# LOCAL FOOD IN PERSPECTIVE: PLACE, TIME, AUTHENTICITY, AND THE RELOCALIZATION OF THE FOOD SYSTEM

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#### **ABSTRACT**

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While the research on local food systems and movements is well established, the time related aspects of local food promotion, production, and consumption have been barely explored.

This dissertation starts to address that topic through three articles: a theoretical analysis of time and agency in food relocalization processes, and two case studies that address ideas of authenticity and heritage, community ties, and place making practices based on the selective framing of shared temporalities at Eastern Market in Detroit.

First, I use French Convention Theory to examine how a set of vendors at Eastern Market in Detroit sell their food emphasizing craftsmanship and cultural values more than price or provenance. The work of these vendors manifests a form of compromise between the Domestic and Market worlds that is based on reputation and regard. This shifts the meaning of local food from provenance to a form of authenticity based on the presentation of heritage and community ties.

Second, I investigate the ways local actors use the physical arrangements of the space inside and around the Market and how the promotion of local food through new and old references to craftsmanship, care and tradition contribute to the creation of a sense of place. Following Gieryn and Molotch et al., place-making is presented as a recursive process led by 'strategically placed actors' (Giddens 1984) whose action creates

a conceptual narrative that may create exclusionary spaces. I adopt a visual approach to offer a fresh perspective in terms of understanding the intersection of time and space, history and geography as well as clarifying how ideas of locality and place are performed.

Third, I analyze embeddedness as pertinent to local food systems, from the perspective of time. Drawing from ethnographic research and current literature I highlight the different ways in which time is a relevant variable that makes food embedded in social systems and reduces the alienating effects of the commodification of the food chain. Appeals to tradition, history, ancestry, duration, co-presence and time commitment are different time related aspects that support the embedding of food production, preparation, and consumption. This approach also allows for identifying agency in wider sets of actions and behaviors than looking at spatial patterns only.

The three papers together contribute to increasing the understanding and theorization of place making processes, the relevance of seemingly marginal practices with respect to the determination of agency, and to increasing the focus on the temporal gaze in relation to commodification and de-commodification practices in the areas of local food production and consumption.

This dissertation is dedicated to Anna, Daniele, and Max. Thank you for bearing with me.

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# **KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS**

AFN Alternative Food Networks

EMC Eastern Market Corporation

DBCFSN Detroit Black Community Food Security Network

DIY Do It Yourself

### INTRODUCTION

"For a *large* class of cases of the employment of the word 'meaning'—though not for all—this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Wittgenstein 2010, *PI* 43).

Wittgenstein's wit and his philosophical understanding of language and human actions have been influential throughout my research career. Writing the articles that compose this dissertation, I realized how profound an influence Wittgenstein's perspective still bears on me. In becoming a food scholar, after years spent as a food activist, the centrality of discourse, and the way humans construct meaning through verbal and non-verbal practices remain at the core of my research interests.

My previous involvement with the Italian Fair Trade movement also shaped my approach to food justice and research. Working with Fair Trade producers, I learned how to use food to bring people together and ease the discomfort in meeting a stranger. Producers from South Africa, Bolivia, Brazil, and Palestine taught me the deep value of food traditions, and alternative ways to create sustainable communities. My cooperative bought provisions from farmers and food artisans from the Turin countryside to cook decent, seasonal and unfussy sustainable lunches in our small restaurant.

From a scholarly perspective, unpacking the meaning of local food proved more complicated than just cooking it. This dissertation investigates meanings, manifestations and practices of local food production and consumption in Southeast Michigan and connects them with a broader theoretical investigation of the time aspects of local food

discourse. The articles that compose this dissertation tackle some elements of a larger picture that is still in the making. The themes the articles concentrate on are convention theory, the embedding and disembedding dynamics, and the overall importance of the time dimension in the analysis of local food practices and performances.

Given the global power of agricultural, food, and retail giant corporations and increasing consolidation of those sectors (Busch and Bain 2004; Howard 2009; McMichael 2009), it seems that local food initiatives have, on the one hand, minuscule fighting chances and, on the other hand, run high risk of cooptation, as the Fair Trade and organic sectors have shown (Jaffee and Howard 2010). Local being an even flimsier descriptor than fair or organic, it is easy to argue the search for sustainability at small scale is a lost battle (Bernstein 2013).

Yet, as Wittgenstein and Granovetter showed, there is power in weak definitions and weak ties, and they can be a springboard for looking at how –in practice – those definitions and ties are used and applied in concrete settings, at how they contribute to the general understanding of places, and at how humble practices might evolve into the seeds of social change. Local lends itself to flexible and place-based practices that might allow communities and individuals to share and participate in different forms. The following articles address three different ways in which this happens. The first two are based in ethnographic research at the Detroit Eastern Market, and the third provides a theoretical analysis that draws from Giddens' ideas on embeddedness and Adam's research on time.

In the past twenty years there has been a landscape change in food scholarship.

What once used to be a field where scholars felt the need to justify their interest (Belasco 1999) bloomed into a multidisciplinary area of research spanning undergraduate and

graduate courses in leading research institutions (Neill, Poulston, Hemmington, Hall, and Bliss 2017). Contextually, research and interest in alternative food movements bloomed (Carolan 2016; Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012). Food has been hailed as a "powerful tool for analyzing almost any kind of issue" (Williams-Forson and Wilkerson 2011: 8), and activists and scholars have hopes that the developments of local food systems might bring about profound social change (Goodman and DuPuis 2002). At the same time, scale fetishization (Born and Purcell 2006) and defensive localism (Winter 2003) are actual risks, and there is an ongoing struggle to deal with race and class issues within the movement itself (Alkon and Agyeman 2011).

In this dissertation I propose a slight change of perspective to avoid the local trap and overcome the defensive aspects of the movement by introducing a strong emphasis on the time aspects and performances in the analysis of local food practices. The starting point of my analysis is Giddens's portrayal of modernity as the great displacer<sup>1</sup>. While I deeply agree with Latour's argument (Latour 1993) that we have never been modern and that, indeed, any aspect of what we call modern life needs to be continuously performed and reproduced, there is no denying the effects of the great transformation brought about by the industrial revolution (Polanyi 2001).

Giddens's take is crucial to me because of his insistence that disembedding affects both time and space. Both Giddens and Polanyi underline that the perception of time and space, and the value we attribute to them changed profoundly with the industrialization of the Western world and the colonization processes. We still conserve memories, traditions of pre-industrial times, and the realm of food production and consumption happens to be

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> If we consider modernity as stemming from the sociopolitical changes that occurred in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, it is important to notice that by that time the European colonial empires had already been responsible for the displacement of populations in the southern and western hemispheres.

one important reservoir of traditional knowledge and practices in every culture (Crowther 2013). The way food production and consumption practices manifest the permanence of meaningful connections among communities and between people and places is one of the reasons the debate on embeddedness has been so significantly developed in agrifood studies (see, among others: Bowen 2011; Buttel 1996; Chiffoleau 2009; Elizabeth 2003; Gomez-Velasco and Saleilles 2007; Higgins, Dibden, and Cocklin 2008; Hinrichs 2000; Massey 2013; Migliore, Caracciolo, Lombardi, Schifani, and Cembalo 2014; Morris and Kirwan 2011; Murdoch 2001; Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000; Sage 2003; Sonnino 2007).

A second theoretical springboard for the research presented here is French convention theory, and specifically the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006; 2000). Their characterization of different polities based on coherent sets of values allows for a reconsideration of the overwhelming powers of the juggernaut of modernity (Giddens 2002). By showing that there is no one coherent set of values that can be superimposed to evaluate human actions and material objects, they create analytical space to understand values and practices that are at odds with the dominant neoliberal capitalist zeitgeist. I make specific use of their formulation of compromise – as deliberate suspension of judgment that allows for a *local* definition of a common good amongst the concerned actors.

The third, and possibly the most important, theoretical leg of my research is the distinction among different uses and understandings of time. Under the current neoliberal cultural regime (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore 2010; Busch 2010; Guthman 2008; Peck and Tickell 2002) it is easy to assume we have all been bamboozled into really believing

that time is money. The accounts of how well-meaning white women scholars cannot make sense of why non-white, uneducated women might enjoy wasting time in preparing elaborate traditional food for their family instead of liberating themselves from the patriarchal yoke are just one ludicrous example (Williams-Forson and Wilkerson 2011). The hundreds of books and websites devoted to improving our time management skills with the goal of increasing productivity while reducing stress and distractions provide another example. For those who write them, time is, indeed, money.

Yet, Adam (1998; 2013) shows that the clock-time Marx pointed out as a crucial tool through which capitalism commoditizes time and labor is only one element in a complex timescape. Since clock-time is –with money – the great commodifier, occasions to wrangle oneself out from its grasp by experiencing and performing time in different ways is a powerful –maybe even revolutionary– tool.

A word on methods for the underfunded researcher

The ethnographic research on which these articles are based has been conducted through an array of methodologies, and has not been supported by external funding. Far from seeing this as a limitation, I argue that the academic world ought to devote more attention to low-cost research. A research field reached through a short drive has two advantages: the most evident is that it can be accessed easily and at a moment's notice, and it can be reached over and over should the need arise. The second, and more important advantage for the engaged scholar, is the creation of longstanding connections with people and places in one's own community. Such a field remains easily open for follow-ups, the research outcomes can be easily shared and discussed with the

organizations involved, and this setting minimizes the risk for the researcher to perceive herself as a detached, purely analytical observer.

I used a full array of basic qualitative methods. Direct observation through multiple visits at the Detroit Eastern Market through the seasons, short and long interviews, and textual analysis of written material provided the starting point for the first round of analysis (published in: Roggema 2016). Introducing a camera and visual research methods provided a pivotal point in the conceptualization of the main themes. Again, thanks to the advancements of digital photography the first round of visual analysis was conducted on my laptop<sup>2</sup> photographic database. I used Dedoose TM<sup>3</sup> (which provides secure online database services and visual analysis tools) for a second, finer level of analysis on a subset of pictures.

I started my fieldwork at Eastern Market looking for "manifestations of the opposing forces of modernity and tradition, class and race stratification, the influence of social and economic capital, and any evidence of the rules that allegedly govern markets" (Giorda 2016: 1). The analysis of the photos I took helped me redefine the fairly stark political economy perspective I started from, and adopt a more nuanced approach that allowed me to give a better representation of the importance of the roles and levels of agency of the different sets of actors at the Market. Contextually time aspects started to emerge as important.

The first two papers present results of the research done at Eastern Market in Detroit, focusing specifically on verbal and visual messages that the vendors and the management set in place to promote the Market. These messages, some subtle, some

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Following IRB directions, I only collected non-sensitive data, which remains password protected

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> http://www.dedoose.com

brash, are essential elements in the continuous reproduction of sense of place, and provide cues on the importance of humble practices and on how these influence the larger message.

The third paper tackles the time aspects of local food practices. From the discovery of perspective in the early Renaissance in Italy to 3D animations, space has been easily depicted and visually represented. The same cannot be said about time, yet it was the photographs I took that showed me how time aspects were extremely significant in the presentation of locally produced food at my site of research, the Detroit Eastern Market.

### A three papers dissertation

Eastern Market is one of the oldest continuously working public markets in the United States. Starting in 2006, a new management corporation was installed, and the Market underwent a round of renovations. In 2007, the Eastern Market Corporation (EMC) opened spaces at the Market for, and started to promote the presence of, what they called *specialty food producers* (Eastern Market Corporation 2015), who sell value-added products and were not previously allowed at the Market (Edible WOW 2016, Sutherland 2012)<sup>4</sup>.

In my research on the material culture of Eastern Market I identify two core dynamics that help one understand the interplay between place, authenticity and reputation, and how the idea of local food pertains to this interplay. The first dynamic is the interaction between the *domestic* and the *market conventions*, as described in

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Farmers have always been allowed to sell value-added products from their farms, and butchers also sold cured meats.

convention theory (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006). This is the theme of the first paper in this collection.

This second dynamic, in which the environment at large plays a crucial role, is the focus of the second paper, and consists of recursive embedding and re-embedding practices that grow and reinforce feelings of community among actors at Eastern Market and make the Market a place with its specific character and soul.

The most common theme manifested by Eastern Market specialty food<sup>5</sup> producers' displays and promotional materials is a reference to family or ethnic traditions. These elements are important tools to create a *reputation* that is used as a proxy for quality and authenticity. As Allaire underlines, markets (actual and virtual places alike) rely on "reputation mechanisms" providing "coherent signaling systems" from which consumers learn about the qualities and value of products (Allaire 2004, 69). Eastern Market is a historical trademark in the area, and new businesses rely on the reputation of the Market itself to build their own while treading carefully so as not to damage the reputation of the Market. The EMC plays a central role in this exchange by creating narratives that vendors are suggested to follow, and as a guide for old and new businesses' branding efforts. In the article, I analyze these dynamics through the lens of Convention Theory

The analysis of the data shows that boutique producers' claims of authenticity are rooted in references to the *domestic* convention: the ethnic or family background makes their narratives thick and their product appealing. Domestic attributes are highlighted to create both an atmosphere and a market outcome. The EMC management's work fits in the *market* convention (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006) as they promote growth and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> I refer to them as boutique producers in the article.

commercial success, and connect the producers with a support network where they can feel empowered and showcase their individual features.

Smithers, Lamarche and Joseph, in their research on farmers' markets in Ontario, argue that *local* and *authentic* suggest ideas of "direct engagement with producers, access to local products, assurance (implied or expressed) of food quality, and the ability to partake in the cultural capital attached to the market as a distinctly recognizable community institution" (Smithers, Lamarche, and Joseph 2008, 340). This paper adds to that literature by analyzing the way a group of vendors (whose marketing style is heavily invested in the ideas of authenticity, quality, and tradition) organize their oral, written and visual narratives to convey those messages. The analysis of those narratives supports the conclusion that among the boutique food producers at Eastern Market the common good is expressed as a compromise between the domestic and market conventions where food quality is assessed according to judgments of worth based in the domestic convention, and commercial worth is attributed following the market convention.

This compromise allows for the establishment of a commercial setting that is deeply supported by domestic attributes, provides a foundation for the definition of food qualities that are performed by the Eastern Market boutique food producers, and provides a narrative meant to support and foster the Market's reputation.

The second article investigates the ways local actors use the physical arrangements of the space inside and around the Market and how the promotion of local food through new and old references to craftsmanship, care and tradition contribute to the creation of a sense of place. Following Gieryn (2000) and Molotch et al. (2000) I present

the place-making performances at Eastern Market as elements of a recursive process meant to reinforce the sense of place.

Doing so challenges the meaning of local food as defined by provenance. My analysis of how local food is presented at Eastern Market shows that care and history (the time dimension) are more emphasized and explicit than provenance (the spatial dimension). The article tackles two questions: In which ways is the stage offered by Eastern Market and its environs used strategically by social actors of the Market to create and maintain a *sense of place*? How is the idea of *local food* connected to the creation of this sense of place?

Moloch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen investigated the process of creating 'place distinctiveness' at the city level in their comparative study of Santa Barbara and Ventura (2000, 792). Kaufman and Kaliner (2011, 149) investigated the idea of place at the state level, and argued that "'our' places became 'places' in part because of the imagination and initiative of often very small numbers of actors".

Here I look at the process of place making at a smaller scale, by analyzing how temporal continuity and spatial connections are supported by the physical setup of the Market that I present as a stage where vendors and customers perform the weekly show that creates the Market. The neighborhood, the streets and the buildings that surround the Market, the sheds and the stands, all contribute at different levels to the creation of a more or less coherent picture that is rooted in cyclical time and presents itself as the current incarnation of a historical institution.

Sense of place is a key concept in the EMC's description of Eastern Market, and it featured prominently in the interviews I conducted on site. Following Gieryn (2000: 465/

467) the article emphasizes that "place should not be confused with the use of geographic and cartographic metaphors (...) that define conceptual or analytical spaces". Instead, "place is at once the buildings, streets, monuments, and open spaces assembled at a certain geographical spot *and* actors' interpretations, representations, and identifications".

I argue that: a) the Detroit Eastern Market can be described as a significant place in (and for) the Detroit Metropolitan area; b) this enables and supports the Eastern Market vendors' ability to present and sell (perform) their products as local; c) the relationship between (a) and (b) is recursive as the two elements grow out of one another; d) this is a re-embedding process, meant to ground the current renovation in the material history of the place; e) the visual cues provided by the physical setup of the Market and the surrounding neighborhood can be used to unpack how this process works; and f) time cues help individuating choice point moves and the information filters adopted by central actors.

The core element of the article is the visual analysis of pictures of structures, stands, and signs that I took at Eastern Market compared with historical pictures I received from the EMC. The 'before and after' comparison shows the structural elements that have been highlighted and removed and the changes in the appearances of the stands after the renovation. The article addresses Gieryn's (2000, 468) suggestion to look at how geographic locations and the material cultures they manifest intersect with "norms and values, power and inequality, difference and distinction".

The last paper stems from a question that looks silly at first glance: Does the food *I* cook become *local* in *my* pot? Enlarging the scope a little, the question would read:

What makes spices from everywhere in the world become local to –for example– Eastern

Market in Detroit? At a deeper level, the question is about the elements that come into play for something to be called local, and specifically how manipulating and spending time with food might influence its status.

Space-based definitions of local food are commonplace: once agreed that certain geographical boundaries are adequate, all food produced and sold within those boundaries could be defined as local. As DeLind puts it, "the attributes easiest to quantify have become the easiest to promote and manage" (DeLind 2011, 278), and "an assortment of discrete and frequently superficial qualities or conditions (...) are used to distinguish local products from their conventional counterparts." From a spatial perspective, several conventional supermarket food items are local, and to further complicate the matter, food can be processed locally and become central to local identities even when the main ingredients *cannot* be local.

The paper explores whether shifting the focus from the dominant spatial dimension of analysis to the less explored time dimension could help in identifying forms of agency that are essential in the creation and/or maintenance of embedded and sustainable food production and consumption practices. This approach gives more prominence to the consumer side, which has been less explored in the literature (Goodman and DuPuis 2002; Maye and Kirwan 2010), and emphasizes cultural and social aspects over spatial and economic ones.

I introduce Adam's work on *timescapes* (Adam 1998; Adam 2008), connect it with an analysis of how (food) practices relate to the time dimension, and propose different ways in which *local food practices* can be framed through the time dimension. I look specifically at how the time dimension contributes to the de-commodification of

food, and to the creation of individual and social identities through repetitive and shared practices. Finally, I look at how the actors involved in this process perform decommodification and provide the basis for the production of food that is local and embedded. I suggest that time-focused practices used to produce, consume and discuss food blur the distinction between producers and consumers of ingredients and meals, and allegedly minor practices might be expressions of different levels of agency and important de-commodification strategies. The article's main contribution to the literature is the challenge to look at local food practices through the timescape lens to identify forms of agency that are lost from the spatial perspective. I will return to these main themes in the conclusion, providing further elaborations and addressing the potential future developments of this research.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

Eastern Market in Detroit is one of the oldest, continuously working public markets in the United States. Starting in 2006, the management changed and the market underwent a round of renovations. Since then, the Eastern Market Corporation (EMC) has worked to increase the number of stands selling avalue-adde food at the market. Following the EMC's lead, the new vendors sell their fare in boutique style, putting specific care in the setup of the stands and in the visual and oral narratives they use. Their presentation of food quality emphasizes craftsmanship and cultural values more than affordability or provenance. The interplay between these vendors and the EMC management point to two worlds identified by convention theory: domestic and market. The work of boutique food producers at Eastern Market manifests a composite arrangement between the domestic and market worlds where the authenticity of the products and regard for the customers are composite principles that solidify the compromise.

# Boutique Food Producers at the Detroit Eastern Market: the Complex Identities of Authentic Food.

"The more you come here the more you realize that this place is less and less about food and more about the people and the stories intertwined with that food."

The Detroit Eastern Market has been open for business for more than a century. Wealthy shoppers from the suburbs, urban professionals and artist types, people who live on food stamps, and a growing number of tourists converge on Saturdays under its canopies to shop and to hang out. About 40,000 visitors come to the Market each Saturday, looking forward to savoring an authentic Detroit experience and getting produce they deem fresher than what they can find at the supermarket.

Eastern Market is also a place of contrasts and diversity. Successful professionally managed farming operations stand side by side with farmers who barely survive and small urban farmers; new organic meat producers and fourth generation butcher shops operate next to retailers who get their produce from the global market. The Market has been under renovation since 2007, and along with remodeled sheds and improved parking, the Eastern Market Corporation (EMC) has been working to increase sales and bring in more customers, and it has created spaces for a new type of vendor to bring their fare to the Market.

The recent introduction of a new group of vendors at Eastern Market, who insist on notions of food quality that emphasize craftsmanship and cultural values (Marsden 2004) instead of affordability, offers the opportunity to explore how the narratives they

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W88WX6tOHXg accessed February 2017.

use might affect the reputation of Eastern Market and the principles on which the reputation is based. Using convention theory as an analytical framework (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006; Boltanski and Thévenot 2000) I investigate the marketing practices of newcomers and what conventions they use when asserting the qualities of their products. In their groundbreaking work *On Justification* (2006), Boltanski and Thévenot create a framework to evaluate judgements of worth within six of different worlds of values (conventions): the *inspired* world, the *domestic* world, the *world* of fame, the *civic* world, the *market* world, and the *industrial* world. Quality and worth are defined differently in each world, because judgements are made using different sets of potentially contradictory values which are specific to each world and backed by different theoretical foundations found in the western philosophical tradition.

By analyzing displays of material culture, this paper investigates how food qualities are performed and implemented by the new vendors at the Market, and how the framework provided by convention theory can be used to interpret the different notions of quality that said displays showcase.

In 2007, the EMC opened spaces at the Market and started to promote the presence of what they called *specialty food producers* (Eastern Market Corporation 2015), who sell value-added products and were not previously allowed at the Market (Sutherland 2012; Edible WOW 2016)<sup>7</sup>. In this paper, I refer to them as boutique food producers<sup>8</sup>. I will elaborate on the meaning of the term later in the paper.

The most common theme manifested by Eastern Market boutique food producers' displays and promotional materials is a reference to family or ethnic traditions. These

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Farmers have always been allowed to sell value-added products from their farms, and butchers also sold cured meats.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Thanks to Brian J. Bowe for suggesting the term.

elements are important tools to create a *reputation* that is used as a proxy for quality and authenticity. As Allaire points out, "reputation mechanisms" allow markets to" introduce a coherent signaling system" from which consumers learn about the quality of certain products (Allaire 2004: 69). Reputation is socially constructed and the actors involved, be they corporations or individual vendors, need to adapt to a changing environment and to envision strategies to maintain their reputation in it (Allaire 2004:70). Eastern Market being a historical trademark in the area, new businesses can rely on the reputation of the Market itself to build their own but they also need to tread carefully so as not to damage the reputation of the Market. In this exchange the EMC plays a central role in creating narratives for the Market that vendors are asked to follow, guiding the vendors in their branding efforts, diversifying the offerings by creating spaces for new vendors, and occasionally adding or removing vendors (Sutherland 2012).

Following the EMC directions, the more skilled marketers among the vendors set up their stands to sell not just a product, but also an experience. Boutique food producers are very active in specifically engaging customers in personal interactions to support sales, and assert ideas of authentic food, family passion, and ethnic heritage.

In my research on the material culture of Eastern Market I identify two core dynamics that help one understand the interplay between place, authenticity and reputation, and how the idea of local food pertains to this interplay. The first, in which the environment at large plays a crucial role, consists of recursive re-embedding practices that grow and reinforce a feeling of community among actors at Eastern Market. I expand on this aspect in the second chapter. The second dynamic is the interaction between the

domestic and the *market conventions*, as described in justification theory (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006). This second dynamic is the focus of this paper.

Boutique producers' claims of authenticity are rooted in references to the *domestic* convention: the ethnic or family background makes their narratives thick and their product appealing. Domestic attributes are highlighted to create both an atmosphere and a market outcome. The EMC management's work fits in the *market* convention (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006) as they promote growth and commercial success, and connect the producers with a support network where they can feel empowered and showcase their individual features.

In this paper I use a cluster of conceptually related terms and phrases (authenticity, reputation, quality) that have become staples in the local food systems literature and are ambiguous and notoriously hard to define, on which I expand in the following sections. Smithers, Lamarche and Joseph, in their research on farmers' markets in Ontario, argue that *local* and *authentic* suggest ideas of "direct engagement with producers, access to local products, assurance (implied or expressed) of food quality, and the ability to partake in the cultural capital attached to the market as a distinctly recognizable community institution" (Smithers, Lamarche, and Joseph 2008: 340). This paper adds to that literature by analyzing the way a group of vendors, whose marketing style uses these concepts heavily, organizes their oral, written and visual narratives to convey those messages. The analysis of those narratives guides the hypothesis that among the boutique food producers at Eastern Market the common good is expressed as a compromise between the domestic and market conventions where food quality is assessed according

to judgments of worth based in the domestic convention, and commercial worth is attributed following the market convention.

According to Boltanski and Thevenot (2006), tradition, respect for hierarchies and care for the household members, and deep community ties are the core principles that govern the domestic world (convention). An object in this world is of good quality when it manifests care and has been produced according to traditional methods by a member of the household who intimately knows the product. Within the market convention the quality of objects is based on their salability and the core principles are individuality and competition.

The first section of the paper introduces the research methods. The second connects the scope and methods of this research with the literature on food quality and authenticity, and the third lays out a hypothesis about the use of the compromise construct in convention theory to unpack the interplay between the domestic qualities of tradition, craftsmanship, community ties, personal involvement with the product, etc., authenticity, and salability at Eastern Market. Subsequent sections describe how the Eastern Market Corporation is working on the renovation of the Market and the role boutique food producers play in this project. Subsequently, I provide a visual analysis of photographs taken at the Market that show the principles and the narratives these actors are explicitly and implicitly deploying. The final section of the paper highlights how a compromise between the domestic and the marketing conventions allows for the establishment of a commercial setting that is deeply supported by domestic attributes. This compromise provides a foundation for the definition of food qualities that are

performed by the Eastern Market boutique food producers and provides a narrative meant to support and foster the Market's reputation.

# A Mixed Methods Approach

The research reported in this paper is part of an investigation of the material culture of Eastern Market I conducted between 2012 and 2015. It stems from of a larger exploration of the values that guide activists and producers engaging in local food systems development. I was already familiar with the Market, and approached the field from a grounded theory perspective (Corbin and Strauss 2007; Corbin and Strauss 1990) using mixed qualitative methods (Berg, Lune, and Lune 2004). Through alternate steps of data collection and analysis I arrived at convention theory (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006; Boltanski and Thévenot 2000) as the general analytical frame for this inquiry. Specifically I argue that, across boutique food producers, the food qualities showcased by these producers highlight different sets of attributes that reflect a compromise between the domestic and the market conventions at Eastern Market.

Grounded theory calls for an open theoretical approach as the researcher walks into the field, acknowledges that researchers have interests and competences they use to understand what they see, and argues for repeated analytical development and revisions of the researcher's perspective (Corbin and Strauss 1990). The background theme that guided my first visits to the Market was the tension between embeddedness and marketness described by Hinrichs: while farmers' markets are "settings for exchanges embedded in social ties, based on proximity, familiarity and mutual appreciation, (...) farmers selling at farmers' markets, especially those dependent on farming, must be keenly attuned to 'marketness'" (Hinrichs 2000: 228, 229).

I collected my data by taking pictures of the Market stands throughout the seasons for one year, and through in-depth interviews with the management. I did brief interviews of the vendors at the stands during Market days, collected their promotional material and looked at their websites, and I was on-site as a participant observer at least once every month in 2012 and 2013, and more sporadically in 2014 and 2015. Each visit lasted from one to five hours, the shortest ones being during the wholesale hours in November and the longest ones being on harvest season Saturdays. I kept my interactions with the vendors, and any occasional interactions with the public, very open, seeking "not to enforce an organizing schema upon encountered data, but to surface (...) a schema local to the domain of the investigation" (Stoddart 1986: 106). My goal was to elicit the vendors' experiences of the Market and to understand the kind of narratives they use to promote their products.

Eastern Market, with its showy stands, big pavilions and colorful crowds is quite picturesque, and photographers come regularly to take pictures. Nevertheless, my presence in the Market with a camera was occasionally problematic: several vendors wanted reassurance that I was not going to write or publish anything that could discredit the Market<sup>9</sup>. I took pictures of all the stands and close-ups of the visual marketing tools used by vendors. I looked at stands, trucks, banners, signs used to price the food and the more descriptive signs that advertise products. I recorded a variety of setups that went from purely functional settings to the use of specifically constructed props.

Vendors at a market have three main marketing tools: from a visual perspective the most relevant is the way they display their fare, which includes the setup of the stand and any kind of signage (banners, price signs, packaging, etc.) they use on the stand. This

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Field notes, September 2012.

is one of the areas on which the EMC insists the most. Second, from a verbal perspective, the most important is the way they pitch their products to the customers, which is of course helped by the setup. The third is any supplemental informational material (websites, leaflets) they use to provide customers with a better understanding of their businesses. The presentation of merchandise is crucial because the main tool the vendors at the Market have is their stand, and the way they use it reveals more than words alone <sup>10</sup>. According to Sweetman, "Visual methods of research may be particularly helpful in revealing or illuminating aspects of practice that are difficult otherwise to recognize or articulate" (2009: 506) and they have been widely used to document material culture and the "ordinary" aspects of life.

The visual elements I initially looked for were the stands, the banners, the signs with prices and the more descriptive signs that advertise or clarify some characteristics of what is for sale<sup>11</sup>. Soon enough the containers used to display the food caught my attention, as well as specific arrangements of products on the stands and the props used for tasting and displaying the food. Vendors use these elements to communicate the messages they use for their marketing strategies.

The other set of concepts (beyond the embeddedness/marketness discussion) I took into consideration come from the way the EMC describes the Market: local food, authenticity, community, and specifically in reference to the boutique food producers, food quality.

"The flight to quality has given them an outlet. The idea of local, slow, organic,

... other marketing niches: you see it in some of our specialty guys. [For example]

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Pictures and videos are one of the main tools Paco Underhill's Envirosales uses to evaluate the effectiveness of marketing practices.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> I did not take pictures of people to respect the privacy of the vendors.

Corridor Sausages doing boutique sausages: it's two guys that do charcuterie and that kind of coincided with the rise of the foodie movement — food snobs for lack of a better description -people who are really willing to pay more for something really really good and who have discerning palates, or those who buy it because it is a status item, who knows..." (Sutherland 2012)

Through multiple visits and subsequent rounds of analysis of the textual and the visual data, the narrative strategies adopted by this specific group of vendors (which differ from those adopted by farmers and retailers) emerged as a fairly coherent set, with *ethnic* and *family traditional* recipes highlighted as the most valuable qualities together with *craftsmanship*, and *personal engagement* with their product.

# Food Qualities at the Market

Harvey, McMeekin and Warde (2004: 2) argue that while quality is a term with positive connotation, its denotation can be fuzzy and "the means by which such claims [to quality] are generated, established, and defended" need to be critically examined. It is therefore crucial to look at "agents, their strategies and the associated social processes through which *reputations* of things good to eat are constructed and *justified*" (Harvey, McMeekin, and Warde 2004: 7 emphasis mine). Convention theory provides a frame to unpack those justifications.

The discussion about local food also is muddled by ambiguity. On the one hand, local food might point to the centrality of community, as in Lyson's ideas on civic agriculture (Lyson 2004). The stewardship aspects, the revival of the agrarian tradition and the sense of community are presented as alternatives to the current capitalist system

(DeLind 2002). On the other hand, as in the quotation at the end of the previous section, local food is also becoming a status symbol, and a longstanding critique of farmers' markets is that prices are not affordable for the majority of Americans (Allen 2008; Bonanno, Kawamura, Baker, Shucksmith, and Jussaume 2010; Chrzan 2004; Friedmann 1999).

Hinrichs (2000: 296) shows that "social connection, reciprocity and trust, [are] often seen as the hallmark (...) of direct agricultural markets and vendors at farmers' markets use connectedness and genuine social ties as a marketing tool. Other researchers highlight that the tool is at risk of failing when the commercial intent becomes too evident (Fine 2003; Ng 2003). Sage (2003) and Kirwan (2006) use the idea of *regard*<sup>12</sup> to describe the kind of relationship vendors try to establish with their customers at farmers' markets. According to Sage (2003: 49), "a relationship of regard" is based on the consumers' "ability to construct value and meaning from the product" and Kirwan (2006: 309) underlines that farmers benefit from the "sense of respect, attention and individual recognition that they received from their customers". Kirwan also notes that the possibility of fake-regard, when vendors manifest friendliness and tell stories just to amuse the customers and get a sale, cannot be ruled out.

Johnston and Bauman, in their analysis of gourmet food writings lay out some of the qualities that are most appreciated: "(A)uthentic foods are seemingly 'simple' foods that come from highly specific places off the middle-class tourist path, they are produced by hard-working rural people with noncommercial motivations (...), they have a rich history, and they are consumed in casual, 'simple' settings" (Johnston and Baumann

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Kirwan suggests the idea of a "convention of regard" that borrows from the market and the domestic convention. Since Boltanski and Thevenot provided the concept of compromise to describe constructive interactions among conventions I do not follow Kirwan's suggestion in this paper.

2007: 187 emphases mine). Research confirms that *buying* food that allegedly was produced for non utilitarian reasons is a common expectation for consumers who support CSAs and farmers' markets (Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman, and Warner 2003; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Pratt 2007; Sassatelli and Davolio 2010).

# Composite Arrangements

According to Boltanski and Thevenot, in any social setting we form judgments of worth (2006: 133) on the basis of the convention that rules that specific setting. They connect the civic world, the industrial world and the market world specifically to the development of modern forms of society. The domestic world, on the other hand, is founded on social norms still linked to a traditional view of the society. It is easy to connect the idea of marketness with the market world. Concepts such as stewardship, community, and tradition sit well within the domestic world, as it is based on continuity and familial ties and "stresses personal relationships" (2006:164). In this sense the great emphasis Eastern Market vendors put on the importance of community belongs to the same realm: more than one of them told me that "it feels like family here".

Conventions, in Boltanski and Thevenot's framework, are essential in determining the worth of people and objects: they provide the way to *test for quality* according to the principles of each world. In the market world, for example, "worthy objects are *salable* goods that have a *strong position* in the market" (2006, 196). On the other hand, in "the domestic world, beings are immediately qualified by their relationship with others" (2006, 167) and tradition is the basis for worthiness.

For Boltanski and Thevenot, composite arrangements are also possible, and they "suggest the possibility of a principle that can take judgments based on objects stemming

from different worlds and made them compatible" (2006, 278). The important aspect of these arrangements is that they are not formalized and "participants (...) are favorably disposed towards the notion of a common good without actively seeking one" (2006, 277). The presence of "composite objects that corroborate one another (...) help stabilize a compromise" (2006, 279). In other words, when a compromise is enacted, we would expect to evaluate the quality of composite objects by merging different scales, such as the creation of market worth based on domestic characteristics. As I will argue below, for boutique food producers at Eastern Market, *authenticity* is the term of the compromise, the quality that bridges the two worlds and makes objects worthy in both, because it is based upon qualities stemming from the family convention and it is priced and valued for its *salability*, becoming worthy in the market world.

Pratt (2007: 295) underlines that "(a)uthenticity is a quality of the rooted and ancient, not of the modern, while culture is precisely that which money cannot buy". The consumption of authentic food gives consumers access to the domestic (and romanticized) sphere of tradition and personal connection, while "money-value is often precisely the guarantor of quality or authenticity" (ibidem: 287). This quality is, as Harvey, McMeekin and Varde argue, "contextual, and, in important senses, fluid" (2004: 196). One of the ways to explain this fluidity is that the evaluation is rooted in a compromise between different conventions. These composite arrangements are unstable and require placing "objects composed of elements stemming from different worlds in the service of the common good" (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006: 278). In order to see how this compromise is organized at Eastern Market, it is time to look at some of the actors in the field.

#### Rebooting Eastern Market

Eastern Market has been described in the past as a farmers' market (De Weese 1975), but it is more correct to define it as a public market, because of the strong and traditional presence of retail vendors selling food they have not grown or raised themselves (e.g., butchers), and its important night time wholesale operations that run for nine months a year. Founded in 1891, the Market is a familiar and favorite place in the Detroit metropolitan landscape (Fogelman and Rush 2013). It consists of a group of covered sheds in the center of the Eastern Market neighborhood, on the east side of the City. The Market has been open on Saturdays year-round since its inception and, since 2012, on Tuesdays during the growing season. A summer Sunday program was added in 2014, featuring entertainers and non-food retailers. From April through December, Eastern Market hosts a daily wholesale market in the early mornings, where farmers from the surrounding areas – mostly from Michigan and Ontario– sell directly to local businesses.

The Eastern Market neighborhood had always been characterized by the presence of food establishments, growing into a large wholesale food distribution hub until it started to decline in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as did many other public market neighborhoods in big U.S. cities. These markets lost their allure with the growth of grocery chains and the subsequent advent of supermarkets after WWII (Deutsch 2010; Tangires 2002; Tangires 2008). Subsequently, starting in the 1990s, "markets / market districts in other cities (...) became hip districts filled with bars, boutiques, and lofts" (Eastern Market Corporation 2015: 3).

Eastern Market's renovation started in 2007 and the Market now presents itself as the heart of "a local food district", where more than 250 "independent vendors and merchants (are) processing, wholesaling, and retailing food" (Eastern Market Corporation 2013: 13). People looking for fresh, local and authentic food in Detroit perceive Eastern Market as a better source than supermarkets or upscale organic food stores (Edible WOW 2016). Alongside the refurbishing of the buildings, which I describe in another paper (Giorda 2016), the introduction of boutique food producers was one of the first steps the EMC took in the renovation process.

The renovation of Shed 2 offered a chance to phase out vendors who were, according to the management, bringing in low quality produce, and the EMC reallocated the space to a new group of producers.

"Specialty (vendors) came out from what we were seeing in the food movement but also because (...) we had space that was underutilized. (...) We started with few bakers, barbeque sauces and the farmers [were not happy]. It was less about the product and more the apprehension we are going to get people here who are not traditional growers. When (the farmers) realized (boutique producers) would bring people in who have never shopped here (they) started to come along." (Jim Sutherland, 2012)

Several food-centered non-profit organizations, such as the Detroit Food

Academy, Keep Growing Detroit, and FoodLab Detroit started cooperating with the

EMC to foster the boutique food businesses. The Kitchen Connect program, that manages
the newly built Eastern Market Community Kitchen in Shed 5, is a partnership between

the Market and FoodLab Detroit that aims at "making affordable licensed kitchen space available to small food businesses" (Edible WOW 2016: 30).

### Boutique Food Producers at Eastern Market

Most farmers and retailers at Eastern Market sell produce or flowers and plants, and that has been the traditional setup for decades. Butchers are another long-standing group, some of them have been going to the Eastern Market for more than 40 years, and a few old time farmers also sell eggs, maple syrup, honey and jams they produce. Boutique food producers are a new feature. The vendors in this group include individuals making a few batches of jam or chocolates as a side business, beginning entrepreneurs with a growth plan, and medium-sized businesses with national production and distribution capabilities. Some of the larger businesses grew to their current size with substantial help from the EMC.

I identify this new group of food businesses as boutique food producers because of the bent towards specialization and sophistication these vendors display. I use "boutique" as a qualifier because it emphasizes the ideas of distinctive, small, high quality, and generally higher cost (Super 2002). The phrase "boutique producers" was originally used mostly in the New Zealand (Simpson and Bretherton 2004) and Australian (Bramley, Ouzman, and Thornton 2011; Fagan 1995) literature, mostly referring to the wine industry. It also appears, albeit without definitions, in the food tourism literature (Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis, and Cambourne 2004), and it is generally used to identify niche production across several food and drink sectors (Archer, Dawson, Kreuter, Hendrickson, and Halloran 2008). Blay-Palmer and Donald (2006), in

their discussion of the urban creative food economy, don't use the term but describe this same kind of food producers.

While the term is not widely adopted, it identifies a specific market segment that goes from *gourmet* to *local*: "Boutique food [producers], like Vermont cheese makers and Umbrian extra virgin olive oil producers, try to speak not only to gastroelites but also to local consumption communities" (Heath and Meneley 2007: 599). Boutique products are promoted through references to naturalness, connection with the land, and antiquity and tradition of the production techniques (Meneley 2007). Boutique food producers can be lifestyle entrepreneurs following a passion or a family tradition, sometimes without an ambitious business plan, as those studied by Marcketti, Niehm, and Fuloria (2006), and they aim at creating meaningful connections with customers and/or bringing positive changes in their community (Cornwall 1998).

On the consumers' side, connoisseurship, appreciative or aesthetic consumption (Howland 2013; Silverstein 2006) and the idea of buying the landscape or the culture a certain product embodies (Pratt 2007) pertain to the deal. These products are sold as part of an experience, and producers do their best to create the right atmosphere (Aiello and Gendelman 2008). As Sage (2003: 48) noticed in his study of alternative food networks in Ireland, these interactions give the buyer "insight into the production system, status and identity associated with the consumption of a good with limited distribution, and enhanced expertise".

During high season, of the more than 225 vendors at the Market, more than 50 are specialty food stands: bakers, butchers, cheese makers, fishmongers, salad mix producers, dip and condiment producers, jam makers, tea brewers and mixers and coffee roasters,

and pickle makers. Not all of them are boutique producers: less than a quarter are butchers, maple syrup producers, and beekeepers that have been at the Market for decades and adopt other marketing approaches. Many boutique food producers are consistently present, but some tend to skip the Market during the colder months after the holiday season. The EMC states that fostering the growth of this group of food artisans has been a boon for the Market, attracting new customers and creating a more vibrant marketplace (Carmody 2014; Sutherland 2012). They support their claim pointing out that these businesses are growing and there is a steady request for Market spaces from this type of potential vendor.

Boutique food producers are diverse, with a substantial presence of young entrepreneurs, recent immigrants, and African Americans. This distinguishes them from most of the traditional farmers at the Market who are older and predominantly white <sup>13</sup>. The attributes of boutique food producers at the Eastern Market reflects national tendencies among first-generation farmers and food producers (Inwood and Sharp 2012).

Boutique producers pay close attention to the design of their stands and to their branding and promotional material, a few went through some re-branding as their businesses expanded, and several of those I interviewed are looking forward to rebranding to enhance their visibility. Most of them have websites, some of which are fairly elaborate, and many sell online (Figure 1). Their stands are small, and the producers pay attention to the design and the appearance of the stand in order to give a specific impression. This curated look is created by the use of tablecloths, small dishes for tasting, and decorative elements such as frames, displays cases, small shelves, or

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> I talked with one African American farmer in 2012. That stand was not there anymore in the summer of 2014.

wicker baskets (Fig. 1.3, 1.6, 1.7). They provide the customers with coordinated printed informational materials, business cards, and printed recipes. The keepers of the stands (sometimes the business owner, sometimes an employee) engage their customers with stories about the origins of the business and elaborate descriptions of the products.

During my visits, prices for fruit, vegetables, and meats at Eastern Market were consistently lower than those at local grocery chain stores (Meijer, Kroger). Most boutique producers commanded higher prices than analogous products at the Market and supermarkets while claiming the quality and uniqueness of their offer.

One characteristic boutique food producers have in common that differentiates them from many of the farmers and other retailers at the Market is the use of strategic narratives (Fig. 1.1, 1.2). All farmers and artisans know their products, but old timers are not necessarily in the business of selling stories. EMC pushes the vendors to engage more with customers, suggesting different marketing techniques, and on the whole it has been far more successful with the boutique food producers than with the farmers (Carmody 2014; Sutherland 2012). The EMC management provides incubator services, marketing support, and guidance to foster growth and strongly encourages smaller businesses to increase their output and scale up. They are even considering "weaning" certain businesses out of the Market, as those businesses are now big enough to sustain themselves independently (Sutherland 2012).

After talking with the majority of the boutique food producers at Eastern Market, I can highlight two significant patterns that characterize how they present themselves to customers and market their products: an appeal to family, heritage and tradition, which in some cases is completely constructed, and a deep personal knowledge of the product.

These narratives convey ideas of authenticity where sets of cues suggest that "a passionate creator is involved in making products, and is motivated primarily by their love of craft, rather than the possibility of financial reward" (Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink 2008: 12).

As Hobsbawm and Ranger (2000) showed, traditions and heritage are not always what they pretend to be. Personal engagement with the product is one of two core characteristics for boutique producers, and it comes from two very different sources. The predominant one is the family or ethnic background: examples of this category are the Mexican-American man selling salsa and guacamole mixes, the Jamaican woman selling her jerk spice mix, the Italian-American man selling homemade pasta and the Italian-American woman who makes cannoli. I met a young French pastry school graduate who makes cupcake sized *fondant au chocolat* (lava cakes), the Scottish-American traditional shortbread bakers, the African-American sweet potato pie bakers, the Mennonite bakers, the gourmet chocolatier from Ecuador, and several pickle makers, all using *their own traditional family* recipes (Fig. 1.2).

The second resource is a personal interest with a specific product grown out of either dietary needs or individual knowledge. Examples in this category are: the chocolatier<sup>14</sup> who learned the art of chocolate in Mexico ("the original home of chocolate" see Figure 3) and perfected it in culinary school; the gourmet sausage makers who love charcuterie; the ex-endurance athlete who now prepares cereal bars with a specific carbohydrate-to-protein ratio devised with help from the Michigan State University Department of Nutrition; the raw food enthusiast who sells raw dips; and the African American woman whose passion for tea has blossomed into a business, who pitches her

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Disclaimer: the mother of this artisan is a friend of the author.

sales on the basis of her years-long study of teas and subsequent accreditations by the American Tea Masters Association.

During direct conversations, Eastern Market boutique food producers also highlight with significant strength the feeling of community they all perceive and consider as one of the most important reasons to keep coming to the Market. These producers refer to each other as their extended family, guard each other's stand when one of them needs to leave for a short time, send customers to farmers and other producers to get ingredients, and socialize in the aisles when the flow of market-goers dwindles.

Finally, they all show a caring commitment to the Market itself, frequently described as a special place in the Detroit metropolitan landscape, and to the EMC management, described as competent and supporting. Producers who have set up stands at other markets in the area highlight that Eastern Market is a much better place to make new connections and engage their customers. The atmosphere is friendlier and more laid back as compared to the farmers' markets in the suburbs; the customers are supportive and eager to connect, and tend to return. I have observed frequent interactions where an "older" customer brought their friends to try the products, and in a couple of cases a customer became so involved as to become "part of the family" and ended up working for the vendor.

# Marketing Authenticity with Visual Cues

Peterson, in his analysis of the social construction of authenticity (2005) underlined that "it is not uncommon for people to claim a bit of authenticity by immersing themselves in what they take to be authentic experiences" (Peterson 2005: 1088). In their research on consumers' perception of authenticity, Grayson and Martinez

point out that authenticity "is not an attribute inherent in an object and is better understood as an assessment made by a particular evaluator in a particular context" (Grayson and Martinec 2004: 299).

The illustrations in this section show different strategies adopted by boutique food producers at Eastern Market. The goal is to highlight the different approaches adopted by these sellers and how they use stands, information material and different kinds of props to convey their message. Visual analysis is frequently a comparative work: in Collier's words "it is reasonable to assume that when you discover and confirm patterns within a collection of images (...), those patterns may have meaning and significance" (Collier 2001: 58). Among the stands of the boutique food producers, some patterns stood out: references to family and tradition, artisanal care, personal commitment. All boutique food producers at Eastern Market adopt some kind of branding (some more visually sophisticated than others) and they put a strong emphasis on the curated look as described above.

### Framing a claim

Frames are a popular device to set up slogans and short stories about the product. Most frames at Eastern Market have a very *traditional* appearance (Fig. 1.3, 1.4, 1.5). The messages inside the frame reflect the sales pitches of the different vendors: the alternative urban farmer emphasizes biodiversity and sustainability, the chocolate makers extoll the excellent quality of their ingredients, and on the care of the preparation. As Johnston and Bauman (2007: 179 emphasis mine) note, "certain qualities are *framed* to create the perception of authenticity." In the following images, this is literally the case:

Picture 4 and Picture 5 show two different ways of *framing* the core marketing messages of two family-owned-and-operated businesses.

Brother Nature (Fig. 1.4), a family farming operation in Detroit, is one of the leading food activists within the urban farming movement in Detroit (see: MacInnis 2011). They grow and sell salad greens with non-certified organic methods, and are very vocal about social and environmental justice issues. The up-cycled blackboard with the antique golden frame plays into this narrative. The contrast between the frame and the board reverberates the tension between the ruggedness of farm work and the highly educated message they convey: biodiverse, self-sufficient, and local.

McClary Bros. (Fig. 1.5) produces and sells "colonial era cocktail mixers". Their advertising shows a frame within a frame, hinting at unspecified "old times". The choice is interesting because it is clear from their website that the business is new, they make up their own recipes, and the whole idea came out serendipitously, as the owner "wanted to showcase the local flavors, but wanted to find a healthier method" than the baking she was doing before. She "did a lot of research into old-fashioned preservation techniques and (...) found Drinking Vinegars". They "source out the majority of our fruits, vegetables and herbs from local farmers" 15, and base all their advertising on the idea of family business (the company is named after the owner's twin sons) and a generic reference to a pre-industrial past<sup>16</sup>.

Color coordination

Color coordination is a common device used to enhance the coherence of a message (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996: 230). Chocolate stands are likely to have rich

https://www.mcclarybros.com/pages/the-story, accessed august 2016.
 McClary bros were featured in the 7<sup>th</sup> season of the Shark Tank TV show.

earth tones (Fig. 1.6); jam and pastry makers use colorful patterns and pastel colors (Fig. 1.7, 1.8); and stands selling salsa all share a bright red- and yellow-based color palette, reminiscent of yellow corn chips and *salsa roja* (Fig. 1.9). The following pictures highlight different color schemes used to showcase the character of the products. Some of these color schemes appear very similar to the palettes used by major commercial brands selling similar products, but the message on the informational material emphasizes family recipes, small batches, and artisanal care. Also evident in these pictures is the use of decorative props (wooden and ceramic plates, boxes, and small containers with selected ingredients) that give the still simple stands a curated look and emphasize again the quality of the ingredients.

# Ethnic Background

Family traditions and references to ethnic backgrounds are prominent marketing tools and another proxy for authenticity. Visually, they are combined with specific color palettes to suggest the ideas of the country and/or culture of origin, in some cases bordering on stereotyping: see the charming looking girl offering French pastries (Fig. 1.8), and the little figure wearing a sombrero in the salsa banner (Fig. 1.9). Fig. 1.10 and Fig. 1.11 show an interesting re-branding example. The older banner resembles an Italian flag, making the ethnic claim very direct. The newer banner employs a more subdued palette of golden colors, but doubles down on the authenticity side: "verace", literally "veracious" is an antiquate term for "genuine" (i.e. true to its genus) or, again, authentic.

Iconic places, more than geographic locations, support these narratives. Great Lakes Roasting Company provides a non-visual example (emphases mine):

"Like many great American brands, we began in a *garage* with not much more than a leap of faith — and our Italian father. His passion for the art and science that transformed those little green beans into the nuanced roasts we still offer is what inspires everything we do, every day, at our *ever-innovating roasting facility*. But our story doesn't end there. After all, if you're traveling the *globe* to source only the finest and most responsibly grown coffee, it's no longer just your story. It's that farmer's story. And his family's story. It's a story about our relationship and responsibility to their passion for caffeinated excellence. It's also a story about how *those people on the other side of the planet* are helping to change the story in *Detroit*." <sup>17</sup>

The highlights of this text are: the reference to family tradition (the Italian father); the passionate claim to care and handcrafting; the connection to the farmer who grows the coffee; the idea of community and relationships; and the focus on Detroit. It is worth noticing that the headquarters of this company and its main facility are located in Bloomfield Hills, one of the wealthiest suburbs of Detroit, and its main Detroit location is in Midtown, an area of the City that is gentrifying rapidly 18.

In the definition of food qualities at Eastern Market, authenticity encompasses and supersedes *local* as a connotation: as Smithers et al. (2008) noticed, the importance of local production resides in the connections between the producers and the public, it is fluid and porous, and substantially connected with the ability of the producers to embody the qualities their customers crave. The concept that dominates the presentation of boutique food at Eastern Market is authenticity, which manifests itself through narratives

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http://greatlakescoffee.com/pages/about-great-lakes-coffee-roasting-company. Accessed October 2016.
 See Sugrue for the contentious relationship between Detroit and its suburbs, and \*author and colleague\*
 2015 on the drawbacks of the revival of Midtown.

that emphasize tradition, ancestry, passion, dedication to craft, and direct connections between consumers and producers. Artisanal care, rootedness in history, and small size productions are the qualities that producers showcase, and they interact with the customers to make them feel like they are members of the Eastern Market family.

## Authentic Food as a Compromise between the Marketing and the Domestic Worlds

Boutique food producers at Eastern Market tell their customers that their food is locally produced by family members, traditional, crafted with care from quality ingredients in a small-scale operation, ethnically authentic. My analysis of the visual, written and oral narratives used by these vendors shows a lot of emphasis on care, ethnicity, and family, and less insistence on provenance. The EMC emphasizes the role of Eastern Market as a local food hub, but the video that presents the Market on their website says it is less about food and more about the people and their stories. The Market itself is being marketed not so much as a place to buy food, but more as a place where the public can partake in the cultural capital of the vendors' community.

The EMC has been working to improve both the physical structures and the products for sale. The EMC management keeps pushing farmers and vendors to adopt new marketing techniques, to manage the appearance of the stands, and to provide better service to the customers. Boutique food producers are receptive to these suggestions and appreciative of the support they obtain. As shown in the pictures above, boutique food producers put a lot of effort into curating their stands according to the management's suggestions. The principles of the market world - sales, economic growth - are some of the elements that determine the worth of the boutique food producers for EMC management.

Yet, these producers use their connections with (actual or claimed) deep-seated traditions and family heritage as their core marketing strategies, which points to the principles of the domestic convention. The vendors I interviewed that lacked the proper "ethnic" background, or sold non-traditional items such as high protein bars, had to support their products with external certifications (be it a recipe devised with a university department, or some kind of diploma), and stressed their qualifications and their passion during their sales pitches. In all the other cases, their cultural capital (e.g., an old, traditional family recipe, whose ingredients they will not share) is what sets the product up. Traditional knowledge and family traditions are presented as the key elements that determine quality; certifications and scientific formulations, which are modern in character (Busch 2000), are less appealing alternative options (Sage 2003).

This confirms what other researchers have pointed out: customers go to markets and seek boutique food producers because they provide more than just food. They are looking for a feeling of connection and belonging to the community, for intellectual and sensory excitement, and to buy into a non-commercial set of principles (de La Pradelle 2006; Fonte 2006; Hinrichs 2000; Hinrichs 2003; Johnston and Baumann 2007; Lahne and Trubek 2014; Pratt 2007). Boutique food producers cater to these expectations by creating an experience to go with their fare.

The Eastern Market environment creates a suitable physical background for these customers: gritty and post-industrial yet cozy, safe<sup>19</sup>, and (now) clean. The longstanding presence of family farmers supports and reinforces the traditions upon which the boutique food producers are thriving: these farmers provide the foundation for the reputation of the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> The EMC hires its own security, and the Detroit Police Department provides two mounted officers to patrol the Saturday markets and several patrol cars to roam the area.

Market as the place for local, fresh, better priced food grown on family farms (see chapter two). Moreover, the EMC provides the boutique food producers with a support network that helps them feel empowered to showcase their unique features while at the same time creating a community: all the vendors I interviewed underlined how important is the support they receive from, and the relationship they have with, the other vendors.

The appeal to domestic principles is based on the interplay between two elements. The foundation for the appeal is the reputation of the Eastern Market as a place of longstanding tradition. "The authenticity of Eastern Market rests in its 125 year history of nourishing Detroit. As the heart of Detroit, it is both a part of the city's cultural legacy and its working economy" (Eastern Market Corporation 2015: 3). On top of this foundation, boutique food producers tell a story of authenticity and artisanal quality and care with the help of specifically designed marketing tools. They stage their food with colors recommended by marketing experts, with banners and signs that convey the idea of the product sold, and with business cards that point to websites where the story is reiterated. As Peterson (2005) showed, the bells and whistles of modern marketing, or at least all the bells and whistles that boutique food marketers can afford, are put in place to connect these new businesses with old traditions and support the claims of authenticity.

These claims are supported by a compromise between the domestic and the market worlds that enables a commercial relationship based on regard. According to Boltanski and Thevenot, references to *reputation*, memory, or tradition are central to the elaboration of a compromise between the domestic and the market worlds that is based on trust (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006: 312). The direct connection between producers and consumers supports trust and provides a guaranty for the authenticity these customers

seek. The availability of composite objects, in the form of boutique food products that are considered worthy because of their embodiment of domestic characteristics while being transferred within a commercial setting, solidifies the compromise.

The marketing practices among boutique food producers at the Eastern Market show that this compromise allows for the establishment of a commercial setting that is deeply supported by domestic principles and allows for the creation of relationships of regard. The domestic principles establish and maintain the feeling of authenticity on which the Market thrives. On one side, the EMC fosters efficiency to run the Market at large, and marketing strategies to make the businesses grow. On the other side, traditional family values make the offer attractive, allow new businesses to find their niche, and bring in customers.

#### Conclusion

Eastern Market is attractive and derives much of its strength from the fact that customers and vendors perceive it as a place where traditions and human relationships are important, and family enterprises play an active role. Efficiency, organization, and marketability are also necessary to keep it viable. Boutique products, "composite objects that corroborate one another", solidify a compromise between the domestic and the marketing worlds (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006: 279). Since the goals and principles of the domestic and the market worlds are not highly compatible, a compromise between these worlds requires a negotiation between the actors involved (in this case boutique food producers, the EMC, and consumers), searching for a *common good* (2006, 278) that "allows for more individualized and locally contingent quality evaluation" (Kirwan 2006,

310). This arrangement is unstable and requires constant commitment among all the actors involved to continue to function.

My analysis of stands, props, and informational material shows how the compromise is materially presented at the Market: boutique producers set up their stands with plenty of references to tradition and care, both in the form of ethnic heritage and family craftsmanship, and use them –following EMC suggestions— to entice customers and create an environment that allows consumers not just to buy food but to participate in an experience, a tradition, a family ritual. References to tradition can occasionally become problematic (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2000): for example the use of the image of "colonial times" in the narratives (see Fig. 1.5) reverberates with the issues of the whiteness and elitism that affect farmers markets and exploits controversial tropes of rural south imaginaries (Alkon and McCullen 2011; Freidberg 2003).

The terms of the compromise are constantly evolving due to changes in the characteristics of the vendors, managers and customers, external influences, and the presence of other actors at the Market. The EMC plays a pivotal role in keeping the balance between the two conventions and fostering innovation without losing sight of how the long history of the Market and the individual stories narrated at the stands create the reputation that allows the compromise to function. The main risk, as the literature suggests, is a push towards gentrification and elitism (DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Pratt 2007; Sassatelli and Davolio 2010). This would easily erode the domestic principles of trust and simplicity and create the premises for pseudo-regard (Kirwan 2006; Offer 1997), and consequent consumers' distrust.

McClure's Pickles Incorporated is an example of the kind of intervention that might be needed to keep the compromise viable. McClure's Pickles is a family business run by the two McClure brothers. Originally based in Brooklyn and Detroit, they moved the production to the Eastern Market neighborhood. They have been regulars at the Market for almost ten years now; they started as a small side business grown from a family tradition, and they now sell more than \$2 million worth of pickles a year and a line of side products (chips, cocktail mixers). While a good review in the New York Times helped launch their business, the steady support and cheaper production costs they found in Detroit are at the base of their success. At the Market stand, passersby can taste the pickles and get them at a discount price. They emphasize that they still use the family recipe and that the whole business is managed to keep the workers involved and to create a good working environment. The EMC considers McClure's an outstanding success story, and they are starting to think about when they will be big enough to leave the Market and make space for some smaller producers (Carmody 2014).

I maintain that acknowledging the need of a balance between domestic and market principles can help actors at Eastern Market keep up the reputation of the Market and ward off gentrification, which the EMC sees as a threat that could erase the authenticity of the Market as the center of a century old working food district (Eastern Market Corporation 2015). False regard, excessive emphasis on commercial success and insistence on price as a guaranty for quality would tilt the balance towards the market world. On the other side refusing innovations because of prejudices and routines might damage the viability of the Market. The reputation of Eastern Market and its long-term economic success are based on the continuous negotiation of a common good that will

sustain the ongoing compromise. As Carmody, the EMC president put it: "this is a place of tradition, being gently shifted into other areas. There is no better clash between tradition and change than at a public market" (Carmody 2014).

# **APPENDIX**



Figure 1.1 Heavenly Chips by Holy Cannoli, Author 2012

This label is a good embodiment of a composite arrangement. Notice the homemade design (see: four different fonts, center alignment, position of the bar code). Also notice the word play (heavenly/devilish) that aims at differentiating the product from other homemade baked goods sold at the market with an easy joke. These features are quite "domestic". Thirdly, the lower part of the label, instead of offering a slogan, points the customer to get the whole story on the company website and follow them on Facebook. I interpret this as a nod to the market convention. The website will point back to tradition and ancestry, and how "it all started 25 years ago in grandma's cozy kitchen".



Figure 1.2 Jay & Ross Thokku, A marriage of culinary cultures, Author 2014

The banner reproduces the label of this producer's best-selling relish.

The design of the label is decidedly non-ethnic, while the wording points at two narratives that support the authenticity: it is a traditional recipe prepared by a couple that shares a love for cooking. They introduced each other to different flavors, and are now sharing their culinary journey with their customers. According to Lu and Fine (Lu and Fine 1995: 540) "Ethnic food can only be accepted by adapting it into a cultural matrix and by creating a set of culinary expectations." Here the approval of the American husband, who's actively involved in the marketing, and the non-ethnic design of the labels combine to convey the message that the American customer will not be disappointed.

This relish is indeed delicious, intensely spicy, with a taste that many customers at the stand found intriguing and unfamiliar.



Figure 1.3 Pete's Chocolate Co., Author 2012

This is a very curated setup with several elements that point at iconic moral authenticity (Grayson and Martinez 2004). The chocolates are displayed as miniature art works on white background, organized by variety, as you would find in an upscale commercial chocolate store. The small frame under the exhibition gives a short biography of the author, and points out the small batch production allowed by the Michigan Cottage Food Law.

The artistic reference is reinforced by the acknowledgement of the graphic artist who draw the company's logo, and by the use of the frame. Customers are invited to find more information on the website.



Figure 1.4 Biodiverse salad mix, Author 2012

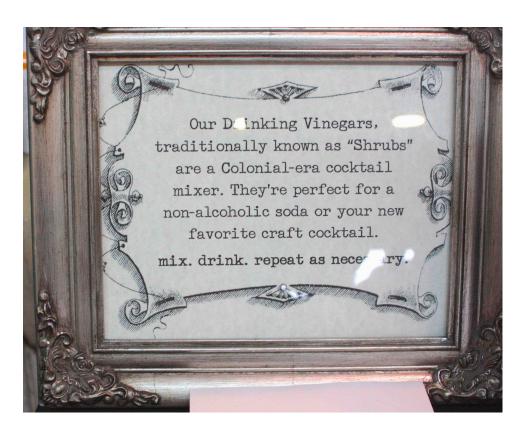


Figure 1.5 Colonial era vinegar, Author 2014



Figure 1.6 Go Forever Energy Bars, Author 2014



Figure 1.7 Slow Jams, Author 2012



Figure 1.8 Straight from Paris, Author 2014

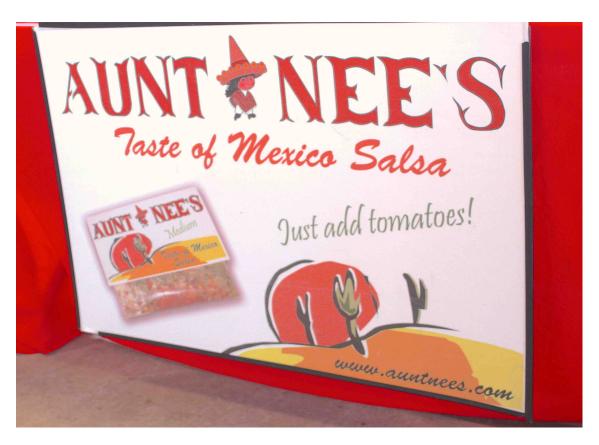


Figure 1.9 Taste of Mexico, Author 2012

Notice the sombrero, and the iconic yet generic desert landscape.



Figure 1.10 Authentic since 1992, Author 2012

An Italian flag for Michigan made pasta.



Figure 1.11 Verace, Author 2013

The producer rebranded in 2103, keeping the Italian reference in the text and insisting on authenticity: "verace" is an old-style synonym for authentic in Italian (it also sounds a lot like Versace).

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#### **CHAPTER TWO**

Eastern Market in Detroit is a special place by virtue of its history, its resilience, and its vendors. This article investigates the ways local actors use and modify the space inside and around the Market and how the promotion of local food through references to craftsmanship, care and tradition contribute to the creation of a sense of place. Following Gieryn (2000) and Molotch et al. (2000) place-making is presented as a recursive process led by 'strategically placed actors' (Giddens 1984) whose action create a conceptual narrative that may involuntary create exclusionary spaces.

A visual approach offers a fresh perspective in terms of understanding the intersection of time and space, history and geography as well as clarifying how ideas of locality and place are performed. The visual analysis of how local food is presented at Eastern Market shows a tapestry of references to the time dimension that supports and enables the explicit promotion of local food and the implicit promise of embeddedness. Time –as it links to tradition, care, and seasonality – is central to this discourse, and the emphasis on place is used as a signifier for these values.

# Making Sense of Place at the Detroit Eastern Market – A Visual Investigation

'If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change'

(Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, The Leopard)

The Detroit Eastern Market is, in the words of Dan Carmody, president of the Eastern Market Corporation (EMC), a *place* with a soul. It is historic, yet sprouting new businesses and it feels lively and vibrant. It is popular among Detroiters, and an easy destination for suburban dwellers. Under renovation, changing and expanding, it has so far avoided the gentrification experienced by the Midtown Detroit neighborhoods.

Eastern Market is a white spot in a black city, but clientele and vendors remain as diverse as they have traditionally been (De Weese 1975), and signs of racial tension are minimal, if any (Sutherland 2012). The surrounding neighborhood is a local tourist destination, the self-described hotspot for local food in South East Michigan (Edible WOW 2016), and an iconic symbol of both the old Detroit and the current renaissance.

This paper investigates how the physical arrangement of the space inside and around Eastern Market and the promotion of local food through new and old references to craftsmanship and care, history and tradition contribute to creating a *sense of place*. My analysis of how local food is presented and sold at Eastern Market shows that care, commitment, and tradition are the central elements supporting the creation of a sense of place. Contextually, the same elements subtly suggest a sense of nostalgia for a time period that marked the alleged apogee of the Market and the city, potentially marginalizing certain groups of vendors and customers.

Following Goffman (1974), many researchers have studied the spatial setup of urban areas – and markets especially – as stages that provide background and props for the performance of urban life (Black 2012; Daskalakis, Waldheim, and Young 2001; de La Pradelle 2006; Gold 1995; Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen 2000). Architects and urban designers set up the physical structure to improve human interaction, and marketing experts provide insights into the setups more likely to attract and retain clients.

Pierce and Martin (2015: 1280) underline that '(c)ontemporary theorizations of place (...), integrate very different kinds of "objects" into a synthetic, hybrid understanding of social/geographical phenomena'. Kaufman and Kaliner (2011: 149) investigate the idea of place at the state level, and argue that '"our" places became "places" in part because of the imagination and initiative of often very small numbers of actors'. Moloch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen study the process of creating 'place distinctiveness' at the city level in their comparative study of Santa Barbara and Ventura (2000: 792). In contrast, this paper looks at the process of place making at a smaller scale, by analyzing how temporal continuity and spatial connections are supported and recreated by the physical setup of Eastern Market as a stage. The neighborhood, the sheds and the stands contribute at different levels to the creation of a picture that is rooted in cyclical time (the market changes with the seasons) and presents itself as the current incarnation of a historical institution.

This research looks specifically at two questions. In which ways is the stage offered by Eastern Market and its environs used strategically by social actors at the Market to create and maintain a *sense of place*? How is the idea of *local food* connected to the creation of this sense of place?

The first part of the paper sketches the historical background of Eastern Market, and the goals that the EMC set when starting renovating in 2006. The next sections provide a theoretical background on local food, embeddedness, and sense of place, and an overview of the research methods. The subsequent sections offer a visual tour of the market and highlight the effectiveness of a visual approach to understanding how the idea of locality is performed. An analysis of the findings, and conclusions follow.

#### The Detroit Eastern Market

Detroit is the largest city in Michigan, the center of a metropolitan area spanning six counties and 10,130 km<sup>2</sup>. The governments of the six counties and 150 cities and townships comprising the Detroit metropolitan area interact awkwardly and have few goals in common (Jacobs 2009). While the population of Metropolitan Detroit increased during the last several decades, the city of Detroit went from almost two million people in the 1950s to about 680,000 in 2016<sup>20</sup>. Detroit's population is 80 percent black, with about 40 percent of the population at or below poverty level (U.S. Census 2016). A wide gap in median household income and a persistent racial divide is visible between the suburbs and the City (Clemens 2006).

These social, political and economic conditions impact the health and wellbeing of the residents of the City. The Detroit Food Policy Council estimates 30 percent of Detroit families are food insecure and Eastern Market is an important year-round outlet for fresh produce in the City for at least a portion of that population (Colasanti and Hamm 2010; Pothukuchi 2011).

The Market, founded in 1891, was declared a historic area in 1974 and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Two other public markets existed in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2622000 accessed January 2017.

Detroit: Western Market, (closed 1965), and Chene Ferry<sup>21</sup> (closed 1990), which some of my informants underlined was preferred by the black community.

On Saturdays the wholesale market that runs during the night Sunday through Friday morphs into a retail market open to the public. In 2010 Tuesday openings and Sunday events were added during the summer months. Wholesale, which used to run year round, is closed during the winter months when Michigan farms have little to sell, and EMC is planning to move it to another area (Eastern Market Corporation 2015).

Current data (Eastern Market Corporation 2015) shows two million people visit the Market each year. The re-development of a strong local food provision and distribution system has been presented as an important means to revitalize the City (Pothukuchi 2011; Treuhaft, Hamm, and Litjens 2009a; Treuhaft, Hamm, and Litjens 2009b) and the promotion of local food is central to the EMC development plan, which aims at presenting the Market as the heart of a growing food hub serving Southeast Michigan.

Many Detroiters do not have easy access to the Market due to lack of public transit and limited income. The "Double Up Food Bucks" initiative<sup>22</sup> helps Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients by matching what they spend on eligible products at the Market and giving them tokens redeemable at Eastern Market or other participating venues (see: Taylor and Kerry 2015). To address the transportation issue the EMC has been instrumental in creating smaller markets throughout the City where residents 'can buy fresh, affordable, locally produced food.' (EMC leaflet 2014)

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> In several instances, during informal conversations unrelated to this research, Detroiters have told me that both markets, and the Chene Ferry specifically, were particularly dear to the black community, while the Eastern Market catered more to a suburban clientele.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> http://www.doubleupfoodbucks.org accessed January 2017.

In interviews, management and vendors stated that Eastern Market is popular with customers looking for local, authentic food, who perceive it as a better source than supermarkets or upscale organic food outlets. Several urban farmers and small producers based in Detroit and the suburbs stated that the Eastern Market was their preferred commercial outlet. This was already the case in the 1970s (De Weese 1975).

Since its inception 125 years ago, the Eastern Market has constantly changed. The first two sheds were built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Shed 3 was added in the 1920s with the goal of providing a sheltered space for the winter months. Sheds 4 and 5 (both open) were added in the late 1930s. This time is regarded as the moment when the Market was at its best (De Weese 1975; Fogelman and Rush 2013) and the current renovation's aesthetics strongly hints at that time period. Shed 1 was demolished in 1967, during one of the most infamous Detroit urban renewal projects (Darden 1990). Shed 6 was built to substitute Shed 1, and for vendors expected to move in after the demolition of Western Market.

By the 1970s the Market, operating in the red, needed maintenance work and new customers. Architect Alex Pollok devised a low-cost project, financed by local businesses and agencies, to advertise and beautify the area. Shed 2's entrances were painted with brightly colored cartoonish characters (a chicken, a bull, a family of pigs). Shed 3's broken windows were covered with plywood cutouts of giant vegetables. Nearby businesses commissioned similar graffiti; some examples still survive today (Fig. 2.2). The makeover was successful in enlarging the customer base. In1981 Shed 5 was demolished and rebuilt as an enclosed structure (Fogelman and Rush 2013).

By 2000, the place was in disarray and the City of Detroit was managing the Market with reduced revenues and funding, yet it remained one of the few outlets where farmers could sell their produce within the metro Detroit area (Sutherland 2012). The Eastern Market Advancement Coalition and the Eastern Market Merchants Association joined forces with the public-private Greater Downtown Partnership (the development organization caring for the wealthiest area of Detroit), under the leadership of then mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, and an ambitious redevelopment plan was commissioned (Project for Public Spaces, Gensler, SmithGroup, and Greater Downtown Partnership 2003). That plan explicitly defined the mission of 're-establish[ing] the historic sense of place in the central market' (p. 3), and specifically of referenced fresh and seasonal produce and specialty foods. The plan never mentioned *local* food.

## Place-creation as a Recursive Embedding Process

This paper explores how the discourse on local food at Eastern Market helps creating a *sense of place* that *recursively* reinforces the idea of locality. This recursive reinforcement I identify as a re-embedding process. I argue that time aspects are underexplored in the discussion of local food (see also chapter three). My analysis suggests that this re-embedding is relatively superficial, yet essential for the creation of sense of place.

Polanyi (2001) posited that the transformations that led to the emergence of modernity were based on the purposeful fragmentation of social bonds that brought about the commoditization of labor and the displacement of people and resources with the 'utopian endeavor' to create 'a self-regulating market system' (2001:31). Over the years many other scholars have elaborated the concept of embeddedness, but this article,

following Gieryn (2000) and Molotch et al. (2000), relies on Giddens' approach because he specifically outlines time and space distantiation as central to the disembedding and re-embedding dialectic. 'The dynamism of modernity derives from the separation of time and space and their recombination in forms which permit the precise time-space "zoning" of social life; the disembedding of social systems (...) connects closely with the factors involved in time-space separation' (Giddens 1990: 16). He claims dis-placement is a foundational character of modernity, affecting people as well as places: 'In the sense of an embedded affinity to place, "community" has indeed been largely destroyed, although one could quarrel about how far this process has gone in specific contexts' (ibid. p.117). In slightly different words Lefebvre argued that '(u)nder capitalism, "abstract space" (...) has colonized everyday life by means of both spatial practices (commodification and bureaucratization) and (...) discourses of planning and surveillance' (Agnew 2011: 16).

Re-embedding practices aim at recreating the time-space connection. In the case of Eastern Market, the *historic* renovation project provides cues and props to emphasize connections, the sense of belonging of vendors and customers and their being part of a living tradition whose continuation creates the sense of place.

The movement of resources and people out of their original places initiates the tension between local and global (Giddens 1990; Giddens 1991; Urry 2003). Localization and globalization are co-implicated because '(t)he global and the local are irreversibly bound together through a dynamic relationship, with huge flows of resources moving backwards and forwards between the two' (Urry 2003: 84).

Researchers and activists have heralded reviving local food production and consumption as a way to recreate the 'embedded affinity to place' that Giddens was

outlining. In Europe, numerous "geographical indication of origin" seals have been instituted to protect the special character of wines and foods that have a distinct link with a strictly bounded territory. Western hemisphere countries have also started to use similar seals, especially for wine. In the United States many states have campaigns to promote *local* agricultural products, and Departments of Agriculture, Health Departments and Extension services support farmers markets and similar initiatives. These policies also promote stereotyped views of these states that, as Kaufman and Kaliner argue, attract and target specific groups of people to live in or patronize the place, 'reinforcing the salience of those stereotypes and contributing to their reality' (Kaufman and Kaliner 2011: 121)

Local food production presented in unreflective (or instrumental) manner as the alternative to globalization, potentially leads to defensive and even xenophobic positions (DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Hinrichs 2003; Winter 2003). Long (2013: 65) highlights that the transformative intentions of local scale activists can 'constitute a form of reactionary place-making' entangled with neoliberal policies that cultivate conspicuous consumption. The promotion of food as local supports the belief many farmers' market customers have about having a connection with the farmers (Griffin and Frongillo 2003), and Hinrichs (2000) showed how this feeling of embeddedness is used in instrumental ways by the vendors. Notably, De Weese's 1975 survey at Eastern Market found that suburban shoppers kept coming to the market to continue their family traditions, while 'black and foreign born shoppers patronize(d) the market for instrumental reasons more frequently than native whites' (De Weese 1975: 16).

If the connection between local food and the place it comes from is presented as given, it is subject to two different issues: On the one hand, and despite the stereotypes,

local food production doesn't necessarily assure that local people have access to it, nor does it tell us anything about the quality of said food. Coca-Cola, for example is always produced *locally*. On the other hand, even when there is a real connection between food, a place and a community, characteristics such as inclusivity and accessibility remain difficult to detect.

Massey (1991; 1995) theorizes that places are defined by *our* interpretation of the "articulations of social relations" through the space and time dimensions. "(I)n trying to understand the identity of places we cannot –or perhaps should not- separate space from time, or geography from history" (Massey 1995, 187). Spatial perspectives by themselves remain flat and cannot take into account change, the perceptions and memories that connect people to a location, the ways history shapes geography, and how different groups interpret a place differently.

According to Tuan (1977: 179), a place is an "organized world of meaning" which comes into being through experiential processes mediated by history and culture. Whereas space is open, free, and possibly frightening, place is a 'calm center of established values' (Tuan 1977: 11). The natural and architectural structures acting as focal points of the human gaze to make a place recognizable "anchor time" (1977, 187) and make accretion of meanings possible. Massey (1995; 2013) also underlines that historical aspects support a significant portion of our recognition of a place. Specifically, different social groups have different readings and perceptions of the same place.

'(S)pace is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation.' (Massey 1995, 265) As

Williams (2014: 76) warns, 'places typically have multiple, often conflicting histories that shape and define cultures and individual identities'.

Place is paradigmatically a social construction, created through plain talk (Kyle and Chick 2007; Stokowski 2002) or by reiteration of traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2000), or by the interaction of planners and community associations (Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen 2000). Molotch et al. (quoting Williams 1973) underline that people's perceptions form a structure of feelings that is an integral part of the structuration processes that enable the creation of traditions.

These different perspectives come into the spotlight when a place disintegrates, by abandonment, blight and decay, or by obliteration. Snyder, Williams and Peterson (2003) make the case that the damage of environmental disasters can obliterate the connections a people has with their land and water, thus erasing all the aspects of that culture that were embedded in the place. In Detroit, the tension between blight, abandonment, urban renewal and revitalization projects is a central theme in the history of the city (Sugrue 2010).

Daskalakis, Waldheim, and Young portray Detroit as the most modern American city, shaped by 'fundamentally Fordist agendas' (2001: 10). Fordism can be described as a 'regime of capitalist accumulation and social, political and cultural regulatory practices' (Steinmetz 2008: 220) that became hegemonic in the United States after WWII but was 'more completely, concretely and precociously instantiated in Detroit in the middle third of the twentieth century' (ibid.). Fordism in Detroit was based on collaboration between unions and factories management. Its characteristic anti-black component manifested in housing and workplace segregation, and the inability for blacks to pursue higher paying

renewal contributed to the dispersal and disempowerment of black communities (Darden 1990; Sugrue 2010), as well as the public markets that served them. What Pierce and Martin notice in Pittsburgh applies to Detroit too: 'competing place-frames entertain(ing) different social, economic, and experiential components' become 'political tools which reinforce inequality across various divides' (Pierce and Martin 2015: 1290).

Sense of place is a key concept in the EMC's description of the Market. Eastern Market is 'a *place* where Detroit gathers' (Eastern Market Corporation 2015: 9), 'a *place* of genuine economic democracy', and 'one of Detroit's most beloved *places*' (ibidem, 4). Similar ideas were expressed in both long and short interviews I conducted at the Market. Yet, as Gieryn (2000: 467) noted, 'place is at once the buildings, streets, monuments, and open spaces assembled at a certain geographical spot *and* actors' interpretations, representations, and identifications'. 'Geography is the 'material fabric' of a place', and the things that inhabit it and move through it make the place meaningful (Cresswell and Hoskins 2008: 395).

Gieryn (2000: 467) also underlines that 'place stands in a recursive relation to other social and cultural entities' and notices that both Giddens (1984) and Appadurai (1996) look specifically at recursive mechanisms by which 'places are made through human practices and institutions even as they help to make those practices and institutions'. In Molotch et al.'s words, 'things exist in the world through the 'success' of connections among various forces and across material and ideational realms' (2000: 793). These forces manifest themselves recursively in the accretions of meanings that *locals* (the community using or inhabiting the place) attach to it through time, which influence

the use and perception of said place by new members of the community, who then engage in similar place-shaping processes. The recursivity of the process implies that at any given point the most prominent voices not only add a distinct layer but also are able to summon the aspects of the past they select, weave those elements in dominant positions, and attract new actors specifically looking for those traits.

Giddens theorized these processes as 'selective 'information filtering' whereby strategically placed actors seek reflexively to regulate the overall conditions of system reproduction to keep things as they are or to change them' (Giddens 1984: 28). Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen (2000: 793) synthesize Giddens's idea by saying that placemaking 'occurs in an unending series of adjacent and recursive choice-point moves'. The current renovation of Eastern Market provides an example of a process of that kind.

I argue that: a) the Detroit Eastern Market can be described as a significant place in (and for) the Detroit Metropolitan area; b) this enables and supports the Eastern Market vendors' ability to present and sell (perform) their products as local; c) the relationship between (a) and (b) is recursive as the two elements grow out of one another; d) this is a re-embedding process, meant to ground the current renovation in the material history of the place; e) the visual cues provided by the physical setup of the Market and the surrounding neighborhood can be used to unpack how this process works; and f) time cues help by individuating the choice point moves and the information filters adopted by central actors.

## Research Approach

According to Gieryn, one of the reasons *sense of place* is difficult to use as a starting point for sociological research is because sociologists have yet to become 'more adept with maps, floor plans, photographic images' (Gieryn 2000:484). Sociological research does not easily deal with bodily sensations and fleeting emotions, while architects, planners, and marketing researchers take these two things into serious consideration (Bellizzi, Crowley, and Hasty 1983; Jarboe 2010; Jive'n and Larkham 2003; Ng 2003; Stokowski 2002). The objects that result from the efforts of these professionals bear visible trace of the planning: 'Physical trace material exists in (...) obdurate form in the built environment (...) but also in the small details of shop signs, plantings, graffiti, and the kinds of goods displayed in store windows' (Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen 2000: 794-795).

To investigate these 'trace materials' I used a visual approach that included direct on-site observation and the collection of historical images and contemporary objects. I triangulated these data with short on-site interviews with vendors; two long, semi-structured interviews with the market management; collection of informational material produced by Eastern Market through time, and informational material provided by the vendors. Local newspaper articles, previous ethnographic research on site (De Weese 1975), popular literature (Rush 2013), and public online discussion forums provided background material.

Data for this article were collected from the fall of 2012 through the spring of 2016 when I visited the Market more than 30 times, at various times of the day, during both retail and wholesale hours. I made 15 trips devoted solely to data collection. In the

subsequent trips I photographed changes in the display of the same stands through the seasons, any new stand that would appear, and whenever an old stand changed their styling or their banners. I engaged in short, informal conversations with vendors, asking questions about their products and business goals at the Market, the challenges and advantages of selling at the Market, and their ideas about and hopes for their businesses, while observing what other customers were asking. I introduced myself officially as a Michigan State University (MSU) researcher, which elicited a positive response from most vendors. Few farmers did not want to answer questions. From those who answered, I learned that some had retained their stands in the same spot for decades. One told me his parents used to come to Eastern Market with a horse and carriage, yet he didn't use these stories as marketing tools. During further visits I acted as a customer, following the flow of the Market, to learn what vendors say to clients during regular sales interactions.

I conducted two long semi-formal interviews with top management of the Eastern Market Corporation: president Dan Carmody and vice president Jim Sutherland. During those interviews I attempted to elicit their vision of the Market, asking specifically about their marketing and management processes. We addressed their vision for the future of the area and the role of the Market within the surrounding region.

Whenever possible, I collected the informational materials (leaflets, business cards, and websites) provided by businesses. This supplements the visual data collected through photographs of the signs and banners on the stands at the Market. I also collected and analyzed informational material provided by the Eastern Market Corporation that

provides background narrative and goals for the Market. This material includes development plans, annual reports, the Eastern Market website, and leaflets. The most important source of data for this article is the 400 plus photographs taken onsite with either a reflex camera or a smartphone. The EMC provided several digital folders of older images, some dating back to the early 20th century. Many were taken in 2006 and 2007, just before the renovation began. I also include photographs from online open source resources, to highlight the architectural changes that occurred during the renovation, and to evaluate the message implicit in the renovation. These images provided the means to evaluate changes in the physical appearance of the stands at Eastern Market within the past decade. Pictures were taken in 'street photography' style, without styling, filters, or re-arranging of subjects. All photos of stands show the stand and the products for sale as they were set up for normal interaction with customers on market days.

I analyzed the photos with Dedoose<sup>TM</sup> <sup>23</sup>, dividing them in several sets: buildings, stands, banners, signs, boxes and containers, props, and displays. I paid specific attention to the use of colors, especially color coordination within a stand; direct reference to provenance in signs and displays; any explicit or implicit reference to tradition (e.g. the use of the Italian flag on a pasta stand is a direct reference; a picture of garlic, oil, basil and tomatoes is indirect), craftsmanship, care, and history; and different ways of implementing the management's suggestions<sup>24</sup>. Following Gieryn's and Molotch et al.'s idea that all the elements present on the scene contribute to the creation of the sense of place (Gieryn 2000; Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen 2000), my analysis goes from

 $<sup>^{23}</sup>$  http://www.dedoose.com  $^{24}$  Jim Sutherland, VP of operations, suggests stand owners to take cues from Paco Underhill's books such as Why we buy. The Science of Shopping. Simon and Shuster, 2000.

the larger scale provided by the neighborhood and the Market buildings, to the stands, to the details of the layout to highlight common themes and discrepancies.

The assumption is that a market can be analyzed as a play, a game, or a show. The setting of the stage is a crucial element of the show, and it is created by placing visual cues suggesting a time period or an atmosphere, and conveying an orchestrated idea of the place (de La Pradelle 2006; Black 2012). In plays, the director has control over how the stage looks. At Eastern Market, the management has control over the Market's physical structure and is involved in the implementation of the renovation plan, while being constrained by budgeting, vendor compliance, and public response. The way designers use color combinations and construction materials to suggest feelings is somewhat codified by the literature (Bellizzi, Crowley, and Hasty 1983) and vendors who set up stands and designers who create promotional material for these vendors follow similar guidelines (Mahnke 1996; Ng 2003).

The analysis of the visual data separates different layers of space and explains how they combine to create the stage for the play (Gold 1995), thereby creating the layers of meaning that are embodied in the place. The visual cues visitors receive from the stage are complex: different structures support overlapping sets of meanings, emotions, and bodily feelings that are not necessarily synchronic, organized, or coherent, as a perfectly staged environment would be.

During the first round of analysis of the photographs, field notes, and interviews several elements emerged to further guide my research. The management pointed out differences among and between farmers (old-timers, farmers who modernize, urban farmers), boutique producers, and retailers. The concept of boutique producers

emphasizes the ideas of distinctive, small, high quality, and generally higher cost (Super 2002). Among farmers, the hierarchies pointed out by DeWeese (1975), based on the amount of space they occupy and their position along the main aisles of the most desirable sheds, persist. There are added distinctions between Detroit urban farmers, old-time farmers and butchers<sup>25</sup> who have been at the Market for generations, and farmers who come to the Market less frequently or cannot hire help to operate the stands.

These groups show different attitudes toward marketing props, and stage their stands differently; these differences will be illustrated and analyzed in the next section. Since the EMC insists that the vendors curate their displays to better market their merchandise, the curated/non-curated dimension is particularly relevant. The presence of curated informational material defined the distinction between boutique vendors (see: chapter one; Super 2002), and farmers, retailers, nurseries and old-timers in general. Another relevant set of features includes all indicators of the passage of time, such as dates operations started, references to "tradition", styles of stands or structures that have clearly recognizable temporal referents, and simply the appearance of the tools used.

#### A Visual Tour of the Market

Eastern Market sits at the center of the Eastern Market neighborhood and covers about 43 acres<sup>26</sup>. Driving in, one sees semi-abandoned industrial areas, blighted buildings, and graffiti (some of them commissioned) – (Fig. 2.1, Fig. 2.2). In the wee hours, when the wholesale market is open, lorries branded with logos of suburban grocery stores crowd the streets and the parking lots. As of 2016, the neighborhood is not gentrified:

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Several butchers at Eastern Market are also farmers who raise their own animals.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> http://www.easternmarket.com/district/maps; accessed January 2017.

few businesses are looking at a wealthy clientele<sup>27</sup>, and wholesale and retail food stores prices remain comparatively low. The differences between the restored buildings and the dilapidated ones, and between the landscaping and the weeds in the parking lots, characterize the visual contrasts of the area (Fig. 2.1, 2.2). Several buildings dating back to the late 1800s surround the Market, housing long-standing food businesses and eateries old and new. As the sheds were being remodeled, several of those businesses were also remodeled and now share an industrial chic<sup>28</sup> aesthetic (Paredes 2006).

The Market consists of five sheds. Shed 2 is the southern entrance to the Market, and its most iconic face (Fig. 2.4). It benefits from being visually connected with the buildings on both its sides and its view of the Detroit skyline on the south. Shed 2 features mostly boutique food producers on the cross aisle, with farmers and produce retailers on the main aisle. It was refurbished in 2008. The once iconic and cartoonish graffiti (Fig. 2.4) on its walls are gone and planters and lighting features have been updated using an earth colors palette (Fig. 2.5).

Shed 3 (Fig. 2.5) is enclosed. Renovated in 2010, it is now heated in the winter. Most vendors in this shed have stable positions, and new boutique stands are featured on a somewhat rotating basis, depending on the season. This is the area to which shoppers go for meat and fish stands. New industrial metal fans and heavy metal doors create an industrial chic look, and the earth tones of Shed 2 are repeated here.

Shed 4 is a canopy structure connecting the two closed sheds. This area has higher turnover, with few farmers and nurseries that are regulars during high season, and

<sup>8</sup> A good description of the style here: http://www.decoist.com/2014-01-20/industrial-interior-designs/ accessed January 2017.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> The Detroit Mercantile, http://www.detroitmercantile.com; Germack Pistachio Company, http://www.germack.com - accessed January 2017.

nurseries selling greenery during the holidays. In the winter, the firewood guy with his metal fire pit is the only presence.

Shed 5 is closed; it was renovated in 2015 and features a community kitchen on its west side. It hosts nurseries and a few produce retailers. It repeats the same color scheme, industrial fans and metal doors of Shed 3. Vendors who have stands in the open sheds relocate here in the winter. Shed 5 was built in 1981, but after renovation its look coheres with the older areas of the Market.

Shed 6 is completely open and consists of a long concrete canopy at the north end of the Market. Plant nurseries use it almost exclusively during the summer and fall months. Built in the 1960s, it has never been popular with farmers or retailers because it sits outside the main flow of the crowd.

As renovation proceeded, management worked with vendors to improve the appearance of stands. Owners were encouraged to set up banners, and approximately half the stands now have signage displaying the business's name (see Fig. 2.9, 2.11, 2.16). The stands were cleaned up: tables and shelves replaced pallets and planks. It is now rare to see people selling produce directly from the back of their trucks, which was still commonplace in the early 2000s (Fig. 2.6). The EMC suggested modifying the set-up of the stands when possible to get a store-like enclosure (Sutherland 2012) that allows customers to shop more comfortably (Fig. 2.11).

Comparing the graffiti of the 1970s makeover (see Fig. 2.4) with the current renovation highlights how the current visual design of the Market is traditional yet artificial. Some features of the structures have been recreated to resemble the original architecture. The current remodeling creates a more refined and coherent look (Fig. 2.4,

2.5) than the *previous* layout, which was composed of structures from different times overlaid with cartoonish decorations and no specific color scheme. The current renovation follows the pre-World War II industrial style (see Fig. 2.5) prominently featured in Detroit's architecture, nostalgically hinting at a time when the City and the Market were allegedly at their apogee (Steinmetz 2008).

Containers used to display produce have changed significantly since renovation. Curated arrangements where vegetables are placed according to color and shape replaced casual mounds, and wooden containers (bushels, little boxes, baskets) replaced collections of repurposed boxes (Fig. 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.14).

Provenance signage showing that *Michigan* food is sold at the market is now prominent and ubiquitous, with retailers displaying it as frequently as farmers. Most of these are generic "Michigan" signs, while the urban farmers point out Detroit as provenance. Canadian farms do not highlight "Ontario", however. Notably, boxes labeled "Michigan apples" or "Michigan tomatoes" were present at Eastern Market before the renovation (Fig. 2.14).

The use of color coordination to convey meanings is increasing, specifically among boutique producers. The classic farmers' market reds, yellows, oranges and greens (Mahnke 1996) are featured on most banners. Fishmongers and bakers use blue frequently, while coffee and chocolate purveyors appear to prefer brown. Stands that use tablecloths predominantly utilize vibrant yellow, red, or green cloths, or jute. Another striking visual feature is the rainbow pattern in produce displays (Fig. 2.7). The

cohesiveness of the aesthetic theme is accentuated by the repetition of similar colors and features in stores surrounding the Market<sup>29</sup>.

Several boutique food stands exploit early 20<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics (Fig. 2.16). McClure pickles, The Brinery, Great Lakes coffee, and Corridor Sausages Co. logos and labels display art deco inspired fonts and bold black and white prints. These businesses show a keen understanding of branding and they use highly curated social media accounts and websites to promote their products.

The setups of farmers' stands are quite diverse. The complexity of the displays is an indicator of hierarchies, with the farms that occupy some of the best positions show the most eye-catching displays. The urban farmers' stands, with small but very curated displays, share with boutique food producers a keen grasp of visual marketing techniques (see chapter 1) (Fig. 2.5).

Wooden boxes and crates have become popular (they were not a staple in the early 2000s – Fig. 2.6, 2.8, 2.13, 2.14). It is not uncommon to see produce retailers repackaging fruits and vegetables from plastic bags (bought at the terminal) into pint size wooden boxes. Farmers use wooden boxes also and when explicitly asked why (at a Shed 2 stand) they offered that they sell by volume and not by weight. Said farmer acknowledged their efforts to create a curated look to another customer who was in awe of the showy display of lettuce in boxes. However, several farmers do not follow the EMC's branding suggestions (Fig. 2.12, 2.17, 2.18, 2.19).

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> http://www.detroitmercantile.com - accessed January 2017; https://www.facebook.com/devries1887 - accessed January 2017; http://www.germack.com/visitusineasternmarket.aspx - accessed January 2017; https://www.facebook.com/LaRondinellaDetroit/ - accessed January 2017.

In most cases the most prominent branding effort by farmers is the presence of a banner with the farm name and address. The two most common features of these banners are references to family business (Fig. 2.9) and the date when the farm was founded.

#### Local is not about Provenance, but it is about Place

Local food, as formally defined at Eastern Market, includes everything from Michigan, and produce grown within an 80-mile radius from the Market that encompasses several farms from Ontario and a few growers from Ohio (Sutherland 2012). In the 2006/07 pictures the only "Michigan" reference is on a box that had held tomatoes but at the time was filled with grapes (Fig. 2.14). In 2012, provenance signs were everywhere, displayed more prominently by retailers and urban farmers than by other farmers. The EMC encourages farmers and retailers to emphasize local production as something special, but farmers can also sell produce that is not grown locally. Celery from California can sit on a farmer's stand, without any notice to the buyer, rib to rib with homegrown cabbage.

Boutique products' provenance is complicated. These are small batch productions that benefit from the Detroit vibe, but many boutique product businesses are suburbbased. Many boutique food producers say they try to buy their supplies locally and from other Eastern Market businesses when they can, but certain ingredients cannot be produced in Michigan and others are seasonal.

Produce sold at the wholesale market comes from Michigan, northern Ohio, and Ontario. The longstanding presence of Canadian producers is interesting because they come from a foreign country, yet commercial relationships between these farmers and

their metro-Detroit clients are cemented in mutual support and longstanding trust. Several wholesalers told me that these connections are the main reason to come to Eastern Market.

On Saturdays, Detroit based retailers sell Michigan produce from wholesalers alongside produce from the global supply chain. Conventional farmers from all over Michigan share space with super-local, Detroit-based, non-certified-organic urban farmers. Suburban producers of salsa mix stand shoulder to shoulder with Amish cheesemakers from the countryside and fancy, fair-trade certified coffee roasters, and local producers of raw exotic fruit juices. Some of the farmers who have been at the Market for decades do not showcase provenance at all, and the vendors at the Saturday market did not showcase provenance until the early 2010s (Fig. 2.10), even if the Market has always featured both farmers and retailers who bought their fare from conventional wholesale sources. Retailers who get their fare at the terminal market use generic "Michigan" signs and "locally grown" crates (Fig. 2.3, 2.11). Without even the pretense to connect to a clearly defined terroir, these shallow descriptors of provenance do not provide a deep meaning, nor do they help to distinguish the produce sold at Eastern Market from what is available at any suburban<sup>30</sup> grocery store.

I argue that the selling points are provided by Eastern Market as a *place*: the human bond to the location, an organized set of meanings, and the ability to trace the history of the location and find ourselves as part of that history. This is what De Weese reported in 1975, and it is what the Eastern Market stage communicates today. The larger stage, created by the buildings' renovation, stretches the historical feeling into contemporary comfort and styling. The farmers bring in community values: tradition, family, homeliness, care. The less refined banners, with their old-style simplicity, speak

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> As of 2017, urban grocery stores remain rare in Detroit.

more strongly to those values. Boutique food producers, with their curated setups and Instagram ready stands, nod to a clientele aware of social media and attentive to visual trends. They do exploit the idea of local food as it is described in popular media, but again, they put the stress on Detroit and the connection to Eastern Market more than with the soil (see chapter one). The urban farmers (Brother Nature, Grown in Detroit) focus their presentation of local food on empowering communities and challenging corporate interests (Fig.2.10).

#### A Visual Analysis of the Stage

Looking at the visual data against the explicit discourse provided by interviews and informational material highlights the coherent elements and elements that go against the grain. For example, the remodeling of Shed 2 aimed at creating 'an historically significant sense of place by integrating the restored 19<sup>th</sup> century structure with public event space' (Project for Public Spaces, Gensler, SmithGroup, and Greater Downtown Partnership 2003: 5). Some customers perceived a risk of gentrification and worried about higher prices immediately, complaining that the market was going to look 'too pretty' (Sutherland 2012). In any case, bringing back the "original" look of the shed involved washing away what had become the iconic face of Eastern Market (Fig. 2.4).

The renovation of Eastern Market is part of a complex development that aims at improving the look and the functionality of the Market without losing its character (Eastern Market Corporation 2009: 44). The historical part of the renovation consists of an aesthetic veneer bringing the older structures back to a *decorous* past by removing the graffiti of the 1970s, providing a cohesive look. A casual visitor will find it increasingly difficult to tell the difference between newer additions and older buildings/ This staging

highlights the role of Eastern Market as a keeper of tradition, helping visitors to feel part of that tradition. The cohesiveness of the look is accentuated by the fact that the sheds now have names: large signs have been erected on the top of the renovated sheds. 'The signage helped customers identify the shed and created an *improved sense of place* and community among visitors and vendors alike' (EMC quoted in Rush 2013, emphasis mine).

The recursive process I outlined above (pp. 10-12) makes Eastern Market a special place by virtue of its history, by the proven resilience of this institution in over 100 years of continuous operation, and by the longstanding presence of small and medium scale *local* farmers. What "local" means in this context is not explained by provenance: Food *is* local because it is sold at Eastern Market. For farmers and food producers the core message is their dedication to the craft, their standing in a living tradition, and the family values of care and hard work embodied in within their products on the stands.

These themes, linked to the time dimension, develop the *place* as the result of the accretion of meanings, through time and repetition of practices that draw from the past (real or imagined) and aim at re-presenting it. Along with food, what is sold, purchased and performed at Eastern Market is the idea of belonging to a tradition that brings the customer into an idealized community, a center of meaning that has survived the storm of time. From this perspective the staging of the Market is a re-embedding process. As Hinrichs (2000) pointed out, marketness and embeddedness stand side by side, and the atmosphere they create provides benefits for the customers, the vendors, and the Market itself.

Yet Detroit still bears the consequences of its long history of racial violence and oppression (Darden 1990; Giorda and Lowe 2015; Sugrue 2010; White 2010): celebrating localism by looking at allegedly neutral spatial aspects is a way to erase the discussion about privilege and access. Several researchers (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Allen 2008) noted that local food practices are frequently exclusionary and perpetuate race and class privileges. The focus on shallow features accentuates this problem (Massey 1995; Massey 2013; Williams 2014) because it does not differentiate practices; it skims over issues of cultural, social, and financial capital; and it does not problematize how food is produced. Locality provides a signifier -like the idyllic landscapes on supermarket signs- for a fetishized rural American world<sup>31</sup>.

The show Eastern Market puts on does not mirror the reality of the city of Detroit. It presents images of an integrated metropolitan area that is at the same time an aspiration and a screen. The majority of the customers at Eastern Market are white suburbanites. Most farmers are white, as well as many of the boutique producers. What is visible, at Eastern Market, is a majority of white vendors, and a variegated crowd very different from the average population of Detroit (Fig. 2.15). Despite all efforts, even at Eastern Market there is a continuous and partly unconscious reinstatement of white cultural practices akin to what has been described by, e.g., Guthman (2002), Allen (2010), Alcon and McCullen (2011), Slocum (2007).

The details of the visual analysis convey a more complex message. The renovation of the Market to create a historical look involves choosing a time period and then using it to define the ideal moment in the history of the Market. This ideal moment is conceptualized as a time when Detroit still had a significant white population (Darden

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> See Lay's 'Closer than You Think' 2009 ads.

1990; Gallagher 2010; Steinmetz 2008; Sugrue 2010; Thompson 1999) and the parents of those who left the City during the white flight of the 1960s and 1970s shopped at the Market. The 1975 survey showed that families who left Detroit still came down to the City to go to the Market because it made them feel connected to their family traditions (De Weese 1975).

The new look of the stands (wooden boxes, checkered tablecloths, rainbows of vegetables) signifies rural bounty, ideals (or fetishes) of simpler ways of living, and solid agrarian family values. The narratives of the coffee roasters and chocolatiers extend these idealized narratives to farmers overseas. Rural sociology research shows that these sugarcoated images are not the everyday reality of farmers and agricultural workers (Allen 2008; Friedland 2004; McMichael 2006; Winter 2005; Wright and Middendorf 2008). Yet at least some of the vendors and farmers at Eastern Market (similar to those portrayed by del La Pradelle some 25 years ago in France) try to follow the script, because it sells.

Some farmers are not willing or able to do it. The visual message of their stands communicates a resistance to change (Sutherland 2012) and their disregard for marketing props (Fig 16, 17, 18). The farmers and the management talked about objective challenges: Often when the retail market opens the farmers have already been there for several hours. Those without extra personnel are exhausted, and have a long day in front of them: They want to sell their cabbage, not tell stories. Griffin and Frongillo (2003: 198) noticed similar attitudes in farmers at markets in upstate New York: "Some farmers talked about the stereotypical 'old-time farmer' who is usually brisk with customers. As one farmer characterized them, 'They're in and out. Some of them are just all-business.""

I argue that the presence of these farmers is actually essential for the staging to work. As the presence of craftspeople at the market in Carpentras reinforces the illusion that many other products are homemade by the stand owners (de La Pradelle 2006), the uncompromising look of the stands of most of farmers who have been at the market for more than 40 years (Fig. 2.16, 2.17, 2.18) supports the staging efforts of the newcomers and provides deeper foundations to the re-embedding mechanisms.

In 2015 the EMC unveiled an ambitious project to overhaul the whole Market district (Eastern Market Corporation 2015). The rationale is that Detroit needs jobs, and research shows that the food industry could bring some prosperity to the area (Colasanti and Hamm 2010; Pothukuchi 2011; Treuhaft, Hamm, and Litjens 2009a). Yet unreflexive renovation can jeopardize the sense of place that makes an area attractive, and transform it into just another mall. The cases of Les Halles in Paris and of Maxwell Street in Chicago show how renovation can destroy a place (Cresswell and Hoskins 2008; TenHoor 2007; The Economist 1994). Detroit has had several waves of urban renewal, the most infamous of which erased the entire neighborhood of Black Bottom just south of Eastern Market to make space for the interstate highway (Darden 1990; Steinmetz 2009; Sugrue 2010).

Excess staging could expunge the working class character of the neighborhood, farmers who do not conform (Fig. 2.12, 2.18), graffiti that are not commissioned (Fig. 2.1, 2.2), and eateries that do not cater to the tastes of suburban customers. These things keep Eastern Market real. The new producers can sustain their claims to tradition and authenticity because they take root in a space where older vendors do not claim any specifically designed narrative because they do not need to. The farmers and butchers

who do not tell stories and do not stage their stands are –ironically– one of the essential props of the Market. Should they be forced to assimilate, it would be more difficult to differentiate the Market from a suburban mall, and keep it attractive for non-wealthy, non-suburban customers and less endowed vendors.

#### Conclusion

The analysis of the surface –the visual appearance of things –highlights important messages and shows contradictions between the explicit discourse and its implementation. In the case of Eastern Market, a complex tapestry of references to the time dimension supports and enables the explicit promotion of local food and the implicit promise of embeddedness. The visual analysis of stands and Market structures suggests that the focus is not as much on terroir and provenance as it is on tradition and family connections. Time –as in links to tradition, care, and seasonality – is central to this discourse, and *local* references are signifiers that point to these values.

Analyzing these performances and looking at the Market as a stage does not imply that there is a deeper level, a secret place that one can visit to see the reality behind the signs (Goffman 1959). What we see is what we get: the stand owners who do not curate their stands are part of the play. The vendors moving pears from plastic bags into wooden boxes are doing what they believe it takes to sell their goods. Some vendors have strong ideological reasons<sup>32</sup> that guide their commitment to growing food in the City; for others, it is the job they have always done. For all of them the end goal is to market and sell their goods.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> See the Urban Roots documentary.

The visual analysis shows that the renovation aims at making the Market look older, more traditional, and even more linked to its rural roots, and at showcasing the Market as a bridge between the City and the suburbs. The way local food is presented is instrumental in the creation of the links between customers and vendors and at the same time presents a curious contradiction. The deep history of the City and the struggles it faces are visible – to those willing to look at them – in the streets and alleys in and around the Market, which is an outlet for –predominantly– Southeast Michigan farmers and food producers who sell to a customer base that is significantly suburban.

At Eastern Market, along with food, vendors sell community and tradition. The participation in the 125 year old weekly ritual allows people to reconnect with their past by partaking in the past of others. This is the re-embedding process at work. There is a big challenge: choosing a tradition gives voice to certain groups, but might erase the voices of others (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2000; Massey 1995). Improving the way the Market looks and providing better services increases revenues and supports the vendors, but will make being a part of a defined conceptual narrative difficult for those who are uninterested or unable to follow.

On the upside, the re-embedding practices that farmers, producers, retailers, customers, and management perform daily at Eastern Market are effective in creating a growing feeling of community among the actors and at enriching the Market and the neighborhood. This vibrancy grows out of the longstanding sense of place that characterizes Eastern Market and will continue to reinforce it as long as all the actors are allowed to play their part.

# **APPENDIX**



Figure 2.1 Water towers and rubble, Author 2014



Figure 2.2 Eat out or Else, Author 2014

Food packing business and wholesale operations are scattered all around the market, and many sport some kind of graffiti. In this case there is a mix of commissioned and unauthorized graffiti. Compared to the new graffiti that grace the immediate surroundings of the market, these are less refined and are reminiscent of cutouts and paintings that have been removed form Shed 2 and 3.



Figure 2.3 Locally Grown, Author 2014

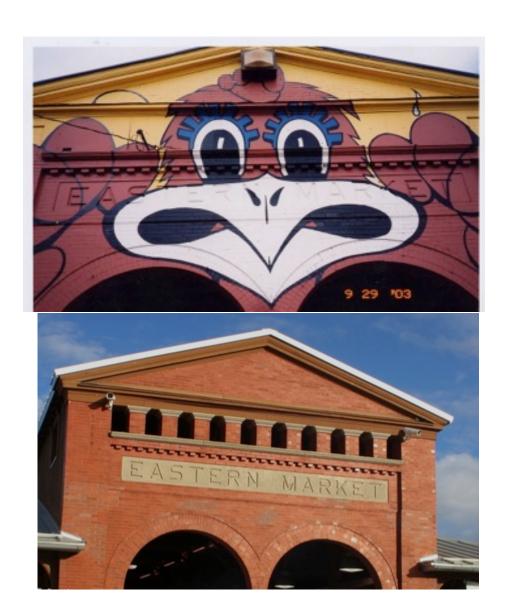


Figure 2.4 Shed 2, Wikipedia/Author 2014

Above: the chicken on Shed 2. Not everybody liked it, but it was certainly iconic. The historic renovation (below) aimed at restoring the more dignified look of the origins, while adding modern convenience and creating a less chaotic display. The new look is more elegant, but raises questions about who decides what parts of the past are worth saving and what can be discarded.





Figure 2.5 *Shed 3*, EMC 2006/Author 2012

The upgrade is even more visible from the inside, with the new palette of warm brown tones. These remain utilitarian spaces, but definitely more dignified.



Figure 2.6 Retailer selling from his truck, EMC 2006



Figure 2.7 The rainbow, Author 2012

The stand in this picture is one of the largest in shed 3, and occupies one of the corners of the cross. This is a very curated setup, which requires careful planning and a lot of time to implement. It is an excellent reproduction of archetypical images of farmers markets, suggesting the abundance and richness of agricultural production. Notice, in comparison to the picture that follows, how there are carpets on the ground, and how the back of the stand is neat and uncluttered.



Figure 2.8 Small farmers stands, EMC 2006/Author 2012

Above: retailer or small farmer stand, 2007. Below: urban farmer stand, 2012 There are several elements here. This is likely a retailer (VanDyk and Ruhlig are two farms that sell wholesale in the morning) or a farmer supplementing his production. The produce is set up in rainbow format, but the small scale of the stand and the spaces between the baskets suggest paucity instead of abundance. The boxes, in mismatched materials, are there for utilitarian purposes and do not beautify the produce in any way. No attention has been paid to the background. There is very little staging in this display.

The other stand belongs to a small urban farmer I saw few times at the market in 2012 and 2013. While the produce is not abundant, it is set up in a way that suggests the extreme care that went in the production of each fruit. Notice the way the boxes are tilted to show the vegetables in a better perspective and the use of little matching baskets, over a tablecloth set in the warm tones we see associated with harvest season. The banner of this stand was hand printed on jute, further enhancing the idea of curated simplicity.



Figure 2.9 Local as family, Author 2014

The message here is all about family: a happy swine family sells eggs and meats. All the signs are handmade, and while the banner announces that everything is locally grown, there is no way to know where. The farm is in Berlin township, some 70 km north of Detroit, but even on the website the location is not prominent and the story of the family is the central narrative.



Figure 2.10 Local as non-chemical, urban, and small scale, Author 2012

Brother Nature is another family operation, but their focus is not on the family aspect, it is on the independence of the operation, its commitment to non-certified organic agriculture, and the idea of Detroit resilience. The owner is one of the most recognizable urban farming activists, having been interviewed for documentaries and magazine articles. Visually, what stands out is the use of old frames and chalkboards that alludes to the past (the frame) and urban eateries (the chalkboard). This is curated, there is color coordination (with the banner too) but the choice of colors, especially the black, suggests a different narrative that is amplified by the use of "biodiverse". Here is a setup that stands out from the romantic agrarianism narrative to assert the political stance of the owners.



Figure 2.11 Sweet corn, Author 2012

This is a banner on a retailer stand, and a good example of shallow focus on locality: the sign has a detachable part, and the vendor (a retailer) can change it when she gets corn from other places.





Figure 2.12 Following the script, Author 2014

These are two examples of farmers who are trying to follow the script suggested by the EMC. They set up the stand as an enclosure to make it more attractive for the customers to come closer, but didn't have the skills or the time to organize the produce a manner similar to the curated style of nearby competing stands The result looks awkward, especially compared to the highly curated stands shown before, and it still requires a lot of time for them to organize things this way.



Figure 2.13 Provenance, EMC 2006

Michigan apples and California peppers sold in Shed 2 in 2006. This is a retailer stand and the containers casually convey the provenance of the produce. Of course, local food and the discussion about provenance was already a big theme in the early 2000s, yet it was not part of the narrative at the Eastern market.



Figure 2.14 Michigan Tomatoes, EMC 2006/Author 2012

Left: a farmer selling grapes and tomatoes circa 2006. Right: a retailer stand, summer 2012



Figure 2.15 Saturday crowd in Shed 2, EMC 2009



Figure 2.16 Old Timey, Author 2014

The Old Timey McClary brothers sell "traditional" drinking vinegars, with a very curated old times branding that goes from the information material on the stand to the look of the bottles that resemble old apothecary products.



Figure 2.17 Pure Honey, Author 2012

A farmer, who has been at the market for more than 40 years, sells maple syrup and flavored honey sticks, neatly organized in repurposed tins, and maple candy in Ziploc bags. In one case a tradition is invented from scratch and marketed, in the other the display is purely functional and doesn't follow any of the management's suggestions.



Figure 2.18 I don't give a damn, Author 2014

I'm just selling my cabbage. Farmer's stand outside of Shed 3.

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# **CHAPTER THREE**

In the debate about local food and embeddedness the spatial dimension takes a prominent role: on the one hand, distantiation processes involving space and labor are presented as the main source of disembedding, on the other, reclaiming the local as center for cultural and agricultural growth offers opportunities to create or restore embedded relations among communities and with local ecosystems. The time dimension of these processes has been seldom explored. This paper analyzes the temporal elements that come into play for something to be called local, the relationship between local and embeddedness, and how spending time with food might influence its status. Shifting the focus to the less explored time dimension of embeddedness helps in identifying forms of agency that are essential to embed food in everyday life. This approach gives prominence to the consumer side, and emphasizes cultural and social aspects. Drawing from Adam's work on timescapes, I propose that framing local food practices through the time dimension highlights embedding and de-commodification practices that support the creation of individual and social identities. I suggest that time-focused production and consumption practices are essential to embedding food and blur the distinction between producers and consumers of ingredients and meals. Spending time with food is presented as the foundation of a process that develops agency and de-commodifies food. Regaining control of use, allocation, and representation of time in the economy of everyday life fosters embeddedness and has the potential to bring about social change.

# **Performing Embeddedness: Time, Agency and Local Food.**

This paper stems from one question: Does the food *I* cook become *local* in *my* pot? Is the food local *only* if all the ingredients are local? What about *most* ingredients? Does *spending time* with food influence its status?

The simplistic definition says: 'something is local if it is produced nearby', but 'nearby' and 'produced' are black boxes with ambiguous connotations and denotations. Emphasizing cultivation and processing defers agency to the production side, overlooking the fact that consumption practices have de-commodifying and embedding capability. Asking what local means from the perspective of the pot provides a pivot for reconsidering the relationship between local and embedded, and the role of the temporal dimension in the making of food.

The spatial dimension of local food production has been extensively explored. Several geographically based definitions have been proposed: foodshed, eco-region, one hundred miles, province or state, etc. Space-based definitions are easy to apply: once agreed that certain boundaries are adequate, food produced and sold within those boundaries is *local*. In De Lind's (2011: 278) words, "the attributes easiest to quantify have become the easiest to promote and manage", and "an assortment of discrete and frequently superficial qualities or conditions (...) are used to distinguish local products from their conventional counterparts". From a spatial perspective, industrially produced food is local: for example, Faygo soda is *local* to Detroit and Coca-Cola, traditionally manufactured and distributed regionally is local *everywhere*. To complicate matters, food can be processed locally and become central to local identities even when the main

ingredients *cannot* be local. Chocolate in Switzerland, Belgium and Italy is iconically local despite cocoa's origin. Gourmet processors of coffee, tea, and chocolate frequently claim local status (see chapter one).

Advocates of local food promote it as supporting sustainability and community growth, setting it against *conventional* food, while the food industry co-opts the term and uses it without necessarily investing in those values (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012). The presence of farms and food production plants in an area does not imply locals have easy access to food (Minkoff-Zern 2012). The literature points out that local food production and consumption are sustainable when they support local development and revive community ties (De Young and Princen 2012; Wright and Middendorf 2008), bring in ecological and economic benefits (Morgan, Marsden, and Murdoch 2006), or when production methods are socially and ecologically embedded (Ostrom 1990). Environmental stewardship, mutual support among members of the networks, and the maintenance of cohesive social practices are some of the embedding practices that support the well-being of local communities (Morris and Kirwan 2011).

This paper explores whether shifting the analytical focus from the spatial dimension to the less explored time dimension helps in identifying forms of agency – the foundation of individual and collective counterhegemonic action - essential in the creation and/or maintenance of embedded food production and consumption practices. Coca-Cola, known to some as a black<sup>33</sup> drink from Trinidad, is again an example. Miller's ethnographic work illustrates how a foreign industrial product became a local trademark. Coca-Cola in Trinidad is "an intensely *local* nationalist drink" (Miller 1998: 172 emphasis mine), tightly embedded in the local culture. There, local consumption

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Black here refers to the color of the drink, as the local distinction is between red and black drinks.

practices shaped the commercialization of Coke and, we can argue, embedded it in the local context.

Commodity food de-commodifies when it loses market value (e.g. because of spoiling), or through practices and performances that involve manipulating, consuming, growing or interacting with food. Local food becomes an actor in performances (Callon 1998a; Callon 2006; Law 1999) generated by growers, sellers, buyers, cooks and eaters activists and writers, and regulators. Proponents of local food aim at creating food systems that are alternative to the globalized one. These efforts go from the development of niche markets, to the growth of regional economies, to experiments that propose radical challenges to the globalized industrial food system (De Young and Princen 2012; Wright and Middendorf 2008).

This paper analyzes practices and performances that are enacted on specific stages (farmers' markets, supermarkets, home kitchens, restaurants, farms, etc.) and affect the identities and presentation of selves of performers manifesting different degrees of agency, from underdeveloped to organized and vocal (Friedland 2008). This use of performances follows Callon's consideration that a "discourse is (...) performative (...) if it contributes to the construction of the reality that it describes" (Callon 2006: 7). Drawing from my ethnographic research and current literature I highlight different ways in which practices rooted in non-commodified time embed food in everyday life and counteract the alienating effects of commodification.

The paper first introduces the literature on local food looking at different approaches in North America and Europe<sup>34</sup>. The next sections review and connect the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> The distinction between time and space is a fundamental trope of Western culture. This paper focuses solely on the Western perspective, with a clear awareness that much is left out of the picture.

literatures on practices, embeddedness, performances, with sociological approaches to time. Subsequently I introduce Adam's work on *timescapes* (1998; 2008) weaving it with an analysis of food practices related to time. I propose different ways in which *local food practices* can be framed through timescapes, highlighting how they contribute to the decommodification of food.

Finally, I look at how these processes embed food in everyday life. I suggest that time-focused production and consumption practices, when the time spent with food is constitutive to the practice, are essential to embedding food and blurring the distinction between producers and consumers of ingredients and meals. Spending time with food is presented as the foundation of a process that develops agency and de-commodifies food. I conclude by suggesting that regaining control of use, allocation, and representation of time is an important and under-reported aspect of local food activism, with the potential to bring about long-term changes.

#### Characterizations of Local Food

Local is not inherently special: scale has been overused as a qualifier for sustainable food production systems (Born and Purcell 2006). Local food systems are livable and sustainable when they are ecologically embedded and, along with food, they provide non-exploitative social connections and equitable economic development (Lyson 2004; Sage 2003). Local food activists claim that by re-localizing the food system, communities can control their food supply, grow their economies, create access to healthy food, and fight the negative effects of neoliberal capitalism (Bonanno and Cavalcanti 2011; De Young and Princen 2012). To promote progressive social change,

local food movements need to (re)create social connectedness and make the linkages between soil, growers, and eaters manifest (White 2011).

Local food movements developed differently in Europe and in the United States. Goodman et al. maintain that, in the United States, "care, stewardship and an agrarian vision" characterized the rise of local food movements. They identify this as a "normative localism", which "places a set of pure, conflict-free local values (...) in resistance to anomic and contradictory capitalistic forces" (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012: 11). In this context, sustainable agriculture movements, frequently conflated with local food movements, are valued because of their ability "to create an alternative, ecologically sustainable and socially just food system" (2012: 136).

Interest in local food in Europe blossomed from the need to protect existing agricultural structures that appeared outdated from a productionist perspective, supported by renewed interests in traditional methods of production, and strong regional political and economic interests (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012). The idea of terroir is sustained by a demand for artisanal quality products that provide sensorial and social benefits to consumers, and a base for practices of distinction (DeSoucey 2010). An array of certification schemes, strongly emphasizing geographical boundaries, has been established to protect these markets and reassure consumers (Higgins, Dibden, and Cocklin 2008; Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000). Normative and ethical perspectives support the creation of networks among producers or between producers and consumers, like the Italian solidarity buying groups (Brunori, Rossi, and Guidi 2012) and the Genuino Clandestino network (Potito and Borghesi 2015).

The insistence on geographical boundaries can be troublesome: the concept of "local trap", i.e., assuming "that a local-scale food system will be inherently more socially just than a national-scale or global-scale food system" (Born and Purcell 2006: 195) captures the risk of fetishization of scale. Localism can revive parochial biases (Hinrichs 2003), and *local* political and institutional interests can push towards the commodification of local food production (Leitch 2003; Sonnino 2007).

Goodman et al. also highlight an imbalance in the attribution of agency. When the focus is set on locality and production, consumers take a stereotyped role, while "the cultural studies literature" tends to "explain away production-consumption relationships" (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012: 41). One way to overcome this issue is to search for agency, as Miller does, in home-based processing and consumption practices that embed food in everyday life.

Practice theory, rooted in the work of Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein, has been adopted in various forms by –among others – Latour, Giddens, Bourdieu, and Garfinkel (Reckwitz 2002). "A practice -a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc." is "a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz 2002: 249). Objects assume central roles, as they are essential to the reproduction of practices, carry cultural and symbolic meanings, and are manipulated to present new ones. Food is a prominent example, as Bourdieu's analysis of the shifting meaning and value of popular French foods shows. Normative expectations, varying

across different social groups, specify the attitude required to perform different practices. (Bourdieu 1984; Warde and Martens 2000).

Research shows that "the temporal rhythm of the day is characterized by practices which hold a 'fixed' position in the sequence of practices" requiring "the co-participation of other people, obligation and personal commitment" (Southerton 2006: 436). Giddens's (1984) recurrent practices and Bourdieu's (1984) habitus point to the centrality of repetition in the reproduction of social systems, but practices "inherently combine a capacity to account for both reproduction and innovation" (Warde 2005). New practices, once routinized, become habits, and have the potential, in the long term, to change consumption and production patterns (Southerton 2013).

#### Embeddedness and Local Food

Conceptually, embeddedness is defined as connections among people and between people and the places in which they live (Dale 2011; Giddens 1984; Granovetter 1985). The agrifood literature elaborates on the concept putting emphasis on the territorial dimension of embeddedness, highlighting "locally embedded, alternative food systems (...) set in opposition to the distantiated, socially disembedded food relations associated with global industrial agriculture" (Bowen 2011: 326). Locations become the starting points in the discussion about how to create conditions that can sustainably connect people, places, soil, and food.

I maintain that embeddedness is also the key to access the time aspects of the localization process. I mostly draw from Giddens's (1990; 1991; 1984) analysis of the disembedding/re-embedding dialectic he describes as one of the characteristic traits of modernity, because he specifically highlights time. Giddens insists that embedding

practices counteract the alienating effects of the commodification of space and time, reappropriating "disembedded social relations so as to pin them down to *local* conditions of *time* and space" (Giddens 1990: 79, emphasis mine). Disembedding is a long-term process that generates profit for those in positions of power: it favors *short-term* financial gains over *long-term* social and environmental sustainability. Embedding practices provide for the re-appropriation of time narratives and re-configuration and decommodification of time usage.

Bonanno and Cavalcanti underline that "in spatial and temporal terms, the local community was the central piece of social existence in the pre-modern era. At the beginning of the process that Giddens (1990) refers to as 'distantiation,' space and time were unified in the community. That is, the lives and social relations of the members of the 'community' were largely – if not exclusively – shaped by actors and events that were part of the community itself' (Bonanno and Cavalcanti 2011: 12). One of the central aspects of distantiation is that "(t)he division of time in agrarian society according to task gave way to work according to the clock" (Bergmann 1992: 101). Distantiation processes transformed time into a *scarce* commodity, by separating clock-time from psychological, social, and environmental time.

The financialization of the economy spurred by the neoliberal turn, i.e., "the tendency of financial markets to dominate and for financial institutions to dictate conditions" of production (Busch 2010: 337) is another crucial character of this global regime. "The process of disembedding social practices and – at least when following Giddens – also their reembedding, defines the specific nature of local-global relationships in heightened modernity" (Mol and Spaargaren 2006: 44).

The complex interplay of globalizing and localizing forces implies that embeddedness is not an inherent property of some practices or food systems, instead, "(f)ood products become embedded through a process of mobilization of values and meanings that construct a place as the 'local'" (Sonnino 2007: 7). De-territorialized examples of embedded networks have been explored. Higgins, Dibden, and Cocklin (2008) elaborate that embedded relations can span from very localized, face-to face environments, such as farmers markets, to proximate networks, to extended ones, such as Fair Trade or otherwise certified D.O.P./D.O.C. foods, sold globally yet still promoted as the product of embedded systems. Sassen (2017: 73) notices that it is not unlikely for an "immobile local activist [to gain] a sense of global connections to others around the world doing their type of activism". This was my experience as a Fair Trade organizer, and it relates to the way migrant communities maintain links with the homeland and create local connections with other migrants (Kloosterman and Rath 2001).

Individual and community engagement (in place and at a distance) with locally produced food is presented as an embedding mechanism that counteracts alienation, disconnection from community and environment, and feelings of powerlessness in contemporary societies (De Young and Princen 2012; Lyson 2004). The people connected through those networks need to keep enacting them over and over for them to work<sup>35</sup> (Callon 1998b): for example, immigrants create and rely on their community food businesses to maintain and nurture connectedness (Toomet, Silm, Saluveer, Tammaru, and Ahas 2012).

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Supermarkets try to exploit this idea: Kroger aired an advertisement (Nash FM 93.1, Michigan, spring/summer 2015) with a "customer" remarking that the cashiers smile at her and some even remember her name, making her feel at home. Wal-Mart and Meijer do the same thing with greeters.

Looking at embedding as a performance deemphasizes scale and distance; highlights the actions that actors take to embed and dis-embed relationships, production processes and food itself; and reduces the risk of fetishizing the local and purposefully ignoring the dis-embedding practices that local agents pursue to obtain commercial advantages. In the Welsh communities Murdoch et al. (2000) describe, embeddedness is expressed by the permanence of pre-industrial, marginalized production conditions that more or less efficiently adapt to modern markets, yet the system is hybrid because producers reach external markets to support economic growth.

Labeling and ranking food using 'local vs. global' and/or 'artisanal vs. industrial' as leading dichotomies is common, and analytically misleading with respect to embeddedness. Among supporters of local food, industrially *processed* food carries a stigma, yet we all clean, cook, pickle and preserve, i.e. *process*, food to make it edible. *Industrial* and *processed* come to signify the undesirable characteristics of contemporary food production, reified into powerful ghosts to be fought at all costs, but no food is intrinsically evil, and that is not the point. At the roots of the negative fetishization of industrial food are issues of alienation and lack of control over the food production chain (Katz 2006).

Marketing practices are adopted to create connections with the customers and counteract negative perceptions. Many brands have succeeded in making their products essential and beloved staples in United States kitchens (Levenstein 2003). Local food movements stress personal involvement and encourage direct connections between

producers and consumers. Creating embeddedness, and the perception of it, requires commitment through time.

Discourses on the meaning and value of food are normative and performative, intended to create the situation described (see: Callon 2006: 7). The experience of embeddedness is created by local food discourse and practices, and time plays a specific role in these performances. Marketplaces, CSA farms, slow food gatherings, restaurants, etc. are stages where the local food discourse is per-formed. Producing and consuming local food can be a lifestyle choice that shapes identities, and the activists' commitment to change the food system sprouts from their core values (White 2011). The elements of artifice in the rephrasing and polishing of practices and traditions showcase the identity-making aspects and the agency expressed through these endeavors.

Following Callon's (1998b) ideas of performativity, local food practices can be both instrumental and aspirational, and performances of embeddedness enact cultural, social, and marketing goals (Hinrichs 2000). As Southerton maintains, "the relationship between practices and performances is recursive: practices configure performances, and practices are reproduced and stabilized, adapted and innovated, through performances" (2013: 339).

### Time in Modern Times

Time can be framed as: a resource, a variable, an aspect of storytelling, the relationship connecting *present* with *past* and *future*, individual feelings of hurriedness, and more (Adam 2013; Munn 1992). I started noticing the time aspects of local food issues while doing fieldwork at the Detroit Eastern Market and with local food activists in Italy and in Michigan. In interviews and through the use of specific imageries (Giorda

2016a, 2016b), my informants spoke of elements pertaining to the time dimension, such as tradition, seasonality, heritage, spending time together and the importance of the time devoted to grow and to prepare food.

Marx first singles out the commodification of time as one of the crucial elements of the industrial revolution that gave birth to capitalism (Adam 2013; Bergmann 1992). The growth of the industrial production system, supported by the enlightenment epistemology, produced a deep change in the perception and representation of time, which moved from local and linked to the pace of food production to an abstract time externally determined by a central authority (Adam 2013).

Giddens maintains that "the commodification of time and its differentiation from further processes of the commodification of space hold the key to the deepest transformation of day to day social life that are brought about by the emergence of capitalism." (Giddens 1981: 131) Adam further elaborates that "the extent to which clock-time has been reified, internalized, and imposed" manifests "contemporary industrial social time as intimately tied to power " (Adam 2013: 120).

Clock-time - fixed and managed for production purposes- supplanted the taskoriented division of time that was prevalent in agrarian societies (Bergmann 1992). As
cities are the fulcra of industrialization and financialization processes (Molotch 1976),
and agricultural production, despite the intense industrialization, retains partially
autonomous rhythms, de-synchronization has become problematic, with rural areas
'lagging behind' in terms of financial and social development (Bonanno and Cavalcanti
2011). De-synchronization is a rising cause of inequality, with fastest systems or actors
systematically putting pressure on the slower ones and creating new financial, ecological

and social crises (Rosa 2017: 36). Ironically, the supposedly slower pace of rural life then becomes marketable for tourists seeking relief from the pressure of city life (Kaaristo and Järv 2012).

From the interiorized clock-time perspective the common saying that 'time is money' follows, as well as the idea that time is a scarce resource to which nevertheless everybody has equal access. In fact, one's ability to do things quickly depends heavily on the time-consuming labor of others (Sharma 2017). Time is also not money for the unemployed: The increased acceleration of most aspects of life in western societies generates inequality between those who can keep the pace and those who cannot (Wajcman and Dodd 2017).

Revolting against or even pretending to ignore the beat of the forced productive pace is –as Benjamin (1939) had noted- is an act of rebellion. Fink (2002) hilariously notices that the meatpacking plant she worked at started a total war against roaches only when the insects colonized the plant's clock that tracked the workers' time schedule. She also describes workers' slacking as resistance practices to disengage from the production pace. Time-based performances of resistance go from defiance or disruption of clock-time norms and expectations, to creating secluded time schedules, to actively reframing time in non-linear ways. For example, one of the meaningful changes that happened with the rise of workers' rights movements was the shift between the fight against the commodification of time to the fight for the right to manage one's productive time at work and to increase leisure time (Adam 2013).

Differences in pace become visible when care is involved, as this forces a desynchronization from the pace of productive working time. "Work, family and gender are significant factors in the constitution and perpetuation of temporal disparities and inequities in contemporary culture" (Parkins 2004). This is relevant in the realm of food activism, where the increased pressure to prepare healthy and nutritious meals from scratch clashes with the time constraint that heavily affects working women, and poor women especially.

In this light it is important to problematize the contraposition between slow and fast food (Hsu 2014). Born out of the protest against industrialized American food taking over Italian traditions, the Slow Food movement's international success generated a renewed interest in slow-living practices. While "slow living involves the conscious negotiation of the different temporalities which make up our everyday lives, deriving from a commitment to occupy time more attentively" (Parkins 2004), "slowness is not outside the temporal order" and the slow living imaginary treats "time as something [to which] we all have equal access" (Sharma 2017: 137), which is not the case.

# Timescapes of Local Food

Embedding practices meant to displace alienation and commodification and to reconnect with our means of sustenance make *local* food a product of resistance. When the inability to use time in the most productive way is seen as either a market or a personal failure, a frame change, based on deliberately moving away from a productionist perspective, allows for the creation of memories, experiences and knowledge that provides non-monetary enrichment, implies agency, and sustains embeddedness.

Adam (1998: 11) provides the *timescapes* frame to "stress the temporal features of living" and to resist the reification of clock-time. The *timescape* perspective "involves a quest to understand the dynamics of relationships, interdependencies, and embeddedness"

(Adam 2008: 4). It highlights the importance of processes and acknowledges "that we cannot embrace time (...) without embodiment in a specific and unique context" (Adam 2008: 2).

The *timescape* perspective considers elements such as time frame, temporality, timing, tempo, duration, sequence, and temporal modalities. By combining those elements, rhythms, cycles, and periods can be identified. If clock-time is intrinsically commodifying, food related practices that pull away from it to reassert other elements of the timescape and to re-center time around family, community, and environmental priorities can be framed as acts of resistance.

Time frame refers to boundaries within linear time measurements: days, years, epochs, etc. The counterpart to the industrialized time frame of continuous production and consumption is the still stubborn seasonality of agricultural production borne from the earth's movement.

Temporality refers to the irreversibility of experiential time. The natural proclivity to spoiling that food has is a constant challenge for the food industry and a source of risk that safety regulatory institutions try to prevent. Food freshness is central to consumers' demands and the fact that some industrial foods seem not to decay (Twinkies, anyone?) is generally a source of concern. A number of movements have grown to reclaim food – reframing the temporality of decay- and make it usable at no cost (Katz 2006).

Temporalities are also involved is the ritual consumption of certain foods, as well as abstinence from consumption, in relationship to certain events. Here the tension lies between the commercialization of holidays and the invasion of themed foods, and the painstaking recreation of traditions requiring time-consuming performances.

Duration has specific links with the communal and historic past, when the food currently on the table is a portal to a long sequence of meals that reconnect generations and mark the timeframe of a community.

*Timing* pertains to two features: synchronization/de-synchronization, and right/wrong times. The issue of right and wrong time points to the normativity of many food related practices and highlights how these norms are shaped and changed by both traditions and the influence of the food industry (Abrahamsson 2014).

Synchronization is an essential character of food-related practices (Southerton 2006; Southerton 2013): eating with or providing food for others, and all agricultural tasks require scheduling and prioritizing. The forced synchronization of industrial time, only accounting for the needs of production, shows its alienating powers in how it disrupts the lives of those who are subject to it, and highlights the privilege of those who can impose their timing onto others. Small farmers and agricultural workers cannot take time off during the growing season. The poor relying on soup kitchens need to be there when the line is open. Flexible schedules reduce the ability to make healthy food choices (Dixon, Woodman, Strazdins, Banwell, Broom, and Burgess 2014). De-synchronization burdens women, who are more likely to flex their schedule taking care of family member's needs (Southerton 2006; Southerton 2013), and individuals and communities with limited power (Jackson 2017; Rosa 2017). In the ideal embedded system, synchronization appears like a flow: The archetypical –and stereotyped – peasant community gathers for the agricultural tasks of the time, stops for the shared meals, and celebrates at the end of the harvest season.

*Tempo* refers to pace, rate of change, speed, and intensity, it is the main frame of analysis for 'acceleration society' theories, and connects to the slow food/fast food dichotomy when slowing down is an act of deliberate resistance against clock-time.

Temporal Modalities (past, present, future) provide an orientation to understand motivations and socio-cultural backgrounds. Food choices might be grounded in the past, as in following a tradition; in the present, as in grabbing a snack while waiting in line; in the future, as in following a diet to support health. More importantly, these modalities can be inflected individually or collectively. I argue that a shift from individual to collective perspectives is essential to the embedding of food.

## Time Aspects in Embeddedness Practices

Food embedding practices insist on different elements of the timescapes' frame. Food traditions (historical, community-based, or familial) present the past as a collective repository of knowledge and memories: both duration and modalities are referenced.

Traditional recipes, passed down through generations, carry the flavors of a bygone era and provide a marketing tool to food artisans (see chapter one). Traditional foods signify the connection with a romanticized past, when authentic flavors and meaningful connections between people and the land flourished (Kaaristo and Järv 2012). At the market, product is presented as the latest installment of a long history and visual cues may be used to manifest duration, so the Scottish shortbread cookies stand is decked with a tartan, and the Indian food artisan sells chutney donning traditional clothes. When family traditions are called upon, the reference is to the time spent with a relative who lovingly taught how to prepare a dish. Cooking revives the time spent with somebody

who cared, and sets the preparation of food and the consumption of the meal in a long history of meals (chapter one).

Performances meant to de-commodify, or at least soften the grip of clock-time create non-commercial venues for the growth, preparation and consumption of food and embed commercial exchanges into cultural and social relationships. The tension between embeddedness and marketness (Hinrichs 2000), *calculativeness* and *disinterestedness* (Callon 1998), underscores that they are interconnected and dependent on framing, and that the same agent switches between them according to the circumstances (Callon 1998: 14). Refusing to give a monetary value to time, allocating it according to the needs of the community or the environment, insistence on quality and care, and the conscious sharing of time to create direct connections between producers and consumers, are some of the options I encountered (See chapter one and chapter two. Also: (Giorda 2016).

Local food is a source of living for many artisanal producers who, while invested in the commercial value of their production, aim not at maximizing productivity but insist on quality. The time devoted to the preparation increases the quality of the product and makes it interesting, and possibly worth a premium price (David 2003). The temporalities involved in the preparations are highlighted to express social and commercial values (see chapter one). The Genuino Clandestino network in Italy seeks to shift the time frame to seasonality and to regain control of time by centering the environmental cycles and desynchronizing farming from industrial production patterns, while retaining commercial capabilities within their communities (Potito and Borghesi 2015). Do It Yourself groups stress how reclaiming control over food production give them the ability to manage time according to different rhythms and increase resilience (Kaplan and Blume 2011).

Time and care are explicit elements of Slow Food's philosophy. Born as a protest against *fast* food, the slow food movement threads challenging paths between defending traditional production methods, pushing the creation of niche markets, educating people to appreciate complex flavors, and generally advocating for devoting time to prepare and consume food (Leitch 2003; Miele and Murdoch 2002). Slow practices insist on multiple layers of the timescape frame showing the embedding powers of changing the ways we perceive and evaluate time.

First and most evident is the insistence on tempo, where fast stands for bland, industrial and standardized fare to be eaten in a hurry. Slow implies relaxation and unhurriedness induced by the consumption of communal meals. It also refers to the time needed to produce quality food, which, according to this frame, cannot be prepared and consumed quickly (Petrini 2003).

Many of my contacts pointed out the importance of spending time together as a community linked by food: Time spent growing, cooking, and sharing food helps cement existing connections, fosters the creation of new ones, and creates spaces to create food-based community narratives. Public food markets are still preferred sites for social interaction in many countries (de La Pradelle 2006), and the bar is the place for friendly interactions (Laurier, Whyte, and Buckner 2001). Old school anthropologists underlined how food practices that mark special times and the time spent together consuming meals are central social practices in many cultures (Munn 1992).

# Spending Time with Food

Denying a 'shared time' has been presented as a way to alienate individuals and communities, (Bastian 2014) and "to devalue and negate people's lived and experienced

re/productive, non-profit-generating time is a political act of oppression" (Adam 2002: 24). Synchronization and the creation of ritual times can be supportive of community wellbeing (Bastian 2014), or can be used as forms of oppression (Foucault 2012).

Spending time with food can take many different forms, going from mild involvement to deep commitment. These practices do not count as participating in a food movement but they imply agency and may produce diffuse social change. "Several continua can be found within the concept of agency. These include individual/social group; levels or degrees of counterhegemony (...), which also implies a continuum of resistance; and degrees of spontaneity, from totally spontaneous to highly organized" Friedland (2008: 46). Taking time to grow, prepare, cook, serve and eat food and not devoting said time to paid, normatively timed income producing activities are acts of resistance. The commitment and the agency of the actors and the connections between people and food make food embedding practices meaningful (Bastian 2014). These practices require explicit efforts to frame time differently, changing tempo, or creating synchronizing and de-synchronizing patterns that challenge the commodifying powers of clock-time.

According to Adam (1998: 97), "the economy of everyday life holds the secret to sustainable development". Everyday practices might appear marginal, but they also channel resistance and cement change. Semi-homemade dinners prepared with the health and well-being of the family in mind are an example of daily embedding practices, as much as growing basil in a can when no community garden is in sight. Shopping with food stamps and trying to make the most out of it requires knowledge and commitment

(Rose 2007). A family gathering at a McDonalds to share a ritual meal<sup>36</sup> counts as a meticulously planned one-hundred-miles-ingredients dinner, and talking about food –as Italians do while eating, after eating, and before eating again – embeds food in the family culture.

Cooking and preparing meals for a family is a grueling task that has been traditionally a part of a female caring role. Women were (and still are) bound to the kitchen. As allegedly unskilled, unappreciated work, cooking is dreaded (Szabo 2011). This exemplifies how the ability to manage one's time frequently depends on somebody else's working time not being rewarded or even recognized (Jackson 2017; Sharma 2017). Cooking can also be perceived and performed as something connecting families to the local community, to the seasons, to the farmers that provided the food. It can evoke "landscapes of childhood and the 'past', images of fertile fields and storehouses of fresh, seasonal produce, and memories of farmhouse kitchens with their rhythms of 'nurturing' activity" (Duruz 2001: 26).

Eating highlights the connection between embeddedness and time in several ways. First, we *are* what we eat, literally. Our diets affect us deeply, and devoting more time and attention to the food we eat, at slow pace, can be conductive to better health (Fiese and Schwartz 2008). Talking about food makes the experience denser by bringing back memories, forging relationships and creating traditions. It is a central part of entertaining with food and also central to reminiscing and recreating familiar sensations (Ferguson 2014). Food embodies connection by being a material and symbolic carrier of the time that goes from farm to fork. The hurried, standardized time of industrial production can carry through the whole process, or it can be blocked and reframed at different moments.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Kelly Moore – From Too Little to Too Much – work in progress.

Producers and cooks perform embeddedness by recreating the food they *inherited*, and when eaters appreciate and eat the food, they partake in the tradition too. The embeddedness factor grows out of the time spent producing the food and out of the lineage that the food is meant to carry and perpetuate (Miele and Murdoch 2002). Consuming that food becomes a way the eater becomes part of embedded connections that spans places and times.

#### Conclusion: Back to the Pot

The discourse about local food is somewhat fraught by a mix of good intentions and cooptation. Stressing provenance and ideas of the intrinsic quality of the local makes cooptation and commodification easy. Looking at performances of embeddedness that emphasize time highlights agency and care and shows that time is significant and a significantly underestimated aspect of local food narratives. This paper highlights practices that support food-embedding performances, based on different elements of the food timescape, such as timing, duration, time framing, and temporalities. Embedding practices bring time and space together to create places and traditions.

Ambiguity is also inevitable: embeddedness is performed to support marketness: sellers/growers/artisans play their parts and are aware of the discourse surrounding them. Customers follow their role, asking questions and 'supporting' the businesses. Being part of a performance does not strip those actors of their agency: on the contrary, they are shifting their attention from clock-time to individual and community time frames, with some facets of those practices termed according to clock-time, others according to different temporalities.

My insistence on the time aspects of these practices is motivated by the need to give marginal players in this field some level of recognition, and to show that a more or less conscious de-commodification of the time of food production and consumption is a subtle but widespread form of resistance against clock-time. I highlight two main time-based ways in which actors in the local food movement —and many who would not consider themselves part of it- engage with food from a time perspective. The first is the assertion of collective temporalities: using the present consumption or preparation of food as a way to connect with a communal past. The second is synchronization: spending time with food, and with people who are engaging with food, in meaningful and conscious ways. Both of them are forms of sustaining and creating embeddedness, and make specific sense in the context of modernity—the living conditions of contemporary industrial countries- but are not strictly limited to them. I suggest that growing, procuring, cooking, eating and even reminiscing are different ways in which time can be spent with and around food to create and maintain meaningful bonds.

So: how does food in my pot become local and embedded? Tradition is one answer: What comes out of the pot belongs to my cultural heritage as an expression of my culture; strengthens my connection with my ancestral roots; creates material and cultural exchanges with guests at my table<sup>37</sup>. As I remember and reconnect with the people who taught me to cook a certain dish, or explained a technique, or shared a meal I recreate at home, I re-embed myself in that lineage, and I pass it on when teaching it to others. Time and care spent gathering or cultivating ingredients count too. As with many immigrants, I grow culturally appropriate food in my backyard while searching for

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> See the work of Michael Twitty on the ancestral roots of black southern food. <a href="https://afroculinaria.com">https://afroculinaria.com</a> Accessed Jan. 2017.

imported goods from my home country. The bulk of the food we use and eat is rarely produced *in loco*, and this is —to a point- irrelevant: the time spent creating the meal and consuming it, and the conscious and signifying practices that surround the meal are relevant factors that qualify the food *I* prepare as local to *my* kitchen and embedded in the networks through which I share my food.

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## **CONCLUSION**

Dissertation work is frequently the result of long held passions and unresolved problems. This work is no exception. My upbringings were shaped by the utopian project of Olivetti's Movimento di Comunità (Olivetti 2013; Olivetti 2014), of which my father was an early member. In the 1950s, Olivetti sponsored the Center for Sociological Research, where Italian sociologists Gallino and Ferrarotti – among others – exchanged thoughts with Olivetti to imagine and implement a new kind of connection between the factory, the local community, and the surrounding environment (Kargon and Molella 2008). They "worked on two fronts: to improve work organization by promoting workers participation and to plan social and cultural services for the development of the community" (Vicari Haddock 1997: 133). It is worth noting, for the purpose of this dissertation, that the Olivetti employees, blue and white collars alike, were given time, during the regular working hours, to access the factory libraries, and to walk in the gardens surrounding the facilities. Olivetti believed that working places ought to be functional and aesthetically pleasant, with access to green spaces and cultural resources, and that giving workers time to enjoy these resources was beneficial for the workers, the company, and the community in which both were embedded (Pampaloni 1980).

Olivetti's utopian experiment was meant to prove that industrial development did not need to disrupt the life of a community; that it was not necessary to apply disembedding forces to gain social and economic development. Alas, the experiment did not survive the death of the principal investigator. Yet a legacy remains in those who were affected, and I ended up recognizing the lasting effects of those ideas in my own scholarly work.

My interest in the dialectic drama of embedding and disembedding (as per Polanyi and Giddens) is framed by my experience of growing up in an embedded industrial community. It also plays to my own history of dislocation, it is a recurrent theme in the African American diaspora, and it is deeply linked with the discourse around the value of local food as expressed by the groups I worked with through the years. The pull between embedding and disembedding is not an abstract concept in my experience: it manifests in the arduous work required to root a family in a foreign land and find the local groups who care *here* and *now* for the things for which *I* cared, *then* and *there*. Finding them is just the first step in a long-term process, because the pull between disembedding and reembedding forces is —in my experience- never equal, and establishing and maintaining connections is an ongoing challenge.

Food also has always been important to me. I learned to cook as a kid, and I have exploited the power of food to bring people together since my high school years. Food was my central educational tool in my Fair Trade years in Italy, and it became again the means by which I was able to connect with people in Detroit. Given the differences between environments, history, and culture, the discourses of food activists in my networks are remarkably similar. It is so despite the diffidence these groups have for the other country: Italian alternative, anti-capitalist activists despise the United States with fervor, and many African American activists I met tend to see Europeans as "the colonizers". Yet, their views on the problems with the food system and the solution to these problems, and, even more importantly, the political ideals and the policies they pursue are strikingly similar.

I appreciate Bourdieu saying that sociology is best used in martial art fashion<sup>38</sup>, when it creates tools for groups and individuals to negotiate and re-negotiate their positions within a society. It is a stance that fits well with my longstanding activism. Scholarly works also feed ideas and interpretive schemes into public knowledge. Giddens' idea of reflexivity (1991; 1984) and Habermas' notions of public sphere and discourse (Habermas 2010) are commonly referred to when analyzing the relationship between scholarly discourse and social change. Gramsci advocated for intellectuals to provide educational support in creating class consciousness and against cultural hegemony (Gramsci and Buttigieg 1992), and more recently bell hooks insisted on the moral responsibility scholars have to engage in and to commit to promoting social change (hooks 2000). Because of the ways in which the work Italian sociologists did for Olivetti impacted my early life and due to my longstanding activism, I approach sociology as a discipline that lays the groundwork for social change.

My research revolves around the role food has in shaping activism and identities, sustaining life (both biologically and socially), and bringing about change. We use food to foster connections with other people, and thinking through food automatically highlights our relationship with the built and natural environments: the way we alter them to produce our food, how food production can improve or degrade social and environmental relationships, and how changes in the natural and built environments affect our ability to afford and access nutritionally and culturally adequate foods.

I said in the introduction that visual tools allowed for an important change in my analytical perspective. The photos I took, showing change happening 'under my eyes', and even more the comparison with older photographic material, helped me move from a

<sup>38</sup> https://vimeo.com/92709274

conventional political economy analysis of local food activism and marketing practices (Giorda 2016) to a more nuanced understanding of the different kinds of practices that hint at the presence of a compromise between the domestic and the market conventions, and allow vendors to communicate what they perceive as special about their work and the market where they sell their fare. I found that focusing on time aspects makes marginal performances more relevant and allows the researcher to look for agency in unexpected contexts.

The research behind this dissertation is based on qualitative methods and showcases two analyses of one case study that focus on ordinary practices such as growing, producing, selling, and promoting food in the context of Eastern market in Detorit. It was not backed by a grant and it was not part of some faculty member's research project. As the hegemony of the neoliberal cultural and economic perspectives keeps rising (Cerny 2008), public funding for research and education shrinks. Low cost, community based research has, along with the many limitations than come from limited funding, the great advantage of leaving the researcher freer to move and be present without an externally mandated time schedule. It provides a low impact and low cost opening to scholarly independence.

The forms of resistance and adaptation to the neoliberal and capitalist hegemonic paradigms that I described in this research are not isolated or novel phenomena: they are examples of a diffused resistance to the dehumanizing powers of the hegemonic zeitgeist, akin to those described by, for example, the work of Wright and Middendorf about the way producers, consumers, and activists challenge the contemporary food production and distribution system (2007) and the research of Wajcman and Dodd (2017) on the

problems that afflict the "acceleration society". Forms of passive resistance have been recorded among slaves, in concentration camps, among factory workers and among all kinds of oppressed populations (Scott 1977). A more active form of resistance I encountered during my research is, for example, the work of the Detroit urban farming community, especially in those groups, like DBFCSN<sup>39</sup> and Feedom Freedom<sup>40</sup> that emphasize the anti-racist and decolonizing aspect of their work. The farms described by Alkon (2007) and Meyers (2016) in California follow similar principles and pursue similar goals.

At Eastern Market resistance is explicitly visible in the anti-corporate banners and statements of the politically engaged Detroit urban farmers: Brother Nature selling non-GMO, 'biodiverse' salad mixes; and the communally managed Keep Growing Detroit's stand. Gregg Willerer, aka Brother Nature, is an activist farmer, whose work has been featured in several publications<sup>41</sup> and a documentary (MacInnis 2011). He is vocal in his anti-capitalist stance, and uses the farm he owns and manages with his wife as a demonstrative site to showcase different DIY practices. Keep Growing Detroit, previously part of the Greening of Detroit, is one of the leading organizations in the Detroit urban farming movement, whose goal is foster food sovereignty in the city<sup>42</sup>.

Less explicit, but equally important, is the defiance of the farmers who silently challenge the management's marketing suggestions and refuse to engage with the dominant narratives at the Market. The practices of boutique food producers, as elaborated in chapter one, are based on a compromise and stand on a more ambiguous

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> d-townfarm.com, accessed Jan. 2017.

<sup>40</sup> https://www.facebook.com/FeedomFreedom

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Grist, Yes!, Vice, and the local press are among the many that covered their work.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> http://detroitagriculture.net/about/

terrain. On the one hand they base their presentations of their businesses on noncommercial values, on the other they exploit the same values for commercial purposes.

In identifying agency and resistance we also need to keep into consideration that the field I worked in is a market, the stereotypical commercial venue, in the United States, the stereotypical neoliberal country. The businesses I describe are small—or at best medium—family enterprises striving to survive in a challenging environment: even accounting for all the compromises they might make, the existence of most of them is by itself a tale of resistance and resilience.

In the following pages I provide a description of the contributions of each article, elaborate on how the themes of the articles and the theories I used can be weaved together, and give suggestions for further research.

### Convergences and intersections

Each article in this dissertation gives a specific contribution to the agrifood studies field. Chapter one makes use of Boltanski and Thévenot's definition of compromise to understand how a community of vendors performs, communicate and commercially exploits ideas of quality and authenticity. Following Hinrichs and Callon, it highlights the tensions between marketness and embeddedness, frames it through convention theory, and provides empirical evidence on how that tension is encompassed and challenged by the reputation and the feelings of community that Eastern Market embodies. Reputation and community are presented and represented as the common good that roots and supports the ongoing compromise between the domestic and the market worlds of values.

Chapter two expands the scope of the analysis to the entire Market, and investigates how the interactions between the different groups of vendors, the management, the

neighboring businesses, and the physical structures – on the background of the city of Detroit and its suburbs - collide, compete and cooperate in creating the sense of place that makes Eastern Market special. Its specifically contributes to the literature by providing visual data to show the recursive processes of place making (Gieryn 2000; Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen 2000) and the role food narratives play in these processes.

Chapter three is the result of a thorough application of ground theory, as it stemmed from questions that were not in focus at the beginning of this research, and were spurred by the fieldwork on which the first two chapters/papers are based. In it I call for a heightened attention to time aspects in the research and characterization of agrifood resistance practices, going beyond the now dated contraposition between slow and fast foods, and provide an initial framework, based on Adam's *timescapes*, to investigate the way different time frames create embedding conditions and provide means to decommodify food. This paper also crucially shifts the attention to the central role eaters and consumers' practices have in embedding processes involving food, providing a framework to fill what has been called out as a significant void in alternative agrifood research (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012).

When food is a significant part of any kind of landscape, it becomes a powerful actor that contributes to shaping the character of the place, because of the cultural values it embodies and the physicality of the consumption. In many ways, consuming food means to also eat the places where it comes from, and I maintain that that these places do not need be actual locations: they could be individual or collective memories, or a different conceptual dimension of the time/space continuum, which brings in the main theme of

this dissertation: the relationship between embeddedness, food, and time-based practices of resistance.

Reclaiming access, decisional power, and connections to our food sources by supporting the localization of agricultural practices and shifting provisioning abilities away from the grip of corporations is not something that can happen overnight, if ever. Moreover, the dualism that identifies all corporations and occasionally, in the words of some activists, all businesses as sold to the neoliberal capitalistic ideology, and all small non conventional food production and provisioning outlets as agents of positive and progressively minded change is not tenable (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012). The middle way, of which the practices at Eastern Market are an example, is the place where practices of resistance are tried and challenged.

Chapter one and two highlight that marginal practices of resistance are constantly at risk of being coopted and commodified, but this is not a necessary outcome as, at the same time, other de-commodifying, embedding practices might appear. On the one hand, figures of compromise show that non-market-based sets of value hold the power to partially modify commercial and production practices. On the other hand, while it is true that certain actors have better ability to define what values and characters a *place* stands for, their action are both constrained and supported by marginal and resistant actors. In the cases I presented, marginal and occasionally defiant actors provide the foundations for the actions of the more aggressive players, and I hope that, as this research is released back to Eastern Market, it might create more awareness of, and appreciation for, the role of said actors.

In chapter three I suggest a pivot to search for resistance from a different angle. By looking at marginal practices of resistance I aim at enlarging the focus that a large part of rural and agrifood sociology studies put on from food producers and food production practices (an area of studies of which the first two chapters are clearly part of) to a wider set of actors. Following Goodmand, DuPuis and Goodman's (2012) suggestion, the time framing brings back the role of consumers, eaters, and household providers as actors in the fight over food.

The goal is to search for embedding practices that are not constrained and limited by the marketness-embeddedness dialectic. Such practices provide individuals, families, and communities with relief from the pressure the neoliberal capitalist modes of production are imposing, and create spaces and times where agency can be enacted, and food can be grown, cooked, canned and eaten that is at least partially disentangled from commodification chains. The practices I highlight in chapter three are mostly drawn from the literature, but I concentrate my analysis on the different time frames they exemplify to show the presence of agency and the resistance potential of these practices.

I maintain that paying attention to meso and micro-level practices is important on two levels. On the one (theoretical) level, micro and meso practices are the building blocks of social reproduction (Giddens 2013). They are the locus of reproduction of the social, and the actors carrying them on consciously and unconsciously incubate potential social changes. These changes, in turn, have the potential to grow into challenges for current social arrangements. For example, in the food sector, the coalition building work of the Immokalee workers shows the power of apparently small changes, and the growth

of the activists' agency from marginal and almost invisible to powerful and life-changing (Holt-Gimenez and Amin 2011).

On the other (experiential) level, daily practices of resistance are the locus of actual engagement, where change can be experimented and reproduced for the benefits of the community one lives in and works with. These practices are the main tools of the organic intellectuals of Gramscian mold, and help counteract the reification and fetishization of social institutions. By pushing and pulling away at the hegemonic values superimposed on individuals and communities by governments and institutions, marginal actors are challenging the power of money, the commodification of time, and the fetishization of absolute private property rights<sup>43</sup>.

Polanyi (2001) first underlined that the commodification of food – formerly the product of the land and community labor – was one of the most important and deleterious aspects of the disembedding processes that allowed the rise of modern production systems. The fight over food – aimed at re-appropriating the means of food production – requires us to "reintegrate the multiple dimensions of our social selves over the rational calculation typified by the conventional agrifood system, which reduces us to economic actors and strips us of other social roles" (Wright and Middendorf 2008: 278).

The chapters on the Eastern Market highlight the role of small actors and how their interaction with larger ones supports the attribution of authenticity and the creation of sense of place, and both papers argue that non hegemonic values and marginal performances are essential to provide depth and meaning to the interactions at the Market and to root it —to embed it—into the social history of Detroit and South East Michigan at large.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> YES! Magazine Issue #65 - Spring 2013

The compromise between the market world and the domestic world that I highlighted in chapter one showcases the complex interplay between modernity and tradition, and the limits and un-completeness of the modernity project itself (see: Giddens 1990; Latour 2012). The commercialization of authenticity, as the qualifying and value-creating feature of local artisanal products can be easily presented as a case of co-optation of values and of commodification and denaturation of artisanal production geared towards the needs of the upper classes (see for example: Overton and Murray 2013).

Goodman et al. (2012) highlight the ambiguities and the large range of goals and methods of contemporary alternative food movements. In my research I found that some activists, wary of the corporate cooptation of organic and fair-trade standards, deem marketing tools as intrinsically evil. Others recognize the need to properly pay for the sustenance of the producers, while developing community ties and considering the needs of all consumers, not only the affluent ones<sup>44</sup>. These statements stem from the understandable fear that in dealings that involve actors with overwhelming power differential the most powerful players get all the advantages, and agency and resistance get washed down (see Maye and Kirwan 2010: for a detailed analysis of these themes).

Goodman et al. (2012: 244) also wonder if "marketization can be redirected to *turn*, or perhaps *return*, ethics and morality into more transformative processes and provide spaces of social transformation". To this, the papers in this dissertation provide both support and challenges, by showcasing the power and meaningful consequences of embedding and de-commodifying practices carried by smaller actors, and the risks involved in ignoring or further marginalizing them.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Giorda, Erica: Land and Liberty. Marginal producers, political activists, performers of alternative realities working on the re-localization of the food system. Under revision.

Specifically, the importance of compromise resides in the recognition that there are several sets of values governing our actions (as consumers, producers, activists and/or researchers), and that the allegedly overarching powers of market-based ideologies can be bent or influenced by those values. Hinrichs (2000) and Callon (1998) pointed out the interplay between market oriented and community or family oriented behaviors in the marketplace. Chapter one adds to their findings by looking at the attribution of values through the convention theory lens, making it possible to analyze the performances of the actors at the Market with a nuanced understanding of the places where they come from, and the way they combine their passion for food and their heritage with the need to make a living and thrive commercially. The compromise that emerges, binding together somewhat contradictory sets of value in pursuit of a locally defined *common good*, is a powerful example of agency: "the ability of humans to act purposively, of their own volition, and to some extent independently of the constraining aspects of structure" (Wright and Middendorf 2008: 15).

The power of marginal practices of resistance also comes to the fore in the analysis of places, where practices that present food as belonging to Eastern Market help in creating a sense of place that recursively reinforces the idea of the Market as a special locality, where special food is made available to the public. Two aspects are worth remarking. First, despite the obvious power differential between actors involved in the place making endeavors, the Market remains a public place where all actors can play important roles. Customers, vendors and friends of Eastern Market reacted loudly to the renovation efforts, through Internet forums, comments left at the Market, and by contacting the management directly. The pushback was mostly directed against the

perception that the renovation was making the Market "too pretty" and against the risk of losing its characteristic grittiness.

While I found the management's comment on this somewhat dismissive (Sutherland 2012), the management also made a point of maintaining a wide range of price levels at Eastern Market and strongly supported and implemented the "Double Up Food Bucks" initiative to provide access and incentives for lower income customers. The analysis I provided in chapter two underlines that marginal actors play important roles in keeping the Market true to its 'soul' and in counteracting commodifying forces. At the same time, it is evident that the recursive processes allow some actors the ability to create narratives and filter information to influence the process. This research provides a warning to keep the needs of Detroit citizens and the history of the city front and center during the next phases of the renovation.

The research at Eastern Market made me aware that time aspects play a central role in the creation and re-production of places and in the definition of agency, the different ways time can be used to frame food production, and how it is used to valorize and recreate places. The individual counterpart of these community and producers based practices is described in chapter three, where the focus shifts to daily practices of consumption and production of food for personal, communal and family use. These are, by large, the same practices that agrifood researchers claim activists and producers use in their de-commodifying, anti-capitalist, embedding work (Bonanno, Kawamura, Baker, Shuksmith, and Jussaume 2010; Bonanno and Cavalcanti 2011; Hinrichs and Lyson 2007). Therefore, I argue, non-producers practices ought to have similar decommodifying, embedding and potentially also anti-capitalist potential. Since these

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<sup>45</sup> http://www.doubleupfoodbucks.org, accessed June 2017.

actors do not (need not to) claim specific links to the land, I identify their use of time as the relevant characteristic to use in analyzing their actions and give them a role within the analysis of larger resistance trends in the agrifood sector. As a theoretical paper, it does not provide empirical data or specific methodologies to evaluate the impact of the practices it describes, but it provides a framework to look further into already collected data from a different angle and could provide a fruitful base for further empirical research.

# Suggestions for further developments

A good research projects adopts, adapts, and challenges current theoretical frameworks to highlight new ways to apply them that provide better understanding of the social practices we study. It must also provide questions and ideas for further challenges, applications and adaptations. The following pages provide questions and ideas for future research.

In the area of food and agricultural studies, one of the known weaknesses of both the embeddedness and the convention theory literature is their limited grasp of the power dynamics highlighted by the political economy literature. Maye and Kirwain (2010: 4), following a discussion already opened by DuPuis and Goodman (2005), argue that most activists, many practitioners, and some researchers evaluate the impact and scope of localization practices and alternative food networks with an uncritical approach that neglects "the standard sociological analytical categories of power, class, inequality and social justice". Furthermore they argue that "more effort is needed to understand consumer involvement with [Alternative Food Networks], moving beyond attitudinal assessments to capture, for example, the role of embodied practices, the influence of taste and aesthetics, the social relations and interactions between consumers involved in AFNs

and so on" (Maye and Kirwan 2010: 9). Focusing on the time aspects of food embedding practices is one possible way to address this concern.

Even if Boltanski and Thevenot do not specifically look at temporal aspects, it is easy to infer that each of the worlds they describe – as well as the 'ecological world' introduced later by Murdoch et al. (Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000; see also: Thévenot 2001) – imply different ways to frame time. For example, if the industrial and market world, focused on productivist approaches are undoubtedly governed by clock-time, the domestic world values duration (as in the connections with traditions and the collective past), and the civic world, with its emphasis on collective persons, puts a strong emphasis on synchronization and collective time modalities. Research needs to be done to understand if and how –given the hegemonic role of clock-time – other time modalities play a role in shaping power dynamics. This kind of research could be specifically useful in analyzing third sector, b-corporations and different kind of non-profit organizations in the agrifood sector to individuate if and how the time practice they implement reflect their ethical commitments.

I highlighted how time-focused practices support embeddedness, but I left power issues mostly out of the discussion. Several authors (Winter, Born and Purcell, Sonnino, Sassatelli, etc.) have explored the ambiguous politics of embedding and re-embedding practices, but the time conflicts of said practices have not been explored. I argued that if devoting time to craft artisanal food products is a way to embed food locally even when the ingredients are not local at all (see spices, coffee, and such), consumers' practices that are similarly devoted to transform disembedded ingredients into a traditional meal must have the same embedding powers. I also argued that these practices are forms of

resistance against the commodifying power of clock time, even when the actors are not consciously involved some social movement.

Classic sociological theory shows that individuals are embedded in different and conflicting environments and institutions (work, community, family, non-profit organizations). These networks and institutions exert competing pressures on one's time and different groups of people (and hybrid objects) wrestle to capture larger shares of the individual's time and attention. Southerton's work (2003; 2006; 2013) specifically highlights how women are frequently the ones who have to adapt the use of their time to these pressures, and how these shape their relationship to food. In these cases embeddedness actually reinforces certain power structures.

Other forms of embedding or re-embedding are intended as acts of resistance, with specific de-commodifying goals, such as the work done in Italy by the Genuino Clandestino network (Potito and Borghesi 2015), of which several of the food producers I worked with in Italy have become members. *Chapters one and two* show that not congruent forces, and different actors concurrently implementing their own agendas shape the physical and cultural landscapes and the timescape of Eastern Market.

Loyalty and regard – manifestations of embeddedness – of vendors, customers, management, and local associations allow for the creation of compromises and the continuous survival and even success of the Market. The public-private partnership that supports the current revival brings in a deeper conflict. The Market has to turn in enough money to be financially sustainable and so that public and private grants they receive can be specifically geared towards community development projects and away from marketing and promotion (Carmody 2014). To accomplish this Eastern Market needs to

function as a commercial enterprise, and as such it has to remain anchored in productionist-focused clock-time. In this scenario time and space for vendors who lag behind are limited, unless they show willingness to upgrade their practices.

The markets of ancient Greece, the Agoras, were already managed public places, planned as such by cities. Yet the scope of the Agora was much larger than it being just a market: it was what today would be defined a mixed-use space, where citizens assembled for social and religious functions, to trade, to barter, and to banter, and went to court for hearings. It was the political center of the Greek (and later Roman) cities, and it is deemed to be the birth place of democracy (Donati 2015). The commercial functions of the Agora were essential to the city's life, and yet they were not by any means the predominant use of the place. Contemporary public and farmers' markets in the United States started as essential provisioning outlets, and many of them have evolved into providing more of an entertainment function (Tangires 2008). The underlining of the discourse about getting to know your farmers and creating community ties is that the vendors need the consumer attention more than ever, at a time when they are not only competing with other farmers down the isle, but with the much more powerful corporate food distribution chains. These elements force vendors to try and entertain or connect to their customers (their public) in order to maintain their business, and exacerbate the tensions between marketness and embeddedness analyzed by the literature.

The researchers I quoted throughout this dissertation (Alkon, Hinrichs, Callon, Winter, Sonnino, Steinmets, among many others) highlighted the differences in goals and perspectives between the various actors at farmers markets: some people are there to make money; others are enjoying leisure time; others are working on creating

longstanding connections. The differences in the way time is used and perceived by customers, vendors, and market managers have not been explored. Are the actors involved aware of these constraints and differences? How do they cope, and what power relations do these tensions create and reproduce? Furthermore, how can we identify ways to distinguish between hybrid arrangements that are true forms of compromise, when the actors involved share similar if not equal powers and are equally involved and benefitting from the maintenance of the compromise, and arrangements based on cooptation and forced agreements?

Another important point, that I highlighted briefly in the third paper and is ripe for further investigation relates to the time needs of low-income individuals and communities. Research on the allocation of time shows that organizational and social temporalities are a relevant source of disparities between the powerful and the poor in urban areas (Wajcman and Dodd 2017), as well as a deep reason of divide between cities and the countryside. One's ability to *manage* one's time –uncritically presented by much popular literature as dependent on the individual<sup>46</sup> - is instead highly dependent on power and money relationships. Being able to decide what's urgent and how to prioritize tasks implies some level of privilege, and the ability to delegate tasks and focus on one's success implies the presence of other people who will take care of those 'less important' activities (Jackson 2017). This power differential applies at larger scale in the relationship between cities and countryside: the divide Molotch (1976) outlined in the 1970s is still growing, with rural areas *lagging behind* in all kind of sectors (Rosa 2003). At the same time, the leisurely pace of country life and old time practices is fetishized

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> See, for example books such as 'The seven habits of highly effective people' by S.R. Covey.

and exploited by tourists seeking refuge from the stress of their high paced lives (Jalas 2006; Kaaristo and Järv 2012).

It is also clear that working people relying on food stamps require exceptional time management skills to feed their families, which are further exacerbated if they try to provide food that is healthy and palatable (Rose 2007). Cooperatives, self-aid societies, community gardens, and time banks are some of the solutions low income groups have implemented historically to cope with time and food scarcity, by tapping into – and organizing around – the time availability of elders, youth, and unemployed individuals.

From the research perspective, these are all significant areas to interrogate the use and misuse of different time aspects in projects that are explicitly geared toward resisting neoliberal and capitalistic oppression. From a practitioner-activist perspective this is an untapped field for IT technologies: Sassen (Sassen 2017) specifically points out that there is a large and untapped need for internet based applications targeted at low-income communities, whose members tend to be simultaneously time-strapped and forced to idle while waiting for external interventions. Mobile phone based apps could be devised to improve food access and strengthen ties in low-income neighborhoods<sup>47</sup>, and Detroit might be an ideal field to experiment with those technologies.

Finally, reflecting on time also brings in meta-level questions on research itself. With the constantly increasing need to crank out publications as the main tool for sustaining an academic career on top of teaching and administrative functions (Rosa 2017), it is worth asking what kind of time framing does research require to be creative, socially relevant

build community, and provide incredible insights on daily time use and food consumption choices.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> A focus group I conducted for Dr. Pothukuchi in 2010 highlighted the incredible amount of time low-income shoppers devote to selecting which stores to patronize in function of daily price variations, and the efforts required to find a suitable ride to these places. The technology to support such endeavors is already available for wealthy customers. Adapting it to the need of low-income people could increase resilience

and respectful of the other networks academics are embedded into, and not dependent on hidden time-bending by researchers' partners, families, and communities at large.

As researchers we are rightfully required to disclose potential conflicts of interest and disclose our funding sources. It would be also useful to investigate what kind of compromises between different conventions influence our research and the use of our time, and which groups are better able to cope with contrasting needs. What kind of entanglements and advantages do being publicly active as a gardener, a home cook, or as a food blogger brings to research work in the agrifood sector? And if –as it seems (Contois, Hysmith, and Parasecoli 2017) –some of these skills are becoming necessary to navigate an increasingly competitive job market, how do we find time for them?

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