentiality, and the interview lacked any sense of rapport. Realising that this was potentially problematic, I decided not to name individuals where possible, coupled with noncommittal remarks about 'interesting projects' in the surrounding area. 'Playing dumb' (Leech, 2002) in this way avoided revealing any of the minutiae of what was discussed in the interview, thereby not impinging on confidentiality.

This tactic, however, was not always successful. In one of the earlier interviewers, prior to me formally beginning the recording, one participant pushed me to confirm if an organisation that he had mentioned—and that I had alluded to visiting for this research—was in significant financial trouble as was rumoured. Whilst I had no concrete evidence to confirm this, the interview conducted there strongly suggested that this was the case. However, I was not willing to share this sensitive information, and I

once again 'played dumb' in saying that I did not know. The participant in question did not readily accept this, however, and seemed surprised (and to some degree exasperated) by my inability to discern the financial position of this organisation despite conducting a long interview with the main grower there. Whilst this strategy of 'playing dumb' importantly protects the confidentiality of other participants, it risked my legitimacy as a researcher. Though I managed to build rapport despite this initial hurdle, and the interview was eventually successful, it was an uncomfortable encounter.

This example is emblematic of what Silverman describes as 'appropriate deception' (Silverman, 2013) in the research process. Despite gaining informed consent with all participants (the consent form is contained in Appendix 3), it is rarely realistic that this leads to total transparency between researcher and participant. Whilst I was always honest about the aims of the research, its limitations, and potential outcomes from it, I found many participants (particularly those with commercial interests) often made presumptions as to my position. Conversely, my perspective has been necessarily ambivalent throughout this research and I never pretended that it was simply a piece of 'market research' that could be instrumentally used to increase sales. In initial interviews, I remained reserved on this, often going along with the presumptions made by participants. As time went on, however, I became more comfortable in standing my ground—both in terms of confidentiality as well as positioning myself in relation to the research. As Baarts (2009) comments on her own ethical dilemmas in the interview process:

> I should have recognized that ethical research does not imply a comfortable sort of neutrality, and that taking a standpoint as a researcher means adopting a third position distinct from both the dominant and the marginal positions within the controversy. […] Taking a stand does not necessarily imply communicating everything to collaborators or participants. But it does mean that one must reflect on the part played by one's personal values and beliefs. Thus, ethical

research requires personal authenticity in the way one positions oneself in relation to the subject matter. (Baarts, 2009: 432)

Developing this position was an important lesson emerging from the various ethical dilemmas raised within the interview process. I continue the discussion of positionality later in this chapter, particularly with relation to ethnography.

Photographic food diaries and follow-up interviews

Methodological approach and the pilot study

Although interviews served as the primary research method for this study, other methods were utilised to answer the research questions more effectively. As Holm and Kildevang (1996) discuss, whilst interviews are "well suited for gathering realistic information on actual practices as they are experienced" (Holm and Kildevang, 1996: 12), these experiences are always subsequently (re-)framed through representational knowledge in the form of language. Yet much of what we know about the world—particularly regarding phenomena such as food—is not wholly reducible to language, at best vaguely mapping on to our experiences (Carolan, 2015). As a result, the two methods under discussion within this section and the next (ethnography) served to try and make sense of practices around food as they occurred. In doing so, the potential weaknesses that came with the sole deployment of interviews as a research method was mitigated.

Though the epistemological status of photographs remains debated (Rose, 2016) they have come to represent an important medium in sociological and geographical research (T. Hall, 2009). Within this study, I recruited 10 participants from the pool of interviewees to complete a week-long photographic diary of food in their everyday lives. This was premised on them also completing a short follow-up interview with the diaries to discuss the process and to reflect on the range of photographs that they had taken. These participants were provided with a cheap digital camera if required, though

many opted instead to use their mobile phones for ease. In addition, they were offered a small voucher as a reward for their participation (Singer and Kulka, 2002). I hoped that this process (interview $\Rightarrow$ food diary $\Rightarrow$ follow-up interview) would help to further develop the findings from the initial interview, providing deeper insights into food practices in everyday lives.

Provided with a paper counterpart to record further details (time, location, comments)—contained here in Appendix 4—I ran the pilot study with Sarah and Matthew as an experimental endeavour. Giving little guidance as to what they ought to photograph outside of the food that they ate over the week, I emphasised that the diaries were theirs to complete as they deemed appropriate. After all, in a poststructuralist vein, I was as interested in the content of the photographs as the framing and setting of it, as well as their reasons (if identifiable) for taking it in the first place (T. Hall, 2009). Naïvely expecting my participants to embrace this freedom, it instead manifested as a source of ambiguity and worry. As Sarah stated in the follow-up interview:

> I think part of it was like, well, I wasn't sure whether you wanted photographs of every meal I'd eaten that day or like or whether it was something like more general than that and it didn't really matter and it could just be like general 'foody' things. So that was something that I was perhaps a little unclear on.

Matthew stated similar, which he felt limited his capacity to complete the diary:

> I didn't feel like I had the space to kind of think about it [the diary] and be particularly helpful. Except the last day where, because your focus is quite broad possibly, I took photos of our green bean plants and tomato plants. We like growing some stuff and it would be nice if we could grow more but we don't have a garden for that. And the other thing that I only kind of thought of giving you was photos of our food plan for the week, our shopping list. But yeah, yeah,

that was the main thing. So my diary doesn't have things from when I ate food outside which was a few times. And it's not complete as well, because I wasn't always remembering to fill it in.

The ambiguity that these participants felt resonates with Latham's (2003) accounts of the problems regularly faced with misinterpretations around the undertaking of photographic research methods. Though much of the empirical content that Sarah and Matthew collected was helpful, it was clear that I needed to offer tighter parameters to participants in the full study. One way that I achieved this was by including an 'example day' at the start of the diary, including a sample of photographs that emerged from the pilot study. At the same time, the pilot study made it clear that rewritten instructions ought not to be *too* prescriptive. Much of the most intriguing data collected through this method was that which participants had intuitively felt was relevant, even if they could not necessarily explain why.

The perils and joys of co-production in research

Research undertaken in this way is closely aligned to what Zimmerman and Wieder (1977) describe as the 'diary, diary—interview method' (see also Latham, 2003). For Zimmerman and Wieder, the fundamental difference between one-off, semi-structured interviews and this method lies in the way that

> Granted that the observer both observes and questions, subjects function in two analytically distinguishable roles: naïve *performer* and reflective *informant*. As performer, the native presumably moves through his or her normal activities 'as if' the observer were not present, which is to say, 'naturally'. (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977: 484, emphases in original)

This perspective echoes Holm and Kildevang (1996) in suggesting that the potential influence of the researcher (as well as those aforementioned micro-geographies of the

interview context) can be minimised if they are at a distance. Though we may critique the 'naturalistic' emphasis of Zimmerman and Wieder—arguably, only covert methods can achieve this (see, for example, Calvey, 2008)—this method allows for the capturing of "spatially diffuse" (Latham, 2003: 2001) practices that cannot be captured in the interview context.

The diary, diary—interview method can therefore be understood as a reversal of the logic behind photo elicitation methods. For Harper, photo elicitation involves "the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview" (Harper, 2002: 13). Whilst the photograph in these cases can help to make the interview more comfortable (Oliffe and Bottorff, 2007), it is provided by the researcher and premised as important based on their judgement. By comparison, getting participants to take the photographs themselves articulates them as co-producers of the research. This has the important effect of "de-center[ing] the authority of the researcher […] [thereby holding] the potential to help us 'listen' more carefully to research participants' experiences, 'see' those experiences more clearly and fully, and recover unarticulated aspects" (Power, 2003: 15-8). Framed in this way, and having rewritten the instructions since the pilot study, I felt positive about the potential of this method in the full study.

In some respects, the diaries were less successful as a method than I had hoped. The empowering spirit of co-production that Power discusses that undergirds this method did not always manifest. Whilst the photographs proved to be a good basis for discussion in the (largely unstructured) follow-up interviews, most of the participants were anxious about the normative judgements that they expected me to make of them and their respective food practices. Whilst I had no intention of making these judgements, these concerns reinforced the intimate status of the relationships that we have with food (Winson, 1993) as well as the power dynamics between researcher and participant that the 'co-production' framing here failed to break down. Other participants apologised for the messy or disorganised appearance of the diary, whilst

others expressed worries around how (self-evidently) unhelpful their account was. On this note, many ran out of enthusiasm for the process, seeing the repetitiveness of their relationship to food as uninteresting and therefore unworthy of documentation.[18] As Sarah suggested on this front:

> I think at the start I found it really interesting and I was quite into it, like you can probably see that I've written like long comments and I was like… and then by the sort of the end of the week they're a little bit less […]. I found it harder as it went on because of the repetitiveness of my diet. So like there were less photos later on because there wasn't… it was just like I had the same thing for breakfast everyday and I'd made a batch of soup which lasted for days, that kind of stuff.

Though I attempted to maintain contact with the participants whilst they were undertaking the diaries—primarily via two brief emails—securing the follow-up interviews was more difficult. It was clear that participants found the longer-term commitment required of this method versus one-off interviews tiring. Not wishing to be overly persistent, I made sure to try and get the food diaries back once completed, but even this was not easy. Two participants stopped responding to my emails during the process of completing the diary, whilst another said she had posted the paper diary to me though I never received it (she then promptly stopped responding). Trying not to take personal offence, it was evident that some of the participants felt over-researched and that I had perhaps expected too much work on their part (Clark, 2008). As Clark's account highlights, only receiving seven diaries back and having insufficient time to recruit other participants was a harsh lesson that participants "are not simple

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[18] As noted elsewhere in this thesis, social practice theory has importantly drawn attention to the ways in which relationships to food become routinised (e.g. Warde, 2016). Whilst lay actors may see these routinised interactions as insignificant—being so interwoven into the fabric of 'normal' everyday life—the fact that they take on these characteristics is itself sociologically significant (Halkier et al., 2011).

information providers who idly comply with the requests of researchers" (Clark, 2008: 954). Though much of the empirical data that I did receive via this research method was relevant—it informs much of the discussion in Chapter Five—it made me consider the ways I might improve my utilisation such a method in future research.

Ethical issues

These dilemmas carried ethical implications. For example, in the case of the participants who failed to complete the diary, how many times was it appropriate to contact them before I conceded defeat? During the initial round of recruiting for the interviews, I operated a 'three strikes' policy whereby I attempted to make initial contact, sent a reminder and then a final message. If I had no response by then, I shifted my efforts elsewhere. Yet whilst accounts (e.g. Latham, 2016) assert the need to be careful and specific in the ways in which participants are contacted for recruitment—especially with research questions such as those that guide this study—few perspectives consider the ethical dimensions of maintaining contact once it is first established. Sarah Marie Hall (2009) suggests that this often necessitates difficult decisions, yet it remains insufficiently considered in the methodological literature. In the study Hall discusses, however, her participants are responsive and the prerogative lies with the researcher as to when she ought to contact the participants. In this research, however, there was no clear answer to this dilemma. Should I have operated a 'three strikes' policy in attempting to get the diaries returned to me? Would it be overly intrusive to contact them by phone if participants had failed to respond to my emails? Should I be apologetic for contacting them multiple times, or was it fair to expect them to complete the diaries as they promised? These were questions that I struggled to answer and position myself in relation to.

Photographic research methods such as these also raised a number of ethical questions which were not encountered during the interview process (Wiles et al., 2010). As Wiles *et al.* suggest, whilst "anonymity and confidentiality are long-established principles in

social research practice […] much visual material makes the anonymisation of individuals or locations problematic if not impossible" (Wiles et al., 2008: section 4). Though few of the pictures received identified individuals, the identification of locations proved to be a more difficult ethical quandary. In some cases, photographs that participants had taken were at the same sites that I had conducted interviews at under the premise of confidentiality. In cases such as these, the question of who provides consent (and to what) becomes altogether more complicated.

These potential problems meant some precautions were taken. Where possible, I anonymised photographs that clearly identified the location in which they were taken by blurring details using image manipulation software. Discarding these images seemed unnecessary, as it is unsurprising that a geographically bounded study such as this entails that locations—if a reader was determined enough—could be identifiable. Although accounts such as Pink (2003) problematise increasing reflexivity on the part of the researcher as a 'one size fits all' solution to the ethical dilemmas raised by photographic methods, we ought to remain mindful of the various meanings within images, as well as possible interpretations of them. Willes *et al.* (2008) subsequently note three key lines on which visual material can be judged as being appropriate for analysis, thereby maintaining the ethical integrity of research. These are "the context in which the image is produce; the content of the image; [and] the contexts and subjectivities through which the images are viewed" (Wiles et al., 2008: section 5). As with much social science research, it is fair to conclude by saying that the potential ethical implications of this method prompts us to be careful, but nonetheless reasonably pragmatic, in our approach (Guillemin and Drew, 2010).

Ethnography

Methodological approach

The third method that I employed was an ethnography of three key sites over a six-month period from April to September 2016. During this time, I took part in various

volunteering sessions at Wood Grove, Flourishing Fare and Beautiful Provender.[19] The time spent at these sites was important as it allowed further opportunities to make sense of food practices in ways that the photographic diaries did not readily allow for. Whilst an important method within this research, the open-ended nature of the food diaries meant that much of the data gathered through them was orientated around consumption practices. Though I did not initially plan to employ ethnography—primarily due to their time-consuming nature (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004)—the research questions necessitated greater insights into production practices. Further, being present as these practices played out enabled me to take "a more active stance towards capturing […] informants' actions and interpretations" (Kusenbach, 2003: 463) than the reflective viewpoints encountered in the interviews, food diaries and their follow-up interviews.

With no prior experience of undertaking ethnographies, I was unsure as to how to approach them. As Sampson (2004) notes, ethnography does not lend itself to pilot studies in the ways that the other methods that I have made use of here do. This leads to ethnography often proceeding through "cold and total immersion [into the research site] which, while carrying some advantages, also carries a number of significant dangers and problems" (Sampson, 2004: 391). Hoping to avoid the shock—and potential problems—of this 'cold immersion' into both an unfamiliar site and unfamiliar method, I contacted Daisy, who I had already visited and interviewed at Wood Grove. With informal links to others also involved in the site, as well as weekly volunteering sessions and it being located close to where I lived at the time, it was the best site to begin with as it would be the one that I would be able to attend most regularly.

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[19] The former two sites were CSA schemes whilst the latter was an organic, direct-to-door producer. Their varied aims, locations and scales meant that the combination of these three sites provided a comprehensive overview of production practices within AFNs. The organisations and participants involved are introduced in greater depth towards the end of this chapter.

Though ethical issues around access and gatekeeping are discussed in the section that follows, my first few visits to Wood Grove felt directionless. Whilst the experience of this participant observation was enjoyable, and the other volunteers were welcoming, it was hard to know what was important.[20] Unlike the other methods, which elicited clear and thought-provoking data, ethnography provided a flux of detail which I had to learn to sift through and make sense of. I primarily collected this detail through a combination of self-narrated voice recordings and reflective notes—in practice often mostly written up on my return home due to the dirty and hands-on nature of work conducted on the site—I was surprised as to just how much I gathered from one afternoon on the site. After the first few volunteering sessions, I began to feel more comfortable and aware of my purpose there, gradually eschewing that initial feeling of directionlessness (Van Maanen, 2011). In my notes, I wrote to myself that perhaps this positive change meant that I had unwittingly completed my own quasi-pilot study, much of which revolved around becoming acquainted with the method. Over time, writing these reflective notes in a direct dialogue with my research questions meant I could be more critical, focusing in on important exchanges and encounters where appropriate. Yet as Baszanger and Dodier (2004) note, the pleasures of ethnography lie in the unexpected, and research questions ought not to act as analytical blinkers. For them, the ethnographer must

> remain open in order to discover the elements making up the markers and the tools that people mobilize in their interactions with others and, more generally, with the world. By markers, we mean representations of the world, or normative

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[20] Though a contested distinction, here I rely on Atkinson and Hammersley's (1994) perspective which suggests that 'participant observation' refers to the data collection method whilst 'ethnography' captures the methodological approach more broadly. Ethnography, therefore, includes the subsequent analysis of the data. As they fairly note, framing participant observation as a substantive method on its own terms could be construed as problematic as "in a sense *all* social research is a form of participant observation, because we cannot study the social world without being part of it" (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994: 249, emphasis in original). Recognising this, their distinction is fair.

expectations, but also the linguistic and para-linguistic resources that are displayed in contact with the environment. (Baszanger and Dodier, 2004: 11)

By 'remaining open' in this way and progressing to spending time in the other two sites, these ethnographic reflections took the analysis in unexpected directions. Chapter Six, in particular, relies on autoethnography, detailing my first-hand experiences of spaces such as food banks (Baszanger and Dodier, 2004). Writing this analysis highlighted the power of an (auto)ethnographic approach, which has recently been used in other food scholarship with remarkable efficacy (see, for example, Garthwaite, 2016a). Though the extensive labour involved in an ethnographic approach initially discouraged me from adopting it, by the end of the six-month period I was disappointed that I had not made more of it and extended it to other sites. At the same time, given that many of these sites were difficult for me to access, I considered it a success and the dialogue reached with the research questions enlightening. Beyond these pragmatic constraints, however, it is worth recognising that ethnography raised other problems.

Ethical issues

The main ethical concerns around ethnographic methods related to questions of access and consent (Li, 2008). Although a clear boundary exists between covert and overt research when applying for formal ethical approval, Lugosi (2006) notes that this distinction is often liminal 'in the field'. For example, none of the sites that I spent time at had a fixed contingent of actors present, and they came and went as their respective schedules necessitated. For those who knew the reasons for my presence, I was overt, whilst for new visitors and people that I had not met before I was potentially covert. My ethical approval was premised on all research being undertaken through informed consent, but the idea that I would immediately rush to tell anyone new that I was there for research purposes seemed overly artificial and forced. The various ethical issues raised by ethnographic methods quickly became clear to me (Dingwall, 1980).

Because of this, some precautions were taken. In each site, my first contact (whom in each case I had undertaken an interview with) acted as a gatekeeper who permitted my extended presence within the site. They all agreed to make others aware of my status as a researcher as required, and I agreed to be forthcoming in conversations about this. Additionally, that I would be writing field notes where possible made it clear that I was there for research purposes, and none of my gatekeepers envisaged me taking part in conversations that would be of an ethically-sensitive nature. With this understanding agreed with all the respective gatekeepers—albeit without any explicit rules laid out— it seemed fair to suggest that a pragmatic balance was struck between the practical demands of ethnographies and ensuring ethical standards of research (Wanat, 2008).

This did not entirely solve the initial dilemmas that I have highlighted. For example, one visit to Beautiful Provender coincided with a 'community work day' that had been advertised in the local area to recruit a larger number of volunteers than typically in attendance week-to-week. The gatekeeper and I had agreed that he would introduce me to the unfamiliar volunteers at the beginning of the session so they were aware of my reasons for being present. Side-tracked by helping with a task in a different greenhouse from the debrief, I presumed that the gatekeeper had introduced me and explained my role in my absence. As it transpired, he had forgotten to mention me amongst the other announcements that he had to make. With the volunteers put to work and distributed across the site, there was no easy way to introduce myself to everyone. Whilst I attempted to explain my position as a researcher in later conversations that I had, there was no mechanism by which I could answer questions or any concerns held by the collective group. This situation was not ideal, and there were some volunteers present to whom I inevitably remained opaque in my intentions.

During another visit to Beautiful Provender, ethical concerns also came to my attention around what was appropriate and inappropriate to record during observations, as well as how this was negotiated in different contexts (Hurdley, 2010; Cant and Sharma,

1998). Though—as noted above—the gatekeeper had not envisaged any ethically-sensitive conversations taking place, on this day the workers took a lunch break together. Whilst I offered to sit out of their lunch, they insisted that I join them. The topics discussed around their business were different to those discussed previously, including financial matters, which I found surprising. However, it quickly became clear to me that what was discussed during the break was considered 'off the record' and did not constitute part of my observation, despite the issues being discussed being important for my research. Similarly, making some small purchases from the on-site farm shop before I travelled home, I was asked whether this was for my research or not. With no clear answer, I wondered why my own personal food shopping should not count as research. This raises a bigger question: when does ethnography start, and when/how/why does it stop? Learning what was (and what was not) judged to be part of my ethnography required a strong sense of reflexivity and personal negotiation (Foley, 2002). At other points during the research, I found myself unwittingly in the presence of participants during social occasions, which highlighted the problems of conceptualising the ethnographer as either being 'in' or 'out' of the field (Burrell, 2009). In reality, these positions are often contested and unclear (S.M. Hall, 2009), even to the researcher themselves.

Focus groups

Methodological approach and pilot study

The final method under consideration in this chapter is focus groups. This consideration will be shorter than the others because whilst I trialled it in its own pilot study, I did not then go on to employ it in the full study. Though I will expand on the reasons for this later in the discussion, this was a largely pragmatic decision. Firstly, however, it is worth conceptualising focus groups, in doing so drawing attention to their differences versus other methods considered thus far.

At their core, the focus group can be characterised as a group interview bringing together a range of participants (Cronin, 2016; Morgan, 1996). Much like semi-structured interviews, open-ended questions are then used to generate discussion between participants (Colucci, 2007). As Stanley suggests, this format means that they are therefore

> particularly relevant to analysing intersubjectivity: the common-sense conceptions and ordinary explanations shared by a set of social actors […]. Everyday talk, gathered through the focus group discussions, allows the analyst to witness the production and performance of […] shared meanings and experiences. (Stanley, 2014a: 20)

The decision to pilot focus groups as a research method developed out the possibility that they may help to interrogate the "shared meanings and experiences" held by a range of actors within the foodscape. Whilst they may therefore be helpful in making sense of the ways that these "ordinary explanations" come to be shared, we may take issue with Stanley's conceptualisation of them as an insight into the "everyday talk" around any given topic. Recognising that all research situations are, in a sense, artificial and that the discussions emerging within them would not necessarily occur elsewhere, I instead saw them as spaces that may allow for more generative interventions beyond those that I could muster in my 'interviewer' role. To clarify, that is to suggest that judging the efficacy of research methods against a naturalistic yardstick is unnecessary, and their benefits may be interpreted under different framings. In the focus group, my role as an 'interviewer' instead shifts to one of 'moderator' of a larger discussion, hoping to tease out the complexities and nuances of the various viewpoints held by participants. As Kitzinger states,

> it would be naïve […] to assume that group data is by definition 'natural' in the sense that it would have occurred without the group having been convened for

this purpose. […] [T]he focus groups are artificially set up situations. Rather than assuming the group session unproblematically and inevitably reflects 'everyday interactions' (although sometimes it will) the group should be used to encourage people to engage with one another, verbally formulate their ideas and draw out the cognitive structures which previously have been unarticulated. (Kitzinger, 1994: 106)

Conceptualising focus groups in this way, and hoping that they may augment the empirical data obtained via other methods, I undertook a pilot study with six acquaintances (including Sarah, but not Matthew who was unavailable). This number was felt to be a suitable number to generate the level of discussion central to Kitzinger's conceptualisation of focus groups (Morgan, 1997). Whilst some of these participants did not necessarily fit my sampling criteria for the full study, their interest in the research and availability meant their inclusion was not problematic. As Hennink fairly suggests, "the essential purpose of the pilot is to identify how the questions are comprehended and whether the questions and their translations capture the issues as intended by the researchers" (Hennink, 2007: 72). Similarly, the pilot helped to consider pragmatic questions of timing. For example, in my initial schedule for the focus group, I envisaged that three main activities (with various questions and discussion points in each) would take between 60 and 90 minutes to complete. In the pilot study, however, the group was only able to complete two of these substantive activities within two hours, at which point I drew it to a close. The third activity had to be abandoned entirely, providing an important lesson in managing the smooth running of focus groups and allowing sufficient time for discussion to develop between participants (Cronin, 2016).

Within these activities, questions initially centred around where participants shopped for food. I hoped that this would provide a way in to wider discussions around food practices, though it largely failed to spur debate. Though I was a moderator in this role, the lack of debate made it feel more like a series of disparate, one-to-one interviews

conducted in the presence of others. Reflecting on this activity, it felt prying, and as Browne frames it, it was an "awkward research encounter" overly confrontational around the "sensitive dynamics of everyday life" (Browne, 2016: 198). As a result, it drew the ethical challenges raised by focus groups to the fore. As Longhurst (2010) notes, confidentiality in these settings becomes difficult to manage as what is said is known by all participants. As a result, a mutually respectful environment must be fostered and it should remain the participant's decision as to what they disclose to the rest of the group (Litosseliti, 2003). Emphasising the importance of this, one participant said that they felt embarrassed to admit where they purchased most of their food, in this case a budget supermarket, due to their financial situation. I realised that this activity in its original formulation risked leaving some participants disenfranchised from the group (Pini, 2002), with ethical implications for the research as a whole.

The pilot focus group was not a completely negative experience, however, and the other activity that I had time to undertake was more successful in fostering debate. Moving beyond verbal questioning, Colucci (2007) suggests that exercises involving "listing, sorting, ranking […] where participants are actually asked to 'do' something […] provide[s] a different way of eliciting answers and promoting discussion" (Colucci, 2007: 1424). Informed by Colucci's perspective, this activity provided participants with nine statements around food practices (contained in Appendix 5). They were then asked to mark on the scale how far they agreed or disagreed that the statement applied to them. For example:

I like to know where my food comes from (i.e. where/how it is grown or produced)

|---|

Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

I went through each statement in order and asked the participants to mark their position on the scale. Following this, the questions were revisited and I asked the participants if

anyone was willing to share where they marked on the scale and why. This delay in the process between encountering a question and the opportunity to discuss it enabled the "more reflective participants" in the group "who [were] less comfortable with immediate verbal responses" (Colucci, 2007: 1424) to consider their position. As one participant informally told me after the focus group, marking one's position on the scale "gives you a voice. If you don't want to talk then you know your opinion still counts". By comparison to the previous activity, being able to compare differing perspectives on each statement was nonetheless generative of extensive discussion between participants. In preparation for the full study, I replaced the open-ended scale with a more traditional Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree). Having these categories provided a more coherent basis for comparison than participants interpreting what their point 'meant' on an open scale (Fowler, 2014).

The method that was not to be

Despite my hopes for this method after the pilot study, it did not progress as expected. Whilst I made the required changes to the documentation based on the above considerations, the pilot was arranged late in the empirical data collection phase, and undertaking it within the timescales of the full study proved to be impractical. Again attempting to recruit from the same pool that I undertook the initial interviews with, I contacted many of the previous participants to a muted response. Despite offering two potential dates as well as reimbursing all travel costs, for those that had undertaken the food diaries (and though I was painfully aware of it) it was yet another commitment that I was asking participants to agree to, further contributing to the feeling of being over-researched (Clark, 2008). Those that did respond to me stated they did not have the time. Similar reasons were received from producers, many of whom drew my attention to the fact that I was trying to arrange the focus groups at the height of the summer harvesting period. For many participants, this was busiest period of the calendar year, and it was therefore implausible that they might find the time to attend.

Two participants agreed to one of the dates, though follow-up emails did not warrant any further volunteers. Considering whether to recruit from outside of the pool of previous participants, with two weeks to go I realised I had nowhere to host the focus group. Whilst cafés were suitable for one-to-one interviews, a focus group required a dedicated, more private space (Bryman, 2012). A community centre with free room hire was unavailable on the relevant dates, and I felt that asking participants to travel to the university to use a meeting room there was overly formal and akin to a job interview. The only other option that I could find in the area was expensive, especially when factoring in refreshment costs (see Barbour, 2005 for further consideration of the often expensive nature of focus groups). Given that, at that point, I already had an extensive amount of empirical data collected, it seemed a misdirected effort to attempt to recruit several new participants. Combined with potential expense, and concerns around a sufficient number of participants to make it worthwhile—especially when focus groups are plagued with problems around participants failing to attend (Morgan, 1995)—I decided not to proceed any further with this method.

Whilst the pilot study gave a tantalising glimpse of the benefits that focus groups may bring to qualitative research, my failure to organise one within the full study was nonetheless insightful. I learnt a lot about the successful running of focus groups, and their substantive differences from semi-structured interviews, despite sharing many continuities. Most importantly, it raised questions around the best way to approach the recruitment of participants, which I have discussed as a recurring problem in this chapter. Stanley (2014a), for example, arranged focus groups in his doctoral research through two gatekeeper organisations, thereby successfully accessing pre-existing groups. Whether this is the best way to recruit participants necessarily depends on the research questions posed (Morgan, 1995), but my discussion here makes it clear that my own recruitment methods left much to be desired and were largely ineffective. If anything, this saga was a pedagogical experience.

Making sense with multiple methods

Having charted the methodological approach taken across the full study—discounting focus groups in the process—it is worth briefly considering how the combining of these three methods helped to 'make sense' of the data in the subsequent analysis (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Though accounts have proliferated articulating the epistemological challenges involved in mixed methods research (see, for example, perspectives mentioned nearer the beginning of this chapter: Morgan, 2007; Hussein, 2015; Johnson et al., 2007; Giddings, 2006; Doyle et al., 2009), this is premised on the mixing of qualitative and quantitative paradigms. Less, however, has been said about the combining of methods that elicit data within a single paradigm. Pritchard echoes this, stating that "the […] practice of working with qualitative-qualitative ('qual-qual') combinations receives much less attention within the literature" (Pritchard, 2012: 132; see also Hesse-Biber, 2010). The (qual-qual-qual) approach that I employ here elicits a range of data with different epistemological statuses that necessitates further consideration in how we approach it. After all, whilst the data may all be orientated around the same research questions, its various forms means that it does not necessarily neatly combine into a coherent whole. Furthermore, it certainly does not combine of its own accord, despite scholarship tending to treat this as a passive or self-evident process (Bryman, 2008).

Making sense of the data across these methods proved challenging. For example, as noted earlier in the chapter, the semi-structured interviews were thematically coded through ATLAS.ti from the outset. This proved helpful in being able to cross-reference themes, focusing in on the analysis and finding a dialogue with the research questions. Aware that the data from the semi-structured interviews alone was insufficient, I hoped when I began the photographic food diaries that I could analyse this data in the same way. Unsurprisingly, the follow-up interviews were coded and did not present any major problems. The problems came, however, with the photographs and the diaries

themselves. Though ATLAS.ti and similar software packages are designed to aid 'qualitative analysis' in an open-ended way, it quickly became apparent that such software is better suited to the analysis of certain forms of data over others. Aside from practical problems—for example the software handling certain file formats of the photographs better than others—it raised more fundamental epistemological questions. The codes that were applied in the textual analysis of the semi-structured interview did not map neatly on to the photographs, and nor the scans of the diaries. Later in the process of data collection, I experimented with the coding of my ethnographic reflective notes. Again, this did not work very well and I eventually abandoned this task. Though all this data was intrinsically qualitative, it exemplified the various gritty problems faced in combining different qualitative methods.

Kincheloe's (2005) productive theorisation of qualitative research as a bricolage (a concept tracing back to Geertz's (1988) and Lévi-Strauss' (1966) anthropological writings)—and the researcher-as-bricoleur—is prescient in explaining how I overcame these problems. For Kincheloe, attempts to reduce complexity, as I initially attempted above, are naïve and destined to fail. Conversely,

> in its embrace of complexity, the bricolage constructs a far more active role for humans both in shaping reality and in creating the research processes and narratives that represent it. Such an active agency rejects deterministic views of social reality that assume the effects of particular social, political, economic […] processes. (Kincheloe, 2005: 325)

Critiquing what Kincheloe understands as "monological knowledge […] [which is] produced in the rationalistic quest for order and certainty […] [thereby] seek[ing] an objective knowledge of unconnected things-in-themselves" (Kincheloe, 2005: 326), the bricoleur retains a spirit of eclecticism throughout the research process (see also Lincoln, 2001). This goes beyond being open to employing research methods as

required—not seeing methods as worthwhile processes for their own sake—but also being open to questioning the reasons for combining methods. Informed by bricolage, Pritchard (2012) asks us to consider what 'properly' combined research looks like, and how we might judge combination as being successful when making sense of the data. These were questions that I struggled to answer. On reflection, my attempt to smoothly assimilate all data under a shared group of thematic codes could be understood as a technical, perhaps instrumental, exercise of combination, undertaken primarily to provide a more coherent order to the various forms of data that I had amassed.

Setting this task aside for a few weeks, it gradually became clearer as to how (and why) I might combine these various methods. Having recently completed my ethnographies when I was attempting this task, I saw the process as recognising—and not necessarily 'healing' or mitigating—analytical rifts that emerged over time. My staggered deployment of research methods (interviews, followed by photographic food diaries and finally ethnography) helped to highlight the different, and often contradictory, conclusions arrived at with regards to the research questions. As opposed to aiming towards the assimilation of all data under the thematic codes, I could instead use these codes as conceptual framings through which to re-analyse the other data. In doing so, I could remain open to recognising continuities across the data but, as per the bricolage, I was also able to recognise discontinuities. Therefore, this approach to data analysis played a partly integrative role between different forms. Elsewhere, where there were discontinuities, it prompted me to view the findings in a richly dialogical way with the research questions (Pritchard, 2012). Whilst admittedly a more conceptual conclusion than I had hoped to arrive at when I set out on this task, to represent various forms of qualitative data as neatly combining belies the complexity both of research and of the wider social world (Kincheloe, 2005). I had developed not only as a researcher, but concurrently a bricoleur.

Outlining the research participants and organisations

The final task in this chapter is to outline the various research participants and organisations that were involved. This completes the scene setting necessary for the data analysis chapters which follow. The AFN label, however (and as noted in Chapter Two) does not make such a task easy. In offering an analytical perspective that focuses in the linkages between different actors—everything from producers, distributors, retailers, consumers, as well as messy 'in between' spaces that defy neat categorisation (see Cook *et al*, 2004)—in networks, the organisations involved are at risk of receiving insufficient consideration on their own terms. Yet the specific ways in which these sites are organised are important for, as Sassatelli (2004) notes, organisational models relate to, but do not necessarily determine, the aims and intentions of these sites and the relationships to food that they might be attempting to enact. Such a tension has played out in problematic ways in AFN literature. For example, Jarosz's (2008) dialectical account initially refuses to ascribe AFNs with any characteristics, instead suggesting that they are "constituted out of multiple, contradictory processes and relations, which they internalize in place and through time" (Jarosz, 2008: 232). A few paragraphs on, however, Jarosz offers a definition of AFNs based on four characteristics with the dialectical framework seemingly forgotten. For her, AFNs can be characterised through a greater geographical proximity between producers and consumers; reduced overall scale; the presence of food purchasing venues such as cooperatives; all undergirded by 'ethical commitments' to sustainable food (Jarosz, 2008: 232). However, this definition is not universally generalisable (compare this, for example, to Si *et al.*'s (2015) analysis of AFNs in China (see also Martindale et al., 2018)) and it seems important to look at the characteristics of different organisations within AFNs in a contextually-aware analysis.

As a result, in recognising the processual nature of AFNs that Jarosz highlights, the differing organisations and sites involved in this research coalesce under four broad headings. Whilst some of these sites have been largely ignored by existing research around AFNs (e.g. food banks and food waste initiatives), these have been included in

this study for the substantive role that they play in food provisioning in the austerity foodscape. As Chapter Two highlighted, to ignore these spaces seems problematic. The account that I develop over the rest of this thesis highlights the important insights that may emerge from incorporating these sites into AFN research, drawing our attention to the need to cast a wide net to make sense of the complex geographies of the austerity foodscape.

Small-scale producers, retailers and co-operatives
(Table 3)

Name of site[21]	Organisational model	Research participants recruited from organisation
Beautiful Provender	Organic co-operative fruit and vegetable grower, with on-site farm shop and direct-to-door delivery service	Robert, Sam
Green Shoots	Organic fruit and vegetable grower, with direct-to-door delivery service	David
Rolling Pastures Farm	Organic dairy, selling milk primarily to the hospitality trade	Joe
The Gigantic Cabbage	Organic grower of vegetables sold on-site and seed orders via post	Joanne
The Exceptional Potato	Vegetable and seedling producer, sold primarily at farmer's markets	Jessica
Wholefood Campus Co-Operative	Co-operative selling fruit and vegetables produced on a university campus, as well as other ethically-certified snack foods	Sarah, Matthew, Chloe
Together Through Food	Online franchise platform to connect small-scale producers with consumers at a specified local weekly collection, with optional direct-to-door delivery service	Craig

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes
(Table 4)

Name of site	Organisational model	Research participants recruited from organisation

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[21] To emphasise, the names of all the organisations and participants are pseudonyms.

Wood Grove	Peri-urban CSA on periphery of housing estate, with weekly volunteering sessions and a crop share	Daisy, Simon, Deirdre, Isobel, Janice
Caring With Nourishment	Rural CSA providing volunteering opportunities to people with mental health issues, selling produce via a nearby farm shop and through a weekly crop share for nearby residents	Steven, Natalie
Edible Landscapes	CSA based in residential location, primarily increasing opportunities for foraging in communal green spaces	Emma
Flourishing Fare	Peri-urban CSA providing volunteering opportunities to people with mental health issues and various impairment categories	Henry
Expanding Communities	CSA operating through a network of underutilised gardens and 'guerrilla gardening' (see Adams and Hardman, 2014) in reclaimed green spaces	Aylish
EcoUni	CSA scheme based on periphery of university campus, run by student volunteers	Holly, Rory

Alternative and 'local' food promoters and campaigners
(Table 5)

Name of site	**Organisational model**	**Research participants recruited from organisation**
Good Food North West	Campaign group promoting alternative food, attempting to implement policies towards local food procurement at regional government level	Laura
Sustainable Lifestyles	Campaign group promoting alternative and 'sustainable' relationships to food, housing and energy with commercial consultancy arm	Neil
Made at Home	Local food promoters, facilitating educational events around food with links to regional government	Michael
Tasting the North West	Alternative food promoters, providing marketing and social media training to small-scale producers and retailers	Fred
Building Our Local Economy	Local food promoter, attempting to expand the local economy through rewarding consumption via small-scale producers	Andrew

North West Economic Development Group	Campaign funded by regional government, facilitating local food events primarily to promote food tourism to the area	Keira, Heather

Food banks and food waste initiatives
(Table 6)

Name of site	Organisational model	Research participants recruited from organisation
North West Foodbank	Large food bank, affiliated to national network	Monica, Trish
Helping Hand Foodbank	Small, independent food bank linked to faith-based organisation	Paula
Distributing Food Well	Food waste initiative affiliated to national network, redistributing unwanted food from supermarkets to a range of charitable organisations including food banks	Dominic, Jake

Though these organisations will be introduced with greater contextualisation throughout the analysis, Appendix 6 diagrammatically maps out the webs of interdependency linking these different organisations together. As this diagram shows, though these organisations were distinct, they—and emphasising the 'networked' dimension of AFNs—shared many substantive links which are worthy of recognition. Additionally, the various research participants involved often had similarly complex links to the differing organisations involved, and are categorised in the above tables via where they were first recruited from (rather than being solely affiliated to a single organisation). Whilst these complexities will be teased out in the analysis, the four broad headings they also coalesce under also help to generalise findings in answering the research questions.

Finally, to conclude this chapter, I summarise the empirical approach taken in Table 7:

Research method	Frequency employed
Semi-structured interview	31
Photographic food diary and follow-up interview	Seven, recruited from pool of interviewees
Ethnographies	Three key sites over a six-month period
Focus groups	Piloted, later abandoned

Chapter Four

Producing worlds of difference: considering the diverse practices of alternative food production in the austerity foodscape

Introduction

> I've always been a subversive little sod at heart, wanting to change the way we
> live, and to me instead of standing and going to protests and doing things like
> that I have always felt the most subversive thing I can do is put a box of
> alternatively grown vegetables on somebody's doorstep and accept payment for
> it, and so that is what I have done this last 30 odd years. (David, owner of Green
> Shoots)

With the organisations involved in this research now outlined, this chapter marks the beginning of the empirical engagement in this thesis. In this chapter, I focus on the organisation of food production within these spaces, arguing that the dynamics of the post-2008 austerity foodscape invoked several tensions for producers involved in this research. On the one hand, I begin this engagement through recognising the significance of material shifts experienced by AFNs in the early years of the austerity foodscape following the financial crisis, with many organisations struggling amidst enormous declines in business. I note the recurring and important reliance in lay actors' explanation of this decline on a discursively constructed figure of 'the consumer' who, following the financial crisis, underwent processes of 'tightening their belt' and 'cutting back' on unnecessary expenditure, no longer able (or willing) to accommodate the price premiums that AFNs are presumed to involve. Based on these accounts, I acknowledge that it may be tempting to suggest that the dynamics of the austerity foodscape have largely repressed the possibility of positive change that AFNs confer, with a reinforced emphasis on 'thrifty' shopping practices at a cultural level amidst the significant growth of budget supermarkets (see Evans, 2011b; Bramall, 2011). On the other hand—emphasising the multiplicity of austerity and the foodscape as a whole that we encountered in Chapter Two—I concurrently follow the diverse economies framework

in recognising that market-exchange was only one of many economic logics within these spaces (Psarikidou and Szerszynski, 2012b). To therefore understand the organisations within AFNs as solely through shifting patterns of market exchange seems reductive—or to use Gibson-Graham's (2006b) term, *capitalocentric*. This, in turn, limits how we might explain the persistence, as well as possibilities, of these organisations despite these challenging shifts.

Recognising, instead, that AFNs are entangled within market and a variety of non-market relations in complex ways—and are therefore not simply attempts to 'escape' (Fournier, 2008) the market economy—I use the rest of the chapter to delineate on the ways in which alternatives come to be contrasted against the mainstream, producing "worlds of difference" (Carolan, 2016: 142) in the foodscape. Rather than further what Gibson-Graham describe as a "sociology of absences" (Gibson-Graham, 2014: 149; see also Santos, 2004), theorising social and economic worlds through what they *lack*, focusing on the performative production of these worlds of difference instead reveals the active ways in which they enact difference within economy (Gibson-Graham, 2008). By focusing on the ways in which diverse economic practices came to be bundled in different ways across these organisations, I develop the analysis around three themes that were prominent in the data: place, vernacular production practices and economies of knowledge. By productively extending Gibson-Graham's framework, I argue that these diverse practices are central in transforming food from what Latour (2004) understands as a 'matter of fact' to a 'matter of concern'. Informed by Latour, Hill states that in becoming a matter of concern our attention is drawn to "practices that multiply possible ways of being and acting in the world" (Hill, 2015: 552). The implication of this lies in developing our understanding of the dynamics of alternative food production in the austerity foodscape. Rather than merely finding their possibilities constrained by shifting patterns of market-exchange, it is through making food a matter of concern that I see AFNs as retaining a generative capacity in bringing about new ways of understanding and relating to food amidst broader "processes of […] world making"

(Gibson-Graham, 2014: 149). Undergirded by a similarly critical optimism, and building upon these ideas, Chapter Five then shifts the focus to food consumption.

Alternative food in the austere marketplace

To begin this account, this first section considers the dynamics of market-exchange in the austerity foodscape. One of the initial interviews that I undertook during the empirical stage of the research was with Robert at Beautiful Provender. A rurally-based organic co-operative, the site was based off a busy main road between two towns and had been growing a wide range of produce within four large greenhouses for close to three decades. Much of this produce was subsequently distributed in direct-to-door 'veg boxes' to nearby customers who primarily lived in the two towns the site was between. Additionally, there was a small farm shop on site open throughout the week, which sold the remaining produce grown on site as well as a range of variously ethically-certified groceries and household goods. During the winter months, the limited produce that could be grown at Beautiful Provender was supplemented with other produce largely sourced from a network of proximate organic growers with the requisite equipment to grow despite adverse seasonal conditions. Given its location, the site attracted a significant amount of passing trade, particularly in the summer, and between my recurring visits to the site new signage had been installed on the road outside advertising tea and coffee that could be purchased from the farm shop. Figures 1—3 (below) show variously the entrance to the site from the road, the farm shop and the inside of one of the greenhouses.

(Figures 1—3, the Beautiful Provender site, my photographs)

Originally founded with the intention to increase the availability of organically produced food in the area—at least in a time prior to the 'mainstreaming' of organic food and its greater widespread availability (Guthman, 2004; Berlan and Dolan, 2014)—it became clear during my conversation with Robert that Beautiful Provender had faced a number of significant challenges over the past decade. Whilst the venture was at one point profitable enough to employ over a dozen members of staff, following the financial crisis these numbers had dwindled significantly. At the point I visited, much of the labour on site was now being undertaken by unremunerated volunteers or the few core members that the site could continue to afford to employ on a waged basis. Robert, who had taken up the role of chief grower in 2015, was tasked with overseeing the production on site. Because of his full-time engagement within the site, Robert was an important member of the organisation to interview for this research. During our interview, I asked Robert how he felt organisations like Beautiful Provender had fared in a post-2008 context. As he stated:

> What happened to small farms and organic farmers, you know, back when Gordon Brown was Prime Minister and the recession kicked in, is everybody went down their bank statement and cancelled the direct debit to everything that wasn't essential. Like […] large numbers of people just tightened their belts a little bit and people stopped buying organic food and people stopped buying treaty food, and loads of places like this almost went out of business. Like literally loads of farmers. And Beautiful Provender is barely here and the customer numbers went down to the point where it was almost unsustainable.

For Robert, many of the difficulties facing organisations such as Beautiful Provender were born out of the financial crisis and subsequent entrenchment of austerity in the United Kingdom. Importantly, the decline in business that these organisations faced could, for him, be explained through lay actors 'tightening their belts' and opting for cheaper options within the foodscape, eschewing AFNs in the process. Whilst the

growth of budget supermarkets in this context has already been noted in Chapter Two, what is important here is the discursive reliance on an abstracted consumer figure in these explanations. This lay explanation of widespread 'belt tightening' was something that recurred throughout these interviews—something that I will go on to explore—which is itself significant for the argument here. As Evans *et al.* (2017) suggest, the consumer is not a "self-evident category", instead being "constructed and mobilized" (Evans et al., 2017: 5) in a variety of ways in different contexts. Drawing on a longer theoretical tradition (see Miller and Rose, 1990; 1997), Evans *et al.*'s account is helpful in making sense of Robert's perspective. As a "rhetorical device" (Evans et al., 2017: 12), 'the consumer'—even if, as in this instance, when not directly named as such—came to be mobilised to explain the typical responses to material shifts conferred by the austerity foodscape. The consumer is therefore distinct as a discursive categorisation, formed only in relation to certain behaviours and logics. At the same time, the consumer in this account remains indistinct, operating in generalised and abstracted ways, irreducible to an empirically 'accessible' individual.

Whilst we ought not to uncritically privilege these lay perceptions as automatically accessing 'the truth', we might instead recognise these perceptions as sociologically derived, emerging from the wider political-economic transformations of the post-2008 context. As I will show, Robert was not the only producer in this research to offer these sentiments. From one perspective encountered in Chapter Two, the recurring nature of these dynamics—circulating around the thrifty behaviour of consumers 'cutting back' and 'tightening belts'—can be understood as emerging from a historically-derived cultural politics of austerity, as elucidated particularly by Bramall (2011; 2013; 2015). From Bramall's perspective, this emphasis in a post-2008 context derives historically from wartime periods of rationing, seeing this as having long-standing effects in "British historical consciousness" (Bramall, 2015: 5). Yet as I warned in our first encounter with these accounts, we ought not solely look for explanations of the present in the past, potentially risking glossing over the specificities of the contemporary

foodscape. For example, as Bramall herself notes, most trips to supermarkets today reveal "evidence of abundance with which we are daily confronted" (Bramall, 2015: 13), incomparable to the post-World War context. Extending this critique, and as Evans (2011b) outlines, we might also problematise Bramall's perspective on the grounds that it fails to develop a nuanced account of different consumption motivations, seeing thriftiness as equivalent to frugality. Evans (2011b) argues that these are analytically distinct: on the one hand, frugality within consumption involves a cutting back on material expenditure out of necessity, whilst thriftiness aims to do more with the same amount of money. Thrift is therefore dislocated from questions around access to material resources (see also Miller, 1998).

Questioning the applicability of these historically-inflected explanations, as well as probing the distinction between thriftiness and frugality, is important in developing our understanding of the 'belt tightening' that Robert discusses as a central dynamic of the austerity foodscape. Whilst some evidence loosely reflects Robert's account, it is not a questioning of necessarily (dis)proving Robert's claims or otherwise.[22] It is not the analyst's role to provide 'God's-eye' (see Haraway, 1988) positivistic observations of the social world, and clearly the effects that this period had had on organisations such as Beautiful Provender were severe. In a later conversation, Robert told me that over three quarters of their business had disappeared in the five years that followed the financial crisis, and that their ability to continue operating had been perpetually precarious since. An important dynamic of the austerity foodscape for this analysis lies, therefore, in producers explaining these material shifts in the foodscape through a habitual reliance on an abstracted body of thrifty (more so than frugal) consumers who actively altered their own food consumption practices with the onset of austerity. In

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[22] Given the economic heterogeneity of AFNs, data exists which both proves and disproves Robert's position. At least in the world of certified organic food production, The Soil Association notes a significant drop in organic food sales following the financial crisis, which has recovered since 2011 and grown year-on-year (The Soil Association, 2018). Nonetheless, generalisations are difficult to make.

Robert's account of belt tightening, these consumers thriftily "went down their bank statement" cancelling various direct debits. Though not as wedded to historical comparisons as Bramall's perspective, Potter and Westall (2013) suggest that much of this can be explained by thrifty consumption being seen as a morally good thing-in-itself, rather than simply seeing thrift as a tactic allowing one to 'do more' with the same amount of material resources (Bramall, 2017; Murphy, 2017; Anderson, 2015). We can, however, dig more deeply into this account rather than accepting these notions as catch-all explanations. Indeed, questions remain unanswered: why was it that other producers in this research echoed Robert's perspective, and how did they (if they did) differ in their understanding of the austerity foodscape?

To develop this analysis, let us turn to another organisation. Much like Beautiful Provender, Green Shoots was an organically certified, agro-ecological rural site producing a range of produce delivered directly to nearby consumers in weekly veg boxes. David, the owner, had together with his wife been growing produce on the site for nearly three decades. During my visit to the site, David told me that whilst they managed to employ a family member to oversee the deliveries, much of the actual labour involved in food production on site was undertaken solely by himself. This was physically demanding and often involved gruelling hours. This had not always been the case, and in the mid-2000s he told me that he had managed to employ many regular members of staff, a number which varied based on the growing season. Sharing many similarities with Beautiful Provender, I asked David to expand on the status of the business and the reasons behind him now having to undertake much of this labour himself:

> [The business was] growing up until the recession. I found people were [buying more] during the boom years of the 1990s and 2000s when there was money around, it was growing exponentially. People had money and felt comfortable and could afford everything that they wanted materially in their lives, I feel

[they] had a little bit of mental space to then go on and embrace ethical, environmental and humanistic, social responsibility, all of these things I felt people had the time to do because financially they felt they were sound […]. Between 2007 and 2009 this business fell off a cliff, over the recession and it only really finished for us probably towards the end of last year, 2015, we lost 75% off our bottom line, that […] cut the staff down from 18 to three.

During our interview, David admitted that he struggled to make sense of the reasons for this period having such significant, and enduring, impacts on business at Green Shoots. After all, he was keenly aware that the consumers a business like his would attract were likely not those who would experience the harshest material impacts of austerity, therefore not altering their practices out of frugal necessity. Leaving him to ponder this question, in a latter discussion David suggested that this collapse in business was likely due to a "variety of reasons", but "the key one was people tightening their belts and the overall presumption that organic food is expensive". Here David's account echoes Robert with the discursive deployment of lay consumers 'tightening their belts', altering their consumption practices based on *presumptions* and feelings around the inflated price of alternative food versus the mainstream. For some producers, these effects had been even more extreme. During the process of trying to recruit participants, I contacted the owner of another direct-to-door veg box scheme only to find that a few months prior they had taken the decision to close the business down after many tough years of trading.

Returning to David's account, the financial crisis acted as a watershed moment in his understanding, serving to alter perceptions held by a wide range of actors. Though a rhetorical distinction, society prior to the financial crisis is marked in David's account by a sense of positive progressivism, with those inhabiting it able to articulate a wide range of positive values around "ethical, environmental and humanistic" projects. By comparison, those inhabiting a post-2008 context see the possibility of enacting these

values dashed, which Haiven (2011) understands as an expression of the power that an otherwise 'imagined' system of financial capitalism—and its crises—holds. By 'imagined', Haiven does not intend to suggest that this system has no 'real' (or purely symbolic) power, but instead means to capture the way in which the behaviour of 'the system' (which is itself pluralised and spatially variegated (see Peck and Theodore, 2007)) is given a degree of coherence as a whole to lay actors. Indeed, Jessop states that an "economic imaginary is a semiotic system that gives meaning and shape to the 'economic' field" (Jessop, 2010: 344). As Haiven elaborates, echoing David's understanding of the impacts of the financial crisis, it served from this perspective to

> Subordinate the rich totality of social values (moral, ethical, aesthetic, etc.) […] [under] capital's cyclopean and hegemonic measure of economic value. […] Capital has no agency of its own but is a durable pattern that profoundly influence[s] people's agency, subjectivity, expectations, and dispositions toward actions that reproduce and expand capitalist social relations. (Haiven, 2011: 98-9)

As Haiven suggests, from a certain perspective capitalism can thus be understood as strongly influential on, though not determining of, patterns of social relations. As David's pessimistic account suggests, for him many of these more positive values that could be identified prior to the financial crisis had been extinguished, subsumed within capitalism's narrow conceptualisation of value. Whilst the diverse economies framework that I build upon is intrinsically critical of perspectives that imbue capital with such power, that it was understood as holding such power within lay representations of the financial crisis and the post-2008 context for participants in this research is important.

Both Beautiful Provender and Green Shoots were direct-to-door producers—though with differences in their day-to-day operation—and thus similar. But other

organisations felt these effects in subtler, if no less insidious, ways. For example, Henry was the co-ordinator of Flourishing Fare, which was run on a charitable basis to provide volunteering opportunities to local people with a range of mental health problems and learning difficulties. Occupying a small growing site based on the edge of a light industrial site, Flourishing Fare had transformed what was once a derelict site into a luscious 'forest garden', covered by a young canopy of trees and with small plots of food grown opportunistically between bushes and shrubs. Henry's involvement in Flourishing Fare extended over several years, and his co-ordination had seen the project grow significantly. It now attracted a regular cohort of 15 to 20 volunteers to the weekly sessions. During our interview, I asked Henry as to whether he saw any changes in a post-2008 context for organisations like Flourishing Fare. After all, whilst they did sell a portion of the produce grown on the site in a nearby farm shop, the site was largely reliant on charitable donations, therefore to a greater degree dislocated from the realm of market-exchange discussed thus far. Yet the impacts of this period, for Henry, had nonetheless been significant. As he suggested:

> [A local charity] has gone tits up, so really good, not-for-profit, community organisations that are making obvious differences are just going. People who've got mental health problems, we've all heard about the cuts of services that were almost non-existent anyway, anyone in drug and alcohol situations, services are cut, people with learning difficulties, forget about it. You've got learning disabilities and difficulties and for both groups of people it's a nightmare. […] [Organisations like Flourishing Fare] become, well, it's a business. But if we're looking at continuation funding, we hope we'll get it, by that point we'll be six years in, so we might look at another bridge for a couple of years but then we'll be at the point of sale, so I'm thinking five years I want to be thinking about micro-businesses and selling, but also diversifying, looking at how we can generate [income] through venue sites, through training and all those other

things that we can do. So […] there's so many other things that we [have to] think about, but in terms of recession, yes it's hit everybody ridiculously hard.

For Henry, austerity had served to further disenfranchise many of those who volunteered at organisations like Flourishing Fare, seeing social 'safety nets' eroded even further following the financial crisis (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017). Yet thinking more specifically about AFNs, for Henry this period had also played host to the intensification (if not acceleration) of market logics within these spaces. As he puts it, organisations like Flourishing Fare had to behave 'like a business'. This echoes Fisher's (2010) diagnosis that contemporary society can be understood as operating through a 'business ontology'. For Fisher, this diagnosis suggests that there is a compulsion to understand *all* aspects of social life through the logic of business, market-exchange and capital accumulation, only being a worthwhile endeavour if it fits this prescriptive mould. Therefore, and with some degree of perversity following the financial crisis, capitalism's crises have been used to justify more capitalism (Crouch, 2013). Whilst important, what is missing in Fisher's diagnosis however is any thorough understanding of how lay actors respond to the demands that this 'business ontology' places on them. Consequently, Fisher risks capitalocentrism, painting these tendencies as inescapable. Yet as Henry's account suggests, acquiescence to these logics was not arrived at without reservation, instead representing a site of contestation and ambivalence.

This power of this market-driven logic (and its ills) within alternatives post-2008 was something that marked many participants' accounts, even organisations such as Flourishing Fare that we may typically think of as largely 'outside' of the market. Yet these market-driven logics never entirely colonised these spaces, and that producers such as David, Robert and Henry continued through these challenging times cannot be explained without reference to elements beyond these dynamics. Indeed, AFNs can be simultaneously read as part of the market economy, but also often critical of it and, as previously mentioned, often continuing to exist *despite it* (Chatterton and Pickerill,

2010). These heterogeneous positions, whilst challenging to negotiate, were often adopted out of necessity, and many of the producers offered extensive critiques of the broader foodscape in our discussions. More commercially-orientated producers such as David may well have engaged in what De Cock *et al.* describe as a "politics of resentment" (De Cock et al., 2013: 403), focusing his frustration on the thrifty consumers who abandoned Green Shoots in their droves post-2008. Though as our conversation continued, it was clear that his focus lay more in wider political-economic dynamics, which was for him an issue that carried moral implications. As David suggested:

> Everywhere you look supermarkets are discounting fruit and veg and a good friend of mine who supplies Aldi tells me that they are selling [the produce] for the same price they pay him! Businesses like [Green Shoots] just cannot compete. We cannot do loss leaders and it is immoral for others to do so. We are losing all [the] UK producers, just look at the dairy industry…

With corporates the only entities that could weather the storm represented by 'loss leaders'—managing to recoup profits elsewhere in their commercial operations—the moral basis of David's critique lies in the growing concentration of production as evidenced by trends within dairy farming (Zimmermann and Heckelei, 2012). Indeed, David recognised elsewhere in our conversation that the aggressive tactics of the mainstream corporates, combined with his need to make even minimal profits on everything he sold, meant that he could not convey the same sense of offering 'value for money' to increasingly thrifty consumers in the austerity foodscape. As a consequence, David felt it was important to convey his gratitude to those who had remained loyal, operating through what Roger Lee (2000) has theorised as an 'economy of regard' (see also Offer, 1997). The puzzle that Lee sets himself in his study of horticulture revolves around the ways in which "marginal businesses" understood through "conventional criteria of economic evaluation […] surviv[e], indicat[ing] that

this marginality is overcome in some way" (Lee, 2000: 138). For Lee, it is this economy of regard which is itself central in overcoming this marginality, with 'regard' deployed to capture the interpersonal, reciprocal exchanges between actors that cannot be quantified within processes of market-exchange. As Offer suggests, exchange "is not only an economic transaction, it is also a good in itself, a 'process benefit', usually in the form of a *personal* relationship" (Offer, 1997: 451, emphasis in original). From the perspective of economic anthropology, regard helps explain a murky territory in the literature between gift-based economies and ones orientated around the aforementioned impersonal tendencies of market-driven exchange, here of particular relevance when considering supermarket contexts that dominate the mainstream (Turner, 2011). David felt that this economy of regard was one of his greatest defences in retaining the support of customers in the post-2008 context, diffracting Green Shoots from the mainstream in the process:

> I always thank our customers with the words 'thank you for your support' […] [so they] don't see that I'm just any old Tom, Dick or Harry farmer selling them a carrot. I actually feel they've paid more for that carrot than they can these days at Lidl or Aldi, they've paid more for supporting us growing locally, and I do see what they're spending their money on is supporting local organic agriculture, so I always thank them for that.

In this way, the economies of regard fostered in these exchanges served to allow organisations within AFNs to survive their otherwise commercially marginal position. Sam, whom I met whilst he was working at the farm shop at Beautiful Provender on a particularly slow summer's afternoon, echoed David's sentiments. Having worked on and off at the site for several years, Sam was keenly aware of the challenges faced by these organisations, seeing the foodscape as shifting extensively post-2008. Whilst he recognised this growing emphasis on thrifty consumption practices at a cultural level,

Sam was hesitant to use this to explain these changes in their entirety. For him, the material dynamics of austerity ought not to be forgotten:

> People who can afford to buy this stuff [at Beautiful Provender] come here. There's no getting around that, and we are out of the way as well. So the mainstay of people are on lower incomes, with the austerity, I mean a tin of chopped tomatoes in there [at the Beautiful Provender farm shop] is 85 pence, you go Lidl you're going to pay 22 [pence]. Those people, they're on austerity, they're gonna buy the other one. They haven't got a lot of choice.

As Sam recognises, AFNs may well risk reproducing exclusionary dynamics on the grounds of price premiums, affordability and subsequent class dynamics, something which has long been recognised in the literature (see, for example, Guthman, 2003).[23] Many in society were understood as being 'on austerity', faced with difficult decisions and being forced by their circumstances to alter their consumption practices. In contrast to David, Sam's account sees the effects of austerity through a more economistic inflection, which later in our discussion he recognised as impacting some in society harder than others. With implications for discussions that are to come, particularly in Chapter Six, Sam reminded me as we were restocking the shop that we ought not to forget the growing number of people reliant today on charitable modes of food provisioning. Sam laughed, highlighting the perversities of the foodscape: whilst so many around the country were now reliant on the meagre offerings of food banks and

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[23] Whilst an important critique, the discussion later in this chapter problematises the universal applicability of it in AFN research. Without pre-empting the path my argument takes, the exclusionary consequences of an increased price premium in contrast with the mainstream presumes that AFNs *only* operate through market-driven exchange. Conversely, the diverse economies framework encourages us to read for the heterogeneity of economic logics, which was extensive in the AFNs considered in this research. Perspectives such as Guthman's (2003) largely fail to consider the diversity of economies, seeing all relations to food as market-driven, determining class relations in the process.

their ilk (see Garthwaite, 2016a), the workers at Beautiful Provender were trying to convince their customers as to how special their organic onions were.

The accounts discussed so far highlight both the complex relationship between AFNs and the wider dynamics of the austerity foodscape, as well as the temporal dimension of social, political and economic change more broadly. Extending this discussion to reveal the many ways in which the austerity foodscape was represented, as well as contested, another important participant in this account was Fred, who ran Tasting the North West. As a rather different entity to those considered thus far, Tasting the North West was a small public relations company which primarily assisted alternative food producers and retailers to develop marketing campaigns as well as their social media strategies. In what Wernick has described as today's 'promotional culture' (see Wernick, 1991), the question of how (and the channels through which) organisations within AFNs promote themselves remains underexplored in the literature (Parkins and Craig, 2009). Yet for Fred these promotional strategies were crucial if alternatives were to beat the supermarkets "at their own game" (his words), recognising the power that their marketing messages hold in shaping people's relationships to food, as well as the foodscape more broadly (Phillipov, 2016). Whilst he recognised the alternative/mainstream distinction was not a rigid binary, and alternatives could always slip into mainstream tendencies, Fred in fact saw a growing interest in alternative ways of doing food in a post-2008 context. His perspective was, as a result, more optimistic than the others considered thus far. Some of the consequences of this growing interest involved the resurgence of certain distribution methods that may at one point have seemed anachronistic: for example, the substantial growth of a local dairy providing direct-to-door milk delivery. This was again thriving after many difficult years, which had at one point seen the dairy nearly closing due to a lack of business. In this instance, Fred had helped the dairy to grow their social media presence, which had previously been non-existent and was now an important locus on which they could promote themselves and their produce, contrasting themselves against the offerings of

mainstream dairies in the process. Their business was now flourishing, delivering to households as well as local cafés, restaurants and hotels.

As Fred told me in our interview, much of his work with organisations such as this involved finding ways to highlight within their promotional material that alternatives were not necessarily more expensive than supermarkets. These were perceptions and presumptions that producers such as David, as discussed above, particularly struggled to dispel. Yet Fred clearly recognised the challenges presented by the dynamics of the austerity foodscape, seeing the post-2008 context as having played a powerful role in economistically placing pressure on budgets for food, a position akin to Sam's perspective. As our discussion suggested when considering questions of access to alternatives:

> Fred: [These spaces are] affordable, so [with] austerity, I think it would even work with people on a lower budget. They might think 'I'm not going to a farmer's market, it will be well expensive', whereas there's actually some really good value products on there. Some of them are expensive and I think overly priced, but there's a lot of good value stuff as well, so if just people knew more about that they might be more inclined [to visit].
>
> JB: And like we were saying earlier about vegetables, you compare [these spaces] to supermarkets potentially being quite dear by comparison?
>
> Fred: Yeah but they often know that in advance, price per kilo, a bag of carrots is only 50p from us and I've just picked them from the field, go to a supermarket and they'll be two weeks old and you'll pay a pound for them.

As this excerpt suggests, Fred recognised the important role that marketing played in making sense of everyday relationships with food. For him, many of those facing limited budgets for food in the austerity foodscape presumed that mainstream supermarkets (as he later clarified, including budget supermarkets) offered better value,

when alternatives could often actually compete on these terms. Extending this, and as with the case of the carrots, Fred believed that alternatives could even provide better value for money, despite connotations that alternatives were perceived as expensive when contrasted with the mainstream. Though the discussion in Chapter Five (and in a different way, Chapter Six) explores the dynamics of consumption within the austerity foodscape in greater depth, for Fred this also had wider implications beyond the question of *where* people purchased their food, but for *how* they ate as well. As he suggested:

> Going back to the austerity thing, people could, even though they're on a lower budget, people could afford to eat better if they actually adjusted their diet to what was in the 1960s, [the] 1970s, where it was something like [one] third meat and two thirds veg, as opposed to two thirds meat, one third veg.

As this discussion shows, producers (broadly defined) both understood, as well as responded to, the dynamics of the austerity foodscape varied ways. The outlook derived from these perspectives can be summarised as revolving around three key points. Firstly, almost all producers across the research suggested, albeit in different ways, that the realm of market-exchange had shifted, often with negative consequences for AFNs, in a post-2008 context. Secondly, these respective declines were explained through an abstracted and discursively-constructed consumer, who underwent processes of 'cutting back' and 'belt tightening'. Thirdly, there was a tension within these producers' accounts as to what extent this process of 'cutting back' was the result of frugal necessity due to constrained budgets for food, or due to the acceleration of positive moral values at a cultural level around thrifty consumption practices (i.e. cutting back on expenditure as a good thing-in-itself).

Organising food differently… and making food a matter of concern

Whilst recognising the complex intersections between the austerity foodscape and AFNs are important, these accounts also raise other questions sociologically. For one, despite the prevalence of market-exchange within accounts considered thus far, this should not encourage an analysis that only sees market logics in AFNs; instead we need to recognise that the social world is constituted by diverse economic practices and logics. As highlighted in Chapter Two, AFNs are themselves diverse rather than one coherent mass (Jarosz, 2008). Further, the latter consideration of Fred's perspective showed signs of more positive transformations amidst the otherwise pessimistic context of austerity (Hitchen, 2016; Highmore, 2016). These more critically optimistic perspectives are important in considering the trajectory of this analysis, with it avoiding fatalistic readings of the effects of 'the economy' following the financial crisis. 'The economy' is not one coherent thing, and we ought to read for difference rather than for sameness to develop our understanding of the dynamics of this foodscape. This position avoids seeing economy as somehow external from social worlds, as if it were "a space of invariant logics and automatic unfolding that offer[s] no field for intervention […] [and as a] stable and reproducing […] singular capitalist system" (Gibson-Graham, 2006a: xxi).

Underpinned by this notion of envisioning economy as spaces of active intervention, the rest of this chapter proceeds as follows. Here I use three interrelated framings (place, vernacular production practices and economies of knowledge) to consider how AFNs produce 'worlds of difference' in the foodscape. It is on these three fronts that, I suggest, that AFNs can be understood as aiming towards more positive possibilities in the foodscape beyond the pessimistic accounts discussed thus far. These dynamics serve, I argue, to transform food from what Latour (2004) terms a mere 'matter of fact' to a 'matter of concern'. As Latour suggests:

Critique has not been critical enough in spite of all its sore-scratching. Reality is not defined by matters of fact. Matters of fact are not all that is given in experience. Matters of fact are only very partial and, I would argue, very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern and only a subset of what could also be called *states of affairs*. (Latour, 2004: 231-2, emphasis in original)

Latour's position therefore serves to problematise the position of the critic. If critics engage 'matter of factly' with ideas that *that is how the world is*, they risk narrowly prescribing certain realities (e.g. the position of alternative food in the austerity foodscape).[24] With it, the possibilities that might emerge from AFNs may become constrained, making the same error as the food regime theorists, who arguably tend towards these matter of fact accounts. Conversely, in considering more carefully via this empirical perspective the ways in which AFNs gather and assemble economic diversity (Hill, 2015), I agree with Latour that we ought not "write not matter-of-factually but […] [write] in a matter-of-concern way" (Latour, 2004: 232). Becoming concerned about food shows how AFNs can transcend the narrow realm of market-exchange, with many other relations (and economies, broadly understood) developing both through and from them. With it, seeing matters of concern allows us to get to grips with the immanent potential of civil society in wider dialogue with capitalist political economy. As critics of foodscapes, it is our task to tease these matters of concern out, because research such as this thesis enacts and articulates certain, possibly more

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[24] Latour suggest that critics largely travel down two problematic paths: the 'fairy' and 'fact' position. In the fairy position, which is fetishistic, "the role of the critic is […] to show that what the naïve believers are doing with objects is simply a projection of their wishes onto a material entity that does nothing at all by itself" (Latour, 2004: 237). The fact position fares no better by comparison. "This time it is the poor bloke, again taken aback, whose behavior is now 'explained' by the powerful effects of indisputable matters of fact […] [for example,] economic infrastructure, fields of discourse, social domination" (Latour, 2004: 238). For the way out of this predicament, see the Heideggerian considerations of gatherings above.

positive, worlds (Law and Urry, 2004). I first consider the politics of place in this account.

Contesting the politics of place in alternative food production

> That sense of connection with where something's come from is something quite important. And I guess that's why I prefer to buy ingredients as opposed to a meal 'cos you kind of lose that sense of really what's gone into your food and therefore where it's come from. (Natalie)

As Chapter Two highlighted, conceptualisations of space and place remain a thorny issue in AFN research.[25] On the one hand, the vicissitudes of lengthy, carbon-intensive food supply chains are becoming increasingly clear on a variety of fronts (Forssell and Lankoski, 2015). Yet on the other, the shortened food supply chains of AFNs are haunted by a legacy that understands them as defensively privileging the local (Winter, 2003). These defensive responses to globalising processes and what Giddens theorises as the "sequestration of experience" (Giddens, 1991: 144) risk a conservative politics. For Giddens, this sequestration characterises 'late modernity' and involves the geographical separation of our lives from various phenomena, particularly nature. That is, an ever more specialised division of labour combined with growing apparatuses of administrative control—which the remarkably complex and continued orchestration of various globalised food supply chains are testament to—allows a distanciation from food production across both space and time. In this way, bringing these experiences of nature and food growing 'back in' to the proximate spaces of everyday life is central to many AFNs (Harris, 2010). As Natalie's account highlights above, whilst reflecting on

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[25] The subtle distinction between space and place is important, though both concepts are relevant to the discussion here. To clarify, I follow Hinrichs (2007) in suggesting that "we think of *space* in simple terms of distance and configuration, [whilst] the notion of *place* incorporates more: the specificity of location, particular material forms, associated meanings, and values" (Hinrichs, 2007: 11, emphases in original). Put another way, space might be understood as nomothetic, whilst place idiographic (Agnew, 2005; see also Harris, 2010).

her consumption practices, this was something that was important to many participants in this research. With this in mind, I argue that these dismissals of 'place' and locality as conservative (e.g. Sharzer, 2012) are unfair, suggesting instead that the place of alternative food played a different, and often more ambiguous, role in making food a matter of concern. At the same time, it is worth noting that the mainstream was itself recognised as having a more complex relationship to place than simply offering placeless 'food from nowhere' (Bové and Dufour, 2001). Here I consider the more deliberative, open-ended accounts of what the local represented—and why, ultimately, it remained important for many participants—before theorising the other ways in which place may be understood in AFNs.

Given that this chapter is primarily focused on production, I begin with Neil, a long-standing volunteer at Wood Grove who offered important reflections on the place of alternative food. Having been involved with the project since its conception approximately five years previously, Neil had links to many of the organisations in this research, and was working for the consultancy arm of Sustainable Lifestyles on a variety of projects around food and sustainability. One such project involved collating a freely-accessible online 'local food database' and, as a result, Neil's insights for this research were important. I was discussing food with him at the Wood Grove site, which had in the five years since it began been transformed from a soggy field into a diverse space of food growing and conservation intended to be open to the community, distributing the produce grown via a 'crop share' at the end of the weekly volunteering sessions (some of the food growing on site is shown in Figure 4 below).[26] As such, Wood Grove was a fairly typical CSA scheme. As Neil suggested when I asked him as to how important he thought place was given his varied engagements with food:

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[26] This 'crop share' arrangement can be seen as a modified form of sharecropping, an agricultural practice with a much longer history (Reid, 1975). In historical sharecropping arrangements, tenants farm land and share the produce with the landowner. Here, the crop share is more communal, shared amongst the volunteers.

I guess in terms of the media there's been a big push on local food and supermarkets have picked up on this, and so I know that more and more people are interested in buying locally but often they don't know what that means. So frequently I've come across people who say they buy locally from Morrison's and that starts a whole conversation around 'well, what does that mean?'

(Figure 4, the Wood Grove site, my photograph)

Neil's account draws our attention to how differing conceptualisations of space and place are interpreted in multiple ways, meaning that loose framings such as 'local' do not have fixed and universally recognised interpretations despite their importance to AFN research (Fonte, 2008). As Feagan notes, framings such as 'local' in local food are "geographically charged" (Feagan, 2007: 10) labels, carrying with them "multiple and conflicting meanings" (Allen et al., 2003: 63). This situation is complicated by supermarkets now to varying degrees marketing their own ranges of 'local' food in spite of this ambiguity (Bianchi and Mortimer, 2015; Barbera and Dagnes, 2016). This, for Neil, has resulted in a contradictory situation, whereby actors become sympathetic to the benefits of consumption via the short food supply chains that characterise AFNs, though (erroneously) re-articulate their practices through mainstream actors by 'buying local' via a corporate supermarket. Whilst highlighting another conceptual problem that plagues the emphasis on local food—that it is often unclear precisely *what* dimension

of local food is (re-)localised (Feagan, 2007)—there is also a degree of irony in actors deciding to 'buy local' through a corporate supermarket chain. However, as Szerszynski (2007) productively argues, irony is not to be understood as a recognition of futility and might instead serve to raise questions—or, as Neil understands it, start new conversations—around collective responses to the vicissitudes of the foodscape.

Whilst utilising the ambiguity of the local as a starting point to enact broader conversations around food, Neil was aware of the problems that a defensively-inflected localism carried with it, and did not wish to automatically privilege the local above any other scale (regional, national, global). For him, this topic presented many challenges, and he suggested that

> I'd hate for the local food movement to lose sight of the global connection. […] The fact is that we have such a connected system that it's just so complicated, like where do you focus?

Intriguingly, in Neil's account drives towards localism ought not to draw unhelpful distinctions against an abstracted global reference, instead emphasising the connections between these scales. Against AFN scholars that oppose 'local' and 'global' as binaries—DuPuis and Goodman state that many speak as "if [the] global is domination [and that] in the local we must find freedom" (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005: 361)— Neil's perspective instead emphasises a processual perspective that is able to reframe its focus reflexively. In this way, as Harris (2010) considers, the regressive politics of defensive localism might be usurped by a move from a "politics *of* place to politics *in* place […] [which offers] a nonterritorial way of viewing place politics in an age of global connectivity" (Amin, 2002: 397, emphases in original; see also Massey, 2005). Other participants were equally wary of the politics 'of place' and its reification of the local that characterises defensive localism. By comparison, seeing a politics *in* place opens a space for a more progressive understanding, with it showing the role of place

in making food a matter of concern amidst different gatherings of economic diversity. Even that Neil and I were able to reflect on these matters, often over mundane but nonetheless important tasks such as tending to crops of beetroot or potatoes, was testament to the ways in which these politics played out in place, with it transforming food into a matter of concern (Gibson-Graham, 2003a).

Whilst I will return to Wood Grove later, for the time being let us move to a different site. Caring With Nourishment was another CSA scheme that I visited during the research. Though the rural site on which it was based had hosted food-producing activities for an extensive period, as an organisation Caring With Nourishment had existed formally for near a decade, providing vocational volunteering opportunities to people with mental health issues. Over time, the scheme had come to attract significant funding from frontline mental health services, which sustained the operation alongside the sale of their organic produce via a weekly 'crop share' (see figures 5—6 below).[27] Residents living in surrounding postcodes could apply to participate, and the scheme had proven so popular that they often had waiting lists to join.

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[27] Revealing the economic diversity of AFNs, this 'crop share' operates differently from the equivalent at Wood Grove. Rather than a modified sharecropping, those who participate in the crop share at Caring With Nourishment simply pay for and collect their vegetable box. They do not contribute to the actual production of food through their labour.

(Figures 5—6, signage on the Caring With Nourishment site, my photographs)

I arranged to meet Steven, who was the chief grower at Caring With Nourishment. He had been instrumental in establishing the organisation in the first place. In between harvesting a crop of salad leaves to be distributed in the next day's crop share, we were discussing how important the locality of produce was for the organisation. This, he suggested, could be interpreted in two ways, both for those involved in the production of food as well as the wider participants of the crop share. Taking a similar stance to

Neil's discussion of the 'local' corporate supermarket, Steven was worried about the ways in which locality could be used to deceive people:

> [Often] people go 'oh, local', and actually it's very easy to be hoodwinked into anything that sells veg, that if you get into that whole thing, going 'what really is local?', is that we were going [to people] 'actually, how local do you want it?'. You can walk on site, you can come here on a weekend, you can look around, you know where it's come from and it's really obvious. We're not going to get into a thing going 'well, is local actually Manchester?'.

For Steven, whilst the locality of food produced at Caring With Nourishment was evidently important—after all, much of the therapeutic work done on the site relied on experiencing this proximate relationship to food *in place* (Alkon, 2013)—he was aware of the ways in which the local framing had been used as a tool to 'hoodwink' people in their consumption practices. As a fluid, scalar concept, Steven expressed concerns as to the extent to which the local could be stretched by some to a regional (and sometimes national) level, with it exploiting concerns around the origin of food. For Jackson (2015), and relating back to the discussion in Chapter Two, this tendency can be explained through various anxieties held by lay actors around despatialised food amidst various significant scandals. Yet these marketing messages situate food within an idealised, defined place (echoing Amin's suggestions of a conservative politics *of* place) that is often fictional. As Jackson (2016) highlights elsewhere, and as one example of many, the Tesco supermarket chain has marketed produce originating from 'Boswell Farm' which does not, and has never, existed.

Yet as our conversation continued, it became clear that, for Steven, the locality of food did not necessarily have to be privileged—and defended—above any other characteristic, nor serve to cynically 'hoodwink' anxious consumers. For him, the locality of the produce grown at Caring With Nourishment was something that many

involved (both directly as well as those that were involved in the crop share scheme) valued, yet it was not the *raison d'être* for the scheme. As Steven told me, as a result of ongoing anxieties shared across those involved at a senior level in the scheme that it may, at any given point, face a similar fate to the 'belt tightening' that Green Shoots and Beautiful Provender had suffered through post-2008, Caring With Nourishment had gone to significant efforts to investigate quite *what* it was about the scheme that people valued. As Steven suggested:

> We ask everybody whether it's the organics, whether it's local veg, or whether it's our mental health work. The majority of people said it was all three. They said they liked what we did, they like our veg and they wanted local veg. So, it wasn't a black and white aspiration, people wanted all those things and they liked being able to buy into all of them.

This recognition that the world is more complex than 'black or white' binaries is important, and it shows how the varied aims of AFNs intermingle. For Steven it was implausible to draw the locality of the produce as a factor out on its own terms, as an intrinsic 'good' distinct from other dynamics of food production and the site generally. Whilst the place of food was therefore important for many and something that they 'liked', such as a perspective shows how AFNs might instead articulate a hopeful politics *in* place, recognising their situatedness against the globalised spaces and flows of the mainstream. These foods appear from afar, landing on supermarket shelves via processes that are beyond our experiential and visceral capacities, in turn limiting any capacity of ours to intervene and become concerned about it (Hill, 2015). As Harvey (1990) evocatively argues, these commodities are 'mute' and freed of their histories, with schemes such as FairTrade never quite capturing the same degree of authenticity as food experienced *in place* (Varul, 2009).

But seeing a progressive politics in place as a locus through which food might be transformed into a matter of concern was not something held solely by producers when talking about consumers. That is, it is not merely a question of language and linguistic representation of certain economic subjects (Gibson-Graham, 2003a), instead being central to much of the 'doing' of food on sites. Language and practices, whilst to some degree analytically distinct, intermingle, capturing different dimensions of the social world though remain *trapped* in language (Sharpe, 2014). Emphasising this, during time that I spent at Wood Grove I met Janice as we were digging up potatoes one afternoon. As someone with an enduring interest in food, Janice had for a long time maintained a small allotment with a friend of hers, though with trips to Wood Grove becoming more regular she had given up this commitment to try and procure more food via the crop share. Whilst more concerned with her consumption practices—which are primarily reserved for Chapter Five—Janice had for many years prioritised her young family and work commitments, which meant often relying on what she understood as 'convenient' options, for her synonymous with the mainstream (see Jackson and Viehoff, 2016 for a discussion of these linkages). But with her family growing up and moving out, Janice had more time to dedicate to Wood Grove and growing food there, about which she found herself becoming increasingly passionate. Indeed, for her, the 'place' of food was something that she found to be increasingly important and something that she had spent a long time reflecting on. As she stated:

> If you haven't had to do the whole food cycle, you don't realise that it's that much investing of time […]. Yeah, you have to go and prepare the ground, to make sure you're in tune with the weather, and maybe you don't want to go but it has to be done at that time, your seeds have to be sewn at that time, so it's good because it just reminds you that you can't just go to the shop and get stuff, that's not how it works. So and I think that's a good thing to learn, and that's where we've got that disconnect in our society.

Echoing previously discussed accounts addressing the palpable 'disconnect' between production and consumption in mainstream practices, Janice saw sites like Wood Grove as playing an important pedagogical role. By revealing the various time-consuming processes involved in growing food that are almost entirely hidden in geographically distanciated mainstream practices, one develops a fundamentally different relationship to the land, i.e. one that is 'placed' and engaged with through these practices. As such, Janice's position goes beyond the fetishisation of place on its own terms. Instead, and in congruence with many other participants encountered across the spaces within this research, she saw the sequestered experiences of food that characterised the mainstream as in a sense 'artificial' when contrasted with the authenticity conferred by alternatives (Sims, 2009).

Despite her growing passion for alternative food, as well as the positive relation to place that she felt the spaces conferred by comparison to the mainstream, Janice felt wary of uncritically championing them. She recognised that these contested relations to place often highlighted the worst, or at best the most unappealing, dimensions of alternatives when comparing them with the mainstream. As she noted, producing your own "does take a lot of work, and you often don't get much" at the end of the process. Yet even beyond the quantity of food produced, its 'placed' quality meant that the little that was produced was necessarily seasonal. Whilst, as Guthman (2008) notes, seasonality is often extolled as a positive virtue in alternative food production, prompting those aforementioned more 'authentic' relations to food (Autio et al., 2013), Janice was more ambivalent. As she stated, "it's like can you think of something tasty to do with courgettes for the umpteenth time or you know, chard". This was something I resonated with my own experiences of spending time in these sites. On more than one occasion I noted that, while conversing with other volunteers whilst sharing recipe ideas for foods, there was more of a sense that there was a glut to get rid of, and a duty not to waste it, rather than a great excitement for what was seasonally available.

In contrast with alternatives, Janice recognised how mainstream relations to food have over time served to normalise extensive dietary variation regardless of seasonality and its intricate relation to place. She cited avocados as one of her 'vices' that she could not do without, despite acknowledging the ecological costs that they carry in distant lands. As the food regime theorists highlighted in Chapter Two, it was only through advances in supply chain logistics that previously 'exotic' foodstuffs such as avocados could be normalised within Western diets. Though a discussion largely reserved for Chapter Five, it was clear that even when prioritising certain notions of place in relationships to food, consumption patterns remained relatively 'sticky' and did not transform rapidly. On the other hand, we might not read the situation as insurmountable. Even these fragmented experiences of food in place at sites like Wood Grove could be seen to spur reflection on wider practices, for example by becoming concerned in the Latourian sense about avocados and their extensive ecological impact. Without these interactions, would we become concerned in the same way? Whilst we cannot know definitively, such a predicament evokes, as Gibson-Graham put it, the ways in which we might see "economy as a contingent space of recognition and negotiation" (Gibson-Graham, 2003a: 70). But whilst we *recognise* matters of fact we only properly *negotiate* with matters of concern. Compare Janice's position to Holly's, who was one of the co-ordinators at EcoUni, an ever-expanding CSA scheme on the periphery of a university campus which attracted many student volunteers. Much like the way that Wood Grove had expanded, over the past five years EcoUni had been transformed from a small plot primarily growing root vegetables to one with polytunnels, ex-battery hens, and numerous plans for the future. Holly told me that she was in the process of attempting to build a small kitchen in a nearby outbuilding, so that they could cook and eat the food that was grown on site, bringing both pedagogical as well as social benefits. As Holly suggested when we were discussing the importance of place and its relations to the broader aims of EcoUni:

[We're trying to] cut out the unseasonality that goes on and reconnect. Otherwise if it's [food] all been procured and brought in vans you're already missing part of that connection. You've got to be able to see it, you've got to be able to walk around and see it growing and […] have that connection with the food rekindled, even if you're just engaging on a very light level. If you haven't got that then you're probably not going to be able to start on the journey of questioning your food system.

Seeing food in this way does not automatically privilege the local, instead envisioning it as a crucial scale through which diverse economic practices may be enacted and food reconsidered. 'Rekindling' a connection to food was, for Holly, important as an initial step towards becoming concerned about food, though she was aware that schemes such as these could not provide the wide range of foods that many had come to expect as a 'normal' part of the fabric of everyday life. However, this ought not be read as an intrinsic failure or deficiency of AFNs, because the reflection on these practices itself signals the ways in which they can spur people to become concerned about food. Returning to Janice, her frustration at the seasonal limitations of alternative food was particularly noticeable, though others expressed different opinions. For some, such as Neil, this was something that lay actors ought to embrace, suggesting that relying extensively on the limited produce that could be grown at Wood Grove had in fact caused him to become much more inventive in his food practices. As something that I explore in greater depth in Chapter Five, Neil suggested that we ought to become attuned to these patterns of placed seasonality in our food practices. Others were less willing to go this far, finding seasonal food overly constraining and a source of ambivalence. This was a dynamic that many producers with a more commercial orientation recognised: a feeling of monotony resulting from being too extensively tied to place was a risk. This is especially prescient given the perilous financial position of those organisations discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Many direct-to-door schemes, including both Beautiful Provender and Green Shoots, had for a long time

bought in produce grown by other producers in nearby areas with more advanced facilities. These facilities (e.g. heated greenhouses) meant that a wider range of produce could be grown throughout the year, thereby attempting to ensure that their vegetable boxes were not viewed as uninteresting, potentially leading customers to cancel their subscriptions. In one conversation, David laughed as he suggested that he had learnt "the hard way" early on in his operation that beige boxes of potatoes, onions and other root vegetables during the winter months were not attractive to consumers, risking his livelihood in the process. Though a generalisation, most volunteers at CSA schemes by comparison were happier to assist in the production of more modest crops, with the sometimes meagre and repetitive selections harvested itself framed as a sign of more authentic, holistic and concerned relationships to food versus the inauthentic mainstream.

As these various accounts suggest, these complex contestations around the place of food marked many participants' accounts. That is: whilst many recognised the problems in privileging place automatically, it was only through food being *in* place that it could be transformed into a matter of concern for the actors engaging with these spaces. Yet other considerations could subtlety reshape these practices, as in the buying in of more 'interesting' produce for the veg boxes at the direct-to-door schemes. In this way, place might be understood as a crucial locus through which producers saw food as something that one could be concerned about, though it did not map neatly on to a narrow range of binaries that assimilate alternative as local and seasonal, with the mainstream diametrically opposed as global, and with it dislocated from these temporal rhythms. Indeed, Feagan's (2007) previously considered warning that these notions are charged with multiple and often conflicting meanings seems accurate in recognising how these relations come to be mobilised in various ways within lay perspectives.

Yet recognising these complexities ought not to risk descending into relativism. By way of moving to the next section, we ought to be able to recognise the divergent ways

across these accounts that place was neither something to be defended for its own sake, nor automatically celebrated (leading to a politics *of* place, furthering defensive forms of localism), but a generative conceptual ground upon which relationships to food might be reconfigured. As I have argued, seeing politics *in* place recognises the inseparability of these relations from the other processes involved in food production, to which my attention now turns in developing this account.

Vernacular practices, knowledge and the production of difference

These contestations around place in AFNs reveals how food might productively be transformed into a matter of concern. Hence, rather than the dynamics of the austerity foodscape being framed as totalising, simply repressing or limiting the potential of AFNs, instead we can see the ways in which they retain a generative capacity in reconfiguring relations to food. Of course, thinking about 'place' only gets us so far, and as hinted at already, the actual production practices employed in food was a recurring theme of importance for many participants. Recent analyses have taken gritty, and very much material, alternative economic practices as their starting point (see, for example, Roux-Rosier et al., 2018; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010; 2015)—offering important contributions in the process—yet fail to situate these practices within a wider framing of alternative/mainstream relationality. As I will argue, considering these practices moves us beyond simplistic binaries (e.g. alternative production practices as simply conflated with 'organic'), instead revealing a wealth of heterogeneous practices that emphasises the ethical contestations central to these economic relations. As I will go on to show, the diversity of these practices was intricately related to the presence of other economies of knowledge in these spaces. By making sense of these practices, I emphasise the pedagogical and open-ended role that alternatives play in making food a matter of concern, with it pointing to positive possible changes in the here-and-now beyond the narrow trajectories of the austerity foodscape.

Vernacular practices and diverse relations

The CSA sites were particularly relevant in thinking over the importance of largely mundane production practices due to my ethnographic proximity to them. So, to develop this analysis, let us return to the time I spent at Wood Grove. As I learnt from Daisy, many of the practices employed on the site had extensive histories, and she told me how many of those involved in its inception had, to gain practical experience of alternative food production, contacted other, more well-established producers discussed in this research. Though I will come on to the topic of knowledge, over the first few years Wood Grove had adopted an amalgamation of these alternative practices on their own site. I asked Daisy to discuss the production of food at Wood Grove, and she suggested that it was important for those involved that the food was "seasonal, ethically grown and [produced minimal] waste". Asking her as to clarify whether 'ethically grown' meant organic, Daisy made clear that this was not the case (again, food production was "not organic, but ethical"). She cited frustrations with the challenges involved in securing organic certification, which was a topic of frustration for others I talked to at similar CSA schemes. To be certified as 'organic', this status must be conferred by external certification boards such as The Soil Association—often at significant expense—and Wood Grove did not have the sufficient resources to achieve this. Additionally, these exploratory conversations with other producers prior to Wood Grove's establishment suggested to Daisy that "to get the [organic] registration is not [flexible] at all, and people are asked to do things that their land won't do or they simply cannot do. So we call it [production at Wood Grove] ethical, no pesticides, no fertilisers". Intriguingly, here ethicality in food production is marked not by the presence of certain 'good' practices, but the absence of other 'bads'—pesticides, fertilisers, and to a lesser extent 'waste' broadly understood. Simon, another participant involved in the development of Wood Grove, echoed this, stating that it is "not organic, it's just run without fertiliser and pesticides". In contrast to accounts that tend towards conflating alternative with certain production practices, e.g. organic (Follett, 2008), the 'ethical' label is more broad, encompassing a greater range of practices within this

143

understanding. These conversations in the early stages of this research were, on reflection, some of the first spurs in reading for the diversity of economic practices and the problems of seeing the world through paradigmatic binaries.

Of course, perceived ethicality in practices of food production can only be marked by absence to a certain degree, and I pushed Daisy to expand on some of the concrete practices that were undertaken in food production through an example. One of the key practices that they adopted in their 'ethical' production at Wood Grove was the uptake of 'no dig' methods where possible, particularly with crops such as potatoes. Talking me through the process of growing a potato, Daisy showed me the area of the site dedicated their production. Whilst mainstream production tends to grow potatoes in deep, mechanically-dug furrows, no dig practices instead attempt to minimise the extent to which soil is displaced. As Daisy told me, this meant both attempting to "keep weight off the ground"—which avoids compacting the strata of soil, eventually turning into mud if the soil is sufficiently wet—and planting the seed potatoes within three inches of compost layered on top of the topsoil, separated by cardboard with regular incisions cut into it. One of the main benefits of the cardboard layer was to stop weeds growing through to the surface of the soil, though the no dig method carries with it much broader implications in understandings of relationships between humans and non-humans in agricultural practices (Suh, 2014). For Robert Biel, practices such as these sit beyond the remit of organic certification and its requisite demands, instead attempting to further a form of agriculture that "operate[s] alongside the soil's own properties, not against them" (Biel, 2016: 51). Indeed, for Biel, mainstream agriculture, with its anthropocentric and modernist underpinnings of the control and ordering of nature, introduces chaos into self-organising systems by destroying "soil structure, […] thereby causing water runoff, leaching of nutrients and greenhouse gas emissions" (Biel, 2016: 51). The result, over time, is the decreased productivity of land and the need to recoup these losses through the uptake of synthetic fertilisers, creating what Marx, informed by von Liebig, infamously understood as a 'fertiliser treadmill' (Marx, 1976). That is

to suggest that technical 'fixes' for declining soil fertility that characterise mainstream agricultural practices have, historically speaking, failed to reverse general trends of historically deteriorating productivity (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2016). This, as Marx was extensively aware, only ever accelerates the fertiliser treadmill and all the damaging relations that it entails, with implications beyond the narrow framing of the productivity of land alone. As my time at Wood Grove showed, no dig practices emphasised how relationships to land are not solely economistic questions of 'inputs' and respective 'outputs' in a matter of fact way, but sites of possible ethical concern and reconfiguration (Beacham, 2018; Larsen, 2016).

By comparison to the destructive, modernist trajectories of the mainstream, Daisy hoped that volunteers seeing food production in place and articulated in a more positive 'ethical' way would spur those involved to think about the kinds of relations fostered through alternative food. Indeed, no dig practices were one such example of attempting to foster more harmonious linkages between humans and the broad actants that we co-operate with in the production of food. During one afternoon, I found myself harvesting potatoes and being chastised by one of the other volunteers for digging too deeply with my fork. After all, as 'no dig' practices, the point was to avoid disturbing the soil as far as possible, maintaining its structure and its ability to order and maintain itself free of unnecessary human intervention. Yet in much Western thought, actants such as soil are not *subjects*, allowing them in mainstream agricultural practices to be seen as something to be manipulated and exploited as a merely 'irrational' resource (Bauman, 1993). Rather than aiming towards control or mastery, we might see alternatives as helping to bring about different understandings of these relations through diverse economic practices (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010; 2015).

Beyond the case of the no dig potatoes, many of the other sites employed diverse practices which did not neatly fit into a certain label such as 'organic'. Though unexpected, another important lesson came from David at Green Shoots. Whilst I did

not spend as much time in this site, my interview with David emphasised the ways in which vernacular practices coalesce with different forms of knowledge. Halfway through our interview, and evidently frustrated by the limits of language and linguistic representation of something as material as the production of food, he took me on a walking tour of the site. Continuing our conversation, he directed me to an area of fallow land on the site which, at that point, was grown over with clover. As David told me, many farmers used clover on fallow land as it was an easy and cheap way to recover fertility between growing seasons. As a broad family of legumes, clover helps to fix ammonia into nitrogen in the soil, and at the end of the fallow season the ground is tilled, ready for the next crop to be sown. For David, however, too many farmers used clover indiscriminately, seeing it as in effect attempting to cynically 'force' the soil to work in certain ways within this problematic Western and anthropocentric framing discussed above.[28] Instead—and especially after a disappointing first crop on this area of land—David recognised that a different approach was required. He urged me to get on my knees and scoop up a handful of the soil with my fingers, which he also did.

With a handful of this soil, I moved it around in my palm and between my fingertips. My own lack of knowledge quickly became evident, as I struggled to know quite what I was meant to be looking for. The soil certainly felt less wet and sticky than that I had encountered at Wood Grove, which had ongoing drainage problems (a subject to which I, perhaps unexpectedly, return to), though beyond that there was little that I could say about it. It was just soil: a matter of fact and a resource to be used. David, by comparison, read it fluently, almost as if he was reading a literary text. For him the soil represented a rich source of information, one that provided various 'hints' as to other

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[28] As I note elsewhere (see Beacham, 2018), these different ways of relating to, and thinking about, food have profound consequences. In this case of nitrogen, as a particularly important case study, its mainstream deployment as a synthetic fertiliser in agriculture has altered biogeochemical flows so drastically that one would have to look back approximately 2 billion years to find an equivalent atmospheric state for its presence (Lewis and Maslin, 2015).

happenings in the pedology of the surrounding area. Importantly, however, the main point that David urged me to try to recognise was that the soil was healthy, full of nutrients and suitable for growing good crops, especially in contrast to what he started with. He had nurtured this through growing different strains of clover which, as I learnt, all rooted at different depths in the soil. With it, he had come to learn how the soil responded in a dialogical way with the crops grown in it. As my field notes suggested, this was not a case of prescriptively assuming that any strain of clover would have a specific effect, but working *with* the soil in an ongoing relationship:

> What kind grown? Green/white/red [clover]. But depends on what grown before. Timing. What grows next? No hard and fast rule: look at and feel the soil. Work with it, <u>NOT against it</u>!

This sense of working *with* the soil (and all its vitality) rather than seeing it as something to be controlled through human agency reveals the ethical scope of these diverse economic practices. After all, the world cannot be 'fixed' in a rational, technical and teleological way, controlled by the human, instead opening a range of other possibilities and ways of relating to the world. As Jane Bennett's (2010; 2007) work has importantly theorised, the world is lively and full of its own forms of vital energy, and recognising these different energies and their agencies reveals the way in which alternative food may help in becoming concerned about food beyond the ways engendered by the mainstream. As David continued, earlier on during his time at the Green Shoots site he favoured strains of clover that would root deep into the ground, pulling up nutrients that most crops would otherwise not be able to reach: "I've all the potassium and all the phosphate that were on all the hills [...] but it's all down deep in my subsoil. [...] [I]f I grow a clover that mines my subsoil, not only does it aid drainage, it pulls that nutrition up and then I incorporate it into the top four inches *where all the life is*" (emphasis mine). Soil has connotations of death, decay and waste; seeing it by contrast as full of life and recognising its own agency—something followed in the no dig practices—was

an important reminder of how these vernacular practices were important in becoming concerned about food, with it considering positive, albeit subtle, transformations in the foodscape.

Let us turn to a different organisation. Vernacular practices proved to be of central importance in my interview with Joanne, who managed The Giant Cabbage. This was a rural growing site that had been run by Joanne's family for many generations; whilst they sold a small range of vegetables on site, much of their business today involved posting out seeds and seedlings through the post. As a result, it was different in its organisation from many of the other sites considered thus far. Over the past decade, and juxtaposed against the gloomy perspectives of the austerity foodscape considered at the beginning of this chapter, the business had seen a significant increase in sales. This was primarily through their online platform, and as I arrived to meet Joanne she was preparing to post some larger orders placed through this to far ends of the country. Importantly, for Joanne much of this increase in sales could be traced to a changing demographic of customers. Whilst The Giant Cabbage's business had once attracted mostly specialist growers, this had now broadened. On the one hand, Joanne explained this was due to "people […] being a bit more adventurous" in growing their food, suggesting that "these days anyone can grow veg". On the other, and bringing us back to complex dynamics captured by the austerity foodscape discussed in Chapter Two, she also suggested that "everyone's a bit more careful about what they eat and what they do, and when you grow your own you know exactly what you've put in the ground […] and you know the fear of using a lot of toxic chemicals". Again, as per Jackson (2010), we can see how food is a topic of understandable anxiety for many—a *matter of concern* in a very different, and profoundly more negative, sense. Yet, problematically, Jackson's theorisation remains stuck within the bounds of consumption practices, seeing consumers as seeking to manage 'risk' in what they buy in the face of various food scandals. In doing so, he largely ignores diverse economic practices such as 'growing your own' that The Gigantic Cabbage encouraged.

The diversification of the customer base at The Gigantic Cabbage had entailed several changes in the day-to-day operation of the site. Importantly, one of the most significant changes involved the growing importance of sharing and exchanging knowledge around vernacular production practices. Whereas at the CSA schemes and sites like Green Shoots one could learn in person, at The Gigantic Cabbage these relationships were often enacted at a distance. Joanne told me that many of the customers that they had attracted in recent years were growing for the first time, often on personal allotments or in their gardens, and that many of them requested advice on best growing practices by email or over the phone. Previously, when primarily selling to experienced producers, Joanne and her colleagues were rarely asked for such advice, but it was now something that they were having to incorporate into their day-to-day running of the site. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, these exchanges are a classic instance of Offer (1997) and latterly Lee's (2000) 'economies of regard', with alternatives incorporating these 'gifts' of knowledge into market-exchange that might otherwise remain impersonal and overly distant (Leyshon and Lee, 2003). As Joanne told me, much of this advice involved encouraging the uptake of organic production practices (though obviously in an uncertified way), with many receptive to this in avoiding the 'dangers', 'bads' and 'risks' that had come to inflect the mainstream and its vicissitudes over recent years. Echoing my experiences at many of the other sites, Joanne suggested that these vernacular practices involved a fundamental shift in relations:

> [When] growing organically, you work with nature. You know often […] we tell customers if you've [got] a bug, if it's greenfly or whatever that's attracting something, you just be a little bit more patient [and] you'll find something come in that will eat those […]. If you attack it with chemicals then you have to wait to harvest it and you deter the good bugs from coming as well.

As with the case of the clover at Green Shoots, for her it was important to work *with* nature and recognise its various agencies in the process, developing this inquisitive and concerned perspective. Rather than defaulting to control nature when 'it' did not behave as expected, Joanne emphasised that many problems could be resolved with a little patience and allowing those 'good' bugs to resolve the problem themselves. Indeed, she was happy to promote these practices, and she was particularly positive when talking about customers whose names and addresses she had come to recognise on packing slips, seeing them—albeit at this geographical distance—transform themselves from experimental growers of forgiving root vegetables and herbs to more advanced growers. Yet whilst seeing people become concerned about their food was for her a positive development (potentially becoming repeat customers with it), she was wary of more general labels applied to production practices. Again emphasising the limits of binaries in these considerations, she was curiously critical of 'organic' being taken automatically as equivalent for 'good', and she saw organic as only one element in a more situated consideration of production practices. For example, in our interview, we were discussing the greater widespread availability of organic (which, as Fonte (2008) notes and as discussed previously has been widely 'conventionalised') food, already grown and waiting to be purchased on supermarket shelves. Yet Joanne was clear that simply being 'organic' needed to be considered alongside other characteristics, citing her own experiences in the process:

> If people can grow their own, it reduces the air miles [of food]. There's nothing worse than seeing a pack of [green] beans in a supermarket, you know ready trimmed, grown in Africa, and labelled 'organic'. How organic is that, for goodness sake? How many miles has it travelled? That doesn't make it organic.

Citing growing your own food as carrying environmental benefits, Joanne here directly references Tim Lang's notion of 'food miles' (see Lang and Heasman, 2016). In doing so, she recognises a potential for labels such as 'organic' to be used in a deceptive way

by certain actors in the foodscape. In contrast to the diverse economic practices of alternatives, these markers of difference *within* the mainstream problematically attaches extensive food miles (and in the process, a carbon footprint) to food. Joanne's dissatisfaction here highlights a need for an analysis that brings into question moralised binaries (e.g. organic as 'good', mainstream as 'bad') and offers a more careful inspection of variance across practices however they are labelled (Carlisle, 2015; Gibson-Graham, 2008).

This recognition of Joanne's ambivalence around certain production practices is an important 'way in' to considering an important event which occurred back at Beautiful Provender. This concerned the way in which vernacular practices were not always decided upon freely, instead coming to be (re-)shaped by certain economic logics. With it, they often came to represent sites of contestation and struggle. As highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, Robert had overseen many difficult years for the organisation, with business all but collapsing in the period following the financial crisis. Arriving back to the site one afternoon, this visit coincided with the height of the summer harvesting season. With the work of the volunteers now taking on an extra degree of importance given the amount of harvesting to do, I checked in with Robert who had clearly had a challenging week prior to my visit.

With the financial status of the site continuously precarious, the harvesting season signalled the important arrival of a wide range of salad leaves with short growing windows. Although seemingly insignificant, the salad leaves provided an important source of income, distributed partly in the veg boxes but also directly to local cafés and restaurants who paid a premium for them. But Beautiful Provender had developed a problem with dock beetle. The dock beetle had damaged much of the crop, meaning that it could not be sold. In any other circumstances, this would be a minor inconvenience, yet the financial significance of the salad leaves meant that action had to be taken. Robert had made use of every permitted spray under their organic

certification to deter the beetle and had even gone as far as digging up the crop and moving it out of the greenhouse, yet none of these tactics had any success. The beetle remained.

After much deliberation with others at the site, Robert told me how he had regrettably decided to apply for an exemption from the strict rules of the organic certification board. For him, this was problematic as they aimed to grow food in a system that did not exclude 'pests'—they even had a pond in the corner of one of the greenhouses, growing food *with* nature. Although temporary, this exemption would permit the grower to use a class of pesticide (a pyrethroid) on the salad leaves to rid them of the dock beetle. I asked him to explain how this process works:

> [T]o be allowed to use it in an organic system you need to explain how you're going to minimise its use, explain that you've done everything else that you could possibly do, explain that the economic impact on your business will be significant and you will be checked on that [...] because it kills insects indiscriminately. [...] So I'm saying I'm only going to use it on a crop that's very economically important to us and which can't be sold when it's full of holes [and] like I'm not going to take a great big sprayer and spray it [everywhere]. If I was a non-organic farmer I could do what the fuck I liked with that and no-one would mind or ask me about it.

Whilst it seems, to use Gibson-Graham's term, capitalocentric to suggest that the logic of market-exchange and the need to remain commercially viable *forced* or *determined* Robert to use the pyrethroid, it was clearly not arrived at trivially. The diverse economic practices employed on the site seemed antithetical to the usage of the pesticide, and as Robert put it, for him "the betterness of the vegetable is [in] the ethics of the organisation". But Robert was not alone on this front, and other producers attested to the ways in which practices came to be 'shaped'. During our walking tour of the site, David at Green Shoots showed me a shed full of the compost that he used: "We have to

import it from Germany, this compost […] [is] peat based, I would love to move away from peat [but] I don't need a crop failure based on the stuff like this". Nonetheless, that these producers expressed this dissatisfaction was itself sociologically intriguing. As a point of contestation, if not compromise, it was testament to their conviction that agriculture and relationships to food ought to be articulated on different, and more positive, terms than those encountered within the mainstream. To continue developing this account, I shift the focus in considering the role of knowledge in these spaces.

Difference in knowledge economies and the possibilities of reskilling

As this chapter has shown so far, considering diverse economic practices at work within AFNs shows how they produce 'worlds of difference' whereby food can become a matter of concern in ways not typically engendered by mainstream relations. With it, signs of more transformation in the foodscape can be delineated and enacted, with potentially positive changes immanent in the present. In this final section, I confront the substantial topic of 'knowledge' and its different economies. Whilst we may see knowledge as underpinning many of the perspectives thus far, it is worth confronting it and its intricate relation to *skills* in greater detail. That is, it is not enough to consider vernacular practices without considering the forms of knowledge that bubble underneath the surface within them.

Isobel was another volunteer that I met at Wood Grove, though it was not until I bumped into her at a local market that we properly broached the topic of this research. Having worked in the educational sector for much of her life, Isobel had been retired for a few years and was making the most of the extra time that she now had available. Aside from being a regular volunteer at Wood Grove, she was involved in various other local food-related projects, and had turned her small backyard into an experimental growing space. Expressing discontent with (partisan) politics in the United Kingdom, Isobel saw AFNs as playing a progressive, more micropolitical role in enacting better relationships to food beyond the negative shifts conferred by austerity. It was in our discussion that she

highlighted the role of knowledge, explicitly drawing out its importance. This is an importance that, until now, has remained largely implicit in this analysis. As she stated:

> Having this kind of alternative relationship to food is a lot of it is about knowledge isn't it really. It's about having the kind of skills to do things like preserving and canning that because so much is so readily available in the supermarkets as and when we want it, especially the processed stuff, these are skills that often people don't really think they need these days or skills that have been kind of lost but a lot of it is about bringing back.

Isobel's account invokes the linkages between knowledge and skills, which extends all the way from the growing of food up to its preparation and preservation. As Chapter Two noted, the move through the three food regimes identified by Friedmann and McMichael is at least partially a tracing of food becoming ever more an input in various 'value added' processes. Whilst the first regime primarily offered food as a raw ingredient, the third regime now offers food in more extensively processed forms, which entails that we have 'lost' those skills of preparation and canning. Intriguingly, and given Bruegel's (2002) historical tracing of the ways in which a market for canned food had to be 'made' in countries such as France in the early 20th Century due to initial public distrust, AFNs in Isobel's account play a different role in *unmaking* the normalcy of processes as we have become sequestered from them (Giddens, 1991).

Nonetheless, what is important about Isobel's account is the recognition that these processes are not unidirectional, following predetermined trajectories. Whilst we can become deskilled, AFNs may allow us to become *reskilled*, with it redeveloping forms of knowledge that otherwise become obfuscated, though rarely entirely 'erased', by certain historical processes across these food regimes. Broaching this topic, Jaffe and Gertler highlight an important distinction between what they understand as *absolute* and *relative* deskilling:

'Independent' commodity producers (farmers), who grow or raise the commodities we eventually eat, have found themselves taking on technologies and marketing arrangements that obviate or supplant traditional agronomic and mechanical skills, and lead to greater dependence on 'black box' technologies […]. Consumers who lack the ability to discern true quality, freshness, or the genuine article with respect to flavor, texture, look, and smell are not likely to be of any assistance to farmers involved in this struggle. (Jaffe and Gertler, 2006: 146)

Absolute deskilling refers to this outright loss of skills (not knowing how to grow food); whilst relative deskilling refers to a loss of understanding within certain skills (not knowing what flavour is desirable in a food). For Jaffe and Gertler, skills must therefore be understood in a deliberately broad way, which builds common ground between this chapter and the discussion more heavily focused on consumption in Chapter Five. Yet considering production for the time being, I recall one of my visits to Wood Grove and the scribbled field notes that I wrote afterwards. On this instance, I noted in my diary that I arrived at the site late, joining the group of volunteers on their initial walk around as we collectively decided who would undertake the various tasks that needed to be completed. At this point, and with the seasons changing, many of the tasks that week revolved around planting new crops in small plots across the site. This time paired with Isobel, we volunteered to plant the new beetroot crop together. Though a space had already been dedicated to the beetroot on the visual plan for the site, neither I nor Isobel had any prior experience of this, and we set about uncertain as to how to proceed.

Joking to each other that it was a case of the 'blind leading the blind' (echoing Psarikidou's (2012) more expansive analysis of knowledge in AFNs), the first step was to prepare the plot. Though this had mostly been completed in the previous week, a few smaller weeds had appeared in the meantime, which we removed using a now familiar

range of tools. Following this, we unearthed the packets of seeds from the shed, finding three different varieties with subtle distinctions—I note in my reflections that I could not name *one* variety of beetroot prior to this, and now I was confronted with multiple. Returning to the plot, and reading the brief guidance on the packet, I noted to Isobel that we were over two weeks outside of the designated sowing window. Yet, and emphasising what Fonte (2008) understands as the central role of 'tacit knowledge' in AFNs, Isobel told me that this was not a problem. Intriguingly, seed packets did not account for differences in latitude and were written taking the South of the country as an apolitical centre, which had to be accounted for given our position significantly further North geographically. Having established that we were, in fact, not too late in the sowing season and that planting the beetroot would not be problematic, we mapped out the plot and where the different varieties would be situated. Of course, spacing was important—if the beetroot were too close together, they would not be able to grow to a sufficient size, whilst if they were too far apart that would be a waste of the (limited) available space in the plot. Without access to any measuring device, we had to judge this by eye and through our tacit knowledge, sensing what looked 'about right' based on judgements of the spacing of other comparable crops. As we were doing this, another volunteer—an environmental scientist by trade, who had significantly more experience with growing food than either Isobel or I—walked past, and Isobel asked him as to whether he thought our judgements looked 'about right'. As an approximation, he attested that our plan looked okay, though he emphasised that he was himself unsure. After all, he laughed, it was not as if his work outside of Wood Grove provided him with objective knowledge as to how to grow beetroot, even if such an objective knowledge exists! We just had to try our best and see what happens. Beginning to dig small holes for the seeds, Isobel suggested that we perhaps not dig as deeply as suggested on the packet, which was only a few centimetres anyway. She told me that there were recurring drainage issues on the site had meant that they had problems before with growing certain crops as the soil was too wet and the seedlings could not root. The wetness of the soil might be understood as a form of important *local* knowledge,

productively mediating other ways of knowing and understanding these activities *in place*. As we continued this task, we checked in with each other to ensure that what we were doing continued to look 'about right', and discussed—amongst other things— what we would do with our respective share of the crop. Isobel suggested that she already had plans to pickle it, making use of some spare jars that another volunteer had offered to anyone at Wood Grove who could make use of them. She told me that they made good gifts.

Though a relatively mundane instance during the time that I spent at Wood Grove, the beetroot exemplified the ways in which different knowledges both coalesced and contested with one another, mediating these interactions in the production of food. Given that Isobel and I were stepping into the unknown by attempting—and it is worth noting, for the record, successfully—to grow beetroot, our face-to-face exchange in this process involved a wide variety of tacit and lay knowledges, shared through linguistic (what looked 'about right') and non-linguistic cues. This was all mediated by the local knowledge of the drainage problems. Even those 'objective' statements as to the length of the growing season made subjective assumptions, and had to be re-interpreted contextually.

Given the various contestations between different forms of knowledge in AFNs, it was unsurprising that this sometimes led to frustrations. Reflecting on my notes taken after these volunteering sessions, I wrote that (in an admittedly exasperated tone) that "no-one seems to know what they are doing!" at the site. This was a feeling that characterised many of my other experiences in other locations. This is not to suggest that mainstream growers, have, by comparison, a clear blueprint of knowledges to employ and processes to undertake. Instead, as Carolan (2006) notes, in considering the role of knowledge across the mainstream and alternatives, it is a question of the way in which certain knowledges come to be emphasised:

> [W]e find differing knowledge systems attached to [them]. […] The distinction, however, is not that conventional farmers trust science whilst [alternative] farmers do not. […] [C]onventional proponents tended to have faith in the science of immutable mobiles, commodified universals, and technical rationality. [Alternative] agriculture proponents, on the other hand, trusted 'local' science—that is, knowledge rooted to geophysical space and communities of place. (Carolan, 2006: 330-1)

By comparison to conventional agriculture—with its emphasis on these agronomic 'black box' fixes that can be universally and objectively applied, disregarding the complexities of 'geophysical space'—alternatives, for Carolan, rely more heavily on local knowledge. As the case of the beetroot shows, very wet soil locally meant that practices were subsequently altered, yet we might question the hierarchical primacy of this knowledge in Carolan's account. Much of the other judgements were informed by tacit knowledge, which amalgamated in the 'doing' of sowing the beetroot crop, problematising the notion that any one of these forms of non-scientific knowledge was prioritised over any of the others.[29] Conversely, we might see local, lay and tacit knowledges as coalescing in different ways across different organisations (Lundvall and Johnson, 1994). Teasing out of these knowledges was deeply important, if often implicit, in making food a matter of concern.

Yet knowledge is not exchanged between actors as if it were osmosis across a cellular membrane, and a discussion of knowledge must necessarily recognise inequities in its distribution. For example, in the case of the beetroot, I was lacking in local knowledge that Isobel shared with me. If I were doing it myself, I would probably have sowed too deeply, not recognising the soil as *too* wet when I did not possess sufficient knowledge to make a comparative judgement. Yet inequities of knowledge afflict the mainstream,

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[29] By 'non-scientific', I continue the previously discussed typology, i.e. entailing knowledge not derived from positivistic methods.

too, as Carolan notes in his study of agronomists selling these 'black box' fixes to mainstream farmers (Carolan, 2006). Focusing on a marketing event hosted by agribusiness, even if the farmers in attendance had doubts as to the validity of the scientific 'expert knowledge', they had to act with what Wynne (1996) conceptualises as 'as-if' trust. To clarify, this involves the farmers keeping their doubts firmly to themselves, acting 'as-if' they trusted and fully believed the knowledge aimed at them. After all, the farmers were articulated as the *non-experts* in this profoundly unequal relationship. By comparison, as the case of Wood Grove and other organisations within AFNs suggest, these ought not be framed as operating through a 'lack' of this scientific, expert knowledge, but rather a critical engagement with elements of it. The relationships fostered around knowledge were more dialogical, and the perspectives of those at the site who, due to their respective careers, possessed greater familiarity with the 'scientific' side of food production were not automatically prioritised over local and lay judgements (Blay-Palmer et al., 2016). Though the lack of a dominant, expert voice made these spaces occasionally feel directionless, it was clear that AFNs facilitated the validity of other judgements and knowledge-claims, combined with the understanding that these scientific knowledges were not the 'silver bullets' in producing food that many presume them to be (Tregear, 2011).

Following this encounter with beetroot, a conversation with Simon—who had been instrumental in establishing Wood Grove—emphasised this understanding that AFNs do not simply raise questions around 'how much' knowledge one has around food (as if this knowledge was volumetric, amassed linearly) but what *forms* of knowledge one possesses and how 'correct' judgements are made when contesting them. He echoed Isobel, suggesting that AFNs could play an important role in reversing certain historical trends:

> We seem to have had a huge loss of knowledge and skill maybe over the last 40
> years. […] People don't look at land and landscape with a knowledgeable eye,

and it takes a long time to work out things that might have been simple to somebody 40 years ago. And that it's about regaining that knowledge, so that 'if you do that, [that] land will be useful', you know, it wasn't as useful when we came as it is now.

Though not directly referencing the different forms of knowledge discussed previously, for Simon the centrality of developing a 'knowledgeable eye' of landscapes clearly alludes to situated local knowledge and not the disembedded, detached (supposedly 'objective') scientific knowledge that Carolan considers. As Simon notes, an ironic dimension of the privileging of scientific knowledge over tacit, lay and local knowledges revolves around many tasks that would have once been relatively simple now presenting more complex challenges today despite technical progression (for an expanded discussion of these unintended consequences, see Schmidt et al., 2012). I asked Simon to expand on this, and as to whether he had any concrete examples of the need for this 'knowledgeable eye' based on his experiences at Wood Grove. Importantly, we returned to the local knowledge that I had already picked up in the process of sowing the beetroot: that of the long-standing issues around drainage on the site and the need to account for the conditions of the soil. As Simon recounted:

The drainage was so bad that when we first came the farmer who was on there showed us [photographs of] one winter when [the site] was completely underwater. […] We've spent about £20,000 putting in a new drainage system across the middle […] [and] I mean you have to tap into local knowledge, so luckily the guy who came to do the drainage, his father worked on the […] farm opposite us. I don't know whether you noticed, there's a big pond, that's not our land, that's the land of somebody who won't do anything about it, and the guy who came to do the drainage said 'oh, my father used to work here, that pond has got a blocked outlet in it, the water's coming underneath the road'. So, for free he put us in a French drain which takes the water, dumps it into another

[separate, unused] field. So, a combination of his knowledge and his expertise and a bit of luck meant that we've learnt what to do about that [...]. But we could have gone on for a long time not knowing what to do, we were lucky to meet someone with local knowledge, and those depositories of knowledge are disappearing.

Complicating the analysis thus far, we can extend the triad of tacit/lay/local knowledges, recognising that these perspectives perhaps do not go far enough in seeing the politics underpinning knowledge. As Morgan and Murdoch (2000) argue, moving beyond *forms* of knowledge, we ought also to recognise that there is 'know what' around food at work, for example, information about a certain food. But there is also 'know how' (skills) sitting alongside 'know who': knowledge of "who knows what, and who knows how to do what" (Morgan and Murdoch, 2000: 160). As Simon's account suggests, the 'knowledgeable eye' of the drain-fitter relied on local, tacit knowledge that was passed, in this case, down through families (a messy combination of know-how and know-who). Though a more technologically-advanced investigation may have eventually discovered the best location for the French drain, this would have been a more time consuming, and therefore more expensive, process. Yet with historical trends of deskilling at work, with those 'depositories of knowledge' disappearing, it was important from Simon's perspective not only to preserve knowledge but to actively reverse these trends. After all, whilst the geophysical dynamics of the landscape, the soil and things as modest as beetroot may appear as a matter of fact to a deskilled actor, to a (re-)skilled actor they come to be a matter of concern: something which can be engaged with, questioned and changed for the better.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter has considered alternative food production in the austerity foodscape, drawing primarily on the diverse economies framework. As Moragues-Faus and Marsden (2017) note, much AFN scholarship unwittingly revolves around market-

based alternatives, problematically narrowing the analytical scope of AFN research. The account that I offer here, by comparison, argues for the need to recognise the heterogeneity of economic logics within these spaces. Economic difference here is not embraced simply as a good thing-in-itself, but as a central tenet on which other relations to food may be enacted. As the beginning of this chapter argued, this does not mean that we ought to ignore or simply bypass the dynamics of market-exchange, which remain deeply important. These relations were a deeply important lens through which to understand the austerity foodscape and its vicissitudes, with many seeing significant declines in business in a post-2008 context. Yet the centrality of market relations varied across the different kinds of organisations involved, and the diverse economies framework reveals the ways in which non-market relations sustain even those that enmesh more directly within market logics (c.f. Lee, 2000). This perspective helps us to move beyond narrowly capitalocentric and fatalistic readings of 'the economy' as one coherent thing. The rest of the chapter proceeded along these more critically optimistic lines, showing how 'worlds of difference' are actively produced within economies, framing them as active sites of interventions and 'doings'. Importantly, in drawing out the varied logics at work in these spaces, I show how AFNs can come to make food a matter of concern, in a Latourian sense, rather than remaining a matter of fact. This encourages us to recognise the possibilities immanent within AFNs rather than seeing change in the foodscape as always on the horizon (Stock et al., 2015a).

Much of this discussion around place, vernacular production practices and reskilling reveals the complex economies, as well as politics, of knowledge at work in AFNs. These differ substantially from the mainstream and its historical trends towards deskilling. Yet this analysis has another effect, with the boundaries separating out a production/consumption binary coming into question, which we ought to keep in mind as we move towards Chapter Five. As this empirical analysis suggests, 'producers' and 'consumers' are only ever ideal types useful as heuristic devices. Within these accounts, the centrality of the 'knowing' body in these interactions is both a body that 'does' the

production and consumption of food, which I develop in the next chapter with the concept of attunement. As I discussed in the main Introduction, food's unusual status as a commodity that we ingest into our bodies shows how questions of our visceral relationships ought never be too far away. Yet I argue that our visceral relationship to food is never something simply superfluous to questions of political and economic change, instead seeing the body as a crucial locus through which this change comes to be enacted.

Chapter Five

On becoming attuned: visceralities and the consumption of alternative food in the austere everyday

Introduction

With Chapter Four considering how AFNs produce 'worlds of difference' in the foodscape, transforming food into a matter of concern, this chapter moves our focus towards consumption. Given efforts to bridge the production and consumption 'divide' within AFN scholarship (see, notably, Holloway et al., 2007; Goodman and DuPuis, 2002), the separation at work here may seem surprising. Yet questions remain as to the success of approaches that aim towards this integration. As noted in Chapter Two, geographical approaches aiming to 'follow the thing' (i.e. a specific commodity such as papaya) through food supply chains (Cook *et al*, 2004) have been particularly influential in bridging this divide, drawing heavily on ANT in the process. Yet in "acknowledg[ing] the connections between points in a network" (Evans, 2018a: 110) through this lens, Evans suggests that they risk a 'light touch' and thus underdeveloped engagement with consumption. For Evans, not only do these approaches tend to avoid important spaces in which food practices play out, e.g. the household, but they also struggle to make sense of consumption motivations and normative critiques implicated within these practices (see also Evans, 2018b).

With this in mind, I retain something of a 'divide' between considerations of production in the previous chapter and consumption here. At the same time, this is not too extreme an analytical break. As the discussion in the previous chapter—particularly around the 'place' of food and economies of knowledge—showed how questions of consumption are never *too* far away from ones of production (and vice versa). In this chapter, I argue for the importance of the concept of visceral *attunement* in making sense of alternative food consumption. To do this, I draw on contemporary feminist political economy and ecology (see particularly J. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013; 2010; A. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013), a perspective informed extensively by the diverse

economies framework. Attunement, I suggest, at its most fundamental allows us to productively rethink the visceral body as fundamental in processes of wider political and economic transformation, thereby central to civil society's ongoing reconfiguration within the austerity foodscape. With it, this account takes issue with two dominant perspectives that have problematised Western assumptions around the body and processes of embodiment. The first of these tends towards seeing capitalism as 'producing' certain bodies (see, notably, Harvey's (2000) supposedly 'hopeful' re-reading of Marx), something that Foucault (2008) well recognised. Yet unlike the legacies of Foucauldian poststructuralism—itself important in theorising diverse economies—the Marxian gaze problematically sees bodies as produced in line with the requirements of capitalism's ceaseless search for the accumulation of surplus value, as if other economies are not at work in the social world. The second tendency, this time informed by the cultural sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (2010) and more traditionally associated with a 'sociology of consumption' perspective, sees the body as a referential marker of a complex interplay of different capitals: economic, as in monetary, but also social and cultural (see also Skeggs, 1997). For Bourdieu, these capitals coalesce to form our *habitus*, which is our embodied, practical knowledge helping us to make our way through the word (Lau, 2004). The extensive incorporation of Bourdieu into today's prevalent 'practice theory' (Evans, 2018b) scholarship tends towards seeing the body as a marker of this class differentiation, with 'alternative' and 'mainstream' food practices explained through different habitus (see particularly Paddock's (2016) recent work).

Whilst these positions both make important theoretical contributions in understanding the embodied nature of consumption, I suggest the body might be understood differently. As with Chapter Four, remaining sceptical of accounts that further a change-on-the-horizon Messianism in articulating better relationships to food (see, for example, Berners-Lee et al., 2018), I suggest that the body and its visceral capacities are a central, albeit underexplored, locus through which values and practices around alternative and

mainstream food consumption come to be negotiated. With it, these capacities might themselves be understood as potentially generative of wider change in the foodscape, illuminating the potentiality inherent within these mundane, embodied visceralities (Carolan, 2016). Further, seeing these visceralities as loaded with political potentiality supplements our understanding of civil society's generative capacities, i.e. where change develops from. To clarify, I am asking whether we can invert accounts that see bodies as produced by certain political economies, instead seeing the body itself as potentially generative of certain political-economic configurations. To develop this account, I first turn to the ways in which bodies come to be viscerally attuned to certain political economies of food through the example of a yoghurt.[30]

The attunement of bodies, or, thinking with yoghurt

> Like it [a yoghurt] was in Booths and it was local and I wasn't like very tempted to it because like next to the nice Yeo Valley yoghurts it looked a bit lame, it looked like, unattractive? And I was like 'oh, I'll just go for it'. But then it also made me realise like how conditioned we are to certain tastes… certain mass produced tastes, because I found that like really, really tart and quite, like, difficult to eat. Probably because it had had like less processing than a commercial yoghurt. (Sarah, Figure 7)

Sarah was one of my pilot study participants. As noted towards the end of Chapter Three, the methodology, Sarah had been a central figure in the (now defunct) Wholefoods Campus Co-operative, which had been incorporated into EcoUni. At its inception, the Co-operative had emerged partly out of dissatisfaction with a narrow range of food provisioning spaces on a university campus, with it showing that they could potentially undercut supermarkets on cost whilst operating on through this co-operative model. Though the transient nature of university life had meant that many key

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[30] It is worth noting that the select examples I draw on in this chapter have been chosen for their typical resonance with the findings of the research as a whole.

figures in the co-operative had moved on, eventually leading to its demise, it was on these grounds that Sarah was recruited for the pilot study. She was the first participant to undertake one of the photographic food diaries, and during the follow-up interview we came across a photo of some yoghurt discussed in the above quotation.

(Figure 7, Sarah's 'local' yoghurt, from her food diary)

As someone with a strong interest in food, Sarah emphasised the disorganised, and often contradictory, nature of her food consumption practices in our interview. This often manifested in a feeling of ambivalence, struggling to rationalise her decisions which prioritised convenience amidst her busy life. As Hjelmar (2011) notes, convenience is central to many food consumption practices, and the alternative producers and retailers (including many that I discuss in this research) that Sarah preferred were often either inaccessible without a car, or had limited/inflexible opening hours. For example, she liked the idea of Together Through Food's online ordering platform and weekly collection point, though she was part of a musical group which met up once a week on the evening of the collection, and therefore had never been able to use it. Instead, she sourced her food from a range of locations, including supermarkets of various sizes as well as independent retailers and small co-operatives where possible. One of the sites that she visited semi-regularly was Booths, primarily as it was on a bus route not far

from her house. This was where she purchased the yoghurt featured above (amidst a bigger food shop, pictured below in Figure 8). Though one would be hard pressed to consider Booths as 'alternative' by comparison to some of the sites considered in this research, it can be understood as occupying a middle ground. A small supermarket chain, it is based regionally in the north-west, generally offering high-end produce sourced both from around the world and with a more localised inflection where possible (particularly with supply chains well served by producers in the north-west, such as dairy farmers). Given her circumstances, Sarah expressed dismay at the price of Booths versus cheaper options, though said that the convenience factor combined with the "nice" (her description) shopping experience and localised supply chains meant she often ended up shopping there.

(Figure 8, Sarah's food shop, from her food diary)

Thinking back to the literature encountered in Chapter Two, many accounts narrowly conceptualise AFNs as offering a 'quality' product, teleologically aiming towards offering an uncorrupted or 'pure' relationship with food versus the mainstream (Portman, 2014). Yet as Sarah's above discussion of the yoghurt suggests, the situation

is more complex than these literatures suggest, with the boundary separating out alternatives and mainstreams mediated through visceral, embodied relationships with certain foods. Indeed, the unusual taste of the yoghurt transformed it into a matter of concern, and having looked over her food diary, Sarah noted in that that the 'local' yoghurt was not all that pleasant to eat. I asked her in our follow-up interview to expand on her reasons for purchasing it. Despite the "unattractive" packaging compared with mainstream 'Yeo Valley' branded yoghurt, she bought it out of a sense of supporting Booths' more localised dairy supply chains. The taste of the local yoghurt, however, was surprisingly tart to the extent that it was "difficult to eat". Recognising that whilst almost all actors to varying extents develop what Wheeler understands as a "normalized vision of what good food comprises" (Wheeler, 2017: 13), for Sarah the mainstream Yeo Valley yoghurt was marked by extensive processing that characterised a "mass produced taste". Sarah's discussion of the yoghurt shows that Wheeler's account does not go far enough: whilst we may develop these 'visions' of good food, these can never be detached from wider political economies, and bodies have to become attuned to certain ways of 'doing' food. These have extensive historical legacies, extending far beyond any individual experience.[31] Indeed, I argue that attunement acts as a theoretical 'bridge' linking together symbolic webs of denotations and connotations held around different foods (Hopkins, 1998) with our visceral bodies.

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[31] An important working example of attunement lies in Martin Bruegel's (2002) history of canned food in France. Developed originally with military logistics in mind, Bruegel argues that French civilians were initially sceptical of it as retailers began selling canned food in commercial settings around the time of World War I. Bruegel quotes the editor of a French agricultural journal who, in 1905, suggested that there was an "irrational as well as instinctive repugnance [for canned food] among a large part of the population" (as quoted in Bruegel, 2002: 113). This negative, embodied response had to be re-attuned to create a viable market for it, which manifested largely through the military uptake of canned food alongside its incorporation in home economics courses in schools. Carolan, commenting on Bruegel's account, suggests that "the French, in a word, *had to be tuned to the tastes* and practical requirements of canned foods […] [and] bodies had to be conditioned to 'choose' these foods" (Carolan, 2011: 33-4, emphasis mine). By comparison to the French context, canned food received a much warmer response in the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany, with markets for it growing quickly (Carolan, 2011). These societies were, by implication, already *more closely attuned* to the pleasures of industrialised food.

With this in mind, let us think of the yoghurt in another way. For Sarah, the 'local' yoghurt and Yeo Valley yoghurt come to be situated as 'ideal types' of alternative and mainstream food respectively. Consequently, they pick up these different connotations whilst both denoting yoghurt. The local yoghurt is cast out as alternative, unprocessed (perhaps thereby a more 'authentic' reflection of yoghurt), consequently challenging of the palate, and non-commercial despite being sold in the same commercial setting as the other yoghurt. The mainstream yoghurt, by connoting a greater commerciality, is much easier to eat due to its extensive processing. Quite what this processing entails more specifically is not elaborated on or detailed, with 'processing' itself carrying negative connotations. If it is less tart, it may seem obvious to suggest that this processing indicates the addition of sugar or other sweeteners, which whilst not making the yoghurt *intrinsically* any more 'commercial', is an understanding that likely develops through broader connotations and mental constructs. Primarily, as Green (2014) details, these connotations may emerge from the levels of added sugar and salt in other processed food such as ready meals. These various connotations, which develop in relation to one another, link commerciality to degrees of processing and subsequent judgements on the moral (im)permissibility of certain foods (see also Jackson and Viehoff, 2016).

This analysis reveals how these denotations and connotations around food intersect with our visceralities, which manifest in certain attuned responses. Of particular importance in this discussion is the *taste* of the yoghurt, though Serres (2008) has fairly argued that our senses productively intermingle within bodies. For example, whilst we cannot properly separate out taste and smell (the olfactory), the visual was also important in Sarah's account: the unattractive packaging carried its own connotations that was also perversely appealing to her. Actors may be more or less reflexive around these attuned responses, and in Sarah's case she suggested that despite finding the local yoghurt difficult to eat—tart to the extent of being slightly unpleasant—she would likely

continue to buy it. For her, it being difficult to eat was a sign that she ought to persevere with it, as she could eventually become attuned to it. For her, this was preferable to acquiescing to the Yeo Valley yoghurt, which whilst she recognised would be more pleasant to eat in the short term was only a consequence of her body being attuned to these more "mass produced", i.e. mainstream, tastes. At the same time, Sarah was likely particularly reflexive on this front to the extent that few others would match. Many would not see a 'challenging' taste as a positive or desirable characteristic, potentially inhibiting the growth of AFNs.

The importance of visceralities in Sarah's discussion of the yoghurt is matched by a growing attention paid to the realm of the visceral in recent geographical research, particularly the work of Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy encountered briefly in Chapter Two (see J. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013; 2010; A. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010; see also Hayes-Conroy and Martin, 2010). With the above discussion of the yoghurt as a practical, working example, their contribution can be elucidated in more detail. For them, responses to certain foods "arise out of specific bodily histories and prior and current affective/emotional relations with alternative foods" (J. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013: 82). Whilst helpful, it is not clear why it is only alternative foods that are worthy of consideration here, when Sarah's example clearly shows that it is involves a strong degree of alternative/mainstream relationality, juxtaposing different foods (and the various experiences they confer) in the process.

Instead, attunement illuminates the way in which responses to *all* foods can ultimately be understood as involving complex biosocial judgements. By 'biosocial', they invite us to understand "biological and social forces as internally combined. […] [This acts] as a disruption to the nature/society binary, and thus effectively to the mind/body binary" (A. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010: 2958). Problematising these Cartesian dualisms and seeing visceral, lived experiences as central to everyday

relationships with food rejects a position that priorities the biological or the social in a hierarchical fashion. Conversely, we can see the body and its visceral capacities as mediating a range of knowledges, perceptions (including the aforementioned connotations) and moral judgements around food, manifesting in a specific attunement (see also Carolan, 2008). Therefore, whilst attunement in one sense occurs at the level of the individual, it is important to recognise the broader histories implicated within these relations. As Sarah's deliberation around the yoghurt suggests, visceral body and its visceral judgements can also be generative of certain new ways of 'doing' food. This further illuminates the problems with two perspectives critically engaged with at the beginning of this chapter. Both the Marxian and Bourdieusian position tends towards seeing the body as either produced by, or referential of, wider political economies. With it, the body remains passively constructed by forces external to it when—as I argue here—it might be considered as a site of more active potential change within the foodscape. This will become clearer later in this chapter.

Returning to Sarah's account for the time being, we eventually moved on from the yoghurt in our follow-up interview. Delving deeper into the diary, and again highlighting her irregular shopping practices, some of the later photos detailed a trip to a large supermarket in a nearby town (shown looming on the horizon in Figure 9).

(Figure 9, Sarah's trip to Asda, from her food diary)

With her partner living in this town for work, Sarah tended to stay over a couple of nights a week, though she often arrived late due to their respective schedules. Whilst she told me that there were some smaller, independent food retailers that she liked in the town, these were all long closed by the time that she typically arrived. Consequently, they almost always resorted to this branch of Asda, on the edge of the town, despite Sarah passionately telling me that she hated it (something that she also wrote in her food diary, see Figure 10). I was intrigued to hear more about her reasons for this, and we paused on one photo that for her encapsulated many of the problems with such a supermarket (Figure 11).

I hate Asda! But sadly it's the only real option when I arrive at my boyfriends at this kind of time (other than eating out)

(Figure 10, excerpt from Sarah's food diary)

173

(Figure 11, Sarah's photograph of the apple display, taken from her food diary)

As she expanded when I asked her to explain Figure 11:

> Sarah: I mean obviously it's in the context of picking up an apple and that being easy… but I really liked this, I thought it was brilliant, just like 'how easy' seemed to be how we want all our food to be. So I thought it was like quite striking actually.
>
> JB: So it's 'how crispy, how crunchy, how tasty…'
>
> Sarah: But 'how easy' is the thing. Like, it's the absolute thing that we want. Yeah.

For Sarah, mainstream supermarkets prioritise the easiness (that is, convenience) of food over all other factors. In this case, the apples retain visceral connotations: we, as consumers, are directly told that they are tasty, crispy and crunchy. But, for Sarah, these are all factors that are subsumed under convenience as being the overarching and most important aspect of them all. As the case of the yoghurt shows, Sarah struggled with the idea that the worthiness of food should be judged on 'ease' alone, and that food might

be in some way challenging was worth persevering with—perhaps attuning ourselves to these political economies in the process. However, the irony was not lost on Sarah that she was nevertheless a regular visitor to this supermarket precisely on the grounds of convenience. In this instance, Sarah did not end up buying the apples, primarily taking issue with the fact that they were unnecessarily wrapped in plastic, citing subsequent environmental concerns. But beyond this, she suggested that the apples were not particularly appealing anyway. They were too uniform and uninteresting. With this in mind, we can expand how we might think of 'easiness' in this context.

On the one hand, supermarkets can be understood as 'easy' because they provide vast ranges of food under one roof (Dixon and Banwell, 2016). On the other hand, their 'easiness' may be construed as relating to the produce that they offer. As Jackson *et al.*'s (2018) recent work on freshness suggests, vastly complex sociotechnical networks underpin mainstream supply chains, allowing for food to arrive at supermarkets as fresh as possible. As one example they highlight, bananas can be 'awoken' with ethylene gas, which causes them to ripen and turn yellow rather than green. But they must not be kept too cold, or they risk turning black. The careful management of these processes through supply chains allows for freshness to be 'made', constructed through multiple ontological framings. Yet they note that, at least in the United Kingdom, food retailers often think of 'freshness' as being marked through uniform colour and appearance: bright yellow bananas, heavily waxed and shiny apples, meat treated with carbon monoxide to maintain an even, untainted colour. But as Sarah's account suggests, these judgements can also go the other way. Food can be *too* uniform, *too* homogenous, *too easy* and therefore dissatisfactory if we are not attuned to food in this way. As Jaffe and Gertler (2006), encountered in Chapter Four, note, it is not just food production which has played host to historical processes of deskilling, but the realm of consumption has too. "Consumers are observed, analyzed, managed, and manipulated all with an eye to modifying behaviors and creating new desires" (Jaffe and Gertler, 2006: 144). Having been deskilled, thereby attuned to the offerings of the mainstream, many of us come to

accept the food derived from supermarkets as a matter of fact—again in the Latourian sense. This drive towards uniformity means there is very little variance by which to viscerally distinguish the available food, and any 'difficulty' in making the correct decision as to what to buy is removed (c.f. Eden et al., 2008).

This theme continued through Sarah's trip to the supermarket. In a later photo, she captured a display of cheeses. Asking her why she photographed this provoked a strong reaction: "one of the reasons I hate Asda is the size… the sheer size and quantity of everything". In emphasising choice and convenience, Sarah saw supermarkets as wasteful when, for her, much of what was available was in fact remarkably similar. She told me how she would, in an ideal world, like to remove "the vast majority… I don't like a lot of choice". Instead, Sarah suggested she would prefer it if they would just leave the 'local' cheeses in the process. Though she recognised the challenge in defining what was (and equally what was not) 'local', this desire was not borne out of defensive localism. Instead, she found the 'local' cheeses to be more interesting than much of what was typically available, with a greater range of textures and tastes. Again, the visceral dynamics of these relations were at the fore. In the final empirical fragment from Sarah's shopping trip, revealing the contradictory dynamics underpinning different attunements to food, she turned my attention to Figure 12:

(Figure 12, Sarah's shopping basket, from her food diary)

As Sarah detailed:

> Sarah: Oh yeah and those were chosen in like, comparison, to our own food. My
> boyfriend is holding them [a pot of instant noodles] in disgust there [laughing].
>
> JB: Sure. These are three minute BBQ Beef noodles.
>
> Sarah: Yep. I mean we have instant couscous and that's alright.
>
> JB: And that [the noodles] would be a kind of foodstuff that you would never
> buy?
>
> Sarah: No, no. If anything my boyfriend has an even stronger reaction against
> that stuff than I do.

Intriguingly, the instant noodles were singled out as exemplary of a problematic
attunement to food. The connotations surrounding the noodles—which Sarah does not
expand on, but we might envisage from her other comments as circulating around
notions of mass-produced tastes, convenience and artificiality—coalesced in a shared

feeling of disgust towards them with her partner. At the same time, and importantly for the discussion here, the basket in the photo also contains the ingredients for their meal that evening: cous cous with roasted vegetables and goat's cheese. The packet of cous cous is, of course, equally 'instant', prepared in three minutes by combining it with boiling water, yet is considered by Sarah to be "alright" and permissible by comparison to the noodles. Whilst this distinction may be read through a Bourdieusian framework of habitus, explaining this embodied disgust towards the noodles through varied levels of cultural capital and requisite class positions, the concept of attunement helps us to consider in a more nuanced way the ways in which biosocial, visceral bodies become entangled within differing political economies. Whilst some foods may be equally 'convenient' in a practical sense (i.e. in the preparation and eating), they do not necessarily carry the same connotations (Jackson and Viehoff, 2016), signalling a different attunement.

"It tastes like it should": attunement within AFNs

Sarah's account considered thus far has been particularly important in highlighting the ways in which attunement operates. As the case of the yoghurt showed, navigating alternative/mainstream relationality in food consumption practices was embodied, biosocial and ultimately visceral. Whilst we can never hope to fully capture the many 'non-representational' knowledges we possess (see Carolan, 2007; Thrift, 2007) in language—not all of our experience, such as the taste of food, is reducible to words—this dimension of lived experience was deeply important for the analysis of food consumption practices (J. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013). Yet much of this analysis so far revolves around Sarah's dissatisfaction with mainstream supermarkets, framing attunement as operating in a negative light, i.e. *against* what is deemed unsatisfactory. Given my argument that we might see different visceral attunements and the connotations they engender as generative in wider political and economic transformation, there is a more positive tale that must also be told. To do this, in this

section I focus on visceral attunement as it played out within the AFNs considered in this research.

Moving on from Sarah's account, though keeping her in mind, let us turn to Simon. As a key figure in establishing Wood Grove, we were discussing Simon's food consumption practices in our interview. Though busy in retirement with various projects, Simon recognised that his age (being born in the 1940s) gave him more of an extended biographical perspective of changes in the foodscape versus many of the other, younger volunteers at Wood Grove. Though epiphenomenal to more central aims in the establishment of Wood Grove, a personal motivation for him lay in a dissatisfaction with food available via the mainstream. Much of this revolved around the visceral experience of food. As he suggested:

> [Foods] don't taste like they used to, and so I've got a willingness to pay more for […] a small amount of something that tastes good, or tastes like I remember it. It's like the taste, the range of tastes seems to have got much smaller, it's blander, it's sweeter, things like sour and those things don't figure so much.

Whilst food available via the mainstream had, over Simon's life, become more homogeneous, this was not simply a question of visual appearance (c.f. Hall, 2015). Instead, the dissatisfaction was much more visceral—for him, tastes had concurrently become more uniform, and the 'extremes' were less noticeable. Whilst these reflections are necessarily subjective, Simon's reflection of these changes in the foodscape over his life match up historically with Norberg-Hodge *et al.*'s (2002) account. For them, the development of the second food regime in a post-World War II context through to the third regime has meant the global trade of food is increasingly premised on interdependent nations producing what they can most cheaply (based on local agricultural conditions) through monocultures. They export this produce internationally, importing produce optimally produced in other countries (see Sandover,

2013). Whilst this has made food cheap, it has also made it more homogenous: as we remember from Chapter Two, a productivist ethic emphasises the quantity of food produced as the most important factor. Simon's account remained in my mind as I continued my fieldwork, and a couple of months later I scribbled in my field notes how indistinct the ingredients seemed in a vegetable chilli that I had made from produce procured from a budget supermarket. At that point in the ethnographic stage of the time I spent at Wood Grove, I was getting most of my weekly vegetables from there via the crop share. In this case, the textures of the various vegetables all seemed to blend into one, making for a week of deeply uninspiring lunches. Was I becoming attuned to these alternative tastes? It seemed so. Returning to Simon, compare his pessimistic discussion of the mainstream to the way in which he talks about visceral encounters within alternatives:

> Wood Grove stuff tastes like it should do and also you pick it raw and eat it raw because… I don't know, you just do. I mean I had an allotment before Wood Grove and one of the things you do is the peas seldom get down to be cooked, they get eaten on the allotment. So yes one of the attractions is that things taste good, and they taste good raw rather than being tasteless. The texture is maybe crisper, chewier, yeah.

The peas that were not eaten featured in Simon's photo diary (see Figures 13—14 below), showing his haul of the crop share from one of the volunteering sessions. As I later came to see for myself during the ethnographies, much of the time I spent at Wood Grove was testament to this account. Harvesting produce grown on the site regularly involved tasting it, showing the importance of developing these visceral relationships to the food in question, rather than stuck in plastic packaging on supermarket shelves (Lockie, 2002). This was also a pedagogical exercise, relating back to the economies of knowledge discussed in Chapter Four. Whilst Simon was sure of what food "should" taste like, many of us were more uncertain, and tasting the food grown on sites like

Wood Grove was a more experimental endeavour. In one instance there, I was harvesting green beans with another volunteer, who encouraged me to snap one off and bite into it. Noting that it was larger than the green beans that one would typically buy in a supermarket, I immediately noticed the extra 'bite' that Simon mentions ("crisper, chewier"). The taste was more complex, too: slightly bitter, but in a pleasant way. It was certainly fresh, and that the connotations that Simon discussed in his consumption practices all made sense was itself important in considering how attunement operates. As Chapter Four highlighted, in becoming a matter of concern, we develop a different relationship with food, recognising these vital properties and nuances that are overlooked within mainstream relationships. Attunement thus operates through a specific form of embodiment, simultaneously cognitive but also open to the sensuous pleasures of foods that we may not typically experience (Szerszynski, 2005). Expectations around the visceral experience of food become reworked in the process (Sandover, 2013).

(Figures 13—14, Simon's crop share from Wood Grove, from his food diary)

A particularly important example of these expectations being reworked in visceral attunement occurred in relation to tomatoes. Discussions around this specific fruit recurred in many conversations and contexts, significantly more so than any other specific foodstuff. As Tieman *et al.* (2017) note, albeit from a genomic and largely 'natural science' perspective, mainstream varieties of tomatoes have, over time, been bred in such a way that they have lost many of the organic compounds that give them flavour. This is intrinsically linked to the political economy of their production. As they suggest:

> [Mainstream producers] focus on yield, disease resistance, and firmness, which are essential for shipping, long-term storage, and external appearance rather than flavor quality. Flavor-associated volatiles are present at picomolar to nanomolar concentrations in fruits and are extremely difficult to quantify. Thus, these chemicals have largely been ignored, and an emphasis on production traits has inadvertently led to a decline in flavor quality. (Tieman et al., 2017: 391)

Modest questions around taste and the visceral relations we have with different foods have been subsumed by efforts to produce tomatoes which are, as a matter of fact, tomatoes. By comparison, Tieman *et al.* suggest that heirloom varieties grown in small-scale polycultures tend to retain many of the compounds lost in mainstream production, resulting in significantly better flavour. As the archetypal tasteless, and often watery, mainstream fruit (Abrams et al., 2010), tomatoes took on significance in this research, perhaps due to their extensive variance (and improvement) across mainstreams and alternatives.

Remaining at Wood Grove in this account for the time being, my first visit to the site to interview Daisy came soon after the erection of the first polytunnel on the site (shown in Figures 15—16). Due to the growing season, they were at this stage limited to growing less hardy greens that would struggle to cope with frosts, and the polytunnel remained largely empty. As the months progressed, and with the weather warming, Daisy told me in one volunteering session how they planned to grow tomatoes. Aiming for a mix of varieties, she took charge of overseeing growing them, rallying against what she described as the "identical heaps" of tomatoes in supermarkets that were all the "same size" which she thought was "horrible". I noted at the time in our discussion, and in my field notes after, that it seemed like this was "what a lot of people have got used to", which Isobel agreed with. Framing it differently, we might instead say that people have become attuned to these mainstream tomatoes as 'normal', despite their deficiencies. The effort to grow their own tomatoes was, thankfully, a success and

Figure 16 shows one volunteer picking them, with many of the tomatoes nicely ripening.

(Figures 15—16, tomato growing in a Wood Grove polytunnel, my photograph (15) and from Isobel's food diary (16))

As with the green beans, I also helped to harvest the tomatoes, and had the opportunity to try them. By comparison to the mainstream tomatoes that I was used to buying from a supermarket near my house, these tomatoes were a range of shapes and sizes. They were far less uniform in appearance. Other volunteers commented whilst we were

picking them as to the smell of them within the polytunnel—a distinct 'freshness' that lingered in the air. They had a 'give' between my fingertips that meant that sometimes they would split at the stem when you were plucking them if you were not careful. A different feel, and whilst we obviously tried to avoid damaging them, it was a good excuse when they did split to eat them. As I found out myself, the taste was remarkable: the tomatoes that I was used to were more a texture than a taste, whereas these had an intense sweetness to them. Everyone who was picking alongside me echoed how much better they were versus even the best supermarket tomatoes. Scouring the plants for ripe tomatoes hidden under leaves, the warmth in the polytunnel meant we quickly needed a break. Outside, tea and coffee was being served, which one of the volunteers elected to bring to the site each week. In order to raise funds for the site, Daisy had decided to sell some of the tomatoes on site to the volunteers for a 'pay as you feel' donation. Announcing that there were a few punnets of tomatoes stacked in a wheelbarrow outside the polytunnel, as well as a pot to collect donations, there was agreement across the site as to how tasty they were. I noted some of the ways in which volunteers around me described them: "proper tomatoes"… "tomatoes that taste of something"… "they taste really good". One of them said that buying tomatoes from the supermarket with the Wood Grove harvest available was "pointless". As 'proper' tomatoes, the connotation that those procured via the mainstream were 'improper' seems simplistic, but important. Expanding this standpoint, Autio *et al.* recognise how these connotations of "fresh, natural, unadulterated local food represents the antithesis to highly processed, plastic-wrapped, artificial convenience food" (Autio et al., 2013: 567; see also Bearth et al., 2014). Of course, taste was also central in these relationships, which Autio *et al.*'s perspective unsatisfactorily glosses over.

This was not the last of my encounters with tomatoes. During the later stages of this research, I visited Green Shoots one Saturday morning. Having been given a pile of leaflets to distribute on my previous visit to the site, this day was scheduled as a 'community work day' to plant the tomato crop for the season. Though Green Shoots

attracted a few volunteers on a week-to-week basis, this day was intended to attract a greater number, with the aim being to plant the entire crop in one day, which otherwise would have been impossible. The layout of the greenhouses meant that the stems of the tomato plants, once planted, had to be tied with string to the sprinkler system (about 6 foot off the ground) to support the plant as it grew. Consequently, it was a slow and physically laborious process, and any help was appreciated. A lunch, cooked on site, was planned as a 'thank you' for the volunteers. Talking over the plan for the day on my arrival with Robert, he recognised that tomatoes were important to get volunteers to attend, primarily because they were so fundamentally different to those procured by the mainstream. Whilst these visceral differences across alternative/mainstream relationality was not unique to tomatoes, this fruit exemplified how much better these foods could be. As Robert put it:

> I eat some of my vegetables and for things like some don't taste better or worse, they're just the same. I don't think our beetroot particularly tastes better than anyone else's beetroot. I do think that our broccoli, if you eat it the day it's picked or very near to that time, it just tastes better. But I think our tomatoes genuinely taste a hell of a lot better than supermarket ones.

Whilst the labour to plant the tomatoes was itself exhausting, the conversation between the volunteers made the time pass quickly, providing a welcome distraction. Unsurprisingly, many of the volunteers who attended were already regular visitors to the farm shop on site or recipients of the weekly veg boxes, and much of the conversation revolved around the tomatoes. Though my field notes from this session were sparse—I spent much of it either covered in soil or trying to precariously tie the stems of the tomato plants to the roof of the greenhouse—many of the volunteers echoed sentiments similar to those at Wood Grove. The tomatoes were described as "special", with one volunteer suggesting that the taste of the tomatoes was a result of the organic production practices employed on the site (discussed previously in Chapter Four).

Further, even though this crop would take a while to end up in the veg boxes—these were varieties that tended to take significantly longer to grow than mainstream tomatoes—the volunteers were readily anticipating them. Some were planning on enjoying them raw, whilst they were at their best, whilst others were planning on making small batches of tomato chutney with them. In some cases, these were planned as far ahead as Christmas gifts for friends and relatives who might otherwise not enjoy the pleasures of these 'proper' tomatoes. This highlights the way in which attunement to certain foods is also temporal, based on messily-constituted expectations and anticipations. We do not have to have a mainstream tomato in front of us to anticipate that it will taste of very little, whilst we can expect our alternative tomatoes to taste much better before they have even been grown (c.f. Lupton's (1994) discussion of the anticipation of 'food events', which fails to recognise the ways in which anticipate foods themselves within our consumption practices).

Attempting re-attunement: on escaping the supermarket

As I have argued so far, attunement is a deeply important concept in making sense of both alternative and mainstream food consumption practices. Rather than seeing the visceral body as an ahistorical phenomenon, I have shown how it is altered over time, becoming attuned to different political economies of food. Consequently, I have suggested that these visceral bodies might spur different relationships to food, acting as sites of complex negotiation that holds immanent political potential (Waterton, 2017). As the discussion of various foodstuffs (yoghurt, peas, tomatoes and so on) reveals, much of the time this (re-)attunement to different foods occurs in a reasonably slow, piecemeal and fragmented fashion. In this final section of the chapter, I consider how we can 'scale up' attunement to situate these lessons within everyday contexts, recognising the variety of structural forces at work in our relationships with food. To do this, I extend the empirical discussion offered so far, firstly by introducing Natalie, one of my research participants whose experiences in attempting to radically re-attune

her relationships to food manifested in a 'challenge' to avoid supermarkets for a 40 day period.

Recruited through snowballing from another participant, Natalie historically had links to the Wholefood Campus Co-operative, though had in the time since its demise had relocated to a rural area on the border of my geographically-bounded study. Now working for an environmental charity, Natalie commuted a long distance daily and had a busy life outside of work, regularly partaking in a range of outdoor activities around where she and her husband lived. As a result, though passionate about food, Natalie told me how convenience had become increasingly important to her. We met for our interview in a café which was close to her place of work, with a large supermarket around the corner that she visited regularly. Yet it was this 40 day challenge that I was most interested in hearing more about, both to ask her about her reasons for undertaking it as well as whether it had prompted any changes in her consumption practices. A couple of days before we arranged to meet, she emailed me a link to her personal blog, which she had set up prior to undertaking the challenge. In this blog post, she outlined her various motivations, which are worth including at length:

> **Its a challenge, I want to see if I can.** I probably visit a supermarket about four times a week. I'm interested to see just how dependent I am on them and how tricky it will be to go without for 40 days.
>
> **Its a protest vote.** Supermarkets are big, too big. Tesco is bigger than half the countries in the world, in some cases MUCH MUCH bigger.
>
> **Power corrupts?** I'm not going to pretend to be an expert on these matters but in my simplistic understanding, the power relationship between suppliers and supermarkets is just too uneven. My fear is that any entity that reaches such a colossal size, will only ever behave in a way that exploits its power and manipulates those it comes into contact with. So if I'm honest, my decision to give up supermarkets for lent is in part a bit of a protest vote.

Supermarkets driving our diet? thanks to supermarkets we have an inexhaustible supply of processed foods packed full of sugar, salt and chemicals. In my mind it will be no bad thing to move away from these over the [40 day] period.

Final thoughts… Ultimately, I think the main reason I am giving up supermarkets for lent is as an experiment. Eating in a healthy and ethically responsible way is a minefield, but one I think it is worth exploring [sic].

Echoing the diagnosis of the third food regime encountered in Chapter Two, Natalie's motivations mirror the widespread (and growing) resistance to the monopolising tendencies of corporates in the mainstream. Framing their power as having a corrupting influence, she suggests the implications of this are twofold. Firstly, there is the question of the power a supermarket has over its suppliers, which is often profoundly unequal (Piercy and Lane, 2007). Further—bringing Natalie's account more into dialogue with this focus of this chapter—she suggests that this this power dictating what people can eat leads to them actively shaping our diets and attuning us to certain foods. Hence, questions of attunement must always take stock of structural, political economic forces at work in different contexts which shape our relationships with food. With this in mind, not only does Natalie critique the availability of 'processed' foods in supermarkets, but she paints these foods as being heavily adulterated through the addition of "sugar, salt and chemicals". Of course, in a certain light *everything* can be understood as being a chemical, and sugar and salt are not intrinsically bad. Conversely, what is important to note are the negative connotations that circulate around these processed foods, which are presumably contrasted against what is available outside of supermarkets. Again, mainstream and alternative foods are framed as being antithetical to one another (Autio et al., 2013; Bearth et al., 2014). Intriguingly, Natalie's reported motivations do not include the possibility of strengthening local economies, which Seyfang (2008) identifies as a central motivation in actors choosing to boycott major supermarkets.

The interview was a good opportunity to expand on these motivations, as well as reflect on how Natalie found the challenge. Again, she repeated her dissatisfaction around the power of supermarkets, citing that dimension as the underlying "trigger" prompting this challenge. "[I saw] the headlines in the news about Tesco deliberately underpaying their suppliers in order to, you know, try and improve their bottom line. And you know that whole scandal really frustrated me". Explaining the practicalities of it, this therefore meant avoiding any 'chain' supermarket, "even Booths!", instead relying on smaller retailers. She recognised that she was lucky, telling me that the area in which she lived had a "very good" greengrocers and butchers, as well as a few health food shops. Though we might question how helpful these distinctions are in practice—for example, Natalie had gone as far as refusing to use the nearby branch of Asda to refuel her car, using a Shell garage instead—she was steadfast in her refusal to use supermarkets during this time. That said, given that food was quite a "social thing […] we have people over for dinner a lot [and vice versa]" for Natalie and her husband, she recognised that she may have to eat 'supermarket food' if it was cooked for her by a friend.

Recounting her experience of the challenge, she immediately recognised that she had to be much more organised in her consumption practices, suggesting that the loss of convenience via supermarkets was the most challenging dimension. This resonates with Warde's (1999) perspective, suggesting that the growing importance of convenience in relationships with food is a by-product of ever more complex (and difficult to manage) 'time-space coordination' both at an individual and household level. In this way, rather than fitting food conveniently around the other activities of everyday life, Natalie told me how she had to 'plan ahead' and anticipate what she would eat throughout the week. This was especially important given the more restricted opening hours of these sites, and something like having to take an afternoon off work for an appointment at the dentist was an excuse to do much of the shopping at sites that may otherwise be largely inaccessible, closing before she finished work. As Warde puts it, today "there is a tendency for too many people to be too often in the wrong place" (Warde, 1999: 525),

which both explains the growing emphasis on convenience as well as Natalie's subsequent need to plan more extensively, managing this tricky time-space coordination. However, showing me a follow-up blog post that she had written a week into the challenge, the benefits for Natalie and her husband lay in an immediate improvement in their relationship with food itself. As she stated in that blog post:

> Over the [first] week my diet has almost entirely consisted of 'natural food'. Instead of flavouring through sauces I have been using prolific amounts of garlic, chillis, spices and limes. Pulses, beans and nuts have also become staples. After our meal last night [my husband] asked me "so was that actually healthy? Because it was delicious!" We have been experimenting with our diet and learning that healthy and tasty aren't necessarily mutually exclusive, it been great [sic].

This suggestion of her diet consisting of a large amount of 'natural food' is intriguing. As Jackson *et al.* (2018) note, what is 'natural' is a deeply contested concept, though they recognise it is something that has become increasingly important in food marketing in recent years. Recognising this ambiguity, 'natural' is nonetheless used by Natalie to capture a range of changes both in *what* they ate as well as *how* they ate. Given that it was suddenly "hard to get hold of cereal, pasta, cheese et cetera", the shift in staples meant not merely adapting but actively experimenting with what they cooked and ate. Natalie told me in our interview how this challenge had been a good incentive to invest in some new cookbooks, which combined with this general shift in staples that she could easily access, had encouraged her to cook new recipes beyond a familiar selection that had become overly routinised and mundane (Truninger, 2011). Though this challenge had no clear goal, Natalie and her husband found themselves becoming quickly attuned to food outside of the overarching concern for convenience. In the case of the meal that was simultaneously healthy and tasty, this was a lentil and chickpea stew, which they had not previously cooked together. Even when we met for our interview a few months

after the challenge had finished, Natalie told me that she was still cooking many of the recipes that she discovered in this period.

On this front, Natalie saw the challenge as a success, even if she could not judge this success against preconceived criteria. Firstly, she felt less reliant on supermarkets, and that her practices had remained altered in terms of where she procured food:

> Up until [the 40 day challenge] I think I almost exclusively shopped at supermarkets. I don't think I would've gone anywhere else really, whereas now I would. […] Now I will spend a fair amount of money in a health food shop, that's been quite new […] and I don't think I'd ever been to a greengrocer or butcher or fishmonger before I did the challenge, whereas now I would quite happily go to them.

Whilst Natalie may spend "a fair amount of money" at health food shops, she was keen to note that this did not mean her budget for food had drastically increased since taking the challenge. Greengrocers, for example, were much cheaper for fruit and vegetables than the supermarket, meaning that budgets had largely remained the same. But any extra expenditure was, for her, worthwhile as she had become increasingly concerned around the health dimensions of food, which she saw supermarkets as unable to match up to. These concerns therefore came to be implicated in *what* she shopped for: it was no longer simply a question of where a food had come from. As our discussion of falafel showed:

> Natalie: I feel like I've been very successful if I look at my shop and the majority of it is things like fruit and veg and nuts. And, you know, I try very hard to avoid, more so than ever before, anything that's kind of not an ingredient but a kind of, you know…
>
> JB: Pre-processed?

Natalie: Yeah, but to more of an extreme level than before. There are exceptions, but yes generally what I'm eating on a day-to-day basis. I usually bring my lunch in but I hadn't got the chance to the other week so I went to the supermarket and wanted to buy some falafels 'cos I felt like falafels and I looked at the ingredients list and there was a whole long list of ingredients on there, most of which I had no idea what they meant. So it put it back on the shelf and I didn't buy it for that reason. I didn't want a long list of ingredients that I didn't understand what they were.

For Natalie, her increasing preference for 'natural' and 'healthy' food amidst this wider reattunement in her relationship with food meant that long lists of ingredients ought to be viewed with scepticism. This meant that trips to the supermarket to buy something as innocuous as falafel may present difficulties, meaning that she would prefer to simply not purchase the food in question at all. Again, whilst a long list of ingredients is not intrinsically bad, here we can see connotations to artificiality, spurring ambivalence (Autio et al., 2013). Yet whilst Natalie was using supermarkets less, it is worth recognising that she was still using them, particularly the one that was near to her work. I asked her why she had returned to shopping at supermarkets, when the blog post from the first week of the challenge seemed so positive about avoiding them—and her reflections on the falafel so negative. For her, whilst developing this different attunement to food was important, over the course of the challenge she stated that she found it increasingly difficult. In Halkier's (2009) account, reflexivity around the environmental consequences of food practices is framed as being in tension with routinisation, which provides important "relief […] [from] not hav[ing] to doubt about choices and consequences" (Halkier, 2009: para. 41). Whilst similar dynamics can be seen in Natalie's case, it is not that routinised visits to the supermarket were free of reflexivity, as the dissatisfaction with the list of ingredients on the falafel was one example of this. Instead, relief for Natalie comes in the breakdown of routines, bypassing the constant planning ahead that her challenge necessitated and which made

193

it increasingly difficult to manage. Spontaneity with what she might cook, dropping into the supermarket after work and before she drove home, carried its own pleasures. This was something that she found she had come to appreciate more after the challenge, and there was a dynamic of desirable *deroutinisation* in these practices (c.f. Warde, 1999).

Given the trajectory of this discussion, attunement as a conceptual framing helps us to understand the visceral body within wider structural tendencies and forces that we, unwittingly or otherwise, manage in our relationships with food. As Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2013) argue, seeing attunement as operating in this scalar way allows for an analysis that does not necessarily prioritise a structural focus (as in much political ecology and political economy), instead understanding the body as modestly intertwined within these structures. With this in mind, I argue that we ought not to underestimate the body as a site of political and economic transformation, spurring different relationships to food within the broader foodscape. But, and continuing with Natalie's account for the time being, these embodied experiences are often also sociable experiences *between* bodies. Echoing some of Sarah's experiences encountered at the beginning of this chapter, Natalie continued her reflections on the challenge:

> The thing that really stood out to me was really enjoying having that connection between people and food and what they were selling. So when I shop in a supermarket, obviously the shop assistants there are very, very far removed from that food and production process, and actually I generally use the self-service checkout machine and, you know, there's no sense of that connection. Whereas when I went to greengrocers or fishmongers or health food shops, people loved to talk to me about their products which I wasn't expecting, but like you know they really took a pride in it, they knew where it had come from, they were kind of experts in it to a certain degree. And [they] would give me advice on, 'oh well you could try this but actually if you're using it for this that's probably better'

and, yeah, so that sense of connection with where something's come from I guess is something quite important.

As Natalie suggests, the experiences of shopping in supermarkets tends to be impersonal and individual. The interactions that we have with shop assistants are typically limited, and an extensive division of labour means that they have little knowledge of the produce on sale (the 'know who' discussed in the previous chapter). For Andrews (2018), this lack of interaction has been furthered by automation of certain processes, such as self-service checkouts. Echoing Ritzer's theory of McDonaldisation (see Ritzer, 2000), consumers in spaces such as supermarkets are rationalised into providing ever more labour themselves, such as in scanning and paying for the goods that they have selected themselves. By comparison, alternatives are generative of different sociabilities and relations around food (Calvário, 2016). Framing these producers and retailers as 'experts', Natalie suggests that many of these sociabilities rested on differing economies of knowledge, as discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four. Not only was there more of a 'placed' connection with food, but these sociabilities revolved around a different 'know how' with the food, which Natalie could learn from in ways that was not engendered in mainstream settings. Whilst le Grand (2018) suggests in a Bourdieusian frame that these sites may be exclusionary of certain bodies on classed grounds, this paints 'alternative food' with an overly broad brush, failing to account for their diverse economic logics. For example, Henry, was the co-ordinator of Flourishing Fare, discussed in the previous chapter. To remind ourselves, this site was located on the edge of a light industrial site and aimed to provide volunteering opportunities to local people with a range of mental health problems and learning difficulties, avoiding the exclusionary tendencies that le Grand highlights. As Henry suggested, the benefits of the site for the volunteers emerged out of sociabilities similar to those developed in Natalie's account amidst a wider visceral re-attunement to food. As Henry stated, he saw the benefits of the site as

knowing where your food comes from, connecting with your food, knowing that it tastes better. I mean [the] lived experiences of that… challenging your palate so we're not relying on J. *Sainsbury's to choose us our set four veg to eat that all taste the same!* […] With this particular group of people it is really important to be able to manage your own risk, to go out and experience the same thing that everybody else does, to challenge all those fitness things, get in touch with people, and when you're growing [food] you are in touch with every single muscle in your body, so you're learning about your own body all the time, not necessarily verbally, but you are. So there's all of that inner communication that's happening, you know, about anything from your mood to a pain in your ankle, [that's] just really important. (emphasis mine)

As Henry suggests, the experiences involved in producing and consuming food via AFNs are profoundly different from those engendered by mainstream relations. Mainstream vegetables are framed as homogenous, viscerally indistinct and all tasting the same. By comparison, growing at sites like Flourishing Fare involves both developing a new attunement during production—both to one's own body and the sociabilities these sites rely upon—as well as the food itself, which 'challenges' the palate. Though implicit in Henry's account, challenging the palate to unfamiliar tastes is framed as a good thing. This is reminiscent of Sarah's persistence with the 'local' yoghurt that she found unpleasant, yet carried on eating rather than acquiescing to the mainstream yoghurt that was presumed to be less challenging.

These accounts all emphasise how attunement implicates both the visceral, knowing body and the structural dimensions of relationships with food. Far from separate, these dimensions are deeply interrelated. To extend these perspectives, this was also shown within Chloe's account. A postgraduate student in her early 20s, Chloe grew up elsewhere in Europe, and her academic studies had, over time, led her to become increasingly concerned about food. Unsurprisingly, Chloe therefore had a keen interest

in the topic of this research, which was furthered by her cross-cultural upbringing and biographical experiences of different foodscapes. Now living in a large house share, early in our interview it became clear that, like many others in this research, her consumption practices were largely driven by convenience and had to necessarily fit around a busy schedule. As she told me in our interview, this meant that much of the time she relied on one of her housemates who had a car and preferred shopping at Aldi, a budget supermarket chain which has been previously noted as occupying an increasingly prominent role in the austerity foodscape. Beyond that, and where possible given her varied daily routine, Chloe supplemented this with a mix of smaller retailers and a biweekly market, particularly when it came to procuring fresh produce such as fruit and vegetables. As she told me, "I don't like buying fruit or veg from Aldi […] because generally it doesn't last very long, it doesn't taste that great, it's not that good quality". Again, familiar connotations are at play in such a statement: perceptions of poor quality entails that fruit and vegetables neither last long once purchased nor confer positive visceral experiences (tasting good). Though others who solely shop at such mainstream locations may be more attuned to the bland tastes of these fruits and vegetables, for Chloe it was a spur to try and shop elsewhere despite these other locations being less convenient for her. By extension to Chloe's position, she saw a better quality foodstuff as not only leading to longer shelf lives—an important practical consideration—but also the perception, as well as expectation, of an improved visceral response to it.

As our conversation continued, I asked Chloe to expand on these dilemmas in her consumption practices, and whether she had a more specific example that she could pin down. Two particularly intriguing examples came to light, which served to highlight the ways in which attunement is developed through certain histories. One of these instances revolved around honey. As Chloe recounted:

197

> I bought some honey the other day [from Aldi] and I'm, like, I don't think it tastes as good as the other honey that I get from somewhere else, for example like the market. […] It says it's a mix of EU [European Union] and global honey or something. So like they've just taken honey from loads of different countries and put it all together and put it in a pot for me. I don't like it.

The dissatisfaction held by Chloe around the honey extends from its status as placeless quality as 'food from nowhere' (see Bové and Dufour, 2001) to its degraded taste by comparison to honey that she would typically purchase from the local market. The market honey, by comparison, is potentially able to convey the more progressive politics of place discussed in Chapter Four. Indeed, the market honey is distinguished from the Aldi honey which is not simply placeless in the sense of its origins being obfuscated but instead that its origins are entirely indeterminate (c.f. Hudson and Hudson, 2003). It is 'global' honey, which cannot be traced to a more specific location. As Chloe continued in her discussion of her issues with the Aldi honey, it transpired that much of these issues derived from her upbringing.

> I think maybe it's because […] my Mum keeps bees and so I know what goes into making honey. And I know a bit about how bees are exploited in the commercial sense as well, so that makes me not [happy], I don't really like the fact that I've bought this honey.

These dimensions served to not only convey a lower quality product, but one that Chloe felt deeply ambivalent about purchasing in the first place. Interestingly, however, this perspective acknowledges something scarcely considered in other participants' accounts. This revolves around labour, and the potentially exploitative relationship the mainstream has with 'nature': Chloe sees bees as more heavily exploited in mainstream relations than with the market honey, despite them both operating through market-exchange and the equivalent 'exploitation' of non-human labour. Of course, honey as a

matter of concern is deeply rooted in her own biography, and may have remained a matter of fact without these prior histories.

Recognising Chloe's deeply negative feeling around the Aldi honey, I asked if there were any more positive examples that she could think of in her relationship with food—examples where the connotations circling around her attunement to any given food was more positive. She recalled a time during one summer where she was living rurally whilst undertaking work experience. Though she had access to a car during this time, which meant that she could drive to a (comparatively) close supermarket, she came to quickly make use of the number of farm shops which comprehensively served the area. One such instance specialised in lamb, which Chloe suggested was particularly worthy of attention:

> I really, really liked that because I could see where it [the lamb] had come from, I could see the actual sheep that were part of the farming, and I knew that the area that those sheep were in was like beautiful and it had like woodlands and lovely clear streams and lots of wild flowers and I'd seen loads of birds around because I'd been there for ages and I knew that that was a good place. […] I'd much rather have that than like a rape seed field that goes on for miles and miles and miles and the borders are like just really straight and there are no hedgerows or anything like that.

By comparison to the supermarket honey, which is placeless and awkward given Chloe's upbringing, the lamb takes on a range of utopian connotations (a "good place") which point to a more harmonious relationship with nature. Though Chloe suggested elsewhere in our interview that she had long felt ambivalent about eating meat—particularly with many of her housemates now vegan or vegetarian—here she was happy to do so as she felt a "connection […] [to] the environment, like the […] fields and the hillsides and stuff". Further, and echoing Natalie's account, Chloe suggested

that one of the main benefits was in the other economies of regard that circulated within these spaces. Again, she had the opportunity to make the most of the 'expert' knowledge of producers. Not only did this mean that she could find more out about what went in to any given foodstuff, but she could also get advice on how recipes and preparation, often spurred to experiment in ways that she would not have attempted of her own accord.

Promoting alternatives

In the final section of this chapter, I consider the ways in which different promotional organisations in this research attempted to bring about different attunements to food. Whilst some AFN research has acknowledged the importance of promotional practices in relationships to food (see, for example, Morris and Kirwan, 2011), fewer have engaged *directly* with organisations that undertake this promotion.

Let us return to Tasting the North West, first encountered in Chapter Four. As a small public relations company promoting alternatives in the foodscape, this was run solely by Fred. During our interview, I asked him to expand on the difficulties that he, as well as those that he worked with, had in attracting consumers to choose alternatives over mainstream supermarkets. He did not see the foodscape as shifting radically, nor rapidly: "I don't think it's about changing people overnight and having a massive transformation […], I think we've got to work on minimal gains and take each little step as a plus". But for him, these minimal gains could only be realised through developing different attunements with food. Reinforcing how this involved a complex intermingling of visceralities, knowledge, and sociabilities, Fred told me that:

> People can go in a supermarket, they pick up a piece of beef, and they can tell once it's in their hand they sort of think they know from experience that would feed four of us, they look at the price, they look at what it does on the pack, they don't have any intimidation or embarrassment while they're deciding. They

think 'five, seven quid can I afford that, yeah I can afford that, that will do for Sunday' and they'll put it in the basket […]. I've seen it time and time again, people walk in and they go out with like six sausages or eight sausages and I think that's a really easy no brainer for them, they know they can afford eight sausages even if they're actually paying more in some cases, per kilo, for those sausages than they would for a piece of pork that's actually sort of a proper piece of meat. But yeah, it's just that people's lack of experience in terms of shopping face-to-face with a butcher, a baker, a greengrocer, a fishmonger and being a bit embarrassed to ask for things. […] A lot of people they just don't feel comfortable with doing that.

As Matthew, one of my pilot study participants suggested, "I think, you know, you have lost this experience of… what it's like to go to a butcher that's like that" when talking about his own food consumption practices, supporting Fred's position. In a sense, attunement to alternatives works by relearning many of these 'lost' sociabilities and judgements around food, which deskilled consumers are no longer able, or willing, to make. Indeed, Matthew cites experiences of going shopping with his grandmother as a child, who would make many demands (often to the embarrassing degree that Fred mentions) of retailers such as butchers before choosing to buy any given foodstuff. Fred therefore saw organisations such as Tasting the North West as important in spurring these different attunements, discussing the increasing popularity of food and drink fairs as one such example whereby these minor shifts may occur. Over the past few years, he had facilitated several of these fairs across the north-west, many of which involved pedagogical elements such as live cooking demonstrations with the produce that was for sale. Again, these fairs were not aimed towards radical transforming relationships to food, but attuning people in more processual and progressive ways. As he put it, the task of such spaces was thinking about "actually how you get that perception of value across to people", not judged solely in monetary terms but implicating the better attunement one may develop with the produce within these judgements. In this way,

organisations such as Tasting the North West can play important, intermediary roles in altering attunements to food beyond the mainstream, though Fred recognised that he often faced an uphill battle given the dynamics of the austerity foodscape.

A final organisation in this research was also important in promoting different attunements to food, which is worthy of consideration. The North West Economic Development Group was a council-led initiative to promote local businesses in a city, which included several food producers and retailers. I met with Keira, whom at that stage had overseen the group for only a few months, and was busy planning a new initiative to host a local food fair at Harvest time in the middle of the city centre. For her, as well as her colleague, Heather, they saw fairs such as these as playing an important potential role in highlighting the economic diversity of the foodscape. They suggested they were "looking at how can we promote all of those [smaller food retailers], so that people really do realise the whole wealth of things that [the city has] got to offer" beyond the mainstream supermarkets. Though a short interview due to their busy schedules, Keira asked if I would come along and see the Harvest food fair approximately six weeks after our interview, which I did. The fair itself was incredibly busy, with a range of stalls, including many run by participants in this research. I scribbled in my notes that I walked past a familiar bakery who had hired a stall and were encouraging passers-by to try "real bread", and other retailers marketed themselves through similar markers of 'authenticity' (Sims, 2009). Of course, we ought not take the authenticity of alternatives as a given when contrasted against the mainstream, risking uncritically celebrating them (Adams and Hardman, 2014). Importantly, however, they provide spaces whereby differing visceralities (the tasting of food), knowledge and sociabilities (discussing the 'know how' of food with knowledgeable producers) all coalesce, potentially spurring different attunements into being. Again returning to Matthew, he told me how he had first come across the bakery I mention here through a similar event, and found the taste of the bread they baked so much better that he had stopped purchasing bread from supermarkets entirely. "It

[supermarket bread] doesn't deserve the name 'bread' really. It's absolutely appalling. I think supermarkets […] masquerade this industrial bread as being 'real' bread". In this way, spaces such as these food fairs ought not be seen as solely serving commercial ends, but may serve to allow actors reflexively reframe (and rethink) their attunement to food, perhaps towards more progressive ends and away from the normalised vicissitudes of the mainstream (Hayes-Conroy and Martin, 2010).

Chapter conclusion

The discussion in this chapter has explored food consumption practices in arguing for the potential of the visceral body as key in spurring wider political and economic transformation. Recognising this potential, though speaking in a much broader sense, McWhorter suggests that

> Every aspect of a human being, including our bodies, is implicated in the powers and knowledges we want to critique. What is at stake in critique, then, is our very bodies, our very selves. These are what we have to change. (McWhorter, 1999: 148)

Whilst we are always capable of discussing our relationship with food through language, i.e. representational knowledge, much of our lived experiences cannot be reduced to this level (Carolan, 2008). Indeed, whilst many participants in this research were capable of airing their dissatisfaction with the mainstream, this was not all that was given in their day-to-day experiences of food. To recall a point made at the beginning of this thesis, food is a deeply intimate commodity (Winson, 1993) which we develop a relationship with through our visceral capacities such as taste, touch and smell (i.e. non-representational knowledge) alongside other economies of knowledge. Though recognising that the analysis I offer here remains trapped within language, here I have shown how these visceral engagements with food can contribute to spurring different relationships. Hence, and informed particularly by Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-

Conroy's 'visceral turn' in human geography, I have developed the concept of attunement. Attunement takes these very 'personal', intimate visceralities that we tend to think of as 'ours' and frames them as historical and contingent constructs that come to be attuned to different political economies of food over time. Therefore, any attunement might be reworked, and our visceral bodies are sites of complex contestation in our relationships with food. These problematise the Bourdieusian theory of habitus, which sees the body as referential of other dynamics, particularly those around class (e.g. Paddock, 2016). This is not to discredit this entirely perspective entirely, but instead to recognise that the body must be understood as playing a more active, generative role in the foodscape.

Of course, the Bourdieusian perspective with its strong focus on class may seem like a logical framing given the dynamics of the austerity foodscape, which can partly be characterised by a material pressure on budgets for food. However, the diverse economies framework encourages us to transcend these simplistic, economistic explanations. Whilst we ought not to downplay the problematic, if not violent, dynamics of the austerity foodscape for the many worse off in society, for many others the amount of money in one's pocket is not all that is given in relationships with food. Attunement helps us to think of these relationships in a more sociologically satisfactory way, capturing the many complexities of the social world, yet forcing us to not lose sight of embodied relationships with food amidst wider structural forces and historical tendencies. Indeed, our agential capacities means our attunement to food may often shift in unexpected ways that are not determined solely by 'budgets', also implicating a raft of sociabilities and knowledges within these relations. Therefore, in a critically optimistic light, the consideration of attunement here also raises questions around *where* we might think of positive change as emerging from in the foodscape. Rather than repeating familiar accounts that see food consumption practices as irrelevant in questions of wider political and economic transformation (Chatzidakis et al., 2012; c.f. Devinney et al., 2010), this chapter frames the body as itself potentially generative of

fostering new, and more hopeful relations in the process. It is with this critical optimism in mind that I move this account to Chapter Six, the final empirical chapter of this research, which explores the 'other' alternatives which have proliferated in the austerity foodscape.

Chapter Six

Spaces of care? On the other alternatives of the austerity foodscape and the reconfiguration of civil society

Introduction to chapter

> I'm seeing more working families struggling and working people struggling over the past few years than previously, especially with food. I don't know whether that's down to the recession or what, what it might be, but yeah definitely seen an increase in that. I mean when I first went into this kind of area of work, you know the third sector, I mean I didn't even know what food banks were. Now it's gone through a stage of food banks and now it's developing even further into more creative ways that are more inclusive, and accessible to a wider range of people, you know. So a lot of these groups and these organisations are coming up with like you say your food co-ops, your pantry models, your community cafés, your food clubs, your lunch clubs, that take away that stigma a little bit. (Jake, co-ordinator at Distributing Food Well)

The empirical discussion that I have offered over the previous two chapters engages with a variety of differing organisations. In doing so, Chapter Four focused on the 'worlds of difference' in alternative food production, and Chapter Five focused on consumption, developing the concept of attunement. Much of this discussion therefore coalesces around the relational alternative/mainstream distinction, with it covering a requisite range of food provisioning models extending beyond, though not ignoring, the supermarket. Taken together, these two chapters have argued for the importance of reading economies for difference, thereby illuminating positive shifts around food that AFNs can confer. With it, I have argued for the need to think of economies as spaces of active intervention and processual 'doings', theorising wider civil society as conferring a generative capacity in light of the vicissitudes of the post-2008 austerity foodscape.

At the same time, and as noted since the main Introduction of this thesis, an important dimension of the austerity foodscape lies in the multiplication of other food provisioning models not typically assimilated under the AFN label. These have proliferated to the extent that they cannot be ignored (Caplan, 2017), and have come to be important 'alternatives' for many. In this chapter I consider practices around food banking, food waste initiatives and community cafés, all of which have been largely ignored in AFN scholarship. Crucially, I argue that they are 'spaces of care' emerging out of this continued reconfiguration between civil society and capitalist political economy. These have largely been ignored in the AFN literature due to tendencies that romanticise alternatives as intrinsically good (Holloway et al., 2007; Massey, 2000), thereby presuming that these organisations are uninterpretable through the rubric(s) of pre-existing AFN scholarship (Cloke et al., 2016). As Chapter Two highlighted, this is echoed in the literature, with these organisations having been overwhelmingly described in negative terms. Variously they are framed as the 'dark side' of the food system (van der Horst et al., 2014); as affectively loaded by those who use them with experiences of desperation, shame and powerlessness (Douglas et al., 2015); elsewhere stigmatisation, embarrassment and personal inadequacy (Garthwaite et al., 2015; Garthwaite, 2016a; 2016b; Purdam et al., 2015). Other perspectives have situated the proliferation of these organisations (particularly food banks) within the structural dismantling of welfare states, arguing that these charitable entities unwittingly reawaken narratives around deservingness and undeservingness in a post or even anti-welfare austerity context (see, variously, Lambie-Mumford and Dowler, 2014; Heynen, 2010; Batsleer, 2016; Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Lindenbaum, 2016; Levkoe, 2011). Either way, these diagnoses are largely pessimistic, often hopelessly bleak.[32] I suggest

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[32] It is worth emphasising here that this account must be situated specifically within the context of the austerity foodscape *of the United Kingdom*. Accounts from other geographical areas where civil society has been impacted by even more severe austerity policies (e.g. Greece and Spain, amongst others in the Eurozone) have been more forthcoming in considering the positive possibilities that might emerge from these organisations (see, for example, Rakopoulos, 2014; Calvário and Kallis, 2017; Walliser, 2013; Davies and Blanco, 2017).

that we might question the utility derived from continuing to read these spaces 'for sameness', reproducing the discursive reality implicated by these accounts. Whilst important, and recognising that there is much to be critical of in these spaces, these accounts risk cutting off the potential for other readings and interpretations (Harris, 2009). Indeed, and as Cloke *et al.* (2016) productively argue in their measured consideration of food banking, whilst it is "important to take this 'dark side' [of the foodscape] seriously", this ought not to preclude an analysis that recognises "other aspects of food banking [and, I suggest, other models of food provisioning] that indicate the potential for a more progressive 'lighter' side" (Cloke et al., 2016: 12). Indeed, the enormous growth of food banking in the United Kingdom within the austerity foodscape has seen many of them transformed from largely non-political—often more aptly apolitical—spaces "into agencies increasingly devoted to giving a voice to the voiceless" (Cloke et al., 2016: 10). But this is not solely a question of political representation. Understanding of them as spaces of care, I argue that they are generative of new affective formations within ongoing processes of wider political-economic transformation, providing glimpses of profoundly different possible foodscapes in the process.

I develop this argument by firstly drawing autoethnographically on visits to two food banks, arguably the archetypal model of food provisioning characterising the austerity foodscape. I then consider Distributing Food Well, a food waste charity mentioned above in Jake's account, before considering other spaces including a community café.

A trip to the food bank: reading beyond sameness

Part one: the North West Food Bank

Towards the end of the research process, and spurred by discussions in other interviews around the topic of food banks, I arranged to visit the North West Food Bank. Though I did not originally envisage including food banks within this research, a developing awareness around the crucial lifeline they represented for many in the austerity

foodscape meant that they were too important to bypass (an awareness further spurred through a timely reading of Garthwaite's (2016a) insightful and much commended work *Hunger Pains: Life Inside Foodbank Britain*). Having arranged to meet Monica, the co-ordinator of the North West Food Bank, it was with a sense of trepidation that I travelled to the site. Like many food banks in the United Kingdom, the North West Food Bank was affiliated to The Trussell Trust, the largest network in the country with 428 sites—a steadily growing number (The Trussell Trust, 2018). Based in an extremely economically deprived area, the North West Food Bank had been set up in 2012 amid a growing awareness at a local level around people struggling to afford food. By comparison to the CSA schemes and growing sites that I was now comfortable spending time in, the food bank represented a very different prospect both in terms of my research and my own personal experiences around food.

On arriving to meet Monica at the time we had arranged, I found myself noticeably more nervous than usual. Climbing the stairs outside the church hall, I entered through the main doors and I was immediately met by a friendly volunteer.[33] She asked if I would like a cup of tea or coffee, then asked if I would like to take a seat around one of small plastic tables that filled the space. In a way that echoed Garthwaite's (2016a) experiences from her own ethnography, I immediately felt flustered by the thought that the volunteer thought *I* was potentially there to collect a food parcel. Barely managing to splutter that I was, in fact, there to undertake an interview with Monica (who oversaw the co-ordination of the site) and to spend the afternoon at the food bank, I felt myself blush. Unwavering in her positivity, the volunteer told me that Monica was busy with a

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[33] It is worth noting that whilst The Trussell Trust is grounded in Christian values, it does not aim to promote these views. As a result, it attracts a wide range of volunteers from many backgrounds (Garthwaite, 2016a). Nonetheless, many of its food banks end up operating out of religious spaces such as church halls for pragmatic reasons, often due to a lack of viable alternative spaces with the necessary storage space.

'client' but would be available shortly.[34] Reflecting on this encounter in my field notes written after the visit, I note that I was annoyed with myself for blushing and having to defend my reasons for being present at the food bank. After all, as a researcher of food in a time of austerity, I felt that I—of all people—bore a personal responsibility in problematising those familiar discourses that stigmatise food bank users as individual failures when the reasons for their usage are primarily structural and socioeconomic (Caplan, 2016).[35] Despite this, I still felt the need to make it clear that I was not associated with 'them'—the food bank users—revealing the subtle and often insidious workings of stigma in the everyday (Tyler, 2013).

Attempting to remain inconspicuous whilst waiting for Monica, I took a seat at one of the tables away from most of the volunteers and distracted myself with the leaflets on the table. Whilst looking at, though barely reading, this information I realised that I had inadvertently picked up one of the 'shopping lists' placed on each table. Clients were welcome to complete one of these before they had their meeting with one of the 'advisors' (volunteers) to collect their parcel, helping them to tailor it to one's circumstances, though this was not compulsory. As Garthwaite notes, the label of 'food bank' is perhaps disingenuous given the wide variety of products often available, including but not limited to "nappies, baby food, toiletries, dog food, cleaning and hygiene products" (Garthwaite, 2016a: 47) as required and depending on what was available on any given day. Versus Tarasuk and Eakin's (2005) ethnographic account which suggests that 'choice' on the part of users is largely removed from these spaces, much of my experience of the North West Food Bank was in fact articulated around giving the clients choice, whether via the mechanism of the shopping list or otherwise.

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[34] The Trussell Trust prefers the framing of clients and not users. 'Client' conveys professional, equal relationships, whilst 'user' carries associations with drug use and dynamics of dependency (Power et al., 2017).
[35] The Trussell Trust acknowledge that the three main factors driving food bank usage are low incomes, changes to welfare payments and delays in receiving these payments (The Trussell Trust, 2018).

As clients filtered in to the hall, I noticed that those around me were confronted with a variety of choices around what they would like to drink, where they would like to sit, whether they would like something more substantial to eat beyond a few biscuits, and whether they would like a magazine to read whilst they waited for their advisor to become available. As Monica would later tell me, the proliferation of these largely mundane choices that the clients faced on their visit to the food bank aimed to empower them and avoid oft-repeated charges of paternalism that food banks commonly faced (Wilson, 2016). For Davis, the phenomenon of choice can be understood as the 'meta-value' of contemporary society, whereby one's self-worth is judged through the ability to "exercise […] free choice within a market setting" (Davis, 2008: 104; see also Bauman, 2005). Those who are excluded from market exchange, by this account, are deemed individually responsible for their failures. As Zygmunt Bauman states elsewhere, these 'flawed consumers' are not merely the unemployed but are more accurately 'non-consumers', facing stigmatisation and exclusion for their inability to fulfil "the most crucial of the social duties […] [in] being active and effective buyers of goods and services that the market offers" (Bauman, 2007: 33).

Though the diverse economies framework encourages us to see beyond these narrow binaries of market/non-market relations, this important privileging of clients' choices reveals a contradiction at the core of practices around food banking. On the one hand, this organisation was critical of the growing responsibilisation of the individual that Dawson (2013) argues emerges from the uptake of neoliberal social and economic policies in the late 1970s, attempting to situate food bank use as a consequence of structural, socioeconomic shifts in a post-2008 context. On the other, situating choice as central to clients' experiences of the food bank—the 'shopping list' as a proxy for the dignity and 'freedom' enjoyed by unflawed consumers in the realm of market exchange—reveals how these spaces may in fact serve to reinforce (or at best emulate) the ideas they are otherwise critical of. In this way, the role of food banks in the austerity foodscape can be read as not only ambivalent but also contradictory. For Williams *et*

al. food banking "neither warrants uncritical celebration nor outright dismissal; but rather presents a highly ambiguous political space still in the making" (Williams et al., 2016: 2292). This ambiguity was something that continued once I met with Monica, who had been involved with the food bank from its inception.

Moving into a small office at the back of the hall, I began our interview by asking Monica whether she could begin by saying more about the establishment of the North West Food Bank in 2012. With links to faith-based groups in the area, Monica said that she (alongside a few others) had approached The Trussell Trust shortly after her church had organised a celebratory screening of the royal wedding between Prince William and Kate Middleton. "[At the celebration] we put on free food, and the amount of people that were coming just for the food and not even watching, 'cos we had a big screen on with the royal wedding on, but people were all coming up for the food". For Monica, this was "the first eye opener" in recognising that many were struggling to access food: "it's the area in which we live, food is a major problem". Though initially she interpreted the demand for food as being related to school 'holiday hunger' in which families struggle to manage without the provision of free school lunches—and increasingly breakfasts too (see Long et al., 2018 for an expanded discussion of this phenomenon)—it rapidly became clear to her that these issues were more substantial. Indeed, the referral system meant that Monica could get a sense of the primary drivers leading people to food banks, and her experiences in the years that the food bank had been active echoed The Trussell Trust's wider findings of low incomes, changes (and delays) to welfare payments as driving usage.[36] Worryingly, Monica suggested that

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[36] The referral voucher for Trussell Trust food banks is primarily accessed by someone in need through 'gatekeeper' institutions such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, job centres and medical professionals. The voucher can be redeemed for a food parcel which is designed to feed either an individual or a family for three meals a day for three days. Official guidelines from The Trussell Trust suggest that a recipient can receive a maximum of three food parcels within any single 'crisis period' to avoid establishing dependency. At the same time, the ethos undergirding the Trussell Trust means that those in need are rarely turned away provided that they have obtained a voucher prior to their visit (Garthwaite, 2016a).

these everyday challenges faced by many in the austerity foodscape had, if anything, grown and there was no sign of political change that might help to alleviate the situation. At this point, and having already moved the food bank once to this larger hall since its inception to cope with ever growing demand, Monica was concerned of how many others might be out there in precarious situations:

> We currently feed four and half thousand a year, of which a thousand are children. […] [We don't know] how many there might be [in need of food], because nobody wants to be here, you've got to be pretty desperate to want to come. It's a lot of shame, as comfortable as we try and make it, we don't know how many people, it's like the iceberg, you know how many people really do want to come and how many people have, but also I mean how many other people at the bottom of the iceberg are getting help from other places where they wouldn't normally get it.

The 'tip of the iceberg' analogy that Monica discusses points to a growing reliance in the austerity foodscape on informal modes of food provisioning, though with many remaining invisible to organisations such as the North West Food Bank. As Swanson *et al.* outline, "informal, food-related supports are those provided through social contacts outside of governmental systems and include charitable food assistance […] as well as the supports provided by family, friends, and neighbors" (Swanson et al., 2008: 677). Importantly, whilst these informal modes sit outside of the realm of monetary, market-driven exchange and are 'free' in one sense this does not entail that they are without 'costs' more broadly defined (Purdam et al., 2015). As Monica highlights, these informal modes—with food banking practices particularly worthy of attention in the United Kingdom's austerity foodscape—carry extensive social 'costs', in the form of the shame and stigmatisation associated with their usage. Despite the various attempts to instil choice into the process of visiting the food bank and make it as comfortable as

213

possible for the clients, for Monica this was only ever partly successful in mitigating these powerful stigmatising dynamics.

Revealing the problems that came with instilling 'choice' in this context, the North West Food Bank came up in an interview with Trish. Though Trish's account has previously been considered in Chapter Five, it was later in our interview that we touched upon the topic of food banking. As it transpired, Trish and her husband—as recent retirees—had decided to volunteer in these advisory roles at the North West Food Bank, feeling that their respective careers in education and the not-for-profit third sector had prepared them well for such an endeavour. Though Trish felt (by her own admission) exasperated by the political and economic inequities around food that led to so many being reliant on food banks today, she painted a complex picture of these practices. On the one hand, she refused to accept accounts that painted them in an entirely negative light:

> The [North West] Food Bank is a very mutually supportive organisation, because a lot of the people going there to help are people who have come from had struggles of their own in the past, various sorts, and that's very valuable for all of us. So it's a very therapeutic place to be I think isn't it, because people look after one another and are kind to one another, and so it's a beneficial thing to go [to]. And a lot of people, there's a number of people there who have suffered from anxiety conditions or other things and who have been very much helped. I can think of one young woman in particular, people who have had major emotional problems and they've gone along to help and it's been very helpful, therapeutic. And you find it a valuable thing to do, you enjoy it.

For Trish, it was impossible to discuss practices of food banking without also considering the affective relations that were developed between those present within these spaces. Though here primarily discussing the volunteers at the site—who for Trish, found these experiences sometimes extended as far as taking on a therapeutic

dimension—these relations also extended to the clients she and her husband met in their advisory role. As she suggested, this involved "chat[ting] to them about any specific needs they have [and] provid[ing] a listening ear to help them to overcome the embarrassment and the sense of failure that they feel when they arrive". Whilst the various empowering choices the clients faced on their visit was the first line of defence against this personal sense of failure, these face-to-face interactions with the advisors were also deeply important. When I asked Trish about the shopping lists, she said she thought of them as helpful distractions to try and get clients to shift their focus towards what they (and often their families) needed, as opposed to their reasons for having to attend the food bank in the first place. In practice, however, this emphasis on free choice—emulating Bauman's (2007) unflawed or, as he prefers, *seduced* consumers—was often contradicted by the harsh realities of food banking. Whilst, as noted above, other products were available, these were often in limited supply and most clients received the same standardised package. Trish could recall it with surprising precision:

> The standard pack, if it's a single person, then it's a box of cereal, two soups—we always laugh about the two soups—I think it's two tins of beans, one tin of tomatoes, two different tins of vegetables, a tin of meat or fish, a tin of potatoes, a packet of instant mash, tinned food, tinned rice [pudding], a carton of juice, a carton of milk, tea bags, 500 grams of sugar, I'm not doing bad on this, a packet of biscuits, 500 grams of pasta, some instant noodles, a loo roll, some soap, that's about it. So that's not bad, but there's obviously no fresh items there at all, there's relatively little protein there, and there's only a tin of meat or a tin of fish, and there's obviously no fresh vegetables at all and no fresh fruit, by definition, because it has to be stored [at room temperature].

Though this list would be expanded in the context of a family, the narrow range of food available sits uneasily against the narrative of choice emulated through other practices within these spaces. Whilst I discuss fresh food later in this section, Monica also

recognised the tension that is highlighted in Trish's account. Going one step further, Monica even drew my attention to the ways in which choice also had to be constrained with reference to clients' access to cooking facilities. As part of the discussion between advisor and client, they now had to consider this and design the food parcel accordingly. As she told me, the food bank could not afford to provide dried food that required cooking on a hob if the client either had no access to a kitchen or—as something she was hearing with increasing regularity—the client could not afford the energy required to cook (see Middlemiss, 2017 for a wider discussion of the growing problem of 'energy poverty'). Monica suggested that over the past couple of years it had become increasingly common for clients to request a 'kettle pack'. As the name suggests, these parcels were designed such that meals could be cooked with a kettle, a bowl and a spoon, therefore remaining accessible to those with the bare minimum of resources at their disposal.

By comparison to the organisations discussed across Chapters Four and Five, I saw a profoundly different side to the austerity foodscape in my time spent here. As my afternoon at the North West Food Bank drew to a close and the volunteers began to prepare to leave, I thanked Monica for her time and insight. Though initially entering the space with a sense of trepidation as to what I might find, my overriding feeling was at that point one of ambivalence. Narrow and all-too-familiar readings of food banking paint them as spaces that operate through shame and paternalistic power relations between provider (advisor) and user (client), personally responsible for their failures. Shifting the focus, another common reading sees food banking as readily assimilated into the 'Big Society' narrative (Lambie-Mumford and Jarvis, 2012; Nolan and Featherstone, 2015). This keystone of conservative political rhetoric during the early years of austerity following the financial crisis envisages the mass mobilisation of volunteer-led provision, replacing unaffordable state-run institutions. Unsurprisingly, its responsibilisation of volunteers as a way to bypass critiques of political and economic structures has been readily critiqued in the literature (Williams et al., 2014),

and food banking has often been understood as one such example of the Big Society at work (Caplan, 2016). Yet in her engagement with these ideas, and with a utopian inflection, Levitas (2012) argues for the need to move beyond these suspicious narratives. In the process, she argues for the need for what she terms a 'hermeneutics of faith' in any given analysis:

> In the improvisation of social institutions, including those of the Big Society, collective practice creates and opens up new possibilities. […] To read […] the Big Society through a hermeneutics of faith is to create a narrative in which they cease to be an ideological cover for neo-liberal dispossession of the poor, and become positive attributes embedded in another potential society. (Levitas, 2012: 336)

Even in the brief time that I had spent at the North West Food Bank, it struck me that the practices at play in the North West Food Bank seemed, "to open out a range of emotional and affective relations" (Williams et al., 2016: 2304) beyond these prescriptive, suspicious narratives, allowing for the other readings that Levitas encourages. Care for others seemed central to many of these relations, which became clear to me as I was leaving. Saying goodbye, and leaving Monica in her office, I walked through to the main room in which my brief journey started, full of the plastic tables with their shopping lists and the volunteers debriefing over tea and coffee. I thanked them all for allowing me to visit the food bank, painfully aware that I was risking what Gerrard conceptualises as a researcher "parachut[ing] into people's lives […] and then vanish[ing]" (Gerrard, 1995: 59). I told the volunteers that I wished I had the foresight to see food banks as more important to my research than I had initially anticipated and that I had the time to return, but they seemed happy to help and allow me to be there for the afternoon. One of them told me that it was important that people heard what life was like for some of the worst off in society in the context of austerity.

217

I noted that there were a few minutes left of the session, and asked if they were expecting any more clients to attend today; one of the volunteers told me that most clients attended earlier on, and it was only in exceptional cases that someone would arrive this late. As soon as the volunteer told me this, he leapt into action, gesticulating towards the table behind him at the back of the room. On this table lay a few unwanted fresh items that I was told I could surely make use of or distribute between my housemates. As another volunteer fetched carrier bags, I found myself unable to decline taking much of what remained despite actively wanting little of it: a large carton of short-dated single cream, stale cakes from a bakery, some yoghurts, a cabbage and some red onions. As this random selection was being packed for me, I recalled that fresh food was something that I had discussed with Monica, and a source of various problems in the day-to-day running of the food bank. Though food banks have been critiqued for their 'failure' to provide fresh and healthy food to their clients (e.g. Neter et al., 2016), health and safety legislation entails that they must abide by the same health and safety legislation as any other space of food provisioning. As a result, fresh food (with short shelf lives) cannot be legally distributed after their use-by dates have been passed.

Beyond these pragmatic considerations, Monica expressed other concerns around the prospect of food banks gaining refrigeration facilities. She was concerned that this may serve to further institutionalise them, normalising them as part of the foodscape:

> You then need more skills, you need more equipment, you need to be able to think about where can you put it. Have you got storage, have you got fridges, can you dispose of it at the end of the day? […] If you refuse it you then get bad publicity because the food bank's turning it away, so we've been put in a very bad position.

The volunteers who were packing my items were equally aware of the various problems in dealing with fresh food. Intriguingly, for them, the biggest difficulty was getting

clients to agree to take the fresh food with them in the first place. Many, they suggested, refused the fresh food because they did not want to risk depriving others given the limited quantities available. This problematises notions that there are "generous 'good' citizens" actively donating food on the one hand and "others [here the food bank clients] as the passive recipients of such compassion" (Darling, 2011: 409) on the other hand. Indeed, even in these mundane instances of declining fresh food, the clients' overarching concern for the needs of others points to the many articulations of care that are regularly teased out in these spaces in ways that existing analyses have failed to pay sufficient attention to (Cloke et al., 2016). In my case, that the volunteers eschewed the food that they might have otherwise taken for themselves—articulating me as more in need of it than them—shows how spaces of food banking ought not to be understood as simply *lacking* certain relations (here market exchange) that must be emulated through proxy mechanisms. Conversely, and to emphasise, I argue that they are constituted by other economies that are specific to them and their organisational dynamics. These are non-reciprocal relations grounded in the recognition of care for—and generosity towards—others. As politically contradictory and ambivalent spaces, food banks simultaneously express many of the more extreme vicissitudes of the austerity foodscape whilst more productively providing tantalising glimpses into what might be possible within very different relations fostered through food.

Emphasising this ambivalence, I thanked the volunteers for the food and said my goodbyes, making my way out of the hall and down the steps outside to get the bus back home. As Figure 17 shows, another policy highlighting the contradictory dynamics of food banking lay in the dedicated usage of branded carrier bags from mainstream supermarkets. Much like the shopping lists, the usage of these carrier bags must be understood as emulating narratives that prioritise the ability to engage in market exchange as an unflawed consumer. The bags, after all, obfuscate the origins of the food, potentially avoiding the stigmatisation inherent in being reliant of charitable modes of food provisioning. Making my way down the steps outside the hall, a bag in

each hand, I saw two young women walking down the street in my direction. Noticing them notice me, one of the women commented to the other (quietly, though audibly) that "he's just been to the food bank… it's a shame, isn't it". As I continued walking in front of them, I felt as if I should turn around and tell them that I was in fact not a 'food bank user' as they presumed, instead only visiting the site for my research and taking food that might otherwise be wasted. In that one instance, the throwaway comment from a stranger shifted my interpretation of food banking once again, emphasising the powerful interpersonal effects of stigmatisation. I kept my head down and carried on walking, ruminating on the complex dynamics of the foodscape and the possibilities of positive transformations.

(Figure 17, donated food from the North West Food Bank, my photograph)

Part two: reading for difference within food banking

A few days after I had visited the North West Food Bank, I had arranged an interview with Paula, who had managed the day-to-day running of the Helping Hand Food Bank since its inception in 2009. Based in a more affluent area a few miles away, Helping Hand was more explicitly a faith-based organisation with strong links to a local church. Whilst much smaller than the North West Food Bank, it had grown significantly in size and, as a result, had changed both in terms of its aims and operation over time. Free of any affiliation to a wider network such as The Trussell Trust, Helping Hand revealed to

me the ways in which analyses ought to be able to read for difference *within* models of food provision.

Feeling more aware at this stage of the operational dynamics of food banks, I travelled to Helping Hand more confident of my ability to traverse this largely unfamiliar space. Unlike the North West Food Bank, Helping Hand was based in a former office space in a largely residential area. Opening the door to enter, I was immediately met by one of the volunteers in the busy waiting area with chairs at either side of the room. In the corner, there was a table with a pile of faded magazines. Greeting the volunteer and, once again, immediately being offered a cup of tea or coffee, I said that I was here to meet Paula without blushing or feeling overly self-aware of my presence this time around. The volunteer told me that Paula was currently on the phone, and that I ought to take a seat whilst she prepared my cup of tea. Sat in the slightly cramped space and unsure as to how to—and, more importantly, whether I should—introduce myself to the clients I sat next to, I picked up one of the magazines on the table in the corner of the room. Compared with the open space and plastic tables (with their shopping lists) of the North West Food Bank, Helping Hand felt more like a visit to the dentist. Mindlessly flicking through the magazine, barely reading any of the words on each page, I looked around the room and noticed the posters on the wall advertising a range of events, most of which were affiliated to the church that had established Helping Hand. There were also larger posters containing psalms from the Bible, which was quite different to the secularised space of the North West Food Bank. In one of the corners was an elderly volunteer, busily knitting with a large yarn of wool beside her. As Paula would later tell me, with many of their clients in difficult financial situations and unable to afford good quality clothing, this volunteer had taken it upon herself to produce a wide range of items—using her own materials—including hats, gloves and scarves as required, and often garments for the babies and young children of regular clients. Though the atmosphere of Helping Hand felt more formal than the North West Food Bank, the

knitting served as a timely reminder of the centrality of care and generosity in these spaces.

After a few minutes, Paula emerged from a back office to meet with me. She suggested that we take a seat in one of the rooms normally reserved for privately meeting clients, and I followed her to begin our interview. I told Paula that this was my second trip to a food bank this week, though she immediately corrected me, suggesting that they preferred the term 'support centre'. I apologised, but recognised it as a good platform on which to begin the interview. I asked her to elaborate on why this was the preferred term and whether she could expand on the development of Helping Hand. As Paula told me:

> We class ourselves as being a support centre. We don't class ourselves as being a food bank, but other people do. But the food bank part of what we do actually happened by default really, it happened in response to a need. Originally we started feeding the homeless once a week, and then we decided that […] it would be easier to try and put those resources into people who really wanted to move on. And so we changed from the meal once a week to having what you now see as a support centre, which is open four days a week. And our mission statement really is to help disadvantaged people. Now, largely by experience we get [people who are] homeless, addicted [to drugs], [in] debt, relationship problems, I guess they are the biggest groups. But food for those groups as you can imagine is a major challenge, and that's why from the beginning we try and help these people to resolve and alleviate their difficulties.

In contrast to the North West Food Bank (where, as I noted, clients were limited in receiving three food parcels per 'crisis period'), the framing of Helping Hand as a 'support centre' reveals a different emphasis within the organisation. For Paula, the restrictions on the number of parcels in place in spaces such as the North West Food

Bank was arbitrary, and the ethos of Helping Hand in 'resolving and alleviating' difficulties meant that there was no pre-determined limit to how many parcels any given client may receive. Indeed, given the severity of some of the challenges people faced— from homelessness to drug addiction and beyond—we might question the extent to which three food parcels may help from a long-term perspective beyond offering the most meagre of lifelines. With this in mind, the parcels at Helping Hand were more substantial, and Paula told me how they had been designed to feed an individual or family for seven days as opposed to three in Trussell Trust food banks.

As Helping Hand had grown in scale, this approach had resulted in some difficult decisions. With food banks now mired in various debates around the extent to which they create relations of dependency amongst their users (Garthwaite, 2016b), Paula was keenly aware of the potential difficulties that came with judging on an *ad hoc* basis who was 'deserving' of this comparatively generous provision. Though under no obligation to operate in the same way, Helping Hand had, over time, developed their own external referral system involving many of the same external organisations as the Trussell Trust network. The most common referral to Helping Hand came from the Citizens Advice Bureau located nearby. For May, these processes represent forms of 'moral outsourcing' (May, 2014 cited in Williams et al., 2016) which devolve responsibility to external professionals "whose own moral judgements [around deservingness] are obscured by technocratic management systems" (Williams et al., 2016: 2309). In the case of the North West Food Bank, ensuring that clients that were visiting had a referral voucher enabled a "more comfortable, 'non-judgemental' stance" (Williams et al., 2016: 2309) on the part of the volunteers, with the 'legitimate' need for food established beforehand. Yet whilst the referral system served an intrinsically similar purpose at Helping Hand, the excerpt below from my interview with Paula captures the other dynamics at work in the referral process. Paula saw this moral outsourcing not simply as a passing of responsibility but instead as the start of a more constructive dialogue:

Paula: If I get a referral and I feel it's airy fairy and somebody's just gone along and said 'can I have a food bank referral?' and they've gone [okay], if I feel that's happened I will ring them up. I will ring up the referrer and I'll just say 'please can you tell me a little bit more about why this person needs this food?', so that I can determine what else I can do to help them [the client].

JB: Get a bit more stringent perhaps?

Paula: Yeah just challenging [the referral] as well, it's not for the sake of challenging [it], it's like 'okay, what is the real problem?'. You know resolve and alleviate that's our motto. […] I mean otherwise we're just prolonging the need for benefits, I mean I don't know whether you ever watch those programmes on the telly, I do sometimes if I'm not too depressed, […] you know we're on to third generation people who are on benefits and it's not good is it. It's not good at all.

Reading for difference between different spaces of food banking reveals important, albeit subtle distinctions in how these practices were framed and interpreted by lay actors involved in their orchestration. Whereas the North West Food Bank was framed directly around emergency food provision, the wider conceptualisation of Helping Hand as a 'support centre' served to entrench many of the individualised explanations that Paula was elsewhere—perhaps contradictorily—critical of. Repeating the centrality of the motto to 'resolve and alleviate' problems at Helping Hand, Paula's attempts to engage many referrers in dialogue with the aim of identifying the *personal* problems that led clients there casts the latter as Foucauldian 'entrepreneurs of the Self' (see Foucault, 2008) who must find their own (individualised) paths out of their problems. These are problems which, of course, have structural and socioeconomic content beyond the bounds of individual subjectivities. For Paula, failing to identify these personal problems worryingly risks furthering dependency on institutions like Helping Hand, which for her tied in to a now prevalent 'common sense' around the spectre of intergenerational worklessness amidst an anti-welfare sentiment (Jensen and Tyler,

2015).[37] In this way, finding out what the 'real problem' was in dialogue with the referrer involved actively locating social problems within personal circumstances and behaviours.

Though Paula's position may seem objectionable—even politically conceited and overly congruent with powerful neoliberal logics that emphasise individual self-determination—elsewhere she offered a more ambivalent position. Probing as to whether she really thought individual actions could mitigate the weight of structural forces bearing down unevenly over certain sections of society, she expressed a deep sense of frustration around the reasons that many were forced to turn to organisations such as Helping Hand in the first place. Much like the North West Food Bank, one of the primary reasons for referrals lay in complex and often unpredictable changes to welfare payments, which left claimants attempting to reason with impenetrable and Kafkaesque bureaucracies for weeks at a time. At the same time, and with already scarce resources at their disposal, these claimants had bills to pay and mouths to feed, limiting their options. As Paula stated:

> I guess the real problem is that there is such a weight on our social system, that
> the establishment, you know the DWP [Department for Work and Pensions],
> they can't cope with it. I mean it is ridiculous that people's circumstances might
> change and they have to apply for a different benefit and while they're doing
> that their housing benefit is stopped as well. Well actually they're still living
> there, they still have their rent to pay, while you sort out the rest of the benefits,
> and it just exacerbates an already difficult situation. And the fact that it takes six

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[37] Social science research has importantly discredited this legitimacy of this spectre. Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong (2014) argue that intergenerational worklessness has become a 'zombie argument', which they understand as a 'common sense' trope which is "resistant to evidence and social scientific efforts to kill [it] off" (Macdonald et al., 2014: 200).

weeks [to resolve], well, what are they supposed to do? What are they supposed to eat? [Should they] shoplift?

Though evidently frustrated that civil society initiatives such as Helping Hand now could now be understood as acting as a safety net for the fallout from the changing landscape of welfare provision (elsewhere Paula told me that "David Cameron used to talk about the Big Society, but actually the Big Society has always been in operation, they just haven't always been aware of it"), Paula's position is provocative. Whilst we may be critical of her prior emphasis on personal 'problem solving', a reinvigorated call for strong, unconditional welfare as an alternative path out of the austere here-and-now risks cynicism. As Cloke *et al.* suggest, we exist in "full knowledge that the state is unable [and ideologically unwilling] to deliver" (Cloke et al., 2016: 5) this reality. Powerful and historically-derived modes of governance do not invert overnight (Brown, 2015) and, further, readings that paint a branching, dichotomous path out of this situation seem problematic (Peck, 2013). One path leads towards the increasing personal responsibilisation for one's fate, loaded with this Foucauldian entrepreneurialism, whilst the other calls for a return to a now anachronistic welfare state. Yet whether structural or agential factors take primacy (or a mix of the two, as Paula's position largely emphasised), the question of culpability around the reasons that people make use of food banks ought not to preclude the possibility of other readings *within* these spaces, even if the cues that are teased out are more subtle. Seeing them as spaces of care neither envisages radical social and political upheaval, nor foresees the dystopian intensification of socially destructive political and economic logics—the two paths articulated from Paula's perspective.

This is not to say that these questions of culpability are not important. Instead, it is about seeing what Anderson describes as a "crack in the here and now" (Anderson, 2006b: 705), pointing towards other positive possibilities that emerge as often central within these spaces. As my time in both Helping Hand and the North West Food Bank show,

these spaces play host to complex moral geographies of care for, and recognition of, the needs of disenfranchised others. Whilst food is not the central focus here, it is the locus through which these encounters are facilitated. Rather than simply seeing paternalistic power dynamics of user and giver, care was not premised on reciprocal exchange but on generosity towards others. Care multiplies care, with it fostering a range of affective relations that could not have been facilitated without this recognition of a need for food in these austere times (Cloke et al., 2016). Indeed, Paula was aware at this point in our conversation of the overwhelmingly negative tone that it had taken, and was keen to highlight the more positive dynamics emerging out of these spaces:

> I have painted a black picture but there is another side [to food banking]. You know there's a side where somebody comes in in tears and shaking before you and we'll pack them a food parcel up and speak some words of hope and [say] 'well have you thought about this, what would happen if you tried that?'. You know, 'look, you're depressed, […] but you're interested in computers, why don't you go and try and [develop that interest]'. So when you've had a woman who's sat here crying and she leaves with a smile on her face, then you feel, well, I've done something, I've made a difference.

As Paula states, this sense of 'making a difference' is grounded in affective relations, spurring a sense of 'hope' in these times that, for many, are characterised more readily by despair (Bhattacharyya, 2015). Drawing on Thrift's (2004) poststructuralist approach, Cloke *et al.* therefore argue that these interactions point to the ways in which people may "learn to be affected by in-common encounters with food bank users who would otherwise remain beyond their visceral (and often emotional) domain" (Cloke et al., 2016: 7). These in-common interactions and recognition of the needs of others therefore transcends what Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) understands as the 'problem of the city'. For Nancy, this problem is one that has extensive sociological resonance: how do we become in-common when the organisation of everyday life inhibits more positive

ethical articulations between us as individual agents? As Nancy understands it, the city is marked by interactions that serve instrumental ends under the logic of an advancing division of labour, foreclosing other relations (see also Harvey, 2000). Yet whilst food banking is therefore widely understood in the literature as a 'last resort' in dark times, with associated experiences full of unpleasantries, their more positive possibilities conversely lie in serving to bring together others who can forge emergent (micro-)political and economic interactions beyond the more negative affective dynamics of the austere here-and-now (Hitchen, 2016). These interactions, as I have argued, are ultimately situated within the recognition of the need of others and capacities to extend care, ambivalently capturing the various possible readings of the spaces and practices around food banking. Of course, it is worth recognising that this account must be read as an invitation for the proliferation of other readings, as opposed to offering a prescriptive or formulaic account. In the next section, I turn our attention to Distributing Food Well, the growing food waste charity briefly considered in Jake's account at the start of this chapter. I argue that as other, similarly informal modes of food provisioning have proliferated (in doing so receiving insufficient attention in the literature), we ought not to privilege the food bank solely as a space of care in the austerity foodscape.

Rethinking 'waste' in waste food initiatives

Beyond food banking, a growing scholarly and media attention is developing around the topic of food waste (Campbell et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2012; Evans, 2018a; Mourad, 2016). As Campbell *et al.* (2017) note, food waste is not a 'new' phenomenon, and throughout human history food has always been construed as 'waste' or 'inedible' for a variety of reasons. The legacy of Mary Douglas' (2003) anthropological take on the categories of purity and danger in human and social life reveals the often arbitrary distinction between edible (at least ingestible), 'pure' food, and inedible, often 'dangerous' waste food. For example, many Western cultures enjoy the pleasure of 'off' and rotting food such as cheeses and yoghurt. As a result, Campbell *et al.* (2017) suggest that the growing attention paid to food waste ought less to be concerned around what is

(or is not) anthropologically contingent waste, but instead around the extent to which differing forms of food waste are made *(in)visible* across these contexts. Historical trends in food across Western Europe and North America have been remarkably successful in making food waste invisible, construing any waste as the inevitable (thus apolitical) consequence of certain spatio-temporal patterns in everyday life, tied in with wider political economies of food and the organisation of society. Yet food waste has become increasingly contentious in the austerity foodscape with a growing awareness around the inequities of distribution and growing food insecurity. In this way, we might suggest that it is becoming increasingly visible as well as being divorced from its apolitical moorings (Evans et al., 2012). This section focuses on a visit to Distributing Food Well—as well as incorporating accounts from other food waste initiatives—in developing the argument in this chapter so far that these may also be read as spaces of care, though with distinct logics from the food bank.

On that note, and at this early stage, it is worth making an important distinction between food waste initiatives and practices of food banking considered in the previous section. Though interlinked, I argue that they can be distinguished on the grounds of their organisational aims. The food waste initiatives that I consider here are, for the most part, removed from the direct provision of food to end users.[38] By comparison, and because of their status as emergency modes of food provision, food banks are orientated around these direct engagements with end users; whilst food waste initiatives more readily serve as distributors between producers or retailers and consumers. Whilst discussing food justice movements more broadly, Agyeman and McEntee's (2014) concern around the co-opting of initiatives such as these by powerful corporate interests

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[38] Some initiatives, however, are more integrated, both sourcing as well as processing food waste so that it is no longer 'waste'. Two prominent examples include Bristol's *Skipchen Food Rescue* (for the sake of clarity, a skip-kitchen) and Manchester's *Real Junk Food Project*. Both initiatives source food waste, primarily from supermarkets and restaurants, before cooking it and serving it on a 'pay-as-you-feel' basis. The latter initiative has gone as far as formulating 'fine dining' menus out of the reclaimed food, emulating food traditionally associated with expensive, high-end restaurants.

seems justifiable. Conceptualised in this way, food waste initiatives may end up bearing the 'costs' that corporates might otherwise attempt to avoid bearing whilst also enabling them to fulfil their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agendas.[39] On the other hand, reading food waste initiatives for difference—envisaging them as spaces of care in the foodscape—may see them as 'producers' in a different sense, transforming inedible waste into edible food. In this way, I argue that the reading of food waste initiatives as spaces of care proceeds by problematising (and contesting) epistemological framings— and the respective visibilities—of both edible 'food' and inedible 'waste'. To further develop this standpoint, it is worth expanding on my visit to Distributing Food Well.

Having first contacted Jake, the co-ordinator of this regional hub of Distributing Food Well, over email—snowballed from another research participant—I arranged an interview with him and he expressed interest in this research. Though he offered a telephone interview to avoid me having to travel to the site, I felt it was important to visit in person. Having read about Distributing Food Well online, I knew that it aimed to redistribute 'waste' food donated by a variety of partnering organisations at both national and local levels. It had even recently announced a formalised partnership with a major national supermarket. With it, Distributing Food Well aimed to foster links to a variety of initiatives at a regional level, redistributing this 'waste' to organisations that largely aimed to expand socioeconomic access to food. This included food banks, but as Jake's quote at the beginning of the chapter suggests, many other models of food provisioning. The first surprise came when Jake forwarded the address of the site. Unlike Helping Hand or the North West Food Bank, Distributing Food Well was situated in a warehouse on an industrial estate a few miles outside of a city centre.

Though partially regretting not agreeing to a telephone interview, I made my way to the site via multiple buses and a long walk. This regional hub had only been in operation for a few months, and though with modest beginnings the wider network had now

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[39] For example, the economic costs associated with sending food waste to landfill (see Brancoli et al., 2017 for an expanded discussion).

expanded to cover much of the country. This development was particularly spurred by these linkages to the national supermarket, and I learnt that one of the key motivations for the formalisation of this relationship by the supermarket chain was to enable efficiencies across the supply chain. These flows of food waste out of commercial environs to these civil society initiatives were becoming an increasingly normal component of the supermarket's operational model. Further, this rationalisation had enabled the supermarket to commit to the amount of waste that they would donate to Distributing Food Well as a key part of their renewed CSR strategy. Previously, these linkages were negotiated informally and at a local level, presenting challenges for the design of organisation-wide CSR policies.

On finally arriving at Distributing Food Well, I was met by Dominic, who was also involved in co-ordinating the site and its various operations. Informing me that Jake was running late, Dominic offered to give me a tour of the site in his absence. Donning high visibility jackets, we walked into the utilitarian warehouse space, which was quite different to the arrangement of either of the food banks. By comparison, the space was well equipped, including large industrial fridges to account for fresh donations. As Dominic told me, much of the labour on the site revolved around either collecting food from nearby organisations or processing the deliveries that arrived, primarily from the supermarket chain. In one corner, a few workers (as opposed to volunteers) were processing the latest delivery from the supermarket: 18 wooden pallets stacked high with donations. Though much of this was what is known as 'ambient food', with long shelf lives, the priority lay in processing fresh food and redistributing it as quickly as possible to ensure that it could be safely consumed. As with the food banks, Distributing Food Well was forced to dispose of any food which had passed its 'use by' date, regardless of qualitative judgements around the safety of the food. Walking down the aisles of shelving, Dominic joked about the odd selection of food that Distributing Food Well ended up receiving. In one particularly telling instance, Dominic pointed out a pallet—still wrapped with industrial cellophane—of jars of pre-made béchamel sauce.

I questioned why they might receive a donation like this, and Dominic suggested that in many cases this was down to a question of profitability. Though accounts have focused on, for example, supermarkets wasting food due to aesthetic imperfections (see Berdegué et al., 2005), fewer have situated waste within their wider political economies. For Dominic, waste within the supermarket had a specifically temporal inflection:

> So you don't always know the speed of the product's movement through the stores, if it's a slow moving item and it's taking up space in the warehouse, 'cos the supermarket is based on pounds per square foot. So let's say these weren't [selling], [they would be] gone. The other side of it is, yeah, so slow moving items they'll obviously replace with faster moving items. So we do get, sometimes, quite strange products.

Judged primarily in terms of the speed of movement through supply chains, food may become 'waste' if it is moving too slowly, thereby limiting the space that might otherwise be dedicated to quickly moving, more profitable items. Dominic, however, told me that he knew without any prior research this was not the reason behind the pallet of béchamel sauce ending up at Distributing Food Well. Asking me to observe the pallet more closely, he asked if I noticed anything wrong with it. At that point, I expected to notice that one of the jars was smashed, and the presence of broken glass made it too dangerous to process any further. This was not the case. The only thing I noticed was that the jars were upside down, which seemed unusual based on my own experiences of working part-time jobs in supermarkets. As it transpired, my assumption was correct and as Damian stated: "rather than turn it over, it would cost too much to flick it over, repack it. So they [the supermarket] just get rid [of the pallet]. That's the way the supermarkets see it".

Highlighting the multiple perspectives at work in food becoming waste, the important implication that Daniel's position teases out is that the "way the supermarkets see it" is not the *only* way to read this. For the layperson, the jars of béchamel remain perfectly

valid or legitimate as a form of food, simply upside down. However, within the context of a complex, technologically-advanced and international supply chain, the fact that the jars were upside down becomes a much more significant issue, potentially causing problems as it is processed. As Swaffield *et al.* (2018) argue, using a theoretical approach developed out of Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) influential work, around how supermarkets might deal with food waste. As a civic, as well as moral issue, redistributing the pallet of béchamel sauce may be read as the supermarket philanthropically 'doing the right thing' given the growing inequities of the austerity foodscape. Relatedly, this positive moral judgement may then serve to boost the reputation of the supermarket in a way that benefits them. Beyond this, as a market issue—and as I have already noted—it has financial benefits in that the supermarket does not have to pay to dispose of the waste in landfill. Yet Swaffield *et al.* fairly note that, within the parameters of capitalist political economy, such activities can never develop into anything more than a "marginal activity" (Swaffield et al., 2018: 48) for it represents labour needlessly expended (see also O'Brien, 2012). Amongst these competing conventions, however, what Swaffield *et al.* fail to sufficiently develop is the varying degree of (in)visibilities of waste as it becomes reclaimed as food by organisations such as Distributing Food Well. To clarify, that an entire pallet of food may become waste simply due to it being upside down seems like an absurdity of market conventions (as Dominic noted, it would not be economically rational to repack the pallet), potentially reflecting poorly on the supermarket who donated it. Importantly, however, organisations such as Distributing Food Well serve to make these absurdities invisible to the organisations who latterly receive the waste, now reclaimed as legitimate food. In the case of the béchamel sauce, it is reclaimed as food simply by removing the cellophane and turning the jars the 'correct' way up. This example highlights the various epistemological contentions involved in food becoming waste, and vice versa.[40]

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[40] As I noted in the main Introduction, various part-time jobs in the food sector had often caused me to reflect on the boundary between food and waste. In a job at a bakery

Though we continued our tour of the warehouse, it was not long until Jake arrived. Ushered to his office, we (including Dominic, who was soon to take over Jake's responsibilities) sat down to begin the interview. My attention was immediately drawn to a large whiteboard which covered most of one of the walls. On it were the details of the various organisations that Distributing Food Well redistributed food to, which totalled over 70. This was over double the number that was initially expected when operations began a few months previously. As well as those that Jake mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Dominic noted various others that have received little attention as modes of food provisioning: from school clubs (both breakfast and afterschool) and school holiday lunch clubs to community centres, women's refuges and residential homes. There were also several 'pay-as-you-feel' initiatives listed on the board, which are considered in greater depth in the next section. As Jake and Dominic noted, many of these organisations ran on differing timetables. For example, and for obvious reasons, school holiday lunch clubs only ran at certain points in the year. This created numerous logistical challenges, and much of the whiteboard was dedicated to recording when any given organisation had collected food from Distributing Food Well, as well as when they could next be expected for a collection. Commenting on my surprise as to the extensive number of organisations crammed onto the whiteboard, Dominic expressed an ambivalent sentiment, reminiscent of many of the experiences within the food banks:

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chain, it was my job to 'waste' unsold food at the end of the day. Whilst this primarily involved simply placing the food in a bin bag, there was something more performative and epistemological at work in these interactions. Having recorded what was unsold on the relevant form, that food could no longer be sold as it was now (inedible) waste, even though all the staff could still understand it as perfectly edible food. As a result, it is not enough to say that the distinction between 'food' and 'waste' is simply marked linguistically, or through what Austin (1962) has theorised as a 'speech act'—perhaps in an utterance such as "I've wasted that food". Instead, the epistemological boundary between food and waste is delineated through technical and administrative procedures, which assist in this transformation. Inevitably these procedures intermingle with the conventions that Swaffield *et al.* (2018) discuss, and the food waste initiatives discussed here show how these transformations can be problematised and often reversed (i.e. waste can once again become food).

Dominic: Sometimes you think 'oh, it's really good', it's getting busy and there's more people want to get involved. And, on the other hand, you're thinking why is there this need [for these initiatives] here? There shouldn't be, in this day and age there shouldn't be that need.

JB: It would be better if it didn't exist?

Jake: Course it would.

Despite this, it was clear that Jake and Dominic found a sense of duty in the activities of Distributing Food Well. The careful orchestration required in the redistribution process had to be managed effectively, otherwise they risked food being unavailable for the many organisations that were now to some degree reliant on them. Asking Jake to provide more context as to the establishment of Distributing Food Well in this area—as well as his involvement in the organisation—he suggested that his initial links came from being on the receiving end of food from Distributing Food Well's wider network in a nearby area:

The reason we got involved is that [another] charity, [a] social welfare charity, used to use [Distributing Food Well's wider network] to receive food for the residents who live and work in the scheme, and also the two community cafés which we run. The profits from that go back into supporting the charity and sustaining the charity. So we received food [there], it was fantastic for us because obviously it saved the charity money, which on tight budgets it helps keep it running and that money can be reinvested into supporting the residents and the people that we work with, so [a] fantastic scheme. The opportunity came up for us to open [Distributing Food Well here], so we jumped at the chance with that. When I started I knew that the need was there, I knew that people were hungry, I'd worked in the third sector for several years, I've worked with people experiencing food poverty, people experiencing a wide range of issues, so I knew the need was there.

Framed within a recurring narrative of identifying need, Jake's previous experiences within the third sector had highlighted a wide variety of social ills around food to him. Yet whilst Jake and Dominic both recognised that food banks were important models of food provision in the austerity foodscape, they hoped that Distributing Food Well could play a more positive, generative role in bringing about better foodscapes. For example, the community cafés at Jake's previous social welfare charity provided a vital source of income for them, and by procuring food waste from initiatives such as Distributing Food Well they could operate in a commercially viable way. In this way, as Psarikidou and Szerszynski highlight in their discussion of AFNs, such instances might help to move the debate "beyond power asymmetries and socioeconomic inequalities, and [instead] to [how to] integrate social justice and broad-based equity considerations" (Psarikidou and Szerszynski, 2012a: 31) into these networks. Whilst Jake and Dominic recognised that they regularly supplied many food banks at Distributing Food Well, these other, less extensively institutionalised initiatives held the positive potential that Psarikidou and Szersynski discuss in their analysis. As they suggested:

> Jake: I don't think food banks are a brilliant long term solution, I don't think that's the way forward.
> Dominic: It's a short-term solution.
> Jake: Short term solution and it can end up being more of a crutch, more of a helping to sustain certain people's negative situation. Whereas these kind of new ways of putting people in touch with other people, you've got that sociability aspect of it, some of them are bringing in, using food as a kind of motivator to come and join them, and then introducing things like training, volunteering, and support, advice, signposting, or just having that social aspect, you know.

On the one hand, this chapter has suggested that we ought not dismiss food banks outright, in the process failing to read them for difference. Arguably, in doing so we

may recognise many positive dynamics within them. On the other, we might use the case of Distributing Food Well to make sense of the various other modes of food provisioning that have emerged within the austerity foodscape. These carry their own possibilities that, as Jake and Dominic highlight, may serve as longer-term solutions to the various ills of the austerity foodscape. To clarify, whilst practices around food banking ought not to be read from a wholly negative standpoint, their organisational focuses on the emergency provision of food shapes their possibilities within the foodscape. Though food banks are closely linked with food waste initiatives such as Distributing Food Well—we ought not to paint the two as opposing or diametric organisations—the comparative short termism of the food bank model meant that, for Jake and Dominic, they ought not to be understood as long term solutions. By comparison, in making waste visible and reclaiming it from supply chains as food, organisations such as Distributing Food Well may play a more central role in developing the open-ended and 'broad-based equity considerations' that Psarikidou and Szerszynski discuss. Whilst food is therefore an important dimension of these emergent (and varied) modes of food provisioning, they take food as a vector by which to enter into a wide range of other possibilities. Congruent with the argument developed in the previous chapter, Jake suggested:

> A lot of these organisations that are tackling that issue […] with regards to cooking and being able to cook and looking at food differently, 'cos that's another issue. People might feel like, well they are in food poverty but they're not making the best of the things that they do have and so being able to use your leftovers, being able to look in your cupboard and see three random ingredients and make a meal out of it, you know and a lot of these organisations that we work with are actually teaching people […] [how to] cook, [running] sessions and things like that. Not just with adults, with families, kids, and all that kind of thing, and they are doing [food] growing projects, a few of them, as well.

With Distributing Food Well (as well as food waste initiatives as a category more broadly) enabling these modes of food provisioning to proliferate within the austerity foodscape, the possibilities that they may probe and develop were, for Jake, broad. This moves beyond purely providing abstracted 'knowledge' as a 'fix' (Eden et al., 2008) for ills in the foodscape, instead bringing actors together around shared aims of developing a certain relationship—if not attunement—to food. With it, we can see these spaces as offering a similar degree of in-commonality and care that the food bank offers, not emerging as external to the mainstream (and its emphasis on individualised consumer sovereignty) but as the 'other', and not necessarily always darker, side of these economies.

As this chapter emphasises, this recognition develops our understanding of alternatives as not simply 'oppositional' or 'against' the mainstream, but entangled in complex ways. In the case of food waste, moving beyond the narrow framing of the household (Evans, 2011a) reveals a range of provisioning models that can, albeit in a fractured way, contribute to the envisioning of better foodscapes. As Carolan (2016) reminds us, the present is forever loaded with immanent potential and we need not start from the ground up in thinking of positive changes in the foodscape. Indeed, thinking beyond Distributing Food Well, other initiatives are growing in prominence in the austerity foodscape. For example, The Gleaning Network (see Feedback, 2018) has expanded across the UK in recent years, with regional hubs now facilitating the gleaning (i.e. the recovery) of fruit and vegetables that cannot be harvested from farmland and would otherwise be wasted. Often this is due to visual imperfections, meaning this produce cannot be sold in mainstream supermarkets, and The Gleaning Network suggests they reclaimed 288 tonnes of produce between 2012 and 2016 (see Feedback, 2018). Gleaning—which as a practice dates back to passages in the Bible—has therefore re-emerged, coalescing both around the visibilities of food (and waste) itself but also the wider affective formations that these organisations engender (Vitiello et al., 2015; Edwards and Mercer, 2007). Indeed, a glance over The Gleaning Network's website

reveals a wide range of volunteers celebrating their hauls from farms alongside other gleaners, learning about the broader political economy of food and agriculture directly from farmers in the process. To evoke the discussion from Chapter Four, food in spaces such as these is transformed from a matter of fact to a matter of concern.

On surplus and other possibilities: the case of the community café

So far in this chapter, I have argued that both food banking and food waste initiatives, though operating with different logics, are spaces of care emerging out of civil society in the wider austerity foodscape. In the final empirical section of this chapter—and of the thesis as a whole—I draw on the case of a community café facilitated by refugees who arrived in the area whilst this research was being conducted. Though in this case an ad hoc initiative and not running on a regular basis—and even on this basis distinct from the organisations that I have discussed so far—I use this café to discuss the dynamics of sharing and surplus within the foodscape. In doing so, I suggest that what unifies the various organisations explored in this chapter lies in their collective capacity to implicitly problematise central tenets of capitalist political economy. Rather than seeing economic scarcity as constraining (and thereby limiting the generative and creative potential of) social worlds, thereby risking devolving to a capitalocentric perspective, I show how these organisations instead proceed from a recognition of surplus. After all, as food regime-informed analyses recognise, we already produce more than enough food to feed everyone on the planet satisfactorily, and scarcity has to be artificially created (Holt Giménez et al., 2012). In disrupting the dominance of scarcity, these organisations provide glimpses into very different foodscapes which see not only a surplus of food but, as Psarikidou and Szerszynski suggest, "produce diverse forms of 'value', above and beyond narrow economic measures […]. They do not simply reproduce social relations, but also *exhibit a normative surplus in their desire for a just and sustainable food system*" (Psarikidou and Szerszynski, 2012a: 36, emphasis mine). To clarify, I argue these organisations see a surplus beyond the food itself, emphasising a surplus of knowledge, affects, care for as well as generosity

towards others even in these austere times. To develop this perspective, I begin by recounting my first meeting with the refugees at Wood Grove.

During one of the later afternoons that I spent at the site, the beginning of one of the volunteering sessions was marked by the announcement that we would be welcoming five refugees for their first visit later that afternoon. As it was explained, the few refugees that had recently been relocated in the surrounding area were primarily from war-torn areas of the Middle East and had often faced perilous journeys over many months (and in some cases, years) to arrive in the United Kingdom. Though a topic discussed in significant detail elsewhere (see, for example, Ostrand, 2015) and not something I intend to cover at length here, refugees such as these often face numerous challenges including temporary and insecure accommodation, lack of material resources and exclusion from labour markets (Duke et al., 1999). Some of the volunteers at Wood Grove had personal links to an organisation that had emerged in the local area out of faith-based groups to help the refugees on their arrival and mitigate some of the difficulties they faced. As it transpired, this organisation was partly facilitated by some of the participants that were involved in this research, and its aims had expanded over the few months that it had been in operation. Aside from providing necessities such as warm clothing and supplies for the refugees' accommodation, they were now able to offer *pro bono* legal advice as well as English language tuition. Recently, with an increasing number of refugees now being relocated in the area, they had arranged a series of 'welcome parties' to help to integrate them to the area, as well as visits to local organisations such as Wood Grove.

Though we were quick to get to work when the refugees arrived, there were many opportunities to converse with them and get to know them. In my case, I was paired with one of the most recent arrivals, and we were tasked with trying to repair a trellis which had collapsed under the weight of green beans that were growing on it. As we were doing this, I asked him as to how he was acclimatising to life in the United

Kingdom, and though his grasp of English was still developing he seemed happy to be in a situation with greater permanence. Choosing not to probe his past too extensively—aware that it was likely a sensitive topic, full of stories that had already been repeated too many times—I was happy that the green beans that we were trying to prop up became our topic of conversation. As he explained, with limited material resources at their disposal (many of the refugees lived off £5 a day), the prospect of a share of free vegetables in exchange for volunteering their labour was enticing. Over the next few weeks, more refugees came to the sessions at Wood Grove, and a regular cohort developed. Their contribution to the work undertaken on the site meant that the weekly volunteering sessions were more productive than ever, and those that returned clearly found value in the project.

As time went on, my own ability to attend the sessions at Wood Grove became more limited. These were partly for pragmatic reasons within the research schedule, as well as personal commitments, and it became increasingly clear that I was both ethnographically, as well as literally, leaving 'the field' (Walsh, 2012). Yet it was only a few weeks after my final visit to Wood Grove that I spotted—and entirely by coincidence on social media—that some of the refugees that I had met during this time were hosting a 'pay-as-you-feel' café in a local community centre. According to the details that were circulated with the event, there was a suggested donation for the food, and the refugees had wanted to organise it on two fronts: both to introduce many of the locals to the unfamiliar cuisines of their home countries, as well as to say a collective 'thank you' to everyone who had been so welcoming during their first few months of relocation in the area.

For Warner *et al.* (2013), the café space has historically been important from a European perspective in "fulfilling certain political, cultural and social functions" (Warner et al., 2013: 306; see also Habermas, 1989), though contemporary perspectives on their role are arguably lacking (Laurier and Philo, 2006). As Laurier and Philo expand, they

remain important sites "as a distinctive site of communality, social ordering, sociability, conviviality and civic life" (Laurier and Philo, 2005: 3) which occupy a liminal space between work and home life. Of course, not all café spaces are equal, and whilst as a generalisation Laurier and Philo's perspective is helpful, greater specificity is required. Whilst many café spaces are commercialised—thereby potentially serving to exclude as many as they include, furthering a conservative conceptualisation of 'community' (Bauman, 2013)—the pay-as-you-feel model under discussion here is articulated differently. Despite a growing proliferation of food provisioning models in the austerity foodscape, such initiatives have received comparatively little attention. Whilst Sonnino and Griggs-Trevarthen (2013) provide an overview of different community food initiatives, which they argue help to "empower local communities through a process of collective mobilization of local resources" (Sonnino and Griggs-Trevarthen, 2013: 272), these tend to oscillate towards many of the organisational models already encountered in this thesis: for example, co-operative retailers. With it, they implicitly further a focus on the realm of market-driven exchange, seeing 'empowerment' enacted through an economic framing, limiting the conceptual space available for other understandings.

I arrived at the centre where the café was being held accompanied by a couple of friends, including one who had also been a regular volunteer at Wood Grove. Unsure as to how such an event would operate—as well as whether I was really doing 'research' or not— I was also hesitant to see how many would be in attendance given the warm weather. It quickly became clear, however, that these fears were unjustified, and having arrived approximately 15 minutes after the advertised start time, we were met with a queue that was now growing out of the door. Taking our place in the queue, we gradually made our way into the centre, and (quite unexpectedly) I was greeted by Trish, one of the participants in this research. She and her husband oversaw the collection of donations (the suggested amount was £5), which was exchanged for a voucher which could then be redeemed for a plate of food in the busy kitchen area in one corner. The rest of the

space was crammed full of tables with people of various ages, though many were choosing to sit outside on the grass and enjoy the sunny weather.

After a short wait as the queue progressed—from my brief exchange with Trish it was clear that they had not expected so many to attend—I eventually made it to the kitchen area. Greeting the refugees—who were too busy continuously preparing a wide range of Middle Eastern dishes in the cramped facilities to talk at any length—I awaited my plate being filled. Being handed a large portion of richly spiced aubergine stew in return, as well as various smaller side dishes, one of the refugees in charge of serving the food suggested that there would be plenty more food to come. Following the crowd, I wandered back outside, finding a space on the grass to sit with friends (as well as a range of other familiar faces encountered across various sites involved in this research). As the conversation flowed, it came to my attention that, where possible, the ingredients had all been sourced, or donated, from across Beautiful Provender, Wood Grove, Flourishing Fare and other similar sites included in this research. Looking back over my reflective notes written after the conclusion of the café, it was telling that much of the discussion (and thus my notes) focused on suggestions for recipes inspired by the food that we were eating. Much like the other spaces considered prior to this chapter, it was clear that the community café involved "complex movements of food, people, knowledge, and ideas between [as well as within] these utopic spaces" (Psarikidou and Szerszynski, 2012a: 35).

Though recognising the role of 'people' in these spaces, what Psarikidou and Szerszynski's perspective understates are the range of affective sociabilities that can develop *between* these actors, which is instead more reminiscent of Laurier and Philo's (2005) account of the café space considered above. These sociabilities serve, as per Chapters Four and Five, to enact food as a matter of concern through extensive debate and reflection. Indeed, despite many more than predicted attending the community café, there was still enough for many of us to have second portions, followed by Arabic

coffee, before being invited back into the community centre to hear the refugees play traditional Middle Eastern music. Many of the conversations that I had throughout, as well as afterwards, revolved around those in attendance hoping that such an initiative could continue, surprised at how effectively a wide range of people came to be connected through the medium of food and the various other activities that it conferred (Roe and Buser, 2016). Indeed, initiatives such as the community café go beyond the narrow premise of widening socioeconomic access to food in the austerity foodscape, instead fostering a wide range of affectively-laden sociabilities and ways of relating to one another (Campbell, 2004; Stock et al., 2015b).

Reinforcing this generative, active potential of civil society, it was in the concluding stages of the data collection process that a newly established organisation came to my attention. Formed by some of those involved in facilitating the refugees' community café, this was an attempt to formalise many of these pre-existing linkages along the same pay-as-you-feel model. Aiming to host cafés every month across a variety of spaces, and open to all, the main difference with this initiative was that, like others that have been mentioned previously in this chapter, it would serve donated and reclaimed food that otherwise would have been wasted. Though I was unfortunately unable to secure an interview with the primary co-ordinator of the initiative, a photograph of one of the cafés appeared in Simon's food diary (Figure 18).

(Figure 18, the pay-as-you-feel café, from Simon's food diary)

In my follow-up interview with Simon, I asked him to discuss what he thought of the pay-as-you-feel model, and what benefits such an initiative might bring. As he stated:

> It's the [food] equivalent of going to buy things from the charity shop. Someone else has already, if you like, taken the carbon footprint on themselves in buying it the first time, so this in, this would have been wasted, you're not taking other carbon footprints, except in the collection of it and the distribution, but then you're short on skills, [so] much food is linked to skills of food preparation. […] You need somebody like [those in the photograph] and some of the other people in the team who can just look at food and turn it into something. 'Cos in some ways you're having to convince [people], you're selling this to people, because I think people are not so used to preparing food. And also there's a sort of thing about food that's quite bad, you know if it's waste it must be bad. So there's a whole set of expectations to get over.

As Simon states, the reclamation of waste as food can have environmental benefits, meaning that the purchasing of food does not have to duplicated with its associated carbon footprint (Quested et al., 2013). Yet as was the case with Distributing Food Well, considered in the previous section, there was also a more active contestation at work involved in the questioning what is (and is not) waste. For Simon, it was only through the complex interplay of skills and sociabilities that those involved in the initiative could begin to rearticulate waste as a 'bad' into food as a 'good'—skills that many people lack, as recognised in Chapter Four. Emphasising this, Evans' (2012) study of household food waste envisages a relatively linear path in most contexts, with "the ways in which food moves between categories and evaluations—for example from raw ingredients, to a cooked meal, to leftovers, to 'past its best' and eventually, waste" (Evans, 2012: 44) operating in a linear trajectory. Problematising this conceptualisation, initiatives such as this pay-as-you-feel café go one step further than the likes of Distributing Food Well, intervening in this trajectory and not simply reclaiming 'bad' waste (for later distribution) but using a collective set of skills to 'see' good food that might be made, with it bringing people together in emergent, affective formations. In the few months that proceeded from the first café, it went from strength to strength, attracting growing numbers of attendees.

It is worth recognising that the community café and its antecedent are only two examples of many that highlight the possibilities emerging out of surplus. Recent perspectives such as Davies and Legg (2018), for example, consider the heterogeneity of food sharing initiatives around the world, many of which are enabled through ICT and app-based platforms. Though primarily focusing on larger cities (and hence not featuring in this research), Davies and Legg note the extensive variation both in terms of *what* is shared as well as *how*. For example, some focus on the gifting of raw ingredients that are risk of going out-of-date at a household level, whilst others operate on a for-profit basis. For example, restaurants may offer cut-price meals rather than wasting ingredients that cannot be made use of. Whilst Davies and Legg are critical of

some notions—for example, they problematise the idea that these represent quick and easy fixes towards 'sustainability' in the food system (c.f. Caraher and Dowler, 2014)—they do recognise positive possibilities implicated within this range of practices. Though deliberately noncommittal as to how these possibilities may be enacted, they draw on Gibson-Graham's notion of 'weak theory', adopted from Geertz (1973). As Gibson-Graham suggest, weak theory "observes, interprets and yields to emerging knowledge […] to carefully reconsider the 'large issues' that 'small facts' are made to speak to" (Gibson-Graham, 2014: 149). The relatively narrow focus in this chapter on a small number of organisations through thick description gives voice to an economic vocabulary which does not privilege market-exchange and the language of scarcity in analyses of foodscapes, instead proceeding from a recognition of care within broader attempts to redistribute an identified surplus. As Trauger and Passidomo (2015) argue, the forms of organisation that I have discussed in this chapter—so often considered as distinct from the AFN literature—may serve to "produce […] new economic subjects that relate to each other in interdependent, rather than disconnected, ways, […] [with it] connecting and integrating a much wider variety of groups who have often been alienated from each other" (Trauger and Passidomo, 2015: 298) in the mainstream (see also Dixon, 2011).

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that 'other' alternatives ought not to be understood solely as reactionary or conservative in contrast to those considered across Chapters Four and Five. Instead, I see them as serving potentially progressive ends in developing 'spaces of care' in the foodscape. Though heterogeneous, they variously foster generative, affective formations between actors and food as a matter of concern. Whilst operating differently in their logics to those considered previously, the organisations considered in this chapter are increasingly prominent in the foodscape and represent a different kind of 'alternative' for many. I suggest that the 'alternative' designation of AFNs has too often been read as synonymous for 'good' or 'positive' (Adams and Hardman, 2014), with it reinforcing the notion that organisations such as those discussed in this chapter cannot be read for more positive lessons. Further, ambivalent engagements with

these spaces have recognised the risks in analysing them, potentially serving to normalise them as part of the foodscape.

Seeing care as central to these spaces allows us to develop our understanding of these organisations—as well as the wider geographies of the austerity foodscape—further. In the case of food banking, I argue that these spaces have been largely read as operating, at best, through paternalistic power relations and, at worst, through the stigmatisation and shaming of the disenfranchised 'users' excluded from the realm of market-exchange. Whilst this perspective is in many ways fair, and recognising the 'dark sides' of these spaces is important, the analysis I offer draws attention to other readings: primarily as spaces of care, generosity and ethical concern for Others. In this way, paying attention to the affective relations that emerge within these spaces points to the other possibilities that they may engender, thereby sharing greater equivalences with the typical spaces of AFN research than has previously been recognised.

The other spaces considered in this chapter—food waste initiatives and community cafés—can be read through similar tactics. On the one hand, these initiatives might be read as cynical ploys by powerful corporations in the foodscape to 'outsource' their problems (such as waste) whilst furthering their CSR profile (Caraher and Cavicchi, 2014). They may also be read as manifestations of the Big Society as state-funded public services are replaced with charitable, volunteer-led provision (Lambie-Mumford, 2013). Yet whilst again not wishing to dismiss these perspectives outright, I have argued that they can also be read as opening up a range of affective relations around food that are not engendered through mainstream models of food provisioning. In tracing continuities between alternatives broadly conceived, I have argued that what links these together lies in the redistribution of surplus. The surplus revealed through reading AFNs for difference does not solely revolve around a surplus of food in its commodity-form, but an intrinsically related surplus of knowledge, care and affect. In this way, reading for difference and identifying surplus—especially when familiar prognoses for the past, present and future of the post-2008 austerity foodscape revolve around ever-accelerating scarcity—across an expanding range of food provisioning models points to the other possibilities which might be probed, experimented with and inquisitively investigated in enacting different foodscapes. In teasing out and "allow[ing] difference to flourish" (Carolan, 2015: 138) AFNs refuse to allow us to see

the world through an either/or logic but instead through a multiplication of possibilities. This has important implications for the main conclusion of the thesis, which follows.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: reading AFNs as spaces of possibility in the austerity foodscape

Introduction

As the discussion across the previous three empirical chapters has shown, the austerity foodscape of the United Kingdom plays host to deeply complex geographies of food. Of course, it is important here to re-emphasise that 'austerity foodscape' ought to be interpreted in a deliberately broad way. In Chapter Two, I suggested that whilst austerity may be understood as a set of socioeconomic policies which emerged as a response to the financial crisis of 2007-8, it has multiple other meanings, and is not a coherent or singular phenomenon (Blyth, 2013; Konzelmann, 2014). Whilst some dynamics of this foodscape can be understood as enmeshing within austerity *qua* these socioeconomic policies—particularly the practices of food banking discussed the previous chapter— others enmesh differently within these shifts. For example, the discussion at the beginning of Chapter Four showed how many producers had struggled in the decade following the crisis. They had experienced significant declines in business, with these shifts explained through consumers who underwent processes of 'cutting back' on expenditure and 'tightening their belts'. Such a phenomenon cannot be *directly* attributed to austerity in a causal way, because austerity neither 'acts' in a univocal fashion nor are its effects felt equally across society. Yet for these producers, this phenomenon of consumers 'cutting back' was clearly an important dynamic that characterised the austerity foodscape, marking it as distinct from a time prior to the financial crisis. Many therefore continued to exist *despite* austerity, though for some these changes were impossible to reconcile. Recently, The Food Assembly (an online franchise providing a weekly collection point for local food and drink producers in given locations across the United Kingdom) announced its closure of all operations with immediate effect, citing declines in business (The Food Assembly, 2018).

Whilst a focus on the realm of market-exchange may therefore lead to deeply pessimistic analyses, restricting the potential of AFNs to enact change in the foodscape, this problematic also spurs us to move beyond economistic explanations of austerity to instead recognise the diverse economic logics and practices at play in the social world. Developing this understanding is not an academic exercise devised for its own sake, but important given the idiosyncrasies of the present: as Moragues-Faus and Marsden (2017) argue, the "combined food, financial and fiscal global crisis unleashed in 2007 represents a significant rupture with the past" (Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017: 275). Therefore, reading lessons from history back into the present only gets us so far (c.f. Bramall, 2015), and these idiosyncrasies ought to be embraced in the development of new, critically optimistic analyses which chart other possible trajectories within the foodscape. Fundamentally, that is to ask how we move beyond the pessimism of austerity in the production other worlds (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Coleman, 2016).

This overall conclusion to the thesis has three main sections. Firstly, I reflect on the methodological approach taken. Following that, and to tie together the necessarily multidimensional discussion spanning Chapters Four to Six, I reflect in a synthetic fashion on the original contribution to knowledge that this thesis offers. This section is therefore the most important within the overall conclusion. Finally, I briefly consider the implications of this research in a future research agenda for AFN scholarship, paying careful attention to potential impacts on the foodscape conferred by the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union ('Brexit'). I then offer some brief concluding remarks, bringing the thesis to a close. Before I begin, it is worth reminding ourselves of the research questions that guided this research in full:

1. What kinds of organisations can be identified within the AFNs of Lancashire?

2. How can these organisations be understood as 'alternative' when contrasted against mainstream tendencies in the…

   a. Production of food?

   b. Distribution of food?

   c. Consumption of food?

3. Has austerity served to alter wider values and everyday practices around food, and if so, how?

4. To what extent can these AFNs be understood as…

   a. Existing *despite* austerity?

   b. Existing *in response to* austerity?

   c. A broader expression of the shifting relationship between civil society and capitalist political economy?

Making sense with multiple methods

As the reader may recall, 'making sense with multiple methods' was the title of a section in Chapter Three, the methodology. In that section, I argued for the benefit of seeing research not simply as a linear process of data collection and subsequent interpretation but instead as messy, often complex, bricolage. This point of this section was not to fetishise mess in the research process for its own sake, but to position the bricolage as "embrac[ing] […] complexity, […] reject[ing] deterministic views of social reality that assume that effects of particular […] processes" (Kincheloe, 2005: 325). Such a standpoint is important when considering a phenomenon such as austerity, which is both a powerful marker of our age and yet ethereal and impossible to directly empirically identify (Hitchen, 2016). To be blunt: austerity is a methodological problem (Bramall, 2013). For the researcher-as-bricoleur, research methods ought not to be employed through a sense of tradition or through an entrenched notion of what 'correct' research looks like, but to develop a rich, complex and dialogical relationship with the research questions. As a result, methods do not necessarily aim towards the neat integration of

research findings, but also to point out and recognise the discontinuities between them, otherwise risking belying the complexity of the social world.

Though I only came across this conceptualisation of the bricolage later in the research process—when it became clear that relying on semi-structured interviews would be insufficient to successfully address the research questions—the discussion across the previous three chapters is emblematic both the benefits and challenges presented by this approach. As my research engaged with a variety of sites, spaces and people across multiple methods, the scope of the analysis is broad. Partly this is due to the formulation of the research questions that led to the adoption of the bricolage. But it is also due to the complexity underpinning any consideration of food: it is never simply a biological necessity. The analytical category of AFN captures so much more than food alone, emphasising, as Goodman (2016) puts it, that food is "multiple, it is liminal, it is shifting, it is fully situated in temporal, social, material and spatial relationalities—and needs to be approached, researched and 'bettered' this way" (Goodman, 2016: 259). Even if the analysis that I offer is, at points, necessarily limited due to the pragmatic constraints of a PhD research project, I hope that it at least partly matches up to Goodman's account, thus doing the 'bettering' of AFN research that he eludes to (even if I recognise both some lingering 'mess' in the findings as well as shifts in the analytical focus—for example, between production and consumption across Chapters Four and Five).

Seeing research-as-bricolage in light of both Kincheloe and Goodman's account, therefore, importantly offers us something different than a simply revised (or 'expanded') version of methodological triangulation (see Leung, 2015). Triangulation recognises the potential benefits of research proceeding organically through multiple methods as required—both within a single paradigm (Barbour, 2001) as well as in more traditional conceptualisations of qualitative-quantitative mixed methods research (Hussein, 2015)—yet, at the level of data analysis, reinforces essentially positivistic

notions. As Barbour explains, the concept of triangulation of multiple forms of data "relies on the notion of a fixed point, or superior explanation, against which other interpretations can be measured" (Barbour, 2001: 1117). Yet the complex social world entails that possibilities for such 'objective' comparison and contrast are near impossible, with bricolage allowing for a greater recognition of indeterminacy. Though the distinction between the two is subtle, such an understanding is important in framing how we think about the social world, and undertake research both of it and within it. This is a particularly important lesson given the varieties of alterity upon which AFNs rest, with their many aims, intentions and politics remaining open-ended and not always leading to a clear end goal, even from the perspective of those who are involved at the locus of organising them (Yates, 2015). At the same time, the recognition of this indeterminacy need not lead to them being disregarded, and this is what (often frustratingly) makes their alterity in the foodscape so important as an area of study.

Reflecting on the original contribution of the thesis: from the austerity foodscape to fragments of a new food regime

To recap on the trajectory of the thesis across Chapters Four to Six, these chapters have been concerned with the ways in which food becomes a matter of concern through 'worlds of difference' in alternative food production (Chapter Four); something that our values, practices and forms of knowledge can become (re-)attuned to at a visceral level in alternative food consumption (Chapter Five); as well as generative of a wide variety of new formations and models of food provisioning with their own affective, caring sociabilities (Chapter Six). Whilst these accounts are clearly interrelated, and share many continuities, I recognise that they (quite deliberately) capture different dimensions of the austerity foodscape. Given the multiple dimensions of these discussions, it is worth considering in greater depth the original contribution to knowledge that this thesis offers.

Crucially, I argue that these three key, interrelated strands across the three empirical chapters—difference and matters of concern, attunement and care respectively—

constitute fragments of a new food regime. As we remember from Chapter Two, the most important dynamic of today's third food regime, per Friedmann and McMichael's outlining, lies in the growing antagonism between alternatives and the (increasingly corporatised) mainstream. If this antagonism has developed historically largely out of the second regime and the Green Revolution of the 1960s, then the third regime has played host to its intensification. But food regime theory's tendency to favour historical explorations means it has little to say on the future (a tendency that McMichael, 2016 tentatively attempts to address). On the one hand, this can simply be interpreted as careful scholarship and reflective of its epistemological underpinnings. On the other, it might signal unnecessarily conservative predispositions within its analyses despite valiant attempts to broaden its scope (e.g. Campbell et al., 2017; Rioux, 2018). But in thinking about what is 'not yet', this does not mean that our analysis must proceed from baseless or empty speculation. Instead, such an account can be derived from pre-existing tendencies. Consequently, a central contribution of this thesis lies in developing our understanding of *where*, *why* and *how* change is arrived at in foodscapes—which, as we will see below, implicates 'civil society' in a fundamentally different direction. This conceptualisation of change recognises that the transition between regimes is not a neat affair, and they instead develop in contingent, piecemeal, processual—and ultimately unexpected—ways (c.f. Friedmann and McMichael, 1989).

If we conceptualise food regimes as changing in this way, what might a fourth look like, and how ought it be differentiated from the third? Contrasted against the antagonism of the third regime, I suggest the fourth envisages a foodscape in which economic difference is actively embraced, spaces exist in which bodies can be experimentally re-attuned, and in which civil society plays a substantially different role in food provisioning. Risking an obtuse point, the third regime is a striated space, whereas the fourth is a smooth space (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013). For Deleuze and Guattari, these differing spaces can be compared to woven fabric and felt respectively. Whilst we feel and tease apart the striated threads of woven fabric, felt is smoother because the threads

that constitute it are deeply entangled and they cannot be teased apart. The horizontal and vertical threads of woven fabric (striated space) point us down relatively pre-determined—linear and metric—paths, whereas felt (smooth space) is non-linear, open-ended, full of indeterminacy: "a space of affects, […] not of measures and properties" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 479). Seeing the fourth regime in this way imagines a foodscape not marked by antagonistic difference between opposing subjects (as in the third), alongside a rejection of the binary, bifurcating logics—X overcoming Y—which haunts much food regime theory. Following Stock *et al.*'s (2015a) argumentation, the fourth regime instead emphasises the multiplication (rather than addition and subtraction) of difference, and with it possible trajectories of the foodscape. This conceptualisation is not merely an escapist fantasy: arguably, the multiplication both of economic subjects (c.f. Gibson-Graham, 2006b) and of *political* subjects (Kalonaityte, 2018) is the only way in which we might move beyond clinging on to 'business as usual'—and its many ills—in the world of food today.

Expanding this discussion, civil society plays a fundamentally different role in this fourth regime. This must be considered with reference to this multiplication both of possibilities as well as subjects. Wittman (2009) suggests that civil society's potential to democratise the food system lies in continuing to open up spaces of food production to greater communicative deliberation, as if that has not been attempted already (c.f. Holt Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). Whilst communicative deliberation is indeed important—as Chapter Four demonstrated, it was central to many sites that I considered—it is not enough by itself. Wittman thinks in a striated way, identifying a lack which can be negated. Instead, and following my argumentation across this thesis, rather than focus on what we politically lack, we might instead pay attention to the 'doings' on the ground and the possibilities they confer. Indeed, I have suggested through my geographically-bounded study that we can recognise civil society as possessing a powerful generative capacity, rejecting analyses that treat it as a "homogenous whole" (Gabriel, 2014: 43) that has simply 'withered' in the face of a

monolithic and totalising neoliberal capitalism (c.f. Hardt, 1995). Instead, as Chapters Four to Six demonstrate, civil society remains a deeply important conceptual framing, but only if we think of it through "a differentiated civic body that engages in multiple forms [of] political activity" (Gabriel, 2014: 43). This prompts us to ask *what* is included in the 'civic' element of civil society. The discussion of soils in Chapter Four—as sites of care and ethical engagement through diverse economic practices (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010; 2015)—and the centrality of care in Chapter Six, points to the ways in which a fourth food regime must embrace a broadened (and with it, strengthened) multifaceted and more-than-human conceptualisation of civil society (Larsen, 2016; Latour, 2002; Gabriel, 2014; Berry, 2004). Again, the point lies in recognising that humans are not masters of the foodscape. Instead, this regime more hopefully embraces the many agencies, human and otherwise, that we encounter through food in setting more positive trajectories in motion. Certainly, one of my contributions here lies in recognising both the more-than-human nature of politics within foodscapes, as well as the centrality of lived, embodied experience, when many accounts speak as if relationships with food are a matter to be treated discursively and ideationally.

Finally, it is worth considering how this fourth regime relates to the impasse of austerity in which this research is situated. Returning to the austere here-and-now, as critics of the foodscape we ought not forget that this is a dark time for many, and any perspective that is naïvely optimistic ends up falling into the trap of what Žižek (2011) describes as 'liberal communism'. For Žižek, liberal communism captures a position that insists on seeing 'good' amidst political-economic strife, thereby failing to directly confront systemic tendencies (see also Cloke et al., 2016). I recognise that some may read my analysis, particularly in the discussion of food banking in Chapter Six, as one such example of this liberal communism in action. But any such reading distorts my perspective: I have not intended to justify the austerity foodscape, and neither to pretend that the ills derived from the crises of financial capitalism that has spurred its

development ought to be glossed over. Rather, my reading emerges out of a refusal against a tendency towards Messianism in social and political thought. As Gibson-Graham (1993) put it, we may be waiting a very long time indeed for the revolution overthrowing capitalism that Marx and Engels predicted in *The Communist Manifesto* (1967). Whilst Marx and Engels were writing in the mid-19th Century in a time of great political upheaval, lessons from the French and American revolution were still relatively topical. Yet capitalism has persisted, and the revolution has not come. This is despite the ills of capitalist political economy becoming ever clearer. But for Gibson-Graham, this lack of revolution against capitalism is not due to its monolithic power, but instead because capitalism cannot be revolted against. It is not a coherent system in the way that a political system may be revolted against and overthrown. How can one revolt against a *tendency*, an economic logic, which is only ever one amongst many? Whilst an admittedly powerful economic logic, this is not to the extent that it entirely erases a whole range of other diverse economic practices and logics, which the analysis that I offer here demonstrates.

With this in mind, it is not that capitalism and/or austerity must be wholly overcome, risking furthering the bifurcating logic that Stock *et al.* (2015a) warn against. Rather, it is about both thinking differently and *doing* differently (Gibson-Graham, 1993), as emphasised in the above discussion of civil society. Difference multiplies difference. Many accounts miss this: Harvey (2000), for example, has argued for alternatives representing 'spaces of hope', evoking affectively-laden imaginaries revelling in the growing 'cracks' of global capitalism (see also Holloway, 2012). In such an account, grand oppositions are painted. Globalising, monopolising capitalism is locked in a battle with its others, necessarily privileging the macro over the micro. In doing so, and despite his insistence otherwise, Harvey entrenches a distant, idealised utopianism. In a more pragmatic way, echoing Gibson-Graham's focus on 'doings' above, Kokkinidis explores the notion of 'spaces of possibility'. As he neatly summarises, spaces of possibility involve "challeng[ing] conventional […] practices while they operate within

capitalism and at the same time offer[ing] alternative ways to organize our work and life as well as our relationships with each other" (Kokkinidis, 2015: 848). The analysis that I offer here, resonating with Kokkinidis' account, avoids trapping AFNs within an all-encompassing capitalism (Harris, 2009), or casting them as forever subservient to a hegemonic mainstream (Wilson, 2013). Instead, the spaces of possibility thesis captures the way in which economy, diversely understood, is a site of agency in everyday relations, and with it possible ethical reconfiguration. But it is one in which the very register through which we understand and make sense of foodscapes shifts: it is no longer alternatives *or* the mainstream, alternatives *versus* the mainstream (as in Harvey's account), but how diverse 'doings' come to multiply possibilities.

Future research agendas in AFN scholarship

In arguing for fragments of fourth, more critically optimistic food regime amidst the dynamics of the austerity foodscape, I have recognised that the present is always loaded with political potential. Foodscapes can be changed for the better, and the reconfiguration of civil society is one such example of this in action. Of course, the focus on possibilities and future trajectories means that we cannot prescribe a narrow, unidirectional path towards the fourth regime, nor can the transition from the striated third regime into the smooth fourth regime be predicted on a linear timeline. But the seeds of change are there. Emphasising this contingency, I now turn my attention in a more practical mode to considering future research agendas that this research can contribute to given other developments which may serve to substantially shape the foodscape. To do this, I use the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union ('Brexit') as a timely provocation to speculate on three interrelated fronts: regulation, (re-)localisation and enduring austerity. These, I argue, are important in not only understanding the impact of Brexit on the foodscape in isolation but also in the processual emergence of this new food regime.

Though briefly alluded to earlier, this research has coincided with the fallout from a public referendum on the United Kingdom's continued membership of the European Union, held in June 2016. Narrowly won by those campaigning to leave, I write this account as we rush headlong towards the planned departure date of 29th March 2019. Though much has been written elsewhere on the reasons for this referendum taking place, and its consequences for almost all domains of society both inside and outside of the United Kingdom (see, for example, Outhwaite, 2017; Jessop, 2017; Pettifor, 2017), there is a growing recognition of the impacts that it will have on the foodscape (see particularly Lang et al., 2017). Given how extensively agricultural, food and trade policy is tied together across the European Union, disentangling the United Kingdom from these arrangements represents *terra incognita* for international relations.[41] Therefore, I take this opportunity to emphasise the extreme degree of contingency within these speculations. In their discussion of Brexit's impact on food written shortly prior to the referendum, Harvey and Hubbard summarise the situation well: "given the number of 'unknowns' and the uncertainty that surrounds the 'in' or 'out' decision, the answer to the question as to how beneficial (or not) Brexit will be to the UK agri-food industry, agriculture and the rural economy more generally, is that 'it all depends'" (Harvey and Hubbard, 2016: 2). Despite this, it is still worth considering the implications of this research for these developments, even if they rest on rapidly shifting sands.

On regulation

Questions remain as to the consequences of trade deals being struck outside of the European Union's relatively stringent regulations around food. Particularly evocative on this front was the extensive media attention directed towards a potential trade deal

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[41] The best example of which is the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). As Gardner (2015) notes, the United Kingdom's removal from the CAP—which provides subsidies to many farmers—would be unlikely to have disastrous effects as it has, in real terms, not buoyed farm incomes since its inception. But the impacts depend on what, if anything, would be implemented at a national level as an alternative.

with the United States post-Brexit, entailing that the United Kingdom may fall under these laxer regulatory frameworks. Encapsulating these concerns was the possibility of importing chlorine-washed chicken into the United Kingdom, a process which is banned under European Union frameworks due to health concerns (McKee and Hervey, 2018). The process of chlorine-washing extends the shelf life of chicken, and in this sense it may be understood as one method through which food is made ever cheaper, which, as Moore (2015) has argued, is central to the fundamental organisation of capitalist society. A variety of concerns proliferated out of these rumours: media reports spoke of the odd texture of chlorine-washed chicken, softer and more like jelly that what many in the United Kingdom were used to. Put another way, the chlorine-washed chicken is not a chicken that many in the United Kingdom would be viscerally attuned to, evoking strongly negative affective responses, even disgust.

Importantly, safety remained the dominant narrative in these accounts, which raises questions for the position of AFNs in this foodscape. Given the relative stringency of existing regulation, the question of food safety has remained largely absent from Western European AFN scholarship. The story is different in other contexts, for example China, where concerns around food safety in the mainstream are paramount given endemic food fraud (see Si et al., 2015). Would this remain the case in a United Kingdom context given the possibility of laxer regulation? We might imagine something akin to another Polanyian 'double movement' (see Polanyi, 1944) occurring post-Brexit. On the one hand, this laxer regulation could allow for food to be produced in ever cheaper ways (as in the chlorine-washed chicken), likely strengthening the position of corporates in the process. On the other, this may also lead to a strengthening of AFNs as concerns proliferate. As this thesis has argued, the need for contextually-aware analyses in AFN scholarship is important, and to presume that AFNs in the United Kingdom would develop around safety, traceability and 'authenticity' in the same way that Chinese AFNs have done so seems to narrowly prescribe their logics. Instead, this research provides a more nuanced framing in

thinking about these developments: how might AFNs transform food into a matter of concern for lay actors, spurred by this growing dissatisfaction with the potential safety risks conferred by the mainstream? Further, how might organisations that already exist within AFNs—developing for different reasons—adapt to these shifting concerns in the foodscape? These are all questions which the approach taken in this thesis helps to address, rather than simply framing abstract consumers as rationally preferring 'safer' options. Indeed, the framework that this thesis develops encourages analyses to proliferate that account for the ways in which relationships to food are both situated in specific political-economic contexts as well as experienced in affective, embodied and ultimately visceral ways.

On (re-)localisation

The uneasy relationship between AFNs and (re-)localisation has been noted throughout this thesis, and I have noted how 'locality' can be readily co-opted by capitalistic interests, or otherwise understood as furthering a conservative, defensive politics of localism (see Winter, 2003). Given Brexit, the restriction of free trade may see previously inapplicable tariffs imposed on food crossing the United Kingdom's borders. Whether these will be tariffs imposed under World Trade Organisation terms or something else entirely remains to be seen, though it may serve to both limit (or framed differently, decelerate) the globalisation of flows of food bearing little reference to local patterns of seasonality which is central to the third food regime (McMichael, 2009c). Whether this more 'harmonious' relationship with patterns of food production, avoiding carbon-intensive supply chains, would be readily accepted remains to be seen. But what if this potentially abrupt shift contributed, instead, to this new food regime, which may be based around the more progressive politics of place as conceptualised in Chapter Four? As that chapter demonstrated, place does not *have* to be understood as conservative and/or defensive. That is, there is nothing intrinsically regressive around the concept of placed food that is 'from somewhere' especially when the problems of food 'from nowhere' are becoming increasingly evident—and which the rise of AFNs

around the world can be traced against. Further, could we see AFNs playing a substantively different role in such a progressive, placed-based food regime? How would we re-imagine supply chains to incorporate smaller scale production, and how might they operate? At the same time, if this does prove to be a dynamic of the post-Brexit foodscape, Chapter Five has shown how bodies become attuned to certain ways of 'doing' food and these do not tend to shift radically or without resistance. These complexities carry many implications for food policy and public health—what challenges might certain attunements present in the shift towards re-localising food at a grand scale? As such, many of the tensions highlighted in the theoretical framework which informs this thesis may end up playing out, presenting fertile lines of enquiry. Certainly, this thesis acts a call to embrace the body and visceralities in research on food, which has so far remained understood as largely epiphenomenal to more serious considerations.

Austerity as an enduring phenomenon

The final speculation revolves around economic growth. With predictions for a post-Brexit economy gloomy—potentially having significant implications, additionally, for the remaining European Union member countries (see Bachtler and Begg, 2017)—what might the consequences of low growth, continued wage stagnation and endemic poor productivity be for the governance of the United Kingdom? Though austerity has been widely critiqued by neo-Keynesian political economists (see, for example, Blyth, 2013; Krugman, 2013) as suppressing economic growth—arguing for greater state-led investment—it seems fair to suggest that such a scenario will simply result in more of the same. As Jessop (2015) puts it, much of the Eurozone now exists in an *enduring* period of austerity with no end in sight—the 'state of exception' becomes the norm (see also Jessop, 2016). Of the speculations considered here, this seems the most likely to come to fruition.

This scenario arguably highlights a central tension at the heart of this thesis. Given that, as I have argued, the austerity foodscape has been generative of alternative ways of 'doing' food—with all the positive possibilities these alternatives engender—would alternatives fade away if the ills of the financial crash were reversed and, though unlikely, the strong economic growth enjoyed by many economies in the 1990s returned? Would a utopianism underpinning visions of infinite, sustained economic growth serve to justify capitalism's 'business as usual', thereby negating the critical gaze of alternatives in the foodscape? We might wager not, and that regardless of the level of economic growth 'enjoyed' post-Brexit—as well as whatever governmental responses coalesce around it—the various critiques offered by AFNs stands firm. After all, as eco-Marxian perspectives (see, in particular, O'Connor's (1988; 1991) influential work) remind us, capitalism—as a powerful economic logic, though by no means unified or the *only* logic that we can identify in our diverse social and economic worlds—is remarkably successful at contradictorily undermining the very biophysical conditions that make capital accumulation possible. Eventually, the externalisation of capitalism's 'costs', which are primarily felt ecologically and far removed from balance sheets, serve to make it systemically unviable. This hypothetical return to increased economic growth would simply serve to make such lessons apparent sooner rather than later (see also Moore, 2014), thereby spurring the possibilities conferred by alternatives. Put another way, and to crudely paraphrase Marx and Engels (1967), what capitalism produces, above all, is its own grave-digger. But the framework of this thesis has made it clear that better futures can be built, organised and brought about given that economy represents a site of ethical intervention (see also Hill, 2015). Again, different worlds are thankfully possible (Gibson-Graham, 2008).

Concluding remarks

This thesis contributes to a growing body of AFN scholarship which cuts across a range of sociological and geographical debates. These are debates which have extensive legacies prior to the turn of the Millennium, but have notably proliferated since then.

With it, increasing attention has been drawn to the ways in which mainstream tendencies around food across the world are increasingly problematic judged on a variety fronts. In a United Kingdom context, this search for better ways of 'doing' food first coalesced around the phenomenon of 'ethical' consumption, though debates have moved on over the past decade, reflecting the complex (and always shifting) geographies of food. Given a growing interest in AFNs—in a suitably Polanyian (1944) mode—today the mainstream is continuously counteracted by alternatives, and vice versa. This thesis does not see any foreseeable end to this back-and-forth, deeply relational, contestation.

If anything, the previously discussed scenarios highlight the potential for this contestation to accelerate or deepen. Given this volatility, I have argued for the need for future analyses to embrace situated, contextually-aware understandings of alternatives, their aims and the reasons for their emergence within wider foodscapes. That is what I have offered here, and given the entrenchment of the austerity foodscape in the United Kingdom, the contribution of this thesis is timely, bridging important gaps in existing analyses. As I have shown, previous AFN research has been largely blind to the proliferation of food provisioning models (alongside a raft of more subtle changes) that the austerity foodscape has played host to, concurrently failing to 'make sense' of AFNs with reference to specific social, political and economic shifts. At the same time, a developing body of literature has considered these varied provisioning models, largely from a social policy perspective and dislocated from the concerns (and the substantive debates) of AFN scholarship. This, I argue, is the consequence of an implicit 'good' morality within much AFN research, with these 'other' alternatives cast out as unworthy of investigation and merely as conservative responses to the vicissitudes of the mainstream. More ought to be done in AFN research to think more comprehensively about the foodscape, even if the 'broadening out' of these accounts must be done carefully so as to not dissolve the analytical category of AFNs into meaninglessness.

Adopting this position enables AFN research to consider the future of the foodscape more convincingly. Here I have argued that the growing contradictions within the austerity foodscape may be probed as the sign of better things to come: a new food regime amidst the bleak, austere here-and-now. Spurred by the critical optimism of the diverse economies framework, I have shown how civil society does not only react to the vicissitudes of the foodscape, but is imbued with political potentiality in bringing about better states of affairs. Hence, and following my line of argumentation, any contextually-aware analysis ought to be open to questioning quite *where* and *how* change in the foodscape manifests. Casting a broader net around 'alternatives', recognising economic diversity and thinking about what is engendered in the complex reconfigurations of civil society helps us to make sense of these positive possibilities. By comparison, and embracing a paternalistic pessimism that I have noted pockmarks many sociological perspectives following the financial crisis—and not just in analyses of the foodscape—Peck (2013) suggests that in an "absence of a truly counter-hegemonic alternative, the free-market project has been running both on overdrive and on empty since the crash of 2008" (Peck, 2013: 720). At risk of sounding dismissive: the same old Messianism, waiting for a viable counter-hegemonic force to come from somewhere, somehow. Whatever Peck is waiting for, we might be waiting for a long time… instead, this thesis is a call to try and re-orientate ourselves to economy, and to the very modest, but nonetheless deeply complex, encounters that we have with food in the everyday. As Gibson-Graham and Roelvink put it, we must become more open to "to what can be learned from what is happening on the ground" in "read[ing] the potentially positive futures barely visible in the order of things" (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2010: 342). The task, now, is to grow these futures into being.

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273

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Appendix 1: semi-structured interview schedule

Interview schedule for interview participants in doctoral research project

Thank you for taking part in the study. The purpose of this research is to investigate how people engage with 'alternative' and 'local' food networks – which are broadly defined here as food that is encountered outside of big supermarkets and other large corporations – in Lancaster and the surrounding Lune Valley. In doing so, I will try and think about whether any of this has changed in the context of austerity as it has developed over the past few years. So, in this interview – which will take approximately an hour to an hour and a half – we will be discussing a number of different aspects of food in your day-to-day life. If anything crops up at any point that you feel is important, please don't feel like you are going 'off topic' even if it is seemingly not related to a question that I'm directly asking! Do you have any questions about any aspect of this research before we make a start?

1. To kick things off, I'd like to talk a little bit about food in your life.

    a. For example, can you tell me a bit about your experience of food when you were growing up and anything that particularly stands out for you in your memory?
    b. Do you think your relationship to food has changed much over the years?
    c. Where and how would you tend to source most of your food these days?
    d. Are there any foods that you can think of that regularly feature in your diet? If so, why do you think they do so?
    e. Do you tend to eat out much or do you tend to eat at home?
    f. If…
        i. (Producer) Have you noticed any ways in which you produce food (e.g. production methods) changing over the past few years?
        ii. (Distributor) Have you noticed any ways in which food is sold as changing over the past few years? Equally, have you noticed any ways in which consumers get hold of food changing over the past few years? Equally, have you noticed any ways in which producers produce food changing over the past few years?
        iii. (Consumer) Have you noticed any ways in which you source food as changing over the past few years?

2. Can you tell me a bit about what is important to you about food when you are (as applicable) producing/distributing/consuming it?

    a. Following this, are there any specific production methods (e.g. organic) that you would prefer or avoid?
    b. Is the origin of food important to you?
    c. Is there anything else that you'd consider important that we haven't discussed already?
    d. What would you say is most important aspect overall for you out of those that we have discussed?

3. Are you involved in any organisations that have some involvement with food at the minute or at some point in the past? If so, what motivated you to get involved with this/these organisation(s) in the first place?

4. What does the idea of 'alternative' or 'local' food mean to you? How do you think you would you identify it?

5. To what extent would you say you engage with 'alternative' and 'local' food in this area? Do you think this is motivated by some of the things that you said were important to you about food as we discussed previously?

6. What kind of foods would you tend to buy in these places? Are there some foods you would always buy from these retailers and then some you would always buy from the supermarket? Do you have any examples that you can think of?

7. Can you tell me about the kind of people that you normally encounter in these areas? Do you think they tend to come from quite a wide variety of backgrounds with different motivations or do you think people share quite similar ideas to yourself?

8. Do you feel like your engagement with the alternative or local food culture in this area is worthwhile? Do you think it is more or less important than it might have been, say, five years ago or so? Why do you think so?

9. Is there anything that has made your engagement with this local food culture difficult for you? For example, opening times of shops, cost of producing food in a specific way (as applicable).

10. What role do you think supermarkets play in the local food culture of this area, if any?

11. Do you know anyone involved in similar food projects/organisations in different parts of the UK? Do you think they might share similar reasons or motivations or do you think it varies between different groups or organisations?

12. Is there anything else I should have asked or anything else that you would like to add here or discuss further?

Appendix 2: participant information sheet

Austere alternatives? Investigating engagement with the alternative and local food culture of Lancaster and the Lune Valley in the 'age of austerity'

My name is Jonathan Beacham and I am a researcher in the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University. I am conducting a research project into how people engage with 'alternative' and 'local' food in Lancaster and the Lune Valley in a context of austerity. I would like to invite you to participate in this project.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview and I will ask questions about your views and experiences around food in your everyday life. Further details are found below.

The interview will take place at a mutually agreed time and place, and should last approximately one hour. The interview will be audio recorded so that I can reflect on what we discuss.

Participation is entirely confidential. The interview information will be encrypted, password protected, and kept in a secure location at Lancaster University. The results of the project will form the basis of my doctoral research and may also be published and presented at academic conferences, but your identity will not be revealed.

Further information

What is the purpose of this study?

This project will investigate how people engage with 'alternative' and 'local' food in a context of economic austerity in Lancaster and the Lune Valley. These foods are here defined as food that is not produced, distributed or consumed via supermarkets or other large corporations. It will try to understand if people are thinking differently about food in the current social and economic context.

What will happen if I take part?

Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate, I will arrange a convenient time and place to meet with you. During the interview, I will ask you about your everyday practices around food, your views of food, and any changes around food that you have experienced. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to, and you may withdraw from the research at any point. If you withdraw from the study within 2 weeks of the interview, your interview material

will be destroyed; if you withdraw after that time your data will remain in the study.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. I will present the findings of this project in my doctoral thesis, which may then form the basis of academic articles, conference presentations and reports. All participants will be anonymised and any details that might identify an individual will be altered in any presentation or publication.

Who is organising the research?

I am conducting the research as a doctoral researcher in the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), which does not have any commercial interests. Instead, it is part of a tradition of sociological research that aims to understand how society works and how it is changing.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by Lancaster University's Research Ethics Committee (reference RS2014-89). The project abides by the British Sociological Association's Code of Ethical Practice and the ESRC Research Ethics Framework.

If you would like more information about the project, please contact me by email or by phone:

Email: j.beacham@lancaster.ac.uk
Phone number: 07800 740937

Jonathan Beacham
Department of Sociology
Lancaster University

If you have any questions or concerns about the way this study is being conducted that you do not wish to discuss with me, you may contact either of the project supervisors:

Dr Bron Szerszynski, B142 Bowland North, Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YN (E: bron@lancaster.ac.uk / T: 01524 592659)

Dr Anne Cronin, B06 Bowland North, Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YN (E: a.cronin@lancaster.ac.uk / T: 01524 593594)

Appendix 3: participant consent form

Austere alternatives? Investigating engagement with the alternative and local food culture of Lancaster and the Lune Valley in the 'age of austerity'

Researcher details
- Jonathan Beacham, Doctoral researcher, B104 Bowland North, Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YN (E: j.beacham@lancaster.ac.uk / T: 07800 740937)

Project supervisor details
- Dr Anne Cronin, Reader, B06 Bowland North, Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YN (E: a.cronin@lancaster.ac.uk / T: 01524 593594)
- Dr Bron Szerszynski, Reader, B142 Bowland North, Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YN (E: bron@lancaster.ac.uk / T: 01524 592659)

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have read and understood the provided information sheet about the purpose of the project.	☐
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation in it.	☐
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	☐
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	☐
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	☐
6.	I consent to my involvement in an interview and for it to be audio recorded.	☐
7.	I consent to my involvement in a focus group and for it to be audio recorded.	☐
8.	I consent to my involvement in a photographic food diary and a follow-up interview, which will be audio recorded.	☐
9.	The use of the data (including photographs, if applicable) in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	☐

Participant:

_____ _____ _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Researcher:

_____ _____ _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.

Appendix 4: counterpart of photographic food diary

Food diary for research project

Name of participant: _____

Start date: ___/___/___

End date: ___/___/___

Key information for participants

Research project title
- Austere alternatives? Investigating engagement with the alternative and local food culture of Lancaster and the Lune Valley in the 'age of austerity'

Researcher details
- Jonathan Beacham, Doctoral researcher, B104 Bowland North, Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YN (E: j.beacham@lancaster.ac.uk / T: 07800 740937)

Duration of the research

The food diary should be completed over the course of one calendar week. A short follow up interview (approximately 30 minutes) will be organised at your convenience to collect the diaries and finalise the data collection.

How to complete the food diary

- As a minimum, please ensure you photograph **all** main meals you eat over the course of the week.
- You are also encouraged to photograph food in other contexts in your day-to-day life. For example, this might include (but is by no means limited to) food you see for sale in shops or supermarkets; food that you have prepared for friends or family; food that has been prepared for you; food that you have grown or collected; food purchased in cafes or restaurants; food in advertising or promotional material. Any photographs that you can provide as to how you experience food in your day-to-day life will help to improve this research and your input is invaluable in achieving this!
- This paper diary should be completed over the course of the week. It will help you to keep track of what photographs you have taken. If you are not able to complete the diary at the time that you take the photographs, then ideally you should complete it whilst they are still fresh in your memory.
- The paper diary provides space for you to record the **time** the photograph was taken, the **location** that you took the photograph, the **contents** of the photograph and **any comments** that you have with regards to the photograph. An example of a completed day from a previous participant has been provided on the following pages three pages as guidance.
- You will be provided with a camera to assist in completing the food diary and usage of the camera will be demonstrated to you.
- Please do not worry if you do not make use of the whole available space for each day – and a huge thank you once again for your help in undertaking this research!

Any questions or problems

Further details can be found on the separate information sheet provided to you. In the first instance, please contact Jonathan Beacham with any questions, concerns or problems encountered over the course of completing the food diary.

Example day

	What time did you take the photograph?	Where did you take the photograph?	What did you photograph?	Why did you take the photograph?
1	8·15	At home	Breakfast - herbal tea and a bowl of banana oats, yoghurt, honey + seeds	This is a fairly normal breakfast but I had different natural yoghurt this week - it's from West Yorkshire (so pretty local) and I bought it from Booths. It was actually the cheapest available but next to its 'professional'-looking counterparts, it didn't jump out. Its funny the effects that branding can have... Also interesting that local products don't always get labelled as such - you can get a feel for them though. They look out of place!
			Tea is one of my 'extravagences' - I buy quite expensive organic, FT tea.	
			Yoghurt has quite a shift to more commercial brands - quite a lot more tart!	
2	9·01	At home	Email from Lancaster Food Assembly	I've not managed to get here yet - convenience wins a lot of the time sadly
3	1·00	At home	Tomatoes and feta - preparing my lunch - will have with couscous and peas	~~Photos~~ Tomatoes coincidentally from Lancashire! Interestingly, peas are the only frozen veg I buy. Peas are ok frozen, but nothing else! Why?

Lunch is not my favourite meal. Always struggle for ideas. Shameful packaging on tomatoes - they'd run out of loose ones...

4	1.30	At home	Chocolate fingers!	I bought these to take to a friend's last night to watch the Bake Off, as I hadn't had time to bake. I'm not generally much of a baker, as (I'm a bit chaotic!)
5/6	7.45	At the water with	A pint ordered by my friend (My friend had also bought me fudge from Scotland!)	Meeting up with a friend. He asked for a local ale – this one is from York!
7	8.00	At the water with	Reclaimed cheese	Bumped into a friend who had rescued some leftover cheese from a nearby table. Freeganism! Here we have bread and Barstang blue (we think!)
8	8.15	At the water with	A burger	Standard eating out and eating meat contradiction. Though I think the burger with meat is fairly well sourced.
9	10.30	Merchants	Tea (because we're cool!!)	Chai tea – came with a little flapjack (Feeling a bit guilty, maybe picking meat)

Further comments from the day

My friend had just been to an Earth First event, so we talked about veganism. Felt a bit contradictory open my meat!

3

6

9

2

5

8

1

4

7
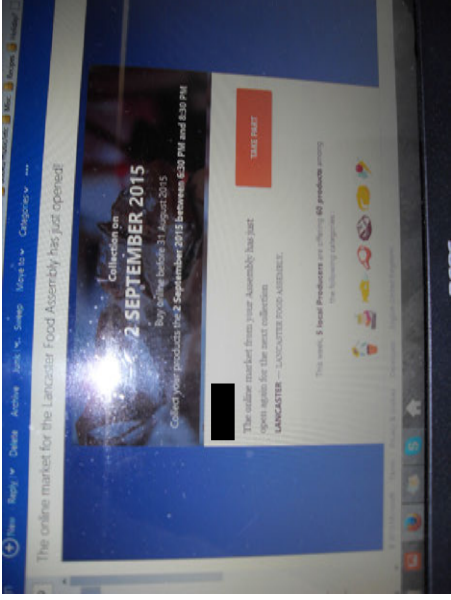
Day 1 – ___/___/201__

Time	Location	Contents of the photograph	Any comments

Any further comments from the day

Days 2 - 7 omitted

Additional comments

Do you think this week was fairly typical for you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

Are there any clarifications or errors in the diary that you would like to note?

_____

_____

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Any final comments on the food diary

_____

_____

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Appendix 5: focus group activity

Activity 2

I like to know where my food comes from (i.e. where/how it is grown or produced)

|--|
Strongly disagree   Strongly agree

Buying food locally is important

|--|
Strongly disagree   Strongly agree

Where I buy food has changed over the past few years

|--|
Strongly disagree   Strongly agree

I think buying food locally can build a community

|--|
Strongly disagree   Strongly agree

People I know are changing how they get hold of food

|--|
Strongly disagree   Strongly agree

I am increasingly concerned about price when buying food

|--|
Strongly disagree   Strongly agree

I think about my health when purchasing food

|--|
Strongly disagree   Strongly agree

I cannot afford to shop where I would ideally choose to

|--|
Strongly disagree   Strongly agree

I'd like to be involved in growing or producing more of my own food

|--|
Strongly disagree   Strongly agree

Appendix 6: diagram of AFNs showing webs of interdependency

Dependency (dotted lines indicates historical)
Interdependency
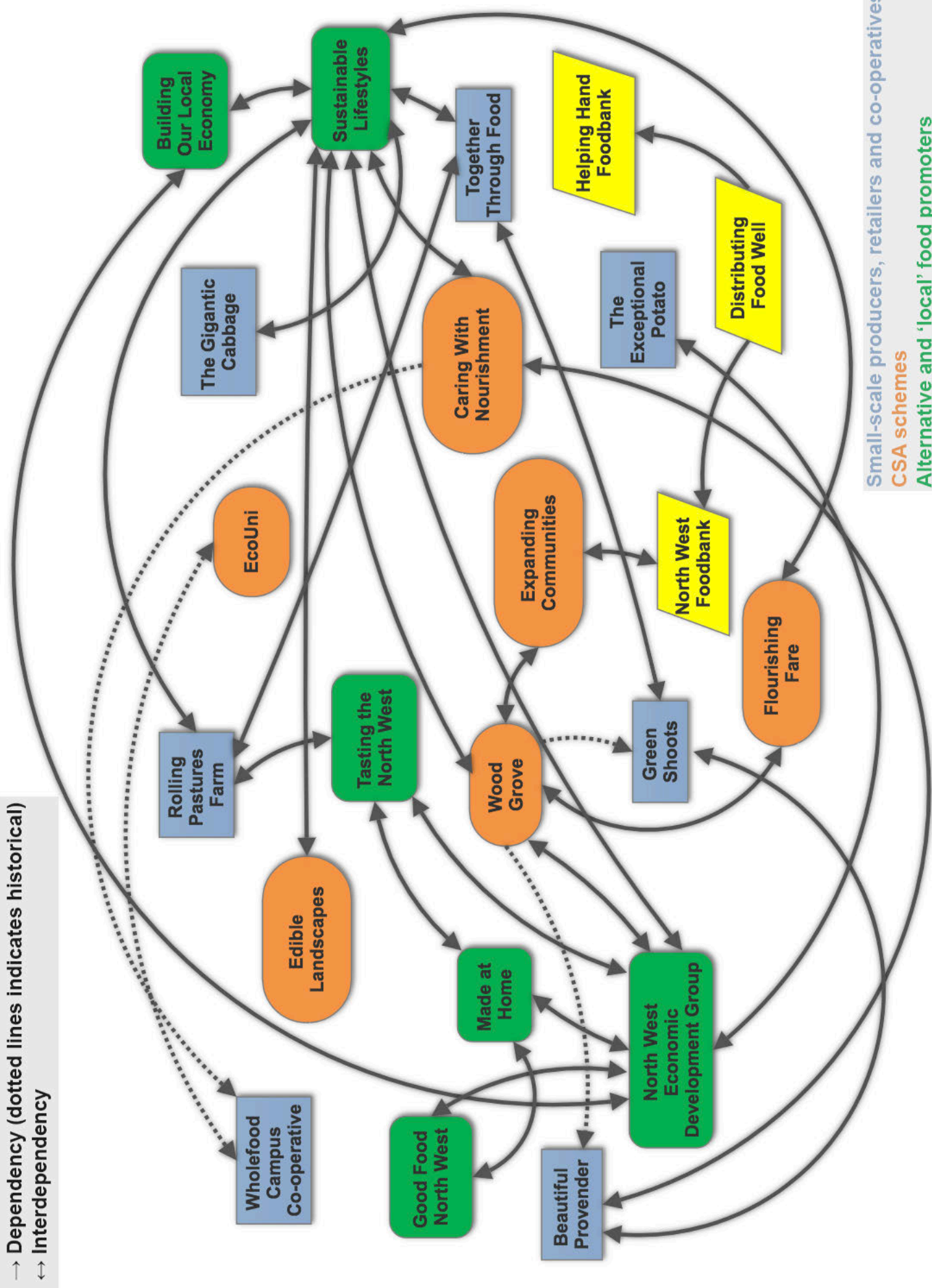
Small-scale producers, retailers and co-operatives
CSA schemes
Alternative and 'local' food promoters
Food banks and food waste initiatives

Building Our Local Economy

Sustainable Lifestyles

Together Through Food

Helping Hand Foodbank

Distributing Food Well

The Gigantic Cabbage

Caring With Nourishment

The Exceptional Potato

EcoUni

Expanding Communities

North West Foodbank

Flourishing Fare

Tasting the North West

Wood Grove

Green Shoots

Rolling Pastures Farm

Edible Landscapes

Made at Home

North West Economic Development Group

Wholefood Campus Co-operative

Good Food North West

Beautiful Provender