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(INTRA-)ACTIVITY OF ALTERNATIVE FOOD: PERFORMING A HOPEFUL FOOD FUTURE

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores alternative food initiatives (AFIs) and their relational ontological forms. Demonstrations of pervasive and dynamic “intra-actions” in the urban foodscape can offer hope for a transformation away from disenfranchising associations of the conventional food system, despite the challenge of unequal dispositions of different actors and activities involved. This participatory ethnographic study of AFIs in Auckland, New Zealand, included following, observing and actively practicing with AFIs. The practices seen and done are read through the work of Barad to consider how a more just food system can be materialized through participants’ engagement with AFIs. Here, several case studies of AFIs disturb dominant thinking, to: highlight the abundance, prominence and dynamism of these models of alternative food; explore how doing differently is regularly and actively embodied by actors in the alternative foodscape; and, how these novel expressions of alternative food can engender hope in the urban food landscape through their intra-action.

Keywords: intra-action; alternative food initiatives (AFIs); ontological form

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Introduction

The transformation of our foodscape can take place through everyday, mundane connections and linkages. I propose here that individual participants of superficially discrete but subcutaneously complex and tangled AFIs, have the collective means to navigate a new food future. This future has potential to be focused on ethical, socio-ecological “capital” by the sharing of effort, experience, skills and information. I explore how AFIs materialize as cohesive

and impactful networks with significant transformative potential for the dominant and unscrupulous “Global Food” system (Carolan 2011). The AFI case studies provided in the following sections highlight several interrelated foci of this paper. Firstly, there is a focus on the alternative foodscape as an inextricable entanglement of discrete individuals as they articulate with AFIs. Secondly, I reveal my observations of the perpetual changes in these relationships and connections. Thirdly, I look at these changes, where different connections are regularly made and remade, which make way for new spaces of ethical and socially embedded practices. Fourthly, I consider the resultant potential for change in our dominant food system given these constant changes in and new potentials of relationships and intra-action.

Modern-day, conventional food typically presents a disengagement between consumption and production (see McClintock 2010; Wittman et al. 2010): how, where and by whom it was produced, distributed and finally, the context in which it was consumed. This disconnection seems unnatural given the entanglement of food ontologies, epistemologies, and ethics bound up in the processes of provisioning ourselves (Goodman 2009). Through the notion of intra-action, our normative view of the conventional food system can be problematized. Diverse “ontologies” of human interactions can be seen as relational and cooperative, embedding intricate social entanglements instead of disembodied and disembodied rational economic actors. This alternative view destabilizes conventional knowledges of both the drivers and the ways of assembling such mechanistic human systems. I challenge presuppositions that conventional food supply chains are made up of these individually constituted agents or entities that fit neatly into process-diagrams of food production logistics. Rather than accept our food system as discretely determinate units of efficiency, this paper offers the lens of intra-action to view an alternative food system composed of initiatives understood as a “mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (Barad 2007: 33).

Further, this perspective of intra-action has no presuppositions of what difference looks like. Instead it explores how differences are perpetually and iteratively recreated. Alternative food initiatives (AFIs) can be seen to offer diversity and difference in their processes of dynamically (re)creating food “phenomena,” juxtaposed against what is traditionally hegemonic and unnaturally stable industrialized mass food production, procurement and consumption. The vast majority of AFIs and their participants are in favor of disturbing the disenfranchising associations of a dominant food system. AFIs portray a diversity of novel food enactments, to engender a politics of difference to help disturb this dominance. This research is important because it uncovers and legitimizes diverse practices that are not regularly considered as part of a valid food space. The intention of this paper is not to present AFIs in terms of relative “success,” which I argue cannot be measured through their lon-

gevity or their size. Rather this paper explores the *what* and *how* of AFIs, to reveal their emergence. I look to AFIs of farmers' markets, food boxes, community and guerrilla gardening as well as initiatives such as raw milk collectives, backyard chicken farmers, and dumpster divers to understand the potential for transformation of a food system subject to entanglements of ethical impoverishment.

Alternative food is nominally reinforced as marginal or fringe practice without traction and generative potential. This paper will challenge that claim, to explore how enacting food differently is regularly and energetically embodied by actors intra-acting in the alternative foodscape (Carolan 2011; Goodman et al. 2014). It will explore how their performance can escape the dominance of exploitative practice to engender a new, dynamic future for food production, distribution and consumption through regular connections, networks and sharing of situated knowledges (Haraway 1988; Rose 1997) skills and information.

Relational Ontological Forms: An Intra-active Approach

This paper is theoretically located in geography and its spatiality is explored through “processes that occur across space and over time, and are integrally related to social relations – not by cause and effect ... but rather by being inextricably bound up in one another” (Ettlinger 2004: 30). The critical disposition of Karen Barad in particular helps us to explore the spatiality of intra-action and its connections to individual and collective practices. Barad's take on “how matter comes to matter” also invokes an appreciation of the world as made of relations rather than discrete things or objects. Barad advocates for matter being non-static, without clear boundaries and rather as phenomena, perpetually changing based on new encounters of “agential intra-action” (Barad 2003). I apply this lens to my own understanding of AFIs, and notice the nature of their (un)boundedness, and types of associations they and their components have between them. These AFIs demonstrate their relationality in that “it is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the components [or participants] of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts [or political projects that they pursue] become meaningful” (Barad 2003: 815). And one should consider for whom these concepts are meaningful. Barad's perspective argues for the inseparability of the observer and observed, knower and known, and this perspective is also given some attention here by locating this research, through positionality.

I interpret our interconnections in the food space through overlapping lenses. My understanding of the world through a post-structuralist, feminist lens highlights a concern for a marginalization or obscurity of diverse socially

and ethically valuable food actions and actors. In association with this viewpoint, I also consider the world through a diverse-economies lens (Gibson Graham 2008), which further uncovers hidden aspects of these under-acknowledged food practices, and simultaneously through a lens of transgression (Butler 1990, 1997; Jenks 2003) of binaries and boundaries to do the same. The participatory ethnography of this study was employed with the above perspectives in mind. It incorporated following the AFIs and doing as the participants do, to best understand and interpret the interrelations and connections of the actors and assemblages within the constraints of my own subjectivities. This method itself contributes to new practices of performing research and of enacting food, echoing Barad's theories of diffraction, as ethico-onto-epistemological entanglement rather than only disturbance. As Haraway (1997) describes, diffraction simultaneously creates difference while recording interactions, interference, and reinforcement. This distinction is significant as it highlights the performance of knowing as an embodied engagement with matter. Diffraction disturbs the idea of linear or static connections, and requires "a cutting together-apart" of relations, "where cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin 2012). With this epistemological framing, we can appreciate that knowing is proximate by nature of the entanglement between subject and object, which Barad terms a *phenomenon*. Instead of being about offering a perfect reflection of one's encounters, objectivity is seen as accountable to "marks on bodies" (Barad 2007: 340). This responsibility and more authentic reflection, I argue, holds potential for change.

I propose here that connection, participation and a means to effect change are all demonstrated by AFIs. The materials and participants of food are not just passive objects but materials with agency as they create mindsets and perform practices. It is important to note that participants in AFIs and the food exchanged do not and cannot possess agency *per se*, as in this trajectory of thinking they do not pre-exist their intra-actions. Rather, agency is exercised as an iterative enactment of intra-acting and enfolding (Barad 2007). Most importantly to this argument "agency is about the possibilities and accountability entailed in refiguring material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production, including the boundary articulations and exclusions that are marked by those practices" (Barad 2001: 93). Therefore, these phenomena are produced through agential intra-action as a result of specific exclusionary food practices embodying human and non-human wellbeing, as way of shaping bodies (and the world) in their becoming (Haraway 2008) – as material configurations of an ethical foodscape.

Features and potentials of a particular intersection, in this case between participants and AFIs, can be ascribed to the types of interactions encircling the organisms in question, while the relations themselves are receptive to

transformation. To reiterate, in Barad's interpretation of being and becoming, the AFI body only becomes because of its position relative to a dominant conventional food system. It is even more apparent in some examples of AFIs where the alternative activity is dependent on conventional production, distribution or consumption of food, to be able to exist (Goodman et al. 2014). This also presents a challenge to the novelty of a different and transformative food network, where it cannot be ignored that there is potential for the usurping of these chains of equivalence to mainstream the alternative. Some understandings of alternative food initiatives and their place in global relations suggest that they generate similar neoliberal partisanship to the ones that they challenge. While urban AFIs are inextricably linked to participants of other AFIs and their larger AFI phenomena, they are also undeniably entangled with conventional, and capitalist systems, related spatially beyond the urban, to rural activities, to national and international regulations and longer and larger supply chains which are enfolded into this system. Consequently, political projects such as food localness, fostering community, food security or environmental concerns are already immanently incorporated into supply chains, but they occupy a marginal position. These progressive systems exist through their own relationality, and depend on further intra-action with similarly progressive and connected systems in order to proliferate. "Many of the initiatives that address food access and food security also locate themselves carefully within an alternative, rather than oppositional, frame ... Directly oppositional stances cannot be successful when they are only local; they require the power of a broader social movement [and set of connections] to prevail" (Allen et al. 2003).

There is a tendency to generalize, in comprehensively stating that in articulation with conventional systems AFIs are endangering their "progress." This is to limit our understanding of AFIs' potential for transformation. What undermines new potentials is the mutual articulation of AFIs with (typically conventional, but *also* non-conventional) systems that sacrifice human and nonhuman wellbeing for their own overarching (capitalist *or* non-capitalist) agenda. The problem is of consumers' disconnection with the production of their food, and a reliance on a food system that has a web of relations on multiple scales that typically do not subscribe to social and ethical values. Therefore relationships that foster cooperation, democracy and mutual interaction are of interest, rather than concern with capitalocentric competition or not. Elements of efficiency in a hegemonic food system would be welcome, if they did not link to exploitative practice. What is clear is a need to recognize, create and perform something different. Gibson-Graham argues for this "reading for difference rather than dominance" (2006: xxxi), as well as for hopefulness and potential (2008).

Enacting this Research

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

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

Alternative Food Entanglements, Connections and Relations

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

ideological family institutions (as interpreted by Foucault) or schools (as read by Bourdieu). This connection reveals the potential to enact change in the spaces where AFIs and the institutions articulate together, therefore not limiting the opportunity for intra-action with potential non-AFI, enactive agents.

City Council appears to play a role in many initiatives' existence, both in terms of funding and networking of bodies. One community garden coordinator suggested that a number of community gardens are "sort of linked by the Council." In recent months Auckland Council has facilitated a number of "Visioning our Food Future" area workshops in order to bring together leaders interested and engaged in food initiatives. In an interactive mind mapping exercise, participants were invited to imagine their ideal food system, with a graphic facilitator creating this food utopia on paper. Not only was diffraction or rippling of ideas evident, but the food vision was created based on fluid and dynamic conversation and instantaneous encounters and overlappings of different ideas together in the same space, often between participants that were previously unknown to each other. Their relations appeared not to have pre-existed their encounter. But based on their relationality to a larger political project, and mutual workings towards a different food future, it can be argued that the smallest material units that Barad (2003) calls phenomena (in this case the relationality of actors or participants that form an AFI) come to matter through the process of continuous intra-activity.

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

components came together to form new phenomena, as a transformation in action.

In another example, a community gardening initiative representative that I surveyed as part of the initial information gathering for this research suggested “occasionally we have a glut of produce, and when this happens we take it down to the local farmers’ market and sell it.” This shows some awareness of different avenues to consumption that the community garden could be connected to aside from their usual subsistence growing, revaluing their produce and their practices. The act of occasionally selling their produce shows that this AFI is self-determining their terms of engagement and in this way, enacting differently the industrialized food system by connecting, and honestly valorizing and sharing information, skills of growing, and produce with another initiative. It is also an act towards sustainability, to reduce waste, and step outside of the industrial food system, which does not invest actively in social and environmental sustainability – often quite the opposite.

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

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

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

Some AFIs reported no definite inter- or intra-linkages in their survey responses. These initiatives tended to be small, covert, or subsistence in nature, and included raw milk collectives, backyard chicken farmers, and dumpster divers. However, in considering for example the latter activity, this somewhat subversive alternative initiative, premised on “rescuing” conventional discarded food from the waste stream, is dependent on typically industrialized production, distribution or consumption of food, to be able to exist. It is arguable therefore, that the dumpster diver implicitly is connected to the supermarkets at which he dives for free food, though these are not alternative. The dumpster diver did also suggest that he participates on online forums and previously on social media sites where other divers would congregate, so there are clear associations between participants there, despite an independent and seemingly isolated activity. The dumpster diver discussed the practical advantage of knowledge sharing online where “updates for potential issues, such as new locks or good new spots [to dive] ... [as well as] health scares or positive experiences” were accessible. This type of information is shared in person too. Before observation of his activity, the dumpster diver I interviewed shared with me a kit list of things to bring, for the uninitiated: gloves, bags, torch. When parking my car at the site, I asked about

“protocol” assuming a covert mission. My interviewee (/fellow transgressor/ knowledge co-producer/ mentor/ subject/ agent of change) forewarned me about the potential for surveillance by the supermarket management, as indicated on a sticker on the dumpster. He pointed out the bin bags with the highest potential for fruitfulness on our mission. These pieces of information were all instructional, educational and introduced me as a new component of the dumpster diving AFI phenomenon, with agency in my own enactment.

Being and Knowing

Using this preliminary evidence I sought to understand what these frequent and pervasive connections mean for the way that AFIs seem to overlap and share information, resources and experiences and what that means for their creation, evolution and endurance. AFIs’ epistemological and ontological form appears to be contingent on porous boundaries and a diversity of form of its participants. It is interesting to observe that relational actors within AFIs (to form phenomena, in Barad’s terms) regularly appear to transgress the perforated bounds of their own AFIs, and move through these spaces of diffraction to be momentarily reallocated to other AFIs. But agency as an enactment, as a possibility for reconfiguring entanglements, exists beyond the immediate, porous boundaries of individual AFIs. Consequently, identity for actors (participants) cannot be specifically tied to discrete AFIs, given the incalculable entanglement and the constellation of relations influencing participants. This reflects Barad’s understanding of relational actors or participants intra-acting to form and re-form as phenomena or AFIs. In Barad’s (2007) terms, these encounters or diffractions in the spaces between initiatives, leading to intra-action of individuals, of combination, overlapping and the experience of obstruction. In this space is considered to be the creation of new ontological entities. To wit, AFIs do not pre-exist their interaction; rather they emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating (Barad 2007) and generate diffraction – transformational effects that ripple out into the foodscape.

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

isolated AFI activity, which link AFIs and provide access for less mobile participants, enabling a form of democracy in connectivity.

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

They create, as Feenstra (2002: 102) describes, “opportunities ... for diverse people in communities to come together to talk, listen to each others’ concerns and views, plan together, problem-solve, question, argue, and come to agreement, compromise, learn another’s language and how to speak so someone else can hear you, and get to know and trust one another in the context of a common purpose or vision.”

Geographies of Hope and Difference

This paper refutes the typical view that alternative food practice is marginal or fringe, without generative and transformational possibilities. Their potential is measured through their demonstration and enactment of something different in the foodscape, through their dynamic and constantly changing forms, their abundance, with potential for significant impact for urban political projects through their continual doing and emerging. While their longevity as phenomena has little consequence for their existence, their shared liveliness and continuous reinvention offers a collective endurance in the re-imagination of the urban. As we configure and navigate our world and its various systems through our seeing of it, we can think of diffraction as not just moderating

what is visible, but assembling an embodied practice in food with associated knowledges (including those of known institutions and conventional actors) but also its potentials (Haraway 1997).

It is therefore important for AFIs to be sharing their practices, their knowledge and their actors, to widen the possible scope of change. From observation and participation of scores of AFIs in Auckland throughout 2013–2014, it is clear that Auckland’s AFIs are connected organically. No formal or official overarching body (yet) exists for the purpose of bringing these initiatives together for sharing of collective value or values. Other cities in the global north have been working on food hubs, food policy councils and collectives to draw in the range of experience and learning to a central point, and some key examples have been recorded in Ontario, Canada (Ballamingie & Walker 2013; Campbell & McRae 2013; and Blay-Palmer et al. 2013) throughout the US (Sommer 2013; Matson et al. 2012; Fox 2010), the UK (Sustain: Alliance for Better Food and Farming 2005), or at least a concerted plan for the way that we produce and source food for the future, such as in Australia (Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance 2013). There have been few assessments as to the potential of institutional or visioning frameworks in Auckland, though there have been research theses written on the potential for such infrastructure in Auckland (for example Durham 2013). The sharing of ideas and the formation of connections in our food space has been recently invigorated by institutional and grassroots, private and public influences alike. Auckland Council has recently hosted multiple food hui, and throughout 2014 have been working with local food leaders on food-futures-visioning. Rallying efforts have come from the social enterprise The Sustainable Business Network, in a series of events to highlight ways to “restore New Zealand’s food system” (Sustainable Business Network 2014). Local initiative Out of Our Own Backyard (OOOBY) has also shown leadership in assembling New Zealand (the majority of which are customer-base-local) smallholders into social enterprise networks, working in a fairtrade-like arrangement with backyard growers. Its success and resonance with a socially conscious patronage has seen its expansion beyond Auckland to discrete local operations: throughout NZ; Sydney, Australia; and, seeds have been sown in the US for inception there. These collaborations in the urban space highlight the reforming of ontological boundaries for the potential transformation of our current conventional food system. In these ways, AFIs pursue diverse political projects including viable, place-based challenges to exploitative aspects of the “Global Food” system.

Conclusion

AFIs' epistemological and ontological form appears to be contingent on porous boundaries and a diversity of forms of their participants. Identity for participants cannot be specifically tied to discrete AFIs, given inherent relations connecting them together. Encounters between actors are disturbances in the spaces between initiatives, leading to "intra-action" of individuals, where new ontological entities are created, and knowledges are remade. Further, every encounter is a re-creation of the participant and the AFI and therefore of their value for all actors. This includes digital or virtual encounters which link AFIs and provide access for less mobile or otherwise marginalized potential participants. There are opportunities for knowledge creation and value-adding. It is within and in-between the permeable boundaries where human capital is shared and remade.

I challenge the view that "alternative" food practice is marginal and a compromise to dominant food practice. With the above evidence of perpetual change and reinvention I would argue that Auckland's AFIs are actually profuse and pervasive in their potential for change. They appear to be lively, politically enabled and in Auckland's foodscape with much possibility to challenge urban food politics. To ground this theory, it appears that as part of these newly emerging networks, agents actively reshape their relations with different stages of the food system and start revaluing the (social, cultural, environmental) meanings of food beyond mere commodities and objects of exchange.

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

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NOTE

1. Popularized by Jim Diers, “bumping places,” otherwise called “bumping spots” created through place making, are spaces where people come together and create relationships.

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