

PREPARE A TABLE:
CREATING EQUITABLE PLACES
THROUGH CULTURALLY BASED FOOD-SHARING

Catherine Arias

Major paper submitted to the faculty of Goucher College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

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Communities are increasingly pressuring professionals in the field of arts and culture, and in the multi-sector realm of creative placemaking, to ensure that their projects are inclusive and equitable. Culturally based food-sharing offers arts administrators powerful ways to democratize arts experiences, celebrate the existing rich characteristics of a place, strengthen social infrastructure, and support communities' self-determination.

An analysis of projects by artists and culture-bearers who draw on shared meals and heritage-based foodways; anthropological and sociological studies about the transformative social bonding that occurs through food-sharing; and research into the state of the field of creative placemaking shows that the interests of artists and communities are reflected by including culturally based food-sharing in creative placemaking plans.

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PREFACE

The process of developing this paper began in the summer of 2019, before the outbreak of COVID-19 forced closures of public facilities and the onset of social distancing. A virulent virus whose spread may be connected to culturally based food-sharing, COVID-19 likely originated from the butchering of bats in a Chinese wet market; its spread was hastened by families gathering together to share meals, whose members then travelled internationally, exposing others around the globe (“Outbreak”).

The closure of public facilities and shelter-in-place orders have wreaked economic havoc in the art world: museums closed exhibitions, performing arts venues cancelled seasons, and thousands of workers face unemployment. Organizations have turned to the Internet to disseminate programming and gather participants virtually. It remains to be seen whether governmental and private relief efforts will avert catastrophe for our most economically vulnerable colleagues and audiences (“COVID-19”).

Food-sharing in a pandemic context has taken on new forms. One example is the work of World Central Kitchen (WCK), a nonprofit run by celebrity chef José Andrés. WCK operates “with the belief that food can be an agent of change in distressed communities” (“Our Long-Term”). In response to COVID-19, Andrés transformed his restaurants in the Washington, DC area into community kitchens (Holmes), and WCK mobilized partners across the country to distribute meals for pickup by low-income families (“#ChefsForAmerica”). Because the long-term impact of the outbreak has yet to be assessed, this pre-COVID-19 document offers a blueprint for the best possible outcomes of a renewed and re-evaluated social infrastructure.

I raise a glass to my husband Bert and bonus daughter Audrey. The meals we have prepared and shared together reveal a little bit of the rich sustenance you have given me.

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Thank you to my cohort, the talented Handlers: Channie, Grace A., Kristina, and Lauren. I could not have asked for a more fun group of people to crack crabs and Natty Bo's with. I am also tremendously grateful to my colleagues in the visitor engagement department at MOCA Los Angeles—most especially Dee, Garrett, Grace K., Kate, and Nathalie—who ably ran the gallery floor while I was in class.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction		1
Chapter I:	FOOD, ART, AND CULTURE	5
	Food-Sharing in Contemporary Art	5
	Culture Bearers and Food-Sharing	19
	Nourishing Culture	23
Chapter II:	CULTURALLY BASED FOOD-SHARING EXPERIENCES OFFER WAYS TO ADVANCE SOCIAL JUSTICE	24
	The Social Infrastructure Imperative	24
	Food-Sharing as a Transformative Bonding Experience	26
	Food-Sharing as a Means to Examine and Shift Structures of Power	29
	Food-Sharing as a Means to Valorize Labor	33
	The Role of Arts Administrators	35
Chapter III:	FOOD, CREATIVE PLACEMAKING, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	36
	The Push for Equity in Creative Placemaking	36
	Food-Sharing as a Means of Connecting People and Place	41
	The Urgency of Connection as a Democracy Builder	46
Conclusion		49
Works Cited		51

Introduction

The field of arts and culture—like so many social institutions in the US—is increasingly mandated to operate in ways that aim for equity. In this context, arts administrators should ensure that their work urges inclusive participation in cultural activities. *Equity* is a term that the American research and action institute PolicyLink defines as “just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential” (“The Equity Manifesto”); it is therefore used in this paper interchangeably with the term *social justice*.

Viewed through this lens, there is a strong case that food-sharing and foodways should be considered by arts administrators as important cultural and creative expressions. Because creative placemaking projects are also increasingly aimed at equitable outcomes, arts administrators should maintain an expansive view of cultural and creative expressions, ensuring that food-sharing and foodways are included in such projects. While the trendiness of food is readily apparent in the proliferation of televised cooking shows, food memoirs, and photo blogs, there is also evidence of a grassroots-level rise in gardens, farmers’ markets, festivals, and events aimed at promoting food security, food justice, and food sovereignty. This zeitgeist played out in a recent grant application process conducted by the Kresge Foundation’s Fresh, Local & Equitable creative placemaking initiative, known as FreshLo, which drew a record-breaking five hundred proposals from applicants around the country (DAISA 9). Amid skyrocketing interest in food, there is a growing body of activity in which food sharing and art intersect. Artists who include food sharing in their work often do so with the intention of

democratizing the arts and in creating conditions for social change. An explosion of interest over the last several years in these projects is evident in an exhibition and series of artist-driven meals at University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art entitled *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art*; a four-season series of art exhibitions and public programs at London's Delfina Foundation called *The Politics of Food*; and the most recent edition of the City of Los Angeles's public art triennial, *CURRENT:LA*, organized entirely around the theme of food. Within settings where art is more typically centered on objects, curatorial focus has shifted to include more process-oriented expressions, such as the preparation and sharing of food. This mirrors the view of communities, often otherwise excluded from elitist definitions of art, that foodways are considered inherent in cultural practices and contain rich traditions worthy of stewardship.

Food-sharing is also an important mechanism for building social cohesion within and across groups. There is no shortage of evidence that our nation faces deep political and economic divisions and that as the planet's climate crisis escalates, societies across the globe contend with the ravages of war and ethnic strife. In a divisive and isolating world, the act of coming together around a communal dining table is increasingly used as a tool for social healing and community repair. This practice is deeply embedded in human experience, and therefore offers the opportunity for powerful recovery of traditions and relationships that have been disrupted by the ills of colonization, forced migration, and oppressive policies. In the US, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks directs a program at Aspen Institute known as Weave: The Social Fabric Project, which promotes the work of people across the country who are dedicated to addressing what he

characterizes as today's "social fragmentation and rise of distrust" ("Weave"). Among the strategies and tools that Weave recommends are dinner gatherings, highlighting nine different entities who organize such events regularly as a means of local relationship-building ("Tools").

Finally, according to Jason Schupbach, Arizona State University design school director and former head of design programs at the National Endowment for the Arts—an agency among the leaders of the creative placemaking movement—food-sharing and the notion of foodways as a means of welcoming or exclusion is gaining in popularity as a metaphor within community development circles. The young field of creative placemaking is a logical arena to ensure that culturally based food sharing projects are included, but this must be done with equity in mind so as to foster inclusion and build community. In too many creative placemaking projects, an outsize emphasis on the built environment and economic development has set the stage for the opposite outcomes, displacing residents from communities and erasing rather than celebrating them. Roberto Bedoya, now Oakland's cultural affairs manager and an outspoken critic of these kinds of practices, instead promotes the term *creative placekeeping*, which he attributes to Detroit activist Jennie Lee (Bedoya, "Creative"). Urban planner and arts advocate Maria Rosario Jackson—among the most influential figures in developing inclusive practices in creative placemaking—finds that "the controversy over the term is...useful because it brings about public debate" over the values and intentions inherent in project plans, generating a healthy conversation that demands participation from all stakeholders in a community, not just those with financial and policymaking resources (Jackson). Both Bedoya and Jackson insist on respecting the existing cultural practices and needs of the residents of a

community before, during, and after the implementation of creative placemaking projects.

Here, the intersections of food, art, and social justice are examined alongside and within creative placemaking because it is the field where communities' connections to place and to one another have the potential to drive lasting and systemic change. Chapter I examines the meeting points between food-sharing and foodways as participatory cultural activities from the perspectives of both institutionally recognized artists and the traditional practitioners and heritage protectors referred to as culture bearers. Chapter II summarizes key concepts in food scholarship that elucidate the nature of food-sharing and foodways as a means of building social cohesion. That chapter also critically assesses the ways that invoking culture—particularly through the cultural practices of groups one is not a part of—carries the potential for reinscribing injustice unless approached with the aim of equity. Chapter III applies the ideas of food, art, and social justice to the field of creative placemaking. That chapter includes a brief historical overview of the terminology and funding practices of creative placemaking. It concludes that culturally based food-sharing practices build community by connecting us to one another in deep and transformative ways, catalyze conversations that encourage systemic critiques, and, thereby, strengthen agency and solidarity among community members to identify and work toward the changes they wish to see. Taken together, this evidence supports the argument that arts administrators can ensure that creative placemaking projects reflect the interests of artists and communities by advocating for culturally based food-sharing elements in project plans.

Chapter I

FOOD, ART, AND CULTURE

Culturally based food-sharing experiences offer rich terrain for arts administrators to cultivate equity. Within the arts and culture sector, projects may involve institutionally recognized artists whose work includes participatory food-sharing or bearers of traditional cultural practices. In either case, strong historical precedent and a future-oriented view of equitable arts participation demand a close look at the intersections of food with art.

Food-Sharing in Contemporary Art

Artists have long been interested in challenging the divisions between seemingly distinct categories of life and art, between the rarified and the everyday, and between artist and audience, often with the intention of enacting social change. Art historian Claire Bishop traces the development of participatory and politicized art in Western history back to the “mass spectacles” employing elements of theater, visual art, and activism orchestrated by French Dadaists in 1920. These early events find throughlines in an array of “social forms” (10) appropriated by artists including Allan Kaprow, known for coining the term “Happenings” in the mid-1960s (102), and German artist Joseph Beuys, whose notion of social sculpture sought to engage “every living person” as “a creator, a sculptor or architect of the social organism” that could “turn into a politically productive force, coursing through each person and shaping history” (125).

For some artists, there is no better experience to push at the socially-constructed boundaries between art and life, and to pose social critiques, than the preparation and sharing of food. The Italian Futurists, a group of avant-garde “aesthetic provocateurs,” for

example, published its *Manifesto of Futurist Cooking* in 1930, rejecting as oppressive the traditional national meal of pasta in favor of experimental and more nutritious ways of eating (Smith 32). In the early 1960s, another group of “loosely affiliated international artists” created a series of events known as the Fluxus movement, which took as its guiding principle “a shared interest in chance, indeterminacy, and the everyday” (66). Fluxus artist Alison Knowles is known for a range of participatory food-related works that she has performed for years throughout the world, including *Make a Salad*, first created in 1962 and now beloved—perhaps because, as the artist explains, “Everybody can enter into it by eating it” (Morais). While the Futurists used food as a means to re-imagine their cultural identity, Knowles and the Fluxus artists emphasized participatory, everyday activities that could be maximally accessible.

Building on the work of these artists, two—seemingly gendered—strands of artwork explored similar terrain in the mid twentieth century. Curator Stephanie Smith, who organized a 2012 exhibition for the University of Chicago’s Smart Museum of Art focusing on “artist-orchestrated meals” in contemporary art history (Smith 12), finds that, “Although the celebrated artist-run restaurants and salons of the 1960s and 1970s were predominantly male-led endeavors, women created many of the most notable meal-based artworks of this period” (14).

Feminist artists put forth the notion that “the personal is political,” and created artworks that examined everyday experiences such as menstruation and childbirth. “The trickle-down of that radical notion meant that all aspects of one’s life could be part of the creative process,” argues arts writer Lori Waxman (29). Suzanne Lacy, now recognized as one of the pioneering artists who created the participatory, often politically engaged art

form known as *social practice*, is a major figure in feminist art. Lacy's food-related works include 1981-82's *River Meetings: Lives of Women in the Delta*, produced in collaboration with choreographer Laverne Dunn and involving approximately five hundred women in "a series of potlucks and a banquet" aimed "to mobilize support for the Equal Rights Amendment" (Smith 77). She recalls the influence of social justice actions on her work:

After exploring meals/eating/foodstuffs in some of my early performances, I learned about the role of meals in organizing in 1920s labor movements; women specifically called out their organizing strategies as being what we would call today conviviality. I became interested in meals as vehicles for large-scale organizing through art, and in the interaction between people as a form of aesthetic gesture. Food united people, and since I was from a very early stage interested in cultural and social differences, meals provided a way to bring lots of people 'to the table,' metaphorically speaking. (qtd. in Smith 78)

While feminist artists invoked the body and called for social change through artworks that included food, several male artists were known for their part in creating physical spaces in which art and food were intertwined. Italian artist Daniel Spoerri, for example, became known for hosting meals in New York City for artists such as Andy Warhol. The detritus from these dinners then became the materials of his art. By turning the surface of a completed meal—dirty dishes, used ashtrays, and crumpled napkins—sideways and displaying the surface on the wall, Spoerri created tableaus he called "trap paintings" (Snyder 140). Eventually, "Spoerri found the New York art world of the mid-1960s disappointing," and returned home to Europe "because...he was appalled by the

American art world's movement away from experimentation and social ideas, toward a rampaging commercialism and social elitism.” Once there, he started Restaurant Spoerri, a space whose walls were “papered with fifteen years of his personal correspondence” and decorated with found objects. While a functional restaurant, Spoerri instigated unconventional—indeed radically non-commercial—activities such as inviting children to participate in cooking projects, or customers to join in kitchen preparations in lieu of paying for meals (149).

No discussion of the intersection of food and art would be complete without a mention of FOOD, a SoHo-based restaurant opened in a former Puerto Rican lunch counter by three artists in 1971. As the neighborhood transitioned from a primarily industrial area toward a booming scene of galleries and artists' lofts, the artists combined their talents and interests to “reinvent what it meant to live in an urban environment—and what it meant to make art” (Waxman 28). Artist Gordon Matta-Clark used his architectural background to renovate the space, dancer Carol Goodden—a member of Trisha Brown's company, which celebrated everyday movements in its choreography—and Tina Girouard created FOOD with a decidedly creative bent. Arts writer Lori Waxman notes “The gastronomic intentions of the restaurant evolved in a manner as romantic and unconventional as its physical environment, parlaying fresh, often locally sourced ingredients into creative dishes that changed constantly” (27). Over time, the practical aspects of running a restaurant caused constant friction with its creative aims, such as a desire to change the menu on a daily basis. “Talk about inefficient!” Goodden told Waxman. “Even the organizational structure of FOOD was idealistic, with a hiring policy that allowed employees to work as many or as few hours as they wished, despite

the resulting scheduling difficulties—and tax penalties for irregular employee hours” (qtd. in Waxman 27).

After two years, the restaurant transitioned away from the artist-driven aspects that made it legendary—a cherry tree planted in the basement, a menu organized entirely around the theme of bones—to a regular food service business no longer connected to its three founders (32). But in its heyday, FOOD exemplified a spirit of generative resistance to the status quo, found in the time’s Black Power, gay liberation, and women’s movements, which “provided meaningful examples for rethinking the most basic social and political systems not through rhetoric but through action.” In the words of artist Susan Harris, “We didn’t need the rest of the world. Rather than attacking a system that was already there, we chose to build a world of our own” (qtd. in Waxman 27).

If the 1960s and 1970s were rife with examples of food-related artist projects in the US and Europe, such experiences “subsided for a time, only to emerge in great numbers, new variants, and across a wide geographic territory in the 1990s under such loose and contested labels as ‘relational aesthetics’ and ‘social practice,’” writes curator Stephanie Smith (15). Perhaps the best-known artist working in this area is Rikrit Tiravanija, an Argentinian-born, ethnically Thai artist who became internationally famous for creating public food-sharing events as part of his artwork that simultaneously benefited from and critiqued an increasingly globalized art world.

Often invited to present a performance in which he prepares a large-scale meal for those assembled for an exhibition’s opening, the remains of Tiravanija’s efforts, such as dirty dishes and cookware, or video documentation of the event, stay on view for its duration. His work may take place within a gallery space or peripheral area not normally

deployed for art display (Novero 265). The food served may refer to Tiravanija's ethnic background, including dishes such as pad thai or curries, or may be more slyly localized to point up cultural schisms in a given city. "[I]n Hamburg," for example, "he staged a soup kitchen in the museum's loading dock....in the space where art pieces for the museum's exhibitions are physically moved, lifted, and touched by behind-the-scenes workers, often immigrants to Germany," writes theorist Cecilia Novero.

Like Beuys' notion of involving "every living person" in the project of "social sculpture" aimed at becoming a political force, Tiravanija's goal, Novero notes, is that the viewers be actor-participants who contribute to the art-making process by transferring one of their everyday acts—eating, helping to set the table—into the museum....[his] performances thus are less about food—and food as material—than occasions to rethink the sites and positionalities of artists and public, of galleries and kitchens, and of producers and consumers. (266)

Now, artist-orchestrated meals, according to curator Smith, have "been fully embraced by arts institutions" and "become nearly ubiquitous tropes within global contemporary art—even to the point of backlash" (15) citing a 2004 quote from art historian Miwon Kwon: "But perhaps we do not need a generation of young artists converting exhibition spaces into semicasual, make-believe dinner parties, living rooms, cafes, stores, bars, and lounges, etc., to remind us that all aesthetic experience is deeply and always already part of everyday social and political realities" (12).

However, Smith notes, recent projects are less oriented toward pointing out the blurred lines between life and art and more commonly now aimed at catalyzing social and political change (16). Where Susan Harris could reflect on FOOD's utopian view of

building “a world of our own” while rejecting broader society, artists who now deploy food sharing see themselves very connected to—and empowered to politically impact—the world around them. The Center for Genomic Gastronomy, a UK-based “artist-led think tank” hosts a periodic Planetary Sculpture Supper Club that examines pressing environmental and agricultural issues through recipes and meals that offer “a more just, biodiverse and beautiful food system.” They outline and expand on their artistic influences as “the logical extension of two concepts: Joseph Beuys’ notion that everyone is an artist and the Fluxus idea that art = life. In the [current era known as the] Anthropocene, where human activity has a significant global impact on Earth’s ecosystems, humankind is reshaping the planet and leaving permanent marks” (“Five Years”).

Examples of these kinds of politically engaged food-sharing projects abound. *Feast* featured projects by artists, artist collectives, and even a group of arts administrators, including Theaster Gates, whose efforts to reinvent a Chicago South Side neighborhood include hosting programming-rich soul food dinners that explore the cultural complexity of their diverse participants (Smith 188); motiroti, a British arts nonprofit that organizes potlucks as a means of building community and facilitating activism that “reimagin[e] the social life of the city” (265); National Bitter Melon Council, an artist collective that uses a bitter tropical vegetable as an analogue for respecting differences and whose membership includes PolicyLink’s Jeremy Liu; and inCUBATE, a group of arts administrators whose *Sunday Soup* events created local microgranting programs for artists and collectives otherwise left out of standard grant opportunities (204-5).

Two artists featured in *Feast*, Michael Rakowitz and the collective known as Fallen Fruit, merit more amplification here for their projects that recalibrate cultural equity and spatial justice. Rakowitz is an artist whose career demonstrates a strong commitment to social change. His early sculptures were designed to be used as shelters by people experiencing homelessness. More recently, he refused to participate in the Whitney Museum's 2019 biennial exhibition because of his opposition to one of its trustees' involvement in producing teargas canisters used against protesters in the West Bank and at Standing Rock (Vartanian). Rakowitz cites two moments in which he realized how culturally based food-sharing could create visibility, catalyze understanding, and powerfully convey solidarity. The first was an "abrupt announcement" by his mother during the runup to the first Iraq War "that there were no Iraqi restaurants in New York" (Rakowitz and Vazquez 150). The second was his experience witnessing "this line of people going around the block almost two times" waiting to eat at an Afghani restaurant in New York City just after the September 11 attacks. "In the midst of everything that was going on at that time, with...certainty there was going to be a war, this is what these people thought to do, to assure the family that was running the restaurant that they were not alone" (qtd. in Lefrak). These experiences inspired him to create *Enemy Kitchen*, a project that over time has involved its various participants in reexamining the power dynamics within and among people whose nations are at war.

Enemy Kitchen began as a series of workshops he conducted with various groups in New York to teach them his mother's Iraqi recipes. Cooking is, according to Rakowitz, "a lot like working with sculpture materials. It's alchemic; you have to get everything just right or it doesn't work. But it's group work, and creates these instant social circles

around the people who are doing it, which can be really dynamic.” One such animating outcome was the invention of Iraqi fried chicken, developed by youth participants in one of his workshops (Rakowitz and Vazquez 151). After moving to Chicago, Rakowitz transformed *Enemy Kitchen* into a food truck in which he “wanted to flip the power dynamics, so we had Iraqi refugee chefs and then the sous chefs and servers were American war veterans, taking orders from the Iraqis” (152). Over time, implements used in *Enemy Kitchen* offered another layer of significance. In Dubai, Rakowitz used “plates that had belonged to members of the evacuated Jewish community of Iraq,” a group that includes his own family. Its cooking knives were made by Sayyed Haidar Ahmen Muhsin, who had been forced to serve as Saddam Hussein’s personal sword maker and to create a commemorative blade for Donald Rumsfeld after the second Iraq War (152). *Enemy Kitchen* serves not only as a meditation on the vicissitudes of history and where they leave each of us in relation to one another, but also a nourishing meal accompanied by hospitality. It offers a means of reckoning with the wounds of war, expulsion, and oppression even as it mends them through acts of creation and sustenance.

On a smaller scale, Fallen Fruit uses food to examine and critique civic notions of public and private space. In 2004, the artist collective “created maps of fruit trees growing on or over properties in Los Angeles...and then distributed the maps to the public for free.” Los Angeles’s property laws governing ownership and maintenance rights of fruit trees stop at the property line, allowing neighbors and passersby access to fruit dangling from branches that extend beyond it. “By making these politically contested areas...visible, Fallen Fruit encouraged the city’s residents to consider their implications and...explore this car-centric region on foot, thereby socializing with new

people under new conditions,” but the project did not end there. Fallen Fruit is known for producing “jam sessions,” in which participants gather and make jams with fruit from publicly accessible trees. Ultimately, the project provides “a reconsideration of public and private land use, as well as relations between those who have resources and those who don’t” (Thompson 150).

The London-based Delfina Foundation sponsored a six-year, four-season series of exhibitions, meals, and public programs under the title *The Politics of Food*, all documented in a publication (“Politics of Food”). Delfina’s website notes, “In recent years, a host of cultural practitioners has been interrogating relationships between food and environmental, economic and social concerns, as well as notions of cooking and eating as performative acts and of dishes, recipes, and cookbooks as oft-contested markers of cultural memory” (“Season 1”). One such project was a residency by Spanish artist Marta Fernández Calvo, who researched *Casas de Comidas*, a practice developed by women during Spain’s Franco dictatorship. The *Casas* were sites where women—needing to bring a second income to their homes—shared recipes and cooperatively cared for children. In Fernández Calvo’s estimation, “They became very powerful in...the kitchen, where no one could expect anyone to get strong,” and their recipes are now credited by Michelin-starred chefs as influences (“Delfina Presents”). For the Delfina residency, Fernández Calvo presented a dinner for thirty people prepared by a woman who would have been the fourth generation of the now-defunct founding *Casa de Comidas*. During the dinner, she described the origins of each dish’s ingredients and presented artwork she created throughout the residency, explaining that through the

Casas, “The kitchen became the site to enact change and resist together” (“Delfina Presents”; Burrows).

A feature of artist-driven food-sharing projects since the earliest days was an effort to expand participation and opportunities for social and institutional critique by offering experiences outside of galleries or other institutional arts spaces. Arguably the longest-standing recent example of this is Pittsburgh’s Conflict Kitchen, an artist-run takeout restaurant operating from 2010 until 2017 that served food originating exclusively “from countries with which the US government is in conflict,” focusing on one cuisine at a time, and packaged in wrappings featuring quotes from interviews that founding artists Jon Rubin and Dawn Waleski conducted “with folks from our focus country and those that have immigrated to the US” (“Conflict Kitchen”; Vodeb 486).

Conflict Kitchen’s location in the heart of downtown Pittsburgh attracted an audience not necessarily seeking an art experience, nor expecting a politically engaged lunch. While occasionally controversial—as it certainly was during its Palestinian cuisine phase—its approach was unassuming and welcoming. According to Waleski, the pair “use food as the medium and the seduction to create a comfortable space with which to engender dialogue.” The art product, then, like the possibilities posed by *Enemy Kitchen*’s meals and the jam sessions of Fallen Fruit, extends beyond the artists of Conflict Kitchen to “the relationships between our customers” (Vodeb 488).

Rubin acknowledges his artistic debt to artists like Allan Kaprow “who were blurring art and life in certain capacities.” However, Rubin “wasn’t necessarily interested...in the model where art and life were blurred primarily for art audiences and participants. I was more interested in art and life being blurred to the point where it was

just as interesting to experience if you knew about art or not” (qtd. in Vodeb 496). In this way, the project’s expansive view of art and audience highlights its potential to carry a broader social impact of disseminating artists’ research, encouraging critical reflection, and setting the stage for meaningful discussion and collective action.

Similar aims are embedded in the work of Cooking Sections, another artist duo based in London who call themselves “spatial practitioners...who explore systems that organize the world through food. Using installation, performance, mapping, and video, their research-based practice tests the overlapping boundaries between the visual arts, architecture, and geopolitics” (Cooking Sections, “Contributors” 256). The pair, Daniel Fernández Pascual and Alon Schwabe, create and encourage participatory food-based projects they view as “...a set of approaches that can shed light on processes to *uncolonize* built environments, landscapes, and geographies” (Cooking Sections, “Franchise” 247). One such project, *The Empire Remains Shop*, supported by the Delfina Foundation as part of its *Politics of Food* series, will be discussed more in-depth in the next chapter. Here, we will consider its *Climavore* project, “a long-term initiative that envisions new seasons of food production and consumption in response to natural and manmade changes to the landscape” (Black 108).

Because the global food supply is one of the many structures impacted by climate change, artists who engage with political and social causes have naturally taken this topic on as an area for exploration. *Climavore* manifested during Cooking Sections’ Delfina residency as a project called “Under the Sea There is a Hole,” a sculptural installation featuring a “series of suspended, unstable dining surfaces...[that] function as a platform to rethink the spatial implications and frictions between feeding bodies and sinking

lands.” Fernández Pascual and Schwabe activated the installation with perilous meals that echoed the precarity of the food supply caused by humans’ impact on the environment:

Finding a place at the table as it rocks, dinner guests perform the geological consequences of food production on a landscape in front of their mouths. At times a giant sinkhole might not leave enough space for cutlery or glasses, and might oblige guests to negotiate where to place their Dead Sea mud-glazed plates.... A poorly balanced appetizer could crash through a sinkhole at any minute. (Cooking Sections, “Climavore” 121-2)

Cooking Sections has continued *Climavore* through a longer-term project on Scotland’s Isle of Skye known as “The Oyster Table.” Its dining surface, “made from metal cages in which oysters are grown,” emerges and disappears with the tide. When uncovered,

it transforms into a community table—a space for conversation, workshops and tastings that focus on creating a climate change-resistant alternative to the intensive salmon aquaculture that dominates, and endangers, Scottish waters.... The guests, including artists, fishermen and philanthropists, sipped kelp-infused local whiskey and ate sea-forest crackers and, of course, oysters. (Black 108)

Food-sharing projects are a means for artists to catalyze conversations and action on political, social, and environmental issues in ways that other art forms may not. Dani Burrows, who curated *The Politics of Food* for the Delfina Foundation and acts as “Director of Care” for Cooking Sections (“Creative Team”), opines that in sharing meals together, people feel much freer and more comfortable to engage in topics artists present. She notes that at programs with a more academic angle, people are hesitant to participate

in discussions, whereas with programs that include food, guests ask questions, express opinions, and engage more genuinely (Hisa and Brazell). Within institutional art settings such as galleries and museums, food-sharing projects lower the threshold of participation and convey inclusion in ways that standard modes of presentation typically don't. In their content, they offer ways to critically examine structures of power. In their form, they involve groups of people to engage in those critiques together and set the stage for collective action.

Jon Rubin of Conflict Kitchen notes that food and foodways have largely resisted the exclusionary boundaries drawn around other cultural forms. “[W]hen only some people maintain the practice and not every one of them shares the resource, that’s when culture becomes disassociated from life, and it becomes a special thing to be cultured. This is why food is much more fluid cultural material than much of art” (Vodeb 507). This concept is especially important when considering place-based equity work. Culturally based food-sharing projects gather people where they are and are predicated on the presumption that each participant has sufficient expertise to experience such activities.

The categorical distinction between art and food is not one held universally but rather is strongly rooted in Western culture, according to philosopher Carolyn Korsmeyer. “The distinction between aesthetic and gustatory taste—as well as the presumption of the superiority of the former over the latter—represents a view of sense experience expressed in philosophical writings as early as Plato, though it became a central point of aesthetic theory only in the European Enlightenment.” Importantly, however, she continues, “The idea is not universal. In the traditions of China, Japan, and India, for example, the

severance of aesthetic and gustatory tastes was never as assiduous as it became with the rise of the notion of fine art or *beaux arts* in Europe.” Indeed, in places like the US and the UK, it is no wonder that people feel more comfortable participating in a conversation that might otherwise remain in a distant intellectual realm once food is introduced as the means of exploring a thorny topic. “In the philosophic shorthand often employed, aesthetic taste is ‘disinterested,’ meaning that no personal desire or appetite need be satisfied to arouse pleasure; in contrast,” says Korsmeyer, “Bodily pleasures remain ‘interested’” (367).

Culture Bearers and Food-Sharing

The *Aesthetic Perspectives* framework is an evaluative tool developed by Americans for the Arts’ Animating Democracy initiative that links social impact measures with aesthetic dimensions. The framework recasts the notion of aesthetics from a distant and purely intellectual exercise to “an essential dimension of Arts for Change work. Aesthetics is about how creative expression stimulates our senses, moves us, and makes meaning in the world” (Borstel and Korza 5). Rather than drawing a clear distinction between artists and culture bearers, its proponents posit that “[a]ll art-makers and cultural traditions engage aesthetic considerations and values, whether explicitly or implicitly.... Audiences, witnesses, and participants also bring aesthetic values to their experience of artistic work” (5). This framework for aesthetics focuses less on formal qualities and more on characteristics such as the effectiveness of a project’s ability to facilitate communal meaning and challenge accepted practices (17, 19). This relatively new set of metrics offers a way to consider artworks that involve strategies for social justice. While not used in institutional settings such as contemporary art museums, the concepts

included in the framework are useful in evaluating aesthetic excellence from an equity perspective.

Indeed, it is important for equity-focused arts administrators to consider cultural expressions broadly rather than narrowly. It is critically important to understand the mechanisms by which some communities are underrepresented in art forms where performers and audiences or artists and viewers are separated, or where distinctions between high art and low art prevail. Instead, a view of cultural vitality like that proposed and measured by the Urban Institute in 2006 presents a more inclusive and therefore more accurate picture: “Cultural vitality is the evidence of creating, disseminating, validating, and supporting arts and culture as a dimension of everyday life in communities.” Researchers arrived at this definition by consulting “people in communities around the country” about what they believed to be significant. Alongside art forms like ballet and opera, respondents cited quilting bees, poetry slams, and amateur musical efforts among the cultural expressions they valued (Jackson et al. 13).

Taking this a step further and over a decade later—a decade in which creative placemaking projects flourished nationwide and even internationally—a study of ten years of creative placemaking projects found that “[F]ood and agriculture are often intimately tied to artistic and cultural expression. Many people we spoke with from diverse locations across the rural-urban spectrum who identify as Indigenous, immigrant, refugee or people of color described food and agricultural practices as inherently artistic and cultural expressions” (DAISA 5).

Indeed, this more expansive definition of arts and culture is one that indigenous groups have advocated for internationally in the discussions around UNESCO’s World

Heritage List. From the 1980s onward, efforts “to broaden its interpretation of what could be valued” critiqued the List’s “disproportionate representation [of] Western countries, since most of the sites considered to be of ‘outstanding value’ were large monumental buildings, religious edifices, and objects that fit particularly Western aesthetic models” and promulgated a definition that eventually included intangible cultural heritage (Brulotte and Giovine 12). UNESCO’s *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* now includes several food-related submissions including the Mediterranean Diet, Traditional Mexican Cuisine, Gingerbread Craft from Northern Croatia, the Gastronomic Meal of the French, Japanese *Washoku*, and Turkish Coffee (14-17). Heritage scholar and museum professional Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett notes that the criteria for the intangible cultural heritage list “entails a shift from artefacts (tales, songs, customs) to people (performance, artisans, healers), their knowledge and skills” (qtd. in Brulotte and Giovine 12).

For bearers of traditional practices, including agricultural and food-related activities, the importance of acknowledging the value of such practices is not merely an abstract problem of recognition but one which carries the urgency of health issues, community sovereignty, and economic and environmental sustainability. Two examples of culture bearers who employ food sharing practices as a means of community vitality, affirmation of cultural identity, and long-term sustainability are a Southwest Native American organization called Tohono O’odham Community Action, known as TOCA, and a Palestinian writer-photographer trained in anthropology named Vivien Sansour.

Faced with severe and widespread health problems largely attributable to a limited and highly processed diet within the Tohono O’odham Nation, two men—basket weaver

and youth educator Terrol Dew Johnson and avid gardener and nonprofit grantwriter Tristan Reader—founded TOCA in 1997. Through programs including a cultural foods project, an outreach program uniting elderly people with youth, and art making workshops, TOCA has revived traditional food harvesting and preparation practices that had been disrupted by an array of destructive policies including federal work programs, boarding schools, and diverted water resources that left the tribe dependent on governmental resources (California Newsreel; Hoover).

Significantly, the traditions of the Tohono O’odham define culture expansively, using the word *Himdag* to express an interrelatedness of people within the environment that sustains them, which includes activities we might otherwise isolate as art forms like singing, movement, or crafting objects such as baskets. TOCA communications and outreach director Cissimarie Juan explains that *Himdag* “means our way of life, and that can mean anything from the clouds to the birds to planting to singing” (WhyHunger.org); Johnson notes that *Himdag* manifests in the ceremonies, songs, and prayers done while preparing soil and planting seeds. It is this very concept that was endangered along with the other economic, environmental, and health threats to the Tohono O’odham Nation (California Newsreel).

On the other side of the globe, Vivien Sansour founded the Palestinian Heirloom Seed Library in 2014 and its car-sized Travelling Kitchen four years later to “eat our history rather than store it away as a relic of the past,” gathering people for meals and discussions about indigenous seeds and ancient agricultural practices (Higgie; Shahin). Like TOCA’s work, Sansour’s message is to restore traditional foods not only to connect with culture and history but also to create a more sustainable future. Sansour notes that

many crops that required no irrigation—foodstuffs that will be in increasingly high demand in a warming climate—were abundant in the region prior to Israeli occupation and the subsequent planting of more profitable, but less healthy and less traditional, tobacco fields (Sansour).

Similar to TOCA’s multigenerational outreach program, Sansour encourages students she engages through the Library and Kitchen to interview their elders to learn more about traditional foods and agricultural practices and present their findings. One such student, whose family all lived together in a refugee camp but who had never discussed traditional foodways amongst themselves, surprised her class with a video featuring the student’s conversation drawing out her grandmother’s recollections. Using techniques like this, Sansour hopes that Palestinians participate in recovering and sharing memories and thereby understand the value of their culture—which she sees as “colonized by self-hatred”—empowering them to act collectively (Shahin).

Nourishing Culture

For decades, artists have deployed food-sharing projects to dissolve the culturally constructed notion that art is separate from the needs and struggles of everyday life. Similarly, culture-bearers have creatively used traditional foodways to engage people in repairing ruptures to land and psyches. Both kinds of projects resonate with the most effective practices identified in the *Aesthetic Perspectives* framework and with the community-driven indicators of cultural vitality, enacting an inclusive, *Himdag*-like vision of culture in which all are participants.

Chapter II

CULTURALLY BASED FOOD-SHARING EXPERIENCES OFFER WAYS TO ADVANCE SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social infrastructure is an invisible yet crucial aspect of our lived experience, one on which our very survival may depend. Developed through regular and ordinary interactions among people, a strong social infrastructure is a necessary component for building equity. This chapter applies the concept of social infrastructure to the practice of food-sharing, investigates projects in which artists have used food-sharing to critique and shift power structures, and concludes that arts administrators can play a unique and important role in supporting equity through such projects.

The Social Infrastructure Imperative

Social justice demands that individuals examine societal conditions and histories in order to create full democratic participation by all members of a society. This difficult and complex process can only be approached when people can dialogue and negotiate together. In the current climate of divisiveness, sociologist Eric Klinenberg finds that while “[w]orrying about the decline of communities is a hallmark of modern societies and a trope among public intellectuals,” the matrix of problems that cause this decline is an urgent one requiring substantial shifts in how people interact with one another. Citing “climate change, an aging population, runaway inequality, and explosive ethnic divisions,” Klinenberg posits that solutions can only come “if we establish stronger bonds with one another and develop some shared interests too” (9).

Twenty years ago, alarmed by a fraying society in which people decreasingly spent time associating in public spaces, political scientist Robert Putnam published

Bowling Alone, which called on Americans to shore up their relationships in community through regular, low-stakes interactions. *Bowling Alone* cited influential urbanist Jane Jacobs, who wrote in 1961, “The sum of such casual, public contact at a local level—most of it fortuitous, most of it associated with errands, all of it metered by the person concerned and not thrust upon him by anyone—is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal and neighborhood need” (308).

Building this web of public respect and trust in our current context of division carries even greater urgency today. As Klinenberg puts it, “the problems that made Putnam anxious when he published *Bowling Alone* are just as prevalent today, and in some ways more extreme” (12). The level of urgency even has life-or-death consequences, as Klinenberg discovered when comparing death rates resulting from a heat wave in two neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago. The two areas were demographically almost identical, but one experienced ten times the number of heat-related deaths. When digging into what helped one community’s survival outcome be so much better than the other community’s, he discovered that its residents

knew their neighbors—not because they made special efforts to meet them, but because they lived in a place where casual interaction was a feature of everyday life. During the heat wave, these ordinary routines made it easy for people to check in on one another and knock on the doors of elderly, vulnerable neighbors. ‘It’s what we always do when it’s very hot or very cold here,’ a longtime resident explained. (6)

Klinenberg calls this network built from regular casual contact *social infrastructure* and characterizes its importance compellingly. “When social infrastructure is robust, it fosters contact, mutual support, and collaboration among friends and neighbors” (5) but when degraded, “the consequences are unmistakable. People reduce the time they spend in public settings and hunker down in their safe houses. Social networks weaken. Crime rises. Older and sick people grow isolated. Younger people get addicted to drugs and become more vulnerable to lethal overdoses. Distrust rises and civic participation wanes” (21).

This illustration of the importance of social infrastructure connects strongly to the Urban Institute’s indicators of cultural vitality, which define cultural participation broadly, inclusively, and part of everyday life: “Arts and cultural activity is no longer thought of as only for special occasions” (Jackson et al. 15). For arts administrators concerned with advancing equity, the parallel is evident. We must think not only of our work as encouraging special-occasion outings and events such as exhibitions and concerts, but rather ensure that it includes normalized, easily approachable spaces and settings that encourage people to come together regularly—such as meals.

Food-Sharing as a Transformative Bonding Experience

The notion that sharing food—also known as commensality—is a deeply human experience may seem intuitive, even self-evident to many. However, key elements of this experience bear examination through a social justice lens. Those who study the role of food in human relations from biological and anthropological perspectives point to its importance in passing on memory and heritage, actions that gain particular urgency for people who have been displaced or whose cultural practices are otherwise threatened. A

glimpse into science-based approaches illustrates the nature of this human experience.

Science writer Susan Allport finds that humans' strong connection between food and memory is evolutionarily rooted, positing that natural selection favors those with "a memory for food...where one is likely to find it, where one might have stored or left it" as "part of our survival package as we foraged for food" (14). Memory is also encoded through the experience of food sharing, a fundamental way in which humans experience intimacy with one another. Anthropologist Penny Van Esterik theorizes that food-sharing begins with breastfeeding as "the conceptual core of human commensality," a practice that "models food sharing for all humans" (33). As children mature, Van Esterik explains, increasingly broadening social relations are created and maintained through the sharing of food.

Repeated experiences of food-sharing, enacted through family meals and community celebrations, offer shared sensory experiences of smell and taste that "mediate...social relations in immediate and unspoken ways" (Walmsley 110). Foodways—which scholars define as including primary staple ingredients as well as "preparation techniques, seasoning or flavor principles, set of socially accepted food behaviors," and the "food infrastructure which organizes food provision" (Joassart-Marcelli et al. 214) —may even be seen as a language that itself creates a sense of place. In the words of pioneering anthropologist Mary Douglas:

Food is not only a metaphor or vehicle of communication; a meal is a physical event. After a year or a decade, the sequence of meals can be counted, as real as colonnades through which people can walk. Food may be symbolic, but it is also as efficacious for feeding as roofs are for shelter, as powerful for including as

gates and doors. Added over time, gifts of food are flows of life-giving substance, but long before life-saving is an issue the flows have created the conditions of social life. More effective than flags or red carpets which merely say welcome, food actually delivers good fellowship. (12)

A familiarity builds not only through the conversations, stories, or practiced social relations that may be shared during these meals, but through a type of physical intimacy: “Eating connects our bodies to others in immediate, elemental, and visceral ways,” according to Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco. “These relations are experienced most intensely at the ‘gut level’” (“Place Perspective” 22). Social anthropologist Emily Walmsley, citing the research of Fiona Borthwick, goes a step further, speculating that participants in a shared meal literally experience oneness or communion: “[T]he separation between self and other is not clear cut in the moment of smelling and tasting, for the same particles are entering different bodies.” These “powerful associative links with those other people with whom they have been experienced,” then, become the solid foundation in building community (123).

It is not surprising, then, to see a proliferation of social justice-focused food projects around the world. Two such ventures are in Southern California. The first is a five-episode public television program created by celebrity chef Roy Choi that profiles people and organizations “who use food as a platform for activism and a catalyst for change” (“Broken Bread”). The second, #TacoTrucksAtEveryMosque, is a project of Latino-Muslim Unity, founded to provide halal-certified free tacos after religious services as a way to jointly increase the political power of Latinos and Muslims under a presidential administration hostile to both groups (Arellano). In Northern California, the

People's Kitchen Collective draws inspiration from the in-school breakfast program of the Black Panther Party to provide "political education through art, activism & food" locally ("Solidarity Statement"; "Home"). World Central Kitchen, a project founded by chef José Andrés and his wife Patricia, works globally to provide disaster relief and long-term assistance through food-based economic development and health promotion programs ("Our Long-Term Programs"). World Central Kitchen's longer-term work in disaster-impacted areas focuses on mobilizing local residents in strategies that improve the health and environmental impacts of cooking practices, broaden access to affordable food, support small farms and agriculture businesses, and build culinary skills as job training. For these efforts, Andrés was nominated for the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize (Carman).

Food-Sharing as a Means to Examine and Shift Structures of Power

In today's globalized economy, where the interconnected web of migration and displacement of peoples mirrors the complexity of our food supply chains, one cannot consider community building through food-sharing uncritically. This is especially important when analyzing the role of food as a signifier of privilege or of the absence of privilege. As Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco put it:

[F]ood plays a particularly important role in branding sites of consumption, defining ethnic neighborhoods, stigmatizing poor communities, gentrifying formerly neglected areas, and promoting tourism to new destinations. These geographical imaginaries of rural and urban food landscapes—the unconscious or unreflective images we have of specific places—fetishize both food and the places where it is produced and consumed, thereby obfuscating ecological

imprints, corporate relations, and sociocultural hierarchies. (“Place Perspective” 21)

Indeed, without examining the power dynamics engaged by the routes a particular cuisine or food product may have taken to one’s table, one risks falling into what bell hooks identified as “imperialist nostalgia,” a means of “reenacting and reritualizing in different ways the imperialist, colonizing journey as a narrative fantasy of power and desire” (25). At the extreme point of this fantasy, hooks explains, is dehumanization and cultural erasure: a scenario in which “cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate...[and where] the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten” (39).

It was anxiety about this very dynamic that resonated with a young Michael Rakowitz and inspired him to create the first *Enemy Kitchen* workshops as an act of resistance. “Being Iraqi was always affiliated with the war,” he notes. “It was dehumanizing, but not surprising. This is what happens, especially when your family is from elsewhere and you’re living in the West.” Through cooking workshops he and his mother presented for diverse audiences, *Enemy Kitchen* “was really about saying, ‘Okay, here’s the culture,’ even as it’s being devoured on the battlefield and consumed in the world” (Rakowitz and Vazquez 150).

Similarly, the British artist duo of Fernández Pascual and Schwabe, known as Cooking Sections, made an extended project critiquing the power dynamics at play in colonialism through food with a project called *The Empire Remains Shop*. Cooking Sections extensively researched the “visual propaganda” deployed in the 1920s and 1930s by the Empire Marketing Board of Great Britain to entice British citizens into

relying on previously unfamiliar “foodstuffs cultivated across its colonies and dominions.” Among the products of this research is a recipe for Christmas pudding, considered an authentically English holiday confection that can ironically only be produced with fruits, sugars, spices, and other ingredients that grow in the far-flung colonies of the British Empire. “Within this national project, the planet became a supermarket for consumers who took the availability of produce as a given (Cooking Sections, “Unmarketing” 19).

A further effort of the Empire Marketing Board was to create Empire Shops that would promote and sell the spoils of colonization; however, these shops did not become a reality until Cooking Sections opened the first Empire *Remains* Shop in 2016. In Cooking Sections’ version, the space functioned not as a retail outlet to exoticize and promote colonial foods but instead as a platform for art events and public programs that “employed food as a tool to question current forms of power and dismantle geographies, origins, and abusive exchanges across the present and future of our postcolonial planet” (21-2). Now, in a post-Brexit world, the UK cannot be thought of as an Empire, but British academic Elisabetta Brighi aptly explains that “it is through food that we are able to very concretely explore the hierarchies and inequalities still in place” (50).

Because of the live nature of these inequalities and of efforts to redress them, Cooking Sections concluded their project by issuing “an invitation for institutions, collectives or individuals to construct their own counterpart: to reflect on imperial legacies and the commodification of their own structures and infrastructures” through franchising “future iterations of The Empire Remains Shop” (“Franchise” 247-8). Franchising an art project is unusual in the visual art world, and perhaps the ultimate

renunciation of authorship, but Cooking Sections' purpose is one of inclusion and redistribution of power. Again, borrowing from and inverting a mode of capitalist marketing, the franchises for *The Empire Remains Shop* are not to be generic or standardized like Starbucks or McDonalds. Rather, each is mandated to operate site-specifically "to differentiate itself through its response to local contexts and colonial histories." Cooking Sections commits to offering guidance and support to its franchisees, and in exchange, each franchisee "will have to ensure adequate working conditions of commissioned artists, participants, performers, and shopkeepers" (249). So far, one franchise has opened in Birmingham, England and another is in the works for Auckland, New Zealand (Black 111). Indeed, an *Empire Remains Shop* franchise could be well situated in a variety of creative placemaking projects.

Rakowitz has also mined the geographical imaginaries inherent in colonialism through projects that reveal the politicized nature of food while opening new possibilities for social relationships across cultures. For one such project, *RETURN*, Rakowitz attempted to import Iraqi dates to a Brooklyn store in 2006, three years after the US invasion of Iraq. Although US sanctions on Iraq had by then been lifted, the project revealed the complications of such a journey; as Rakowitz told *Hyperallergic's* Hrag Vartanian, "the dates end up travelling the same trajectory as the Iraqi refugees"—after a failed attempt to be shipped out of Jordan they were never permitted to cross the border, and eventually spoiled in Syria during a second attempt to fly from Egypt—"and they never get here." When Rakowitz decreased the quantity of the order, a new shipment of dates was finally able to travel via DHL, although that was met with "numerous delays and holds from US Customs, Homeland Security, USFDA, and USDA.... All along,"

recounts Rakowitz, “the project was meant to interrogate the prohibitive laws and agencies that make this type of transaction impossible” (qtd. in Eleey 280). As a business, Rakowitz notes, this complex and expensive process could only be considered marginally successful, but as an artwork, the project “cast an extensive web that complicated yet enriched its embodiment” (287).

The fraught nature of the dates’ travel path developed what Rakowitz considered a “powerful narrative” characterized by “a dark poetry.” Notably, because of the publicly accessible nature of the Brooklyn store, the project gained a local following eager to learn each new development in the transit story and who felt invested in the project’s outcome. Rakowitz observed “that the bulk of the audience were neighborhood residents, not just a cultural audience” (288). Because of the communality food can create, this project demonstrates how powerfully food can elucidate the vicissitudes of cross-cultural contact, not just for an art-informed audience but in inclusive ways.

Food-Sharing as a Means to Valorize Labor

Similarly, artists have invited the public to join them in turning a critical eye to the often-gendered, power-laden inscriptions on food preparation and clean-up processes. As food scholar Alice Julier finds, “Feeding work remains an important material site where gender gets constructed and reproduced, even as the context shifts.” While women generally perform most “daily food work” at home, men’s role in food preparation tends toward the “celebratory, special, or out of the ordinary” (200). Artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles, whose retrospective was organized by the Queens Museum of Art in 2017, explored this division in her influential *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*, a proposal for a never-realized exhibition that sought to combine and thereby reconcile the onerous

tasks of domestic chores with her work as an artist. The manifesto proposed performing daily tasks “as public Art activities: I will sweep and wax the floors...cook, invite people to eat, clean up, put away....” As articulated on the exhibition description on the museum’s website, the decidedly feminist manifesto “laid out the hidden, yet essential role of maintenance in Western society—and the radical implications of actively valuing rather than dismissing or hiding it” (“Mierle”).

Artist Ben Kinmont’s approach is similar. In a career including many performative artworks involving food preparation, sharing, documenting, and cleaning, Kinmont has several times done a performance that consists simply of washing the dishes in someone’s home and leaving them with a commemorative sponge (Trippi 137-41). Like Ukeles, he resists the notion that art—like the kind of special and celebratory spectacle-oriented cooking Julier associates as male in our society—need be “something that’s grand” (Trippi 139). Participatory artworks such as Ukeles’ and Kinmont’s serve not only the artists’ interests but also include the public, inviting them to reconsider the role of art outside of the elitist paradigm of constant innovation and notions of genius and, instead, redefine creativity in accepting and celebrating the ordinary.

A recalibration of the role of food depends on a reassessment of the effort its preparation and cleanup demands. Food writer Toni Tipton-Martin, who has researched nearly two centuries of African American women’s cookbooks, explains that phrases like “slaving in the kitchen” convey a societal expectation that cooking is labor that should be done by those of lesser status. By recasting this work as valuable, creative, and enjoyable, Tipton-Martin argues that the largely misunderstood cooking practices of African American women can be appreciated in new ways, for the artistry and knowledge those

practices demonstrated (Tipton-Martin and Nguyen). By valuing something as elemental and labor-intensive as food—in its cultivation, preparation, and cleanup—we value the people who perform these tasks, people who are often the most marginalized.

The Role of Arts Administrators

In aiming for equity, arts administrators must consider ways to ensure that our work strengthens the social infrastructure. The most effective means of doing this create mechanisms for participation that are approachable and become part of people's ordinary day-to-day lives, not just special occasions. Food-sharing projects offer exactly this kind of low threshold of participation, but also offer much more. Because food acts as a powerful convener and bonder, projects that involve artists or culture bearers interested in social justice issues offer transformative ways to catalyze social change. When arts administrators properly elevate food-sharing projects as cultural expressions, we also elevate the status of those who prepare, serve, and clean up after meals.

It is clear that culturally based food-sharing projects have the potential to advance social justice when approached through a thoughtful critique of the power dynamics embedded in food systems and foodways. Artists' food-based explorations of the legacy of colonialism, of oppression and displacement, of domesticity and patriarchy, and other complex themes offer ways to engage with issues that are direct, visceral, and poetic, and to engage with those issues with one another in community. Because we turn to artists to show us truths about our world in ways that more didactic forms cannot as effectively capture, arts administrators must support and advocate for these kinds of projects.

Chapter III

FOOD, CREATIVE PLACEMAKING, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Creative placemaking is a multi-sector approach to community development that at its best aims toward enhancing civic and cultural participation of residents in a specific area. This goal is clearly aligned with efforts to build social cohesion and shore up social infrastructure. Because the debates around the intentions and impacts of creative placemaking projects have been hotly contested, arts administrators need to understand the history of—and potential for—policies that support equitable projects. This chapter examines the development and shift in the terminology and goals for creative placemaking before situating culturally based food-sharing projects within this field as a means of advancing social justice.

The Push for Equity in Creative Placemaking

Creative placemaking is a relatively new and highly contested term that at its most basic refers to the infusion of arts and culture into cross-sector community development projects. The integration of the arts and culture into bettering communities has been going on for centuries—or as former National Endowment for the Arts design programs director Jason Schupbach puts it, “since humans” (Arizona State). However, the label of creative placemaking as a policy framework has only taken shape over the last decade or so, with significant course-corrections along the way.

Andrew Zitcer, a former arts administrator who directs the graduate program in urban strategy at Drexel University, outlines a timeline for the evolution of the term *creative placemaking*, finding that its roots go back to the City Beautiful movement of the late 1800s and continue to the development of the term *placemaking* during the highly

controversial urban renewal efforts of the 1950s. In these early iterations, arts and culture were often instrumentalized to serve the interests of developers and government agencies rather than those of grassroots constituencies. It wasn't until the Obama administration's response to the 2008 recession that the name and policy framework of creative placemaking took hold, with a new mandate to federal agencies, according to Zitcer, "to develop place-based policy solutions in response to the spatial nature of the financial crisis" (2).

The National Endowment for the Arts, or NEA, commissioned a foundational white paper on creative placemaking by economist Ann Markusen and arts consultant Anne Gadwa, which made the case for including arts and culture in community development processes. The document was influenced by the work of urban planner and arts advocate Maria Rosario Jackson, whose tenure at the Urban Institute included developing inclusive indicators for measuring a community's cultural vitality, and by research conducted by Penn State's Social Impact of the Arts Project. Although Markusen and Gadwa listed "avoiding gentrification and displacement" as one of several challenges of creative placemaking, equity was not the focus of their monograph (17). The 2010 document became a road map for policymakers nationwide as they strove to recover from the Great Recession, while the major funding from the NEA, ArtPlace America, and Kresge Foundation supported hundreds of creative placemaking projects (Zitcer 2, 5).

Initially, much of the funding understandably focused on improving economic outcomes, but this came at a cost. An equity-focused report published by PolicyLink states, "creative placemaking is not exempt from driving more inequity or fostering displacement. Arts and culture can be seen as agents of, as well as subject to,

gentrification” (Rose et al. 5). Schupbach agrees, noting that at the NEA and ArtPlace, “We fell into the gentrification trap” by emphasizing the economic development aspects of arts and culture in grantmaking strategies. Under pressure from arts administrators working in communities, funders reexamined their grant guidelines (Schupbach) and “evolved in recent years to reflect a stronger commitment to equity and inclusion and a greater relevance for lower-income communities of color” (Rose et al. 6). The major supporters of creative placemaking—NEA Our Town, ArtPlace America, and Kresge Foundation—now “more frequently [encourage] equity-driven strategies and design processes for inclusive community building” (6).

The very language that made creative placemaking so appealing to mayors and policymakers initially—encapsulated by urbanist Richard Florida’s *Rise of the Creative Class*, published in 2002—generated fury from artists and arts administrators who saw the danger in defining *creative* in narrow, elitist, and economically-focused ways. The 2006 study by Jackson and others at the Urban Institute had aimed to expand the definition of cultural vitality beyond bolstering the “creative economy” and supporting the notion of “ideas as commodities” (Jackson, et al. 12, 22), and instead emphasized small-scale, locally-driven, and participatory forms of arts and cultural participation “as valuable on its own terms and also integral to everyday life, community dynamics, and community conditions.” The report posited that “arts and culture are also resources that come *out of* communities rather than merely resources that are ‘*brought to*’ communities from the outside” (14-15; emphasis added). But it would be nearly a decade before this kind of thinking would take hold in the creative placemaking funding scheme.

Schupbach points out that, although community-centered arts administrators—including Roberto Bedoya, then the head of the Tucson-Pima Arts Council in Arizona, and Carlton Turner, executive director of Alternate ROOTS in the South—had been critical of the economic development-focused funding landscape for years, a major and visible shift toward equity occurred when the leadership of ArtPlace America transitioned. Founding director Carol Colletta, who had worked with the economic development-oriented Richard Florida (“Knight Welcomes”), was replaced by former NEA Chief of Staff Jamie Bennett, who was deeply familiar with the conversations around equitable creative placemaking in the field (Schupbach; “Team”). Grant guidelines for NEA Our Town, for example, now include social change and systems change as potential project outcomes in addition to economic and physical changes (“Our Town”) and ArtPlace’s website currently touts its equity focus up-front (“Introduction”).

Diving more deeply into the criticisms of creative placemaking as a current practice, Zitcer sorts questions about its efficacy into three major areas, each relating to dimensions of equity. These include its evaluative mechanisms and intended outcomes, which may pit economic development interests against grassroots involvement in transformation and repair; its ability to authentically express a local area’s identity, rather than deploying once-unique place-based elements that have become standard-issue nationally, such as food trucks; and most importantly, its political impact on the residents of a given area, which in its best cases invites participation as opposed to exclusion and displacement (3-4). Additionally, it is clear that creative placemaking projects widely vary in format, duration, goals, and outcomes, raising the question of what essential

elements a project must have to be considered within or outside the scope of creative placemaking (Zitcer 3).

By creating a typology of such projects, outlined in her 2017 book *Arts in Place*, British arts administrator and scholar Cara Courage has developed a tool to analyze the relative levels of community engagement within a given project structure, thereby pointing toward practices that are more likely to produce equitable outcomes. Her typology draws distinctions between projects that emphasize democratic participation as the means of advancing equity and those that superficially include arts and culture as a mere add-on. Citing architectural theorist Doina Petrescu, Courage finds that community-driven placemaking “builds social capital through social cohesion,” producing results that may be complicated and unexpected but have the potential to strengthen social outcomes. In contrast, “[p]lacemaking as top-down urban design...produces generalist outcomes and generates further fixed notions of community and public space” (57), leading to the generic projects Zitcer criticizes.

Damon Rich, who co-directs an urban design, planning and civic arts firm known as Hector, takes a similar view. He finds that community development efforts that purport to benefit artists or a vaguely defined arts and culture sector “duck...questions of equity and justice” (Atlas et al). Instead, Rich, like Courage, promotes the notion of accountable development, which focuses resources and planning not on a pre-determined end product of a creative placemaking project but rather on including more voices in a democratic decision-making process to develop and implement the project (Atlas et al.). In Courage’s estimation, arts administrators should be wary of planning processes that employ “a ‘pseudo-participation’ model that is organised and manipulated, idealised, uncritical and

concerned with reaching consensus...effectively silencing the voices it is meant to articulate” (57).

By instead insisting on a high level of democratic participation in creative placemaking, arts administrators are less likely to reinforce the problematic elements embedded in the evolution of the term and more likely to authentically engage communities in developing projects on their own terms. Indeed, because of the power of arts and culture to “reflect the assets of communities and enable cohesion in a pluralistic nation...[t]he tools of arts and culture can accelerate equity, build communities of opportunity, and design for broadly shared prosperity” (Rose et al. 4). Los Angeles-based arts administrator Karen Mack, founder and director of LA Commons, characterizes her work in precisely this manner, emphasizing efforts “to get the community organized and thinking civically so that they can claim the space and be part of the conversations about their community and what happens there” (Atlas et al.). Processes of convening communities to collaboratively determine their own outcomes are increasingly the focus of creative placemaking planning.

Food-Sharing as Means of Connecting People and Place

Creative placemaking is a powerful arena to deploy culturally based food sharing projects as a component of community building and civic engagement. By surfacing and celebrating the stories of people in a given place, food-sharing projects are ideal catalysts for conversations about inequity as well as its potential remedies. Arts administrators may consider such projects from an art-centered point of view, such as those generated by an artist’s own social practice or traditional cultural practices, or from the perspective of forming cross-sector partnerships between arts administrators and community

development practitioners in other fields, such as food service and agriculture. Both kinds of projects can tap into and expand the existing resources of a community, forming a bulwark against the forces of gentrification and displacement.

Like arts and culture, the field of food has been scrutinized for its role in neighborhood change. “[F]ood projects have emerged as powerful tools of urban renewal and neighborhood transformation.... Along with music and art, food is a central tenet of so-called creative cities—a newly embraced model of urban development in cities around the world” (Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco, “Food and Gentrification” 129). Indeed, the “marketability of food...has been associated with the rise of a cultural economy linked to postfordism, neoliberalism, and postmodernism... Together, these set the stage for the idea of the ‘creative city’ where,” as Richard Florida wrote in 2002, “‘talent, technology, and tolerance’ intersect to generate economic growth” (qtd. in Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco, “Food and Gentrification” 131).

Because the food industry, unlike art, is generally not funded through a nonprofit grantmaking apparatus, those within it who advocate for equity do so in a manner distinct from that of the negotiations around creative placemaking dollars. The food industry’s power dynamics mirror those of the arts and culture field: large-scale corporations versus small businesses, struggles over authenticity in identity, and levels of investment in specific communities. Food, like art, is a milieu where identities, traditions, and practices are coopted. When a revitalized neighborhood or city aims to attract outsiders but prices its residents out of its offerings, these locations risk reinforcing inequity by becoming tourist attractions. In the worst cases, a dynamic similar to the one described earlier by bell hooks plays out, where

difference is consumed by white diners as a means to acquire cultural capital, distinguish themselves, and validate their own identity, rather than a way to understand and engage with other cultures. This narcissistic project can lead to ‘multiculturalism without migrants,’ in which ethnic food is marketed for and by white people, and migrants’ struggles with poverty and prejudice become invisible. (133)

A better model of creative placemaking insists on belonging and placekeeping, while furthering the self-defined aspirations of a community. Ten years after the formation of ArtPlace, the consortium commissioned a range of field scans to assess the impacts of creative placemaking projects across different sectors, including an analysis by DAISA Enterprises of projects in which food and agriculture were key elements of community change. Culling an initial list of over fifteen hundred projects from foundation and government funding databases to an examination of 155 community-based efforts in which arts and culture are contributing to food and agriculture outcomes, researchers interviewed thirty-one “thought leaders and practitioners representing various identities in urban and rural settings” (7). Types of projects included community gardens and farms, community gathering spaces, community and incubator kitchens, culinary arts, food and agricultural tourism and celebration, and food markets (11).

DAISA found the intersection of food with arts and culture to be a rich area for impact but one where an eye toward equity is critical. “While food in general may be getting more attention these days, this does not necessarily translate into better outcomes in terms of food access or justice,” citing the now-trendy business models of food trucks and market stands that initially offered low-risk ways for immigrants and low-income

people to enter the food industry. “However,” the study notes, “when it lacks a justice-focused lens, food trendiness and startup culture can enable inequitable development and gentrification” (9). The notion of spatial justice can aptly be applied to analyzing the roles of culturally based food-sharing projects. Citing urban planning theorist Ed Soja, Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco posit that “Spatial justice requires a reorganization and reenvisioning of space to promote equal access to opportunities, foster participation in decision-making, and encourage different ways of being in space” (“Place Perspective” 24).

Two examples—one rural and one urban—illustrate the range of forms that food-based creative placemaking projects can take in order to support spatial and social justice by surfacing the intersecting stories of people in a given community, strengthening their voices to shape change together. Clemmons Family Farm, “one of the largest African-American owned historic farms in Vermont,” is in a transition from becoming a privately-owned farm to a nonprofit organization. Its programming includes cooking lessons, educational talks, performances, art exhibitions, and other cultural events (“Who We Are”). Its A Sense of Place Project, supported by funders including ArtPlace, focused on African American and African literary, visual, performing, healing, and culinary arts (“A Sense of Place’ Project”). Significantly, its initial efforts toward creative placemaking through A Sense of Place were not explicitly aimed in the realm of social justice but rather at improving health in the region. However, by virtue of its rarity as a piece of land under African American ownership and its promotion of Black culture in a majority-white state, Clemmons family members and farm staff found themselves necessarily in the pursuit of social justice. “The need to provide a safe and inspiring space for community

healing around racism is increasingly emerging as an important goal,” notes a recent grant report. “For very different reasons, White and Black residents are stressed, angry and overwhelmed with the current climate of hate crimes, racial discrimination and race-related violence in our state and nation. The arts and culture programs,” including food-based projects, “offer an avenue to foster healing and a healthier community” (“Sense of Place”).

Across the nation in Los Angeles, a project called the Chicharrón Chronicles focused on intersections between the Filipino and Latino communities in a neighborhood known as Historic Filipinotown—HiFi for short. A collaboration, known as Hidden HiFi, between a social enterprise organization called Public Matters and the Filipino Workers Center developed the Chicharrón Chronicles as a series of convenings to gather and record stories from a variety of members of both Latino and Filipino communities. “Teasing out the bonds that can form over fried pork rinds (chicharron/chicharon/cracklins) and a shared Spanish colonial history, the project invite[d] community members to break bread and exchange and document stories about labor, language, and food” (“Save the Dates”). Hidden HiFi edited and uploaded recordings of the conversations as a self-guided audio tour for people to listen to as they physically investigate the spaces discussed in the neighborhood. Project participants include spoken word artists, a former resident whose home was relocated to build a freeway, people from various walks of life gathered in a backyard, and the executive director of the Dolores Huerta Labor Institute—who points out on the tour that although the luminaries of the United Farmworkers Movement were Latino, the majority of its leadership were Filipino (“Chicharrón Chronicles”).

The memories are place-based stories developed through the fellowship of sharing food and exemplify the kind of placekeeping prized by Roberto Bedoya and intangible heritage celebrated by UNESCO. The project also documents a neighborhood in transition, described by Figgy Baby, a newer resident and self-proclaimed “rapper, performer and experience provider” who observes new large-scale developments that will inevitably displace people and a shifting demographic who seem less interested in engaging with the existing community (“Chicharrón Chronicles”). Like Clemmons Family Farm’s A Sense of Place project, the Chicharrón Chronicles invites participants to learn the complexity of dynamics involved when different groups live in relationship with one another. Both projects also make visible the struggles of inequity in a given place and point the way toward alternative futures.

Delfina Foundation’s Dani Burrows recalls how her work on the *Politics of Food* illustrated “the rare space that the arts can offer to bring a range of people together in a multitude of formats” to consider “the most pressing issues of our time and how we might make changes” (13). As DAISA evaluators discovered about food-related creative placemaking projects, “Successful projects can enhance social cohesion, connectedness, and community engagement. They bring people together from different groups to work across silos and inspire them to take action based on their experiences” (16). With food-sharing in a creative placemaking context, taking action together is, of course, the key.

The Urgency of Connection as a Democracy Builder

As Eric Klinenberg discovered, social infrastructure is as important as its built environment to the well-being, even survival, of people in any given place. Arts administrators can learn from one of the best examples of spaces that support social

infrastructure—the public library. Klinenberg’s book *Palaces for the People* took its title from Andrew Carnegie’s aspirational phrase for the public libraries he funded. In one such site that Klinenberg investigated, a branch librarian coincidentally named Andrew told him, “at most businesses...the assumption is that you, the customer, are better for having this thing that you purchase.... [Whereas a]t the library, the assumption is you are better. You have it in you already” (51-2).

This is an assumption that parallels the act of community cultural asset mapping as a preparatory step in creative placemaking, an activity that LA Commons’ Karen Mack identifies as essential. Her work includes documenting “cultural treasures,” which are the people, groups, organizations, events and places that are valued by their community” (Atlas et al.). By documenting these treasures, communities surface and valorize their inherent creativity rather than relying on outside entities to produce arts and culture experiences. Maria Rosario Jackson identifies creativity as “a natural impulse and community asset from which to build,” something that arts administrators can capitalize on through including food-sharing elements in creative placemaking projects.

At his library branch, Andrew created a simple version of this kind of element, a recurring event called Tea Time to which people were invited to get together and share tea. “Tea Time quickly became one of the library’s more popular programs, attracting a regular group of older patrons and a steady stream of newcomers,” evolving into “a reliable source of social activity: as they sat together, sipping tea, participants also shared newspapers, and then stories, until over time a small and unlikely community of Chinese, Turkish, Latino, Jewish, and African American patrons had formed.” For Andrew, this socializing carried more impact than mere recreation: “Tea Time is one of the best ways

that the library can express faith in people.... Serving tea doesn't seem like that big a deal, but the truth is it's one of the most important things I do" (Klinenberg 52-3).

In creative placemaking projects, arts administrators can work with communities to develop approachable spaces and ritualized, small-scale events such as meals that convey a presumption of the inherent dignity of people in that place. These shared, incidental—or as Jane Jacobs called them, “fortuitous”—experiences are the building blocks for a social infrastructure that undergirds civic engagement and nourishes democracy. Arts administrators may consider creating such spaces and events by inviting artists to orchestrate meals that encourage learning and discussion, like Maria Fernández Calvo's *Casas de Comidas*. They might organize collective food-based experiences that reveal structures and histories within a place, like Fallen Fruit's jam sessions or the Chicharrón Chronicles' mining and sharing of memories and stories. They could engage culture-bearers in surfacing the traditions and heritage of historical residents or immigrants in a place, like Vivien Sansour's Heirloom Seed Library and Traveling Kitchen. Such steps would be an effective means of planning a creative placemaking project, setting the stage for the kinds of elements residents would like to make more permanent in their communities. Alternatively, if the dynamics of a given place indicated such a strategy, arts administrators might choose to advocate for a cross-sector partnership with a food or agriculture-related small business or agency similarly aimed at community self-determination. Ultimately, the purpose is to achieve what Maria Rosario Jackson considers creative placemaking “at its best...a way of addressing harm that has been done over time to cultural root” and strengthening that root as a community treasure.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the intersections of food, art, and social justice as they apply to the field of creative placemaking. Particularly in the planning stages, arts administrators have the mandate to ensure that the interests of artists and communities are centered as drivers of creative placemaking projects. Culturally based food-sharing elements powerfully engage communities and artists to identify and celebrate existing creative richness, strengthening social infrastructure and residents' self-determination.

Artists in formal art settings such as galleries and museums have long deployed food-sharing as a means of blurring the distinction between art and life, to encourage inclusion and participation, and to viscerally engage a myriad of political issues. Outside such settings, culture-bearers draw upon the deep cultural significance of traditional foodways—which include all aspects of food production, preparation, and consumption—to sustain the physical and psychological health of their communities. Because both modes of operating favor process over product, reflect on the human condition, and offer collective experiences, they are worthy of the support of arts administrators.

Food-sharing is strongly rooted in our human experience and creates the conditions for bonding that shore up social infrastructure. Critical to communities' survival, social infrastructure is built through everyday experiences of connection. This is analogous to an expansive notion of cultural vitality, which prizes inherent creativity within a community and not only professionalized art forms and experiences. Social infrastructure is also similar to the idea of intangible cultural heritage—an important and

connective aspect of human experience that exists alongside the built environment.

Through culturally based food-sharing elements, artists and communities can examine, question, and devise solutions to address histories of injustice, including colonization, war, racism, and sexism. Finally, by insisting on the inclusion of food-sharing projects, arts administrators valorize the labor—often performed by a society’s most marginalized members—involved in the production, preparation, and clean-up of meals.

Culturally based food-sharing is a form of storytelling that connects people with one another and with their place, building invisible social infrastructures that anthropologist Mary Douglas identified as “real as colonnades.” As the multi-sector field of creative placemaking is increasingly held accountable to produce equitable outcomes—including social change and systems change—there is a strong case for ensuring that culturally based food-sharing elements are included to help reach those outcomes. As arts administrators, we are uniquely positioned to do so.

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