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# Rhetoric and Food: The Rise of the Food Truck Movement

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# RHETORIC AND FOOD: THE RISE OF THE FOOD TRUCK MOVEMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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in

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This analysis is an attempt to study the rise of a new mobile food medium the food truck. I examine the movement of rhetorical actors, the situation, the audiences, and discourses created and sustained through rhetorical practices. These include looking into contemporary controversies, the history and storytelling that helps to convey identity, a new aesthetic experience created by the medium, and specifically their sophistic character and rhetoric helping them speak on issues of social justice and change. To understand these texts, I examine each of them in light of their rhetorical situation and the convergence of a multitude of kairotic factors. I use the situation as a hinge to examine how the movement, through its rhetorical practices and characters have changed the foodscape and the foodways of the communities in which they are active.

## INTRODUCTION

Chatsworth Street runs east to west through the suburban community of Granada Hills California. Its four lanes channel a great volume of motor traffic through the center of the city. Most of the seven miles provides access into the heart of the suburban landscape of residential homes. Part of the town, commonly called the Old Granada Village, also functions as a “main street” (Bartholomew 2011). Bordering the main street, particularly between White Oak and Zelzah Avenues, are large sidewalks on both sides, ficus trees shading sections of the concrete, and one-story buildings used as commercial storefronts and restaurants. There is even an iconic row of palm trees dividing lanes going east and west bound. People can be seen year round parking their cars along the wide road to shop and dine in a town that has a maximum average temperature of 76.29 °F and minimum average of 49.69 °F.<sup>1</sup> In many ways, Granada Hills embodies an idealized 1950s Americana main street.

But Chatsworth Street has an important distinction because it is located close to “ground zero” of the viral-food-truck outbreak of 2008 in Venice Beach California.<sup>2</sup> The Los Angeles area was undergoing the costs of inventing/reinventing the “mobile kitchen,” or food truck. The invention set loose actors who mediated not only the eating patterns of late night bar goers and the lunchtime blue collar office workers, but also served symbolically to open up further discourses and concerns

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<sup>1</sup> As cited on <http://www.usa.com/granada-hills-ca-weather.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Viral is a term specifically referencing/foreshadowing the important integration of social media within the food truck medium and its community. Roy Choi and the Kogi BBQ Truck are often cited for starting the food truck revolution (Shouse 2011; Myrick 2012).

over larger food systems. In other words, the food truck was and still is a sign of change to the foodscape of the community. It creates a space where change can happen in the forms of debates or dialogues on a range of topics including the following; the relationship between the economy and social justice, how technology changes the social landscape, the ethics of land use and the practices of growing/producing food stuff, the rise of foodie gourmandism, concerns of bodily health and dietary practices, and/or the nature of eating habits and their impact on one's relation to others and the landscape.

In effect, studying the food truck actors illuminates another means of mediating messages to hundreds of thousands of individuals about what the foodscape could and should be during a massive transition of social patterns of interaction. This rhetorical dimension contributes to the sense that the rise in popularity and spread of food trucks is a unique situation, in some ways a mini-social movement, among many historical technological intrusions into everyday life that demands further analysis. However, while the intrusion and chaos is ideal for the movement, it was certainly not without tension for those actors living or running certain businesses in Granada Hills at the time.

Granada Hills has large streets, ideal sidewalks with shade, and plenty of parking, making it an ideal environment for food trucks to find a market and a perfect testing ground for this new innovation. As it happened, it took just one food truck to find the right location to start a snowball effect. As one of these new mobile kitchens started to have success, another truck would show up, then another, and



then another. Bartholomew (2011) stated, "What started as a couple of food wagons parked early this year... has grown into a full-on traveling food court" (para. 5). Before long, they were fighting amongst each other for the increasingly limited space along Chatsworth Street. By the end of 2011, according to Charles Beris, Granada Hills had the "largest non-organized food truck gathering in Los Angeles" (as cited in Bartholomew para. 9).

From the perspective of the food truckers rolling into Granada Hills and setting up their kitchens, their arrival seemed to bring nothing but good news. In the midst of a national recession, Chatsworth Street was an oasis filled with customers looking for something to eat and willing to pay a premium price. According to Bartholomew (2011):

Sanjay Patel, owner of Bollywood Bites, was among the first trio of trucks on the street, in January. Now his Indian food is among the most popular draws. "I get more business here than any other place, including Santa Monica and Venice," said Patel, of Van Nuys. "People are very nice. I love them. They love my food" (para. 41-42).

Patel was not the only food trucker impressed by what Chatsworth Street had to offer. Miguel Casiano, owner of Philly Please food truck, stated, "I was open for a week, five days officially rolling. And last Friday we got an invite to Granada Hills and I just got my doors slammed off. It was rocking out here last night" (Hovater 2011). The combination of the new medium for delivering high quality food to customers in the area had potential to positively impact all parties involved.

The food truckers were not the only entities excited by the new relationship between the town of Granada Hills and the new mobile kitchens. Many throughout

the community of Granada Hills and the greater Los Angeles area saw this change as a sign of prosperity. Holly Patterson, of the blog theSFVscoop.com, stated regarding the events on Chatsworth Street, "You know, after 6 p.m., usually, when you go down Chatsworth Street, it's dead...These food trucks actually bring life to the area, and it's a very important thing" (as cited in Villacorte 2011 para. 21-22). The president of the Granada Hills Resident Group, Dave Beauvais, commented, "I love the fact it's brought a lot of people out" (as cited in Bartholomew 2011 para. 16). In other words, the combination of Chatsworth Street and the food truck was being touted as stimulating an atmosphere of opportunity in a local economy that had been stagnant.

However, to others in the Granada Hills community, food trucks and Chatsworth Street were far from a haven in the midst of a recession. For example, while Dave Beauvais appreciated the fact that food trucks were drawing people into a sleepier part of town, he still described the event as having "Wild West" qualities where "there are no rules" (as cited in Bartholomew 2011 para. 15). Without rules to guide and regulate the spread of the food truck "virus," there arose a whole host of problems—trash (and the ensuing increase in the rat population), noise, no public access to restrooms, health and sanitation concerns, parking spaces, traffic, and the fear that food trucks would put local "brick-and-mortar" restaurants out of business (Hovater 2011). Bartholomew (2011) stated in some instances, "While packed sidewalks have drawn smiles from some mom-and-pop businesses, others say the trucks have obscured their restaurant signs, robbing customers of parking spots"

(para. 17). Paul Tomassian, owner of Ani Bakery located on Chatsworth Street, stated, "I was very upset with the trucks...I felt like I was in Lebanon again - no rules. No government" (para. 25). Terrance Powell, director of the county Department of Public Health's Bureau of Specialized Surveillance and Enforcement, visited Chatsworth Street's food truck court and recognized the need for monitoring, saying, "Our basic objective is to ensure that food is safe and will not get someone sick...There cannot be unsanitary conditions, and employee hygiene has to be at the highest point in order to prevent foodborne illness" (as cited in Villacorte 2011 para. 11-12). In other words, the rise of the food truck industry in Granada Hills and ensuing issues now necessitated deliberate interventions.

Dramatic episodes, like those along Chatsworth Street, show a kind of disruption that occurs when a new medium alters conventional patterns of social life. The disruption and resulting alteration to human behavior is what Marshall McLuhan means by "the medium is the message." McLuhan (1994) states, "This is merely to say that the personal and social consequence of any medium... result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (p. 7).<sup>3</sup> Thus, as a medium, the food truck is not merely a vehicle for delivering different "content," whether it is bourbon cronuts or ginger-carnitas nachos and represents the introduction of a new tactile medium. As is

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<sup>3</sup> The distinction between medium and content means more when one considers McLuhan's belief that ultimately the "medium" tells us the important messages concerning how these objects or technologies are altering the self and society. McLuhan did not proclaim the medium is the content or the content is the message. He infers that if a person is reading this on a computer screen, the "content" of what is written are words that he is interpreting. The "medium" is a combination of word processor or PDF reader and other computer technology.

indicated by the reactions of the citizens of Granada Hills, the arrival of the food truck announces the message that the scale, pace, and pattern of life in that town is going to undergo a transformation. As food trucks become ubiquitous, the speed by which food is sold and consumed increases. The habits of a formerly sleepy main street are radically altered and the message of the food truck is that “things are going to change.” For instance, according to a neighborhood council survey, on one Friday night along Chatsworth Street they “tallied 43 food trucks and 650 sidewalk diners, for an evening estimate of up to 6,000 visitors” (Bartholomew 2011 para. 6). Those simple survey numbers help illuminate the relatively large quantity of people, motorized vehicles, trash, and everything else that comes with an outdoor food court to be suddenly thrust upon a suburban street. As one member of the community put it, “It is literally walking distance from my house and it feels like a street fair, it feels like a happening” (Hovater 2011). The question being, to what degree that change will be consciously controlled so that the medium doesn’t “overheat” its environment.

### **Food as Communication and the Rhetorical Situation**

What is notable about places like Granada Hills is that city officials and residents took the initiative as a community to work together to find a way of understanding and regulating this new mobile food medium. Their experience became the subject of a documentary called Food Truck Wars (Hovater 2011). For instance, Jerry Askew, a board member of Granada Hills South Neighborhood Council, stated in the documentary:

We are interested in helping the business in the neighborhood. And we are also very interested in the environment the food trucks have brought. The members have never really seen the community come together like it has since the food trucks have been here. So we are trying to get the businesses to talk to the food trucks and see if we can work out some type of agreement where businesses are benefiting from it, the community is benefiting from it and the food trucks are benefiting from it (Hovater).

As the documentary narrates, the action taken by people like the neighborhood council had positive results. Where businesses like the Frosty Queen or Ani Bakery worried that the food trucks would hurt their business, it turned out that with some modifications they could share in the profits brought by the increased foot traffic (Hovater). Concerns over safety and waste issues due to the presence of too many trucks were mitigated by a third party that stepped in to coordinate a clean up crew and fix the parking problems through a system of small fees and parking cones. The Granada Hills Grub Fest, as it is called today, is still an event today and is host to large crowds of individuals coming out to Chatsworth Street and patronizing the businesses, mobile and brick-and-mortar, that line it.

One way to approach the deliberative context created by the sudden presence of food trucks is to treat it as a rhetorical situation. According to Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawee (1999) the Greeks' notions of a rhetorical situation seemed from the idea that rhetoric, the art of using symbols to persuade an audience, was a means of altering their surrounding, particularly in during chaotic or difficult situations. In order to successfully make a change, however, an orator had to utilize *kairos*, or right/appropriate timing. For example, the early sophists, according to John Poulakos (1995), would teach and personally rely "on clever uses

of time to capitalize on and create opportunities for itself and its adherents” (p. 71). Kathryn Morgan (2004) writes that Isocrates believed “‘Kairotic’ skills” were “at a premium” for his oratory students because the orator/rhetor needed to be prepared and constantly aware of the moving treads of the citizenry/audience (p. 150). Having a pulse on the shifting mind of the polis also reminded the orator that the words they spoke happened in a specific time and what was pious at one moment can easily become impious the next. Therefore, it was a sophistic virtue to be constantly ready to debate and dialogue on just about any given topic at hand.

Aristotle would take *kairos* and build a methodology out of it in order to analyze a text’s degree of eloquence and style the rhetor capitalized on. James Kinneavy (2002) states, “In the use of stylistic tropes, Aristotle insists that ‘the seasonal or unseasonal use of these devices applies to all kinds of rhetoric’” (p. 72). This is in reference to the orator’s ability to make judgments and rhetorically act in an ideal measure of *prepon*, or measure of fitness, that runs through “rhetorical devices such as rhythm, metaphor, epithet, and correctness. It is also included in all three appeals: the logical, ethical, and pathetic” (p. 73). The level of fitness, then, is a measure of success or failure for a rhetor’s argument. For Aristotle and many other rhetors of Ancient Greece, *kairos* was properly coined “the cornerstone of rhetoric in the Golden Age of Greece” (Sipiora 2002 p. 3).

*Kairos* is also the cornerstone of rhetorical situations for many modern rhetorical scholars. Lloyd Bitzer’s construct of the rhetorical situation will be used to analyze different aspects of the food truck movement. Bitzer himself primarily

draws on the work of Aristotle and his conception of the rhetorical situation. Bitzer operated from the position that “rhetorical discourse derived its meaning from the situation in which it was created” (Farrell & Young 2009 p. 34). Crick (2006) goes so far as to claim Bitzer “implicitly accepts that even philosophy, traditionally the most ‘contemplative’ of all arts, is nonetheless related to some actual situation” because the philosophers must consider the nature/situation in which they philosophized (p. 132).

In Bitzer’s original article “The Rhetorical Situation” published by *Philosophy and Rhetoric* in 1968 (1968) he defines a rhetorical situation as a manifestation of a complex interaction “of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision of action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence” (p. 6). This definition has created many counter-arguments and suggested alterations which have helped it evolve over time, but, at its core, it states that when a problem arises, it is through rhetorical communication presented to an audience that can facilitate change that problems have their best chance at resolution.

Bitzer claims that three base prerequisites have to be in place for a rhetorical situation to exist. The first is having an *exigence*, which is “an imperfection marked by urgency” (p. 6). The second is the need for an *audience*, defined as “those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change,” and lastly are the *constraints*, articulated as the “persons, events, objects, and

relations which are part of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence” (p. 8). He goes on to note, “Standard sources of constraints includes beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives, and the like; and when the orator enters the situation, his discourse not only harnesses constraints given by the situation but provides additional important constraints—for example his personal character, his logical proofs, and his style” (p. 8). With Aristotle clearly in mind, Bitzer argues that the level of how well a rhetor understands the audience and constraints created by the situation can help rhetorically produce the best possible outcome for any issue. Therefore, by investigating exigent moments and the speakers’ stylistic choices in their art of marketing to specific audiences in those moments, the question of how a band of small mobile kitchens created a national movement can be better answered. Under Bitzer’s most ideally constructed rhetorical situation is the model case of the *kairotic* and situated moment defining the meanings embedded in the Food Truck movement’s discourse.

While Bitzer will be the primary step into the movement, it is still necessary to discuss some of the alterations to the theory over the years. Some of these alterations have appeared at the hands of people working with the theory with the intent to advance it and they will be noted. However, Bitzer’s conception of a rhetorical situation has not been without its fair share of criticism. As Marilyn Young (2001) points out, he:

Immediately became the target of criticism. Bitzer’s “sin” was publishing his essay at the dawn of the postmodern era, as the emphasis in critical



assessment of rhetoric was shifting from the rhetor to the audience, though many of his critics relied on classical concepts to refute his ideas (p. 275).

Scholars such as K.E. Wilkerson, Richard L. Larson, Walter Fisher, Richard Vatz to later scholars Barbara Biesecker and Garrett and Xiao all took the time to carefully point out how Bitzer's theory cannot account for the complex and dynamic relationship that the rhetor and audience have to the creation and sustaining rhetorical situations (Young). They saw the relationship as being much more fractal in nature as opposed to Bitzer more literal or even static-minded view. It was as if he still operating as though it were Ancient Greece. One of the more infamous critiques stems from Richard Vatz in 1973 arguing, "To the audience, events become meaningful only through their linguistic depiction" and therefore "meaning is not discovered in situations, but created by rhetors" (p. 157). As Young (2001) states Vatz finds that "Bitzer has not accounted for the creativity of the rhetor" (p. 280). More than anything, his reading of rhetorical situation adds another dimension to consider in the analysis of a text in that the rhetor is in part responsible of the creation and sustaining of an exigence and not simply responding. As Young notes, the work of "Hunsaker and Smith focus on exigence and audience in relation to issues" and "discuss the ways in which the situation and the rhetor grow out of both exigence and audience to constitute and constrain the rhetorical situation" (p. 285). Young goes farther to state:

Their work advances our understanding of the rhetorical situation by focusing on the role of the audience in the creation, development, and resolution of issues. Issues, according to Hunsaker and Smith, grow out of audience perceptions of the exigence; Bitzer, while mentioning audience as

an element of the rhetorical situation, does not, in this essay, account for variations in the audience (p. 285).

As Young addresses in her article, the flexibility of the method and its “resilience and its explanatory power” to reveal a confluence of complex factors that arise or constituted through rhetorical acts. It was Andrew King (2015) who noted in a personal conversation, the food truck movement seems to have:

The right conditions, the right community, the right orators to largely, partially, or wholly explain its success. It is so powerful that it constantly evolves new forms, and gains new constituencies, it adapts to new conditions, and it refashions its image and reinvents itself. It is a highly visible piece of social change. It represents a whole series of happy convergences.

With Bitzer and the rhetorical situation come a method that aides in explaining the movements success or limits of success to achieve “convergence” within the large public discourse concerning foodways—collection for habits of action, beliefs, attitudes, and values. For example, some actors see the food truck as a problem and a threat to their livelihoods in the brick-and-mortar restaurant industry. The food truckers are also seeing a number of different exigencies such as the bad economy, growing unemployment, and a lackluster foodscape as caused to continue to grow their mobile food business and act within the situation accordingly.

Another addition to the use of the rhetorical situation is to distinguish it from a purely technical situation that can be resolved by the application of technique alone—as one might use a cookbook to fix a better meal. In a technical situation, according to Nathan Crick (2011), “only proper application of the tools of instrumental rationality is need for resolution, much as a ‘How To’ book provides an

index of how to repair common household problems” (p. 42). But a rhetorical situation “features the presence of a moral conflict that cannot be resolved by logical reasoning alone” (p. 42). Therefore the public is tasked with listening to competing moral claims about this new medium and its role in the foodscape. In essence the arrival of food trucks as a new medium of food preparation, distribution, and consumption is both a sign and cause of disruption to traditional economic and social patterns of dining in public spaces.

The fact that the rhetorical situation was brought about by changing foodways neither makes it any less rhetorical nor particularly new. For long periods of time, food has been used rhetorically to move people to change. Going back to the Greek atomist Epicurus, food was used rhetorically to articulate the means to achieve the “goodlife” (Symons 2008; Asmis 2010; Rist 2010). When Epicurus set up a garden school outside of Athens, the school not only physically embodied the philosophy of the Epicureans, but was also persuasive in getting people to move away from the city and regain a lost closeness to nature while perusing higher levels of enlightenment in a communal setting (Symons 2008; Sedley 2010).

Since the time of Epicurus, food as communication has only become more ubiquitous and refined. Carlita Greene and Janet Cramer (2011), editors of *Food as Communication: Communication as Food* write that in recent history, food has been “taken for granted” and potentially too often “associated with both a common and an ordinary enterprise” (p. ix). Nonetheless, no matter how much in-the-background food and its discourses have become to the larger public, its impact is still massive

on day-to-day life. To both Greene and Cramer, communication, verbal and nonverbal, is a means to understand our world and they assert that “we can view food as a form of communication because it is a nonverbal means by which we share meanings with others” (p. x). Lindenfeld (2011) expands food’s communication role stating, “Discourses on food occur in a complex web of communication in which debates about citizenship, culture, identity, economics, and politics intertwine” (p.

4). Rhetorical scholar Barry Brummett (2011) points out:

Politics and the table are no strangers to each other. In the United States we have a long history of dumping tea into the harbors to protest taxes, boycotting grapes in support of Cesar Chavez, or renaming French fries Freedom fries in irritation at the French for correctly opposing our corrupt Iraq war (p. 257).

This makes food and foodways rhetorically powerful and key to understanding our shared experiences. As German (2011) points out food is used as a:

Critical component of change as situations of upheaval disrupt the identities of people. It also may be important as they attempt to assemble or reorganize their identities, drawing upon the reassuring practices of food preparation as they define, remember, and retell the stories of their lives. In particular, food may serve as the only window into the lives of people who were swept from history by socio-political forces (p. 140).

Much like those in Granada Hills and the rest of the communities affected by the rise of the food truck, there was a disruption and a desire to solve the problem because there was more at risk than making money.

In summary, the urgency/exigency in the situation is often attributed to a few things. Firstly, there is a perceived threat from the new medium to the financial stability of brick-and-mortar restaurants. On the other hand, food truckers have a

perceived threat from a recession and high levels up unemployment, desires to breakaway from old patterns of unsuccessful work/life balance, and a generally lackluster foodscape. Secondly, the arrival of food trucks comes with a more general disruption of day-to-day public life such as larger amounts of trash, increased noise, and larger amounts of traffic in areas where the mobile kitchens are located. And lastly, there is a great deal of uncertainty stemming from not knowing what the success of mobile cuisine represents to the future of eating in public spaces, the brick-and-mortar restaurant, and eating habits of the public in general. The rise of the food truck thusly illuminates a variety of constraints in terms of what can physically, legally, and persuasively be accomplished within the foodscape by an audience of difference makers that includes lawmakers, consumers, business owners, and the food truckers themselves.

Even with a success story like Granada Hills, this dissertation posits that food trucks, as new mediums, are disruptive forces. However, through conscious attention to and inquiry into the potentials and drawbacks of their disruption, which Marshall McLuhan (1994) refers to as “wakefulness” as opposed to “numbness,” harmony can be achieved and maintained throughout the social, rather than it simply being run over by the chaos produced by these mediums when they are inserted into matter-of-fact routines. Therefore, one has to argue rhetorically in order to get the best out of the situation and one also has to rebuild a broken social pattern in a way that uses rhetorical and democratic means to orchestrate a more fulfilling and productive experience with the new medium of the food truck.

## Chapter Breakdown

This dissertation investigates the relationship between the exigence that arises with the arrival of food trucks into the modern foodscape and the social, economic, legal, and rhetorical practices and discourses that arise in response. Despite having rhetoric as its primary emphasis, this dissertation, by necessity, must explore many arguable non-rhetorical phenomena in order to understand the complex nature of the situation and the motives and strategies of the many actors involved. This project, therefore, speaks across multiple discourses. It contributes to the understanding of the role of transportation media and how people not only consume but also talk and argue about food. It addresses sociological questions about the ways in which the introduction of new food mediums change to the social order. It speaks to economic and legal discourses about how a new medium like the food truck should be regulated in a way that preserves boundaries and traditions while at the same time stimulating economic growth. It calls attention to the issues of food politics that are becoming increasingly important in how consumers make food choices. And finally, it reaffirms traditional rhetorical concerns with fostering deliberation about the issues that impact communities, health, economies, and social lives.

The dissertation will have four chapters. The first chapter observes and documents the rise of the food truck through the discourse of Bruno Latour to show how the new medium produced a situation that went from stable/matter of fact to unstable/matter of concern. Latour defines “a matter of fact” something that has an

established pattern and “may remain silent” (2007 p. 115). Being silent leads matters of fact to often remain unnoticed and be taken for granted. Something becomes a matter of concern when “we can no longer be satisfied either by the indifference to reality that goes with multiple ‘symbolic’ representations of the ‘same’ nature or with the premature unification provided by ‘nature’” (p. 117). In other words, to make something a matter of concern is to de-naturalize it—to make it something, in McLuhan’s (1994) words, that people are no longer “numb” to, but fully aware of as a part of themselves. This means that the food truck disrupted “matter of fact” social patterns and there is a demand to find out what those patterns were and how they are being reconstituted. During a food truck showdown on the Miracle Mile in Los Angeles California we can see the actors and mediums interacting with new communication patterns during periods of controversy. With this data, food trucks can be used to map out the social order before and after the disruption in order to identify controversy, participants, and interpersonal relations once taken for granted.

The second chapter looks at how, in Latour’s language, a “panorama” can be constructed in order to make sense of the food truck in a broad historical sense. The panorama always has a broad, mythic sweep to it and encompasses a large scale of time and space. It is something that sees everything in general (but few things in particular) by painting a big picture of an event or time period. According to Latour (2007), sociological panoramas are powerful tools because;

They solve the question of staging the totality, ordering the ups and downs, of nesting the ‘micro’, ‘meso’, and ‘macro’ into one another...They design a

picture which has no gap in it, giving the spectator the powerful impression of being fully immersed in the real world without any artificial mediations (p. 188).

However, panoramas can get caught up in trying to provide all the information contained in the big picture and, thus, be blinded by the overwhelming amounts of data. At other times, panoramas are incomplete and do not provide a foundation on which to act. Latour states that they should “prepare us, once the screening has ended, to take up the political tasks of composition” (p. 189). To create a panorama of the food truck is to situate it within a larger historical narrative and to perform a rhetorical act by helping define it in terms of its genealogy and give a model for how it functions and how to respond to it as a new medium.

The panorama produced by the food truck community is often too incomplete to make sense of the phenomena. While Charles Goodnight is constantly credited and valorized for his skill and forethought when building an early mobile kitchen, the famous “chuck wagon,” it provides a limited genealogy that associates modern food trucks with the heroic frontier myth.<sup>4</sup> However, this account ignores the context the tragic elements of the situation that motivated him to act in sometimes less-than-honorable ways while leaving out other narratives that provide equally rich resources for cultural understanding. Therefore, it is the intention of this dissertation to incorporate more stories so that more aspects of the food truck are represented within them. There are four different episodes in the

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<sup>4</sup> Goodnight is referenced in many food truck blogs and books for his construction of the chuckwagon, which is seen by many as the first food truck. The chapter of many of those narratives will be referenced, but a good introductory narrative is written by Richard Myrick (2012).



past, each of which has some relationship to the food truck, that are used as case studies; (1) Goodnight and his chuckwagon; (2) the origins of the restaurant in the French revolution; (3) the lunchwagon and lunch cart during the Industrial Revolution in New England; and (3) the tamale cart in Southern California and throughout the western half of the United States. Each of these panoramas shows a shift that is relevant to the new medium of the food truck; mobility, gourmet cuisine, and attachment to the urban communities and its street cuisine. Rhetorically, the panoramas/myths help to showcase virtues and identity markers that the food truck community has embraced and advocates to the public, while providing a panorama that helps researchers practically understand the influence of new mediums within a social foodscape and thereby better predict and control the impact of new mediums like the food truck.

In the third chapter, the dissertation will take a more localized look at the food truck as opposed to the historical/panoramic broad view. Specifically, the chapter examines the phenomenon of eating at the food truck as a specific encounter/experience between a person and a mobile kitchen. In other words, it will look at how the food truck is advertising itself and a few of the ways one can encounter the food truck as an aesthetic experience. Drawing from John Dewey's (1934) work on experience, the food truck experience can be identified as aesthetic on the one hand and a source of disruption on the other. Ideally, it is an aesthetic moment when an encounter with the new medium is informed by expectations that are influenced by the communication and rhetoric produced by the food truck

community, but also grounded in a respect for local cultural patterns and environmental conditions. The food truck community advances its own idealism of creating an aesthetic experience by communicating with its surroundings in enriching ways, which also entails addressing parking laws, zoning regulations, health codes and a variety of other constraints to running a mobile kitchen.

However, this chapter also looks at food trucks as a source of aesthetic disruption—particularly when food trucks see themselves as apart from the community. Issues of trash, noise, restroom access, sanitary conditions, parking, and even crowd level can negatively affect the experience of the customers, food truckers, and locals in the areas where food trucks frequent. Because of the organic nature of many of the food truck gatherings, there is a short amount of time to plan out the future of what a street might look, feel, and function like after a crowd of potentially loud, brightly colored, and smelly “party starters” show up. For example, with a food truck event underway, the daily activities of many individuals could become bogged down by the increased traffic, along with other complications such as blocked roadways and limited parking. The noise produced by generators, people yelling, and the constant clamor of the working parts of an outdoor dining area and kitchen combine to create a cacophony most people would find disturbing. Eating at a food truck may not be pleasurable for all people and communities. Therefore, the aesthetic-disruption type of experiences need to be examined as well.

Chapter four will look at different mobile food mediums as rhetorical actors. On one hand, food trucks can be seen as an opportunity to channel propaganda from

a food industry—such as Taco Bell, Costco, Burger King, and Applebee’s—that privileges mass consumption and production. This, in many ways, mimics Plato’s critique of rhetoric and the character of the sophists. By pointing out mobile mediums that use rhetoric to flatter for short-term pleasure over just action and true knowledge can be useful in making consumer choices within the foodscape. On the other hand, food trucks also function as a stage for advocacy and deliberation. Drawing from John Poulakos (2008) and the idea of the Greek sophists as traveling entrepreneurs, the chapter looks at the food truck as stages in which rhetorical arguments are made. There are performative actors and spokespeople, like Roy Choi who take a sophistical spirit and use their position to advocate for change, educate citizens, and defend his community. The dichotomy encourages a contrast of the rhetorical/sophistical against the propaganda/economic uses of the food truck.

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## CHAPTER ONE: TRACING THE FOOD TRUCK

Prior to the age of ten and during the mid to late 1980s, I would head to my grandfather's place of work, a construction supply business located in South El Monte, California. Contractors and home improvement agents/workers/laborers are generally early risers. In order to serve them, my grandfather opened the doors before sunrise for over seventy-five years. However, about the time the sun peaked in the morning sky, a polished aluminum "roach coach" would pull up and announce the morning break. It would open its side window and start serving a line of waiting workers hot coffee, pre-wrapped sandwiches, and a variety of other snacks to take on the go. I would enjoy a candy bar occasionally or even a pre-packaged microwavable breakfast burrito. Thankfully, the food came out quickly, allowing the truck to serve the entire line of waiting customers before the break bell called everyone back to their day-to-day operations. The entire experience was over in a few minutes. Patrons did not take the food and sit down, as there were no tables in the area; rather, they ate and drank on the move or took it back to a desk or break room.

The whole experience seemed to perk up the workers more than a caffeine or sugar rush. At the time, I believed that this was due in part to many workers having a social moment away from the monotony of loading cement and gravel into pickup trucks. For me, the event was also wild and fun to see everyone interact differently from when I would see him or her around working. To this day, roach coaches still

remind me of my grandfather and those mornings with all the employees chatting about what to get and what to avoid or even the workday that was ahead of them.

Some thirty years later, I have tried to remember all my other interactions with some type of mobile vending vehicle. Other than a few interactions with the one and only *In-n-Out Burger* truck parking outside of my high school serving up burger and chips, the shrimp trucks on Oahu's North Shore, and a few taco truck burritos after a late night or two hanging out with friends.<sup>5</sup> In total, the mobile vending vehicle was something hidden in the corners, hard to find, something that only appeared maybe once a year, and was unusual except for those rare occasions.<sup>6</sup> But in 2009 and 2010, this image of the blue collar, hidden, strange, and unruly mobile food vender started to change. Upon my return to Southern California after spending two years on Oahu Hawai'i, I discovered that the foodscape had become dotted with a whole host of roach coaches and taco trucks. I could not drive through Southern California without seeing the neon lights, the long lines of people crowding side walks or filling up parking lots, hearing music coming from the trucks load speakers, or smelling the food being cooked on the grill or sitting in over-flowing trash cans. In other words, what had happened in Granada Hills was happening everywhere in California.

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<sup>5</sup> One of the major disappointments in my life was to have four years of high school, were the In-n-Out truck would show up and serve their famous burgers. But, and this is a big but, they did not serve their amazing fries on the truck. It most likely it had to do with not installing a fryer or not have the insurance to cover a fryer on in mobile kitchen. Whatever the case I was bummed out.

<sup>6</sup> Maybe if grew up in New Brunswick or went to Rutgers University around 1996 I could have "ended the night with a visit to one of the all-night food trucks parked just off College Avenue for a gyro or a 'fat cat,' a submarine sandwich filled with two beef patties, French fries and the works" (Newman 1996 para. 1). This would have been something like a food truck experience of today.

There was also a difference about the customers who were crowding around the trucks. Instead of the working men and women I grew up with, these customers looked like they just stepped out of a business meeting—far from the type who just stepped off a forklift after loading a ton of used brick onto the flatbed truck. The whole scene made me wonder what took those roach coaches and taco trucks to this phase of their evolution and what transformative process of the mobile food vendor I missed. The more I looked into the trucks, the more it became more apparent these were something new and they were causing joy and chaos in my local foodscape while I was away. In fact, this new medium rolling around Los Angeles was the cause of much concern.

A sociological made famous by Bruno Latour called Actor Network Theory or ANT will help to address these difficulties. In this chapter I will use ANT to defuse the set of controversies located at the Miracle Mile between many actors as they deal with the impact of the new medium/food truck and make rhetorical utterances that help define the relationships they have and how they go about trying to make change them via communication. ANT, with this slight rhetorical twist, exposes what actors are connected to each other and what mediation they are responsible for during this period of transformation. This chapter will then use ANT to show how the “social” is being reassembled through the establishment of new behaviors through new mediums.



## **Latour's General Approach to Sociology and the ANT Method**

Why use Bruno Latour, ANT, and the language of sociology to help understand the food truck phenomena? It is not because Latour grew up in France or, according to Harmon (2009), enjoyed the cafe in his hometown or the products produced by and time spent on his family vineyards—although that is a happy coincidence. Rather, Latour has a long academic history producing insight into his love of inventions, science, and technology. According to Justin White (2009), using social science is and has been a way for Latour “to know what we have in common, what connections are associated together, and how to live in the same common world” when those objects or technologies come crashing down into our living rooms (para. 18). During times of confusion or uncertainty, finding the ways in which we are and are not connected to one another is valuable in figuring out how society assembles itself.

But Latour and other thinkers of human social activity—notably Michel Callon and John Law—were not happy with the existing set of sociological methods used to make these findings (Latour 2007; Harmon 2009). Specifically Latour refers to Durkheim's Sociology of the Social/S.O.S as a method to avoid. Durkheim's S.O.S according to Latour claims, “a given trait was said to be ‘social’ or to ‘pertain to society’ when it could be defined as possessing specific properties, some negative—it must not be ‘purely’ biological, linguistic, economical, natural—and some positive—it must achieve, reinforce, express, maintain, reproduce, or subvert the social order” (p. 3). In other words, the social is not a separate sphere we inhabit, or which is a

property of things, or which is a force which causes us to act, but rather consists of the totality of relations that we establish with people and objects around us.

Therefore, Latour and others designed a new method and language (Sociology of Association/S.O.A or Critical Sociology) for describing a people's definition of themselves, the groups they are interacting with, the events they participate in, the rationales and theories for their actions or the actions of others, why ontologically the world was the way it was, and/or whatever else is underway and is important to the actors. In this way, he seeks to multiply rather than to reduce the number of actors in any social network and take into account each of their own properties and attitudes. Latour (2007) states:

Actors have many philosophies but sociologists think they should stick to only a few. Actors fill the world with agencies while sociologists of the social tell them which building blocks their world is 'really' made of. That they often do this for high-minded reasons, to be 'politically relevant', to be 'critical' for the good of the actors they wish to 'free from the shackle of archaic powers', does not reassure me. Even if it were excellent politics, which it is not as we shall see, it would still be bad science (52).

Therefore, Latour believes, "When you wish to discover the new unexpected actors that have more recently popped up and which are not yet *bona fide* members of 'society', you have to travel somewhere else and with very different kinds of gear" (22). The gear of an ANT is for tracking and document actors' movements by tracing connections rather than identifying some "force" behind the scenes.

By following multiple actors, recording what they say, and by investigating what objects they interact with, the ANT sociologist is able to construct a case study

in which actors interact and in effect illuminate “the social” and/or the happening within “society.” As Michel Callon (2007) states:

The most important thing is that ANT is based on no stable theory of the actor; rather it assumes the radical indeterminacy of the actor. For example, the actor’s size, its psychological make-up, and the motivations behind its actions – none of these are predetermined. In this respect ANT is a break from the more orthodox currents of social science (p. 273).

Social scientists are then tasked with unpacking that network of actors and their interactions in order to trace their associations. Graham Harmon (2009) stated, “actors are autonomous forces to reckon with, unleashed in the world like leprechauns and wolves” (p.6). In short, the descriptions of a S.O.A or ANT study claim the investigator wants the actors to interact as much as possible, to talk about themselves, and to define the happenings of their “society.”

How does the ANT researcher keep track of all this movement of actors?

Latour encourages the ANT to create a “text” when studying a collective or group. The text is written by the ANT researcher who has identified and followed associations, then captured the movement of actors in and around a controversy in the form of stories. These stories use the network of associations created by actors as a tool to aid in gathering information to describe some group or collective.<sup>7</sup>

Latour (2007) states the ANT’s study:

On the one hand, it is just a text made up of reams of paper sullied by an inkjet or burnt by a laser beam. On the other, it is a precious little institution to represent, or more exactly to re-represent—that is, to present again—the social to all its participants, to perform it, to give it a form (p. 139).

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<sup>7</sup> Latour (2007) states, “A text, in our definition of social science, is thus a test on how many actors the writer is able to treat as mediators and how far he or she is able to achieve the social” (p. 128-129).

Latour refers to that researcher's text as being the "equivalent of a laboratory. It's a place for trials, experiments, and simulations" (p. 149). However the quality of the text is determined by its ability to produce a network of its own. Latour states that a network:

Is nothing more than *an indicator of the quality of a text* about the topics at hand. It qualifies its objectivity, that is, the ability of each actor to *make* other actors do unexpected things. A good text elicits networks of actors when it allows the writer to trace a set of relations...In a bad text only a handful of actors will be designated as the causes of all the others, which will have no other function than to serve as a backdrop or relay for the flows of causal efficacy (p. 129-130).

This ANT study will produce a text that includes as many actors as possible.

Furthermore, producing a S.O.A or ANT text can be a rhetorical act and documentation and analysis of actors' rhetoric when this text enters a debate in which the assembly of the social is in flux. Actors, small or large, are considered powerful agents and voices by S.O.A. Therefore it is the ANT's rhetorical function, after finding those actors, to produce a rhetorical text that advances the "minority viewpoints in exigent circumstances such that they have the opportunity to transform public opinion through persuasion in an egalitarian public sphere" (Crick 2012 p. 12). The documentation of a *kairotic* moment and its rhetorical utterance, like in the case of the food truck, is also the witnessing of the "end" but a signal of rebirth as well.

## The Language of the ANT

Early ANT pioneers knew that developing a theory requires some language construction and reconstruction. Therefore, it is necessary to define a few ANT terms and concepts. First, *actors*—also known as “actants” and “objects”—are not fixed, substantial concrete material in an Aristotelian sense that carry their essential properties with them wherever they go (2007). Graham Harmon (2009) clarifies that Aristotle believed, “Individuals are substances—and substances are deeper than their accidents and their relations to other things, and capable of enduring despite changes in these essential feature” (p. 14). In other words, Aristotle believes that one could define a substance in isolation rather than in relationship to other actants. Latour believes, in contrast to Aristotle:

An actant is not a privileged inner kernel encrusted with peripheral accidents and relations. After all, this would make a thing’s surface derivative of its depth, thereby spoiling the principle of irreduction...a thing is so utterly concrete that none of its features can be scraped away like cobwebs or moss (p. 14).

This definitive stance is often where Latour and the other S.O.A get their philosophical reputation as “materialist.” Nonetheless, he believes that there is one sure thing concrete objects and actants are good at doing—acting. At its base Latour (2007) claims that an actor/actant/object is “anything that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference” (p. 71). Harmon (2009) adds, “Atoms and molecules are actants, as are children, raindrops, bullet trains, politicians, and numerals,” which leads Latour to conclude, “All entities are on exactly the same ontological

footing” (p. 14). In short, actors/actants/objects are real material objects, not limited to human actors, interacting, and defining their reality.<sup>8</sup>

ANT studies are then tasked to find actors and then study their capacity to move around and *mediate* information throughout a system of associations to other actors. Latour states, “As soon as an actor has found a somewhat more faithful ally, it can force another ally to become more faithful in its turn” (as cited in Harmon 2009 p. 20).<sup>9</sup> Actors thus do not exist in isolation but only as objects that move other things to act in certain ways over others. As Harmon (2009) points out, a mediator/actor “always does new work of its own to shape the translation of forces from one point of reality to the next” (p. 15). As Latour (2007) describes them, “they transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry,” they may look “complex”, “if the nuance looks moot, its effects are radical, and they “trigger other mediators” (p. 40 & 50). More data about the mediation/communication process is available for the researcher to collect and analyze as a result of having more interactions between actors. Latour states that the social becomes present “during the brief moment when they are reshuffled together,” meaning that the “social, for ANT, is the name of a type of momentary association which is characterized by the way it gathers together into new shapes” (p. 65). In sum, the *social*, according to Latour (2007):

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<sup>8</sup> More about the human agency given to non-human objects according to Latour and other S.O.A in the section talking about the deploying controversies surround the nature of objects.

<sup>9</sup> Latour and S.O.A’s maxim “actors cannot not transport meaning/data to another” is very similar to the communication/social linguistic maxim “one cannot not communicate.”

Doesn't designate a domain of reality or some particular item, but rather is the name of a movement, a displacement, a transformation, a translation, an enrollment. It is an association between entities which are in no way recognizable as being social in the ordinary manner, except during the brief moment when they are reshuffled together (p. 64-65).

Those traces of interactions and mediations give the only physical empirical evidence and offer a figuration of how the network of actors. It is for this reason that ANT works best around controversies— because it makes the social present to all involved.

ANT studies want lots of data therefore it benefits the researcher to treat most actors/actants/objects as *mediators* and not *intermediaries* and/or “black boxes.” Latour (2007) claims, an intermediary or “black box” is where sociologists account for the one, “even if it is internally made of many parts” (p. 41). According to Besel (2011), in “following Latour’s lead...the concept of a black box has been understood within science studies by calling it ‘a technical artifact’ that is often used for a specific scientific function without an awareness of the artifact’s internal workings” (p. 4). In other words, the definition of an object’s input is enough to define its outputs. For Latour and other S.O.As, this theory is not acceptable. For them, identifying objects as intermediators or black boxes leaves out the possibility of tracing larger numbers of actors participating in transporting and translating meaning. In the food truck study, the food truck itself is a mediator, something which alters the nature of the food, the chef, the consumer, and the environment in visible, tangible ways.

So where do we start looking for traces of association between actors when new technology/actor/actant comes into status quo day-to-day patterns of interaction? For Latour, it begins with deploying uncertainty to make the traces between actors appear, as if they were a hidden laser beam alarm made visible to the thief who throws a white powder into the air. Those associations add up and represent a trail of clues/data for the researcher, regarding the nature of the actors and the larger group of association—often referred to as “the network.” As Cressman (2009) states:

There is literally nothing else for an ANT except associations. These associations, in turn, can be used to describe how networks come to be larger and more influential than others, how they come to be more durable through enrolling both social and material actors, and where power comes from and how it is exerted (p. 4).

It is precisely those marks and associations that define Latour’s central sociological thesis that “an actor is its relations” and thus researchers must follow those marks and relations—many of which are done through rhetorical communication (Harmon 2009 p. 15).

The main objective of ANT is to go where the action/controversy/uncertainty is most dynamic and layered with interactions between actors and follow [them] around. Kenneth Burke claimed “life was drama,” and, therefore, places with more controversy were the best in which to get glimpse at human motive and relations expressed rhetorically (Burke 1969). Crick (2015), states, “It is only through drama that rhetoric lives, and it is only when rhetoric lives that we challenge ourselves and others to make a better world” (p. 10). Latour



(2007) would address these places of high drama, where actors live and attempt to make the world better or worse, as *Centers of Calculation*. These locations are heavy with actors and data flowing in and out that are constantly being mediated. Traces of association are exposed through the disruption of the status quo. When old patterns of association are placed under pressure and/or forced to dissolve, there becomes a mad scramble to reconstitute the old patterns, make new ones, or mix the old with the new. Latour claims this movement allows the ANT study to more accurately determine the number of new actors forming the same network in the future (Latour 2007). Latour gives the example that “Capitalism may be an untraceable entity endowed with a spirit, but a Wall Street trading room does connect to the ‘whole world’ through the tiny but expeditious conduits of millions of bits of information per second” (p. 178). He goes on to state:

The first part (the actor) reveals the narrow space in which all of the grandiose ingredients of the world are hatched; the second part (the network) may explain through which vehicles, which traces, which trails, which types of information, the world is being brought inside those places and then after having been transformed there, are being pumped back out of its narrow walls” (p. 180).

To better expose the connections and actors in that Wall Street trading room, like Granada Hills at Chatsworth Street or the Miracle Mile in Los Angeles, Latour and other S.O.As need a type of breakdown or new technology in order to observe patterns of associations as they move due to disruption—or rhetorical exigence—in a centralized location.

## Deploying Food Truck Controversies

Apparently, while I was away in Hawai'i, the car culture capital of the United States—Los Angeles— transformed the foodscape as it grew into the “epicenter of the modern food truck industry,” creating a unique rhetorical situation (Linnekin, Dermer, and Geller 2012 p. 43). Like in Granada Hills, or any of the other many locations in the Los Angeles area, the rise of the food truck was, at times, traumatic to the existing community. The local news covered a series of events that took place along Los Angeles' Miracle Mile in 2009 concerning “mobile kitchens” and the trauma they created. The story was pitched as a dramatic tale of mobile vendors forced out of the area that traditionally had ties to the mobile kitchen and culminated with police and other city and state officials intervening. A headline covering the event for the Laist.com read, “Restaurants Band Together to Rid Food Trucks on Wilshire” and “LAPD Ticketing Twittering Food Trucks on Wilshire, Again?” (Behrens 2009). The Los Angeles Times headline less sensationally read “Mobile Food Vendors Told to Leave Miracle Mile” (Simmons 2009). It was shocking for me to think that the traditional taco truck or roach coach, the ones that pulled into my grandfather's business, could be under so much scrutiny for doing something I assumed to be the norm.

According to many reports, the controversy began on the Miracle Mile earlier in 2009 when mobile food vendors began parking along the 5700 block of Wilshire Blvd, particularly near Museum Square and its street side restaurants (Behrens 2009; Simmons 2009; Tomicki 2009; DeMello 2010). By the August 19, 2009, the

situation had escalated, and restaurant owners were making statements to the police and looking to them to arbitrate the situation (Simmons 2009). Upon their arrivals, they helped disperse the food trucks from the location with force, shutting their kitchens off. Some trucks took on extra expenditures, in addition to the lost profit for the day, because they were “cited for minimal violations such as parking too close to the curb, or parking too far away” (para. 4). Sumant Parda, a food truck operator at the scene, stated that police “were trying to find any reason to cite me” (para. 11). By the end of operation, the consequences ranged from citations to impoundment of the trucks. Parda’s truck was impounded and this effectively shut his business down for an extended period. This controversy marked the emergence of a new actor on the Los Angeles foodscape and into public memory. Pat Saperstein, from the blog EatingLA.com in 2009 expressed his disappointment at being in Northern California for such a dramatic event, one that he dubbed “the beginnings of the Wilshire food truck wars” (para. 1).

To observe the change in actors’ interaction patterns due to this series of events, it is important to know the events that *framed* the situation as Latour (2007) states. A framing is the action of actors that seemingly anticipate the future happening in the space for a given purpose. Latour gives the example of the designer of a lectern. He comments that she “anticipated in a gross way, one aspect of such a scene’s script: you will have to be heard when you speak; you will sit at the podium; you will face a number of students whose maximum number, space requirements, etc. must be taken into consideration” (p. 195). Latour claims that this is why when

you walk into that space fifteen years later “what you need to act is already in place” (p. 195). Therefore, when mobile kitchens acted, they had what they needed in order to sell food on the side of a busy street.

For an actor like Parda Sumant, the ability to park his relatively wide and long food truck on the side of a busy road, in a major cosmopolitan area, which contained plenty of space for foot traffic to stroll by, took many years of *framing* to make it possible. In the 1920's the Miracle Mile, located just north of downtown Los Angeles, was the first landscape and architectural development to use the relatively new invention of the personal vehicle as a design focal point. A.W. Ross, the engineer of the project, wanted the commercial strip to attract and serve the growing automobile traffic (Labossiere 2004). Ross was forecasting the future role of the car in everyday life by rhetorically advocating for its use in urban areas. His design called for widening the streets, requiring merchants to provide automobile parking, and designing large window-fronts to grab the attention of passing traffic (Miracle Chamber of Commerce 2005; Liebs 1995). The conceptual vision of the vehicle in urban settings represents a significant moment for Los Angeles because it created a new environment/actor-network where automobiles, businesses, and human beings collectively made a definable and repeatable pattern of interaction. In other words, the car had its own moments of controversy when it was thrust onto the city streets. One can imagine that, at the time, the horseshoe salesman, among many, would have been upset and fearful of the future with the prospect that these machines were taking over.

But for many today, the car's mediating capacity has become hidden through years of exposure and repetition—it has become a natural part of our “social.” For Southern Californians specifically, it is easy to forget that the Miracle Mile helped to identify an entire culture where the motorized vehicle became indispensable from daily life. Furthermore, the success of the Miracle Mile was indicative of the powerful association between the automobile and business practices that would become a model for future urban development. Sociologist George Martin (2009) states, “Los Angeles is the prototype for the expansive combination of single-family housing and hyperautomobility” (p. 222). Hyperautomobility meant “saturated car ownership, more daily trips, for longer distances, with fewer occupants” (p. 221-222). The motorized vehicle was framed for use in conjunction with everyday travel, foot traffic, and commercial architecture. But urban planning back in the 1920s through the 1970s did not account for food trucks, taco trucks, or roach coaches and how they would change the patterns of interaction in established networks.

Another staging factor leading into the early part of 2008 and right before the gourmet food truck explosion was the number of traditional mobile kitchens available for purchase. Linnekin, Dermer, and Geller (2012) state:

The speedy emergence of the “gourmet” food truck industry could only have happened in Los Angeles County because there were already over 3000 trucks permitted in 2007. In 2008, after the fall of the real estate market, many of the traditional food trucks went out of business because construction sites had been their primary market. Many of the permitted trucks were just sitting on commissary lots waiting for a new lessee (p. 43).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> A similar event happened on the east coast of the United States in the early 1900s when horse pulled trolley cars were being replaced by eclectic trolley cars. This left a plethora of cheep vehicles waiting to be converted into lunch wagons (Gutman 1993).

The connection to the availability traditional mobile kitchens was a framing event for a new crop of owners that began setting up new varieties of mobile eateries and parking them along the city's streets. The taco trucks acted as a rhetorical canvas for their cuisine and business venture. As such, the Miracle Mile was going to get a new wave of vehicles and actors that would transform/mediate the everyday patterns of operation.

The Miracle Mile's foodscape would look radically different by December of 2009. According to Linnekin, Demer, and Geller (2012) there were somewhere around forty of these new mobile kitchens on the streets of Los Angeles at the end of 2009. By 2011 there were close to one hundred and fifty trucks in the same area. The number of actors helping to mediate new patterns of association increased rapidly. This was signal for the ANT researcher that the association between groups of actors was growing and becoming more complex. In other words, the happenings in Los Angeles and the Miracle Mile were putting my old conceptions of the mobile kitchen as Roach Coach for laborers into a state of "uncertainty." The controversy that happened on its streets in August of 2009 on the M.M. helps to trace the nature of the groups/actor networks involved, and ultimately helps define the food truck from the more traditional mobile kitchens the taco truck and roach coach.

For Latour, a controversy is a way to reveal the traces of association and mediation because it brings actors out to speak about their concerns. He states, "groups are made to talk" and produce "lots of contradictory voices about what is a group and who pertains to what" (2007 p. 31). An ANT controversy is similar to a

rhetorical situation that calls for utterances by a concerned audience of actors who are in a position to alter the situation. But it also helps point to the existence of anti-groups, the groups out side of their own self assigned network, and their attempts to fetch more resources “for the purpose of making their boundaries more durable” through great numbers associations (p. 31).

In order to better understand those voices, an ANT study and a rhetorical analysis should seek out those actors that “speak for the group existence” (p. 31).

Latour calls these existence-speaking actors *spokespeople*. He claims that to:

Delineate a group, no matter if it has to be created from scratch or simply refreshed, you have to have spokespersons which ‘speak for’ the group existence—and sometimes are very talkative...defining who they are, what they should be, what they have been... justifying the group’s existence, invoking rules and precedents and, as we shall see, measuring up one definition against all the others (Latour 2007 p. 31).

They perform the informative and persuasive side of the group’s rhetoric.

Furthermore those spokespersons will be in “constant uproar” and filled in by the “millions of contradictory voices” and thus hopefully producing lots of data in the process (p. 31).<sup>11</sup> Through spokespeople, the group rhetorically functions to define “Who they are,” “What they should be,” and “What they have been” (p. 33).

Spokespeople are rhetorical advocates that “justify the group’s existence” by “invoking rules and precedents” and “measuring up one definition against all others” (p. 33). Additionally, Latour claims, “they will dig out a wide range of

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<sup>11</sup> Again rhetoricians are chomping at the bit of ANT studies. Besel (2011) states, “ANT allows rhetoricians an approach that takes into account the complexity involved” by simply following the actors/text and their associations, something many rhetorical methods in the past have avoided focusing “close readings” of text fragments without a method to trace those fragments to the other actors helping to mediate the social (p. 6).

features, mobilized to make the group boundary hold against the contradictory pressures of all the competing anti-groups that threaten to dissolve it” (p. 33). Lastly, the spokespersons will identify new resources that are brought into the network. Latour states this is done “for the purpose of making their [group] boundaries more durable” (p. 33).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, once you have a controversy and location, the second step in an ANT study is to find the loud rhetorical actors and start listening and following them as they connect to other actors.

### **Brick-and-mortar Restaurants**

For some observers of the events on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August on the Miracle Mile was an escalation of these harsh feelings and fears directed towards the new mobile vendors by brick-and-mortar actors. Farivar (2009) stated, “It was only a matter of time before the traditional brick-and-mortar restaurants started getting their napkin rings in a twist over all the new taco trucks” (para. 1). Among a few other groups Lieutenant Dan Hudson of the Los Angeles Police Department Wilshire Division gave voice to brick-and-mortar restaurants’ complaints about food trucks with his comments to Ann Simmons of the Los Angeles Times. The officer stated, “Restaurants complain because the lunch trucks are taking their business, and they don't have [proper] permits” (Simmons 2009 para 7).<sup>13</sup> The actual complaint to the

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<sup>12</sup> This seems to be a natural function within the Latour’s methodology. Latour states an actor “must program” other actors “so they are unable to betray it, despite the fact that they are bound to do so” (as cited in Harmon 2009 p. 20). This also suggests that the actor must continue to act to maintain the association.

<sup>13</sup> Lt. Dan Hudson still works for the LAPD and has the same title of LAPD Watch Commander. He also seems to enjoy food and the local foodscape, posting to facebook.com, “I love watching Man Vs Food, I want to go to some, actually all of these places! I don't want to try any of the challenges, just want to try the food!!!” (Facebook post 12/25/2013).



Los Angeles Police Department came from an unreleased source but the term restaurant is mean to rhetorically define a very specific set of actors.

The “restaurants” complaining to the LAPD were “brick-and-mortar” restaurants. There are three basic types of brick-and-mortars within the 5700 block of Wilshire Blvd: non-food establishments, food establishments, and hybrid food establishments.<sup>14</sup> Non-food brick-and-mortars are fixed locations not serving or producing food. There are the fashion stores, banks, or office supplies stores. Food brick-and-mortars are fixed location that primarily serving food. These could be coffee shops, local restaurants, chain restaurants, or even grocery stores. Hybrid food brick-and-mortars are that are a mixed business with food and non-food products. The drug store that has a small dry goods section and produce section, and living spaces such as apartments or homes are examples of the hybrid type of brick-and-mortar. This typology aids in pointing out some obvious issues concerning the controversy on Wilshire by identifying the differences between “brick-and-mortars” actors when they are enrolled into actor-network.

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<sup>14</sup> Historically, the cross section of brick-and-mortars and restaurants—in its most evolutionary sense—dates back to the as late 1700s (Spang 2001). However, once established, the physical space of the brick-and-mortar restaurant and the proprietor are enrolled into the social fabric of the city and public in a variety of ways. For example, French Philosopher Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin provided this apt observation in 1825, “Gourmandism offers great resources to the government: it adds to taxes, to duties, and to indirect fiscal returns. Everything that we swallow must be paid for, and there is not a single treasury which does not owe part of its real strength to our gourmandizing” (2009, p. 157). A large actor-network in Paris embraced this type of perspective on the foodscape and profited from it in a variety of areas, not just monetarily. Furthermore, Part of that growing gourmandizism was the new “restaurants,” where anyone, who had the money, could dine in a similar fashion to the Court and Aristocracy. Spang (2001) claims this early version of the restaurant is the evolutionary descendant of our current popular kitchen in its physical construction and methods contained within.

In Saperstein's (2009) report, he identifies some of the "restaurants" that might be responsible for contacting the police, adding more traces between brick-and-mortars and other actors or spokespeople in their group and anti-groups. According to the report the owner of Barbie's Q mobile food vehicle was "asked to move by the restaurants on the Baja Fresh/Johnnie's/O to Go strip" (para. 1).<sup>15</sup> Another brick-and-mortar Toshi's Fresh Asian food commented that the complaining started prior to the increase in regulations. Concerning the events on that Wednesday, Toshi's General Manager, Fred Williams, stated, "We're actually not the ones who called the police [on Wednesday]. All the restaurants here have been complaining about the trucks. We gave up on it a long time ago. We really haven't been doing anything about it" (as cited in Behrens 2009 para 4). It is still unclear who did make the call to the police, but tracing associations between actors has helped identify what type of actors and anti-groups are assumed to be responsible and the ones that have been part of the controversy leading up to the events on August 19<sup>th</sup>.

This network of brick-and-mortars also shows a figuration of actors using confrontational rhetoric to deal with the food trucks. Scott and Smith (2001) claim that confrontational strategies during social movements, practically when radical, can be aimed at total annihilation of the other parties. However, "undoubtedly confrontation is brought about by those who feel only division, not radical division.

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<sup>15</sup> However, not all brick-and-mortar restaurants were upset at the mobile vending vehicle's arrival on Wilshire. Ann Simmons (2009) reported, "Patricio Palacios, manager of Baja Fresh in the 5700 block of Wilshire, said he had no complaints because his business was thriving despite the presence of mobile food vendors" (para. 8).

For those the forces of good and evil pop in and out of focus, not clearly perceived, now not; not identified with this manifestation of establish power and now that” (p. 31). The spokespeople for the brick-and-mortars are establishing their own boarders and potential agency. Latour (2007) suggests an ANT study be “collecting statements not only traces new connections but also offers new highly elaborated theories of what is to connect. They perform the social in all practical ways” (p. 232). Again S.O.A and Latour want the actors to speak and define themselves and the group. Those comments help to “detect the type of connectors that make possible the transportation of agencies over great distance and to understand why they are so efficient at formatting the social” (p. 221).

The brick-and-mortar restaurant actor-network that contains restaurants such as Toshi’s, Baja Fresh, Johnnie's New York Pizzeria, Koo Koo Roo, Marie Callendars, and Organic to Go, are the actors making statements about the events. Behrens (2009) reported, “Jose Ceja, the manager over at Johnnie's New York Pizzeria, says all the restaurant managers in the area, including Koo Koo Roo, Baja Fresh and Organic to Go, have been meeting over the issue” (para. 5). This group of actors, spoken into sociological existence by Ceja states they were “trying to work together getting rid of these things” (para. 5). The spokespeople rhetorically tried to show strength in number of actors willing act or stand up to these new mediums. Some of actions included calling the LAPD and enrolling another form of the local officials by contacting Councilman Tom LaBonge. According to Behrens, “it appears he might be looking into some regulations,” adding “But we've been here before.

Regulating taco trucks in the past has proved a difficult task for officials. Most recently, a judge struck down a 2006 city ordinance that regulated food trucks” (para. 7).<sup>16</sup> The attempt to reach out to the highest official indicates the level of the actors’ outrage when the food trucks disrupted the social.

In order to make the group boundaries and associations appear more obvious, one must include social scientists, social statistics and social journalism, according to Latour (2007 p. 33). As White (2009) states, social scientists studying these phenomena in the first place is what make the groups stand out to wider audiences and reveal more ties. In his ethnography of restaurant kitchens, Finn (2009) found that brick-and-mortar establishments are based on a fragile economy. The economy is fragile based on high overhead costs to starting up and maintaining the business. The fragility of the brick-and-mortar creates vulnerability to new inventions. Brick-and-mortars thus should be I high alert to new mediums that might cut their “bottom line.”

In some ways the fear of a new medium’s negative effects on profit has historical merit because the financial stakes of running a brick-and-mortar are higher than those in a mobile food business. This is evident in Behrens’ genealogy of the brick-and-mortar restaurants along the 5700 block of Wilshire Blvd between the summer of 2009 and spring of 2010. Behrens (2009) quotes Jose Ceja, manager of Jonnie’s New York Pizzeria, who stated his restaurant was forced to:

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<sup>16</sup> We will take about the taco truck and its involvement in the controversy in another section of this chapter.

Cut employees left and right because we don't have enough income to keep everyone here. The economy has been bad and I had to cut, and then these trucks show up and had to cut more. We all average \$15,000 to \$18,000 in rent, have to pay employee taxes and alcohol licenses (para. 5).

Ceja was not the only brick-and-mortar doing similar things to cut costs. Behrens states:

But as the lunch truck row continued, some brick-and-mortar restaurants said goodbye. The latest was Koo Koo Roo, which shut its doors last week as part of its bankruptcy. Then, a few months ago, Organic to Go got going. Before that, it was Toshi's Fresh Asian that left. All three had terrible Yelp ratings. That leaves just three of the original restaurants -- Marie Callenders, Baja Fresh and Johnnie's NY Pizza. In March, Mixt Greens took over the Organic space and, for now, it looks like food trucks will continue to arrive bringing food that employees are happy with (para. 3).

With such large overheads, the nature of being “fixed” to a single location, and the responsibilities and money it requires in order to maintain that location is an exhausting and expensive task.

However, being fixed to a single location is also a major benefit when it comes to serving food and helping to distinguish them from the mobile kitchen—specifically in terms of providing more ample space in which to store more equipment and allowing for a greater range of culinary methods, plus seating for patrons who wish to dine inside the restaurant. The greater range of equipment, combined with a more broad selection of methods allows for skilled cuisine to be produced with extreme efficiency. Dining “in” the restaurant is also important because it allows the brick-and-mortar to stay open year round (even in locations with inclement weather), provides a semi-private eating experience, and is required by most states to have washrooms/restrooms located inside, not to mention the

long list of other accommodations and health code regulations. All of these qualities and capacities trace different networks of actors between the mobile food trucks and the brick-and-mortar restaurants.

Ceja and others speaking on behalf of the brick-and-mortar restaurants help to define themselves, but in the process, they also enroll another set of actors—the food trucks—Latour called *anti-groups*. Latour (2007) states:

Whenever some work has to be done to trace or retrace the boundary of a group, other groupings are designated as being empty, archaic, dangerous, obsolete, and so on. It is always by comparison with other competing ties that any tie is emphasized. So for every group to be defined, a list of anti-groups is set up as well (32).

By calling out other groups, specifically the mobile kitchen/vendors, it defines the qualities and actors within their own network of brick-and-mortar restaurant.

Calling out other actor-networks means spokespeople like Ceja function as *critic* while aiding in deploying ANT's second source of uncertainty concerning the nature of action. When a critic makes accusations about a group being “fake, archaic, absurd, irrational, artificial, or illusory” they are mediating the nature of what motivates or even forces actors to act (Latour 2007 p. 52). Latour claims:

Action should remain a surprise, a mediation, an event...By definition, action is dislocated. Action is borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, translated. If an actor is said to be an actor-network, it is first of all to underline that it represents the major source of uncertainty about the origin of action (p. 45-46).

In other words, action is a source of uncertainty until the actor speaks it or is marked by interactions with another actor or actors, and there are no S.O.S theories trying to fit the observations into them.

The rhetorical argument for brick-and-mortar restaurants is generalized into the statement “food trucks take away business due to unfair competition.” We can observe this generalized perspective not just from the associations to Lt. Hudson or Jose Ceja but also City Councilmember Paul Koretz. In 2010 he spoke on behalf of brick-and-mortars, claiming:

A lot of businesses in stationary, permitted locations feel it’s unfair competition, and I tend to agree with them. There have been problems with these trucks popping up in front of businesses and people’s homes. They’re less of a nuisance in one lot, but I’m not thrilled with that either. I think they work well at construction sites where it’s difficult for workers to have access to other food, but I think that should be their only place in the city (as cited in Behrens, 2010, para. 2-3).

Brick-and-mortar spokespeople are loudly asserting that mobile food vendors are unfair competition and need greater regulation in order to remove them or to have them place under similar standards. This calls into question the nature of food trucks ability to produce quality and safe food for their customers on the M.M. The councilman suggests that the trucks do not belong on the street next to brick-and-mortar restaurants, but on “construction sites” where access to good food is limited. The councilman’s remarks disconnect the food trucks from being apart from the city that the brick-and-mortars belong to because they are relatively permanent structures. The assertion is that if the food trucks’ behaviors are modified, the restaurants have a better chance of surviving and the social/civil order is reestablished.

Yet the simplistic oppositional frame conceals the complexity of a social network undergoing significant change. Finn (2009) notes, brick-and-mortars “do

not just succeed or fail, but rather they succeed or fail *in context*...Decision makers at restaurants...must be aware of what is occurring in the social fields that affect its ability to achieve its instrumental and expressive goals” (p. 141). As such, the brick-and-mortars along the Miracle Mile are doing a bit of rhetorical “scapegoating” of the food trucks by singling them out as the only source of disruption. But more than likely, and as we will hear from some of the audience of eater, the brick-and-mortars are relying on old patterns of interaction. Hsiawen H. (2009) commenting on the Miracle Mile event on a Yelp.com forum stated,

I actually have a huge problem with the business harassing the trucks, these same trucks are required to pull and pay for permits etc...Consumers don't always want the same crap over and over again, that's WHY these trucks are making such a huge impact. By "crushing" your competition you as a business are showing that you can't compete on the same level as these mobile eateries. As in any industry those who can't compete fail and those who can succeed. I can see the issue of parking in front of established businesses, but as a consumer I would walk!

These comments demonstrate support for free market capitalism/bourgeois ethics.

### **Mobile Vending**

The new mobile vending vehicle—the food truck—was introduced into the network by actors Lt. Dan Hudson and a host of brick-and-mortar restaurant actors. Not only are these actors enrolling the human actors inside the food truck but also the food truck as a non-human actor. This leads us to the third source of uncertainty: the nature of objects. For Latour (2007), everything can be an actor and almost any actor, human or nonhuman, is potentially important insofar as it functions as a mediator and leaves traces of their interactions in the process. But how does an ANT study find non-human actors to trace, since objects cannot “speak



for themselves” the same way human actors can? Latour (2007) posits that even from the perspectives of a “back-drop:

Things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on. ANT is not the empty claim that objects do things ‘instead’ of human actors: it simply says that no science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored, even though it might mean letting elements in which, for lack of a better term, we would call non-humans (p. 71-72).

For example a stove is a non-human actor that often associates with mobile chef.

The connection between the two makes something new through a variety of other potential connections to other objects or actor-network within the foodscape. The mediation reveals a collection of new cooking techniques and methods. There could be a significant advancement in the types of food produced if a food truck chef is associated with a stove or with Dutch oven fueled by bison chips like those on the Chuck wagon that moved along cattle trails. Granted, the non-human actors do not have motives, but they do mediate the situation. This mediation demands be accounted for when analyzing the rhetoric produced by spokespeople during a controversy like the one at the Miracle Mile.

This mediation is apparent insofar as the food truck operates as a site of innovation that transforms how food is cooked, distributed, and consumed. To understand this mediation, however, analysts need to find the occasion whereby they can “listen” to them. Latour (2007) states, “specific tricks have to be invented to *make them talk*, that is, to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce *scripts* of what they are making others—humans or non-humans—do” (p. 79). For example,

the first type of occasion occurs around “*innovation*”— the ones that take place “in the artisan’s workshop, the engineer’s design department, the scientist’s laboratory, the marketer’s trial panels, the user’s home, and the many socio-technical controversies” (Latour 2007 80).<sup>17</sup> The kitchen has long time been a place of experimentation. It is a logical progression that food trucks would attempt to use their kitchens in similar ways. In fact, there are reports of trucks like Greenz on Wheels (2013), a gourmet salad and sandwich food truck from Los Angeles, blogging about their experimentation in the truck, stating:

Food trucks provide a lot of things: a quick meal on the street, a catered dinner for 500, a deluxe dessert buffet at a wedding or a buttoned-down business breakfast. But foodservice marketers are looking to food trucks for something else –information on what consumer want – as they turn the mobile restaurants into public test kitchens (para. 1).

Greenz on Wheels identifies a location of innovation, the test-kitchen, used for researching foodscape desires or trends in the behavior of actors. The test-kitchen is geared to operate, in part, using methods and protocols found within the scientific laboratory. You might find beakers and other glass measuring tools, along with

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<sup>17</sup> Only two of the four occasions will be used in this chapter of the dissertation. I will briefly describe the two I will not be using right now: The fourth type of occasion comes through the resurrection of archive material. Latour (2007) states, using archives, documents, memoirs, museum collections, etc., to artificially produce, through historians’ accounts, the state of crisis in which machines, devices, and implements were born,” adding, “Behind each bulb Edison can be made visible, and behind any microchip is the huge, anonymous Intel” (p. 81). In the next chapter the chuck wagon, lunch carts and wagons, and tamale carts produce this distance and in effect a novel way to look at the current food truck movement and new actors and associations might appear.

As fail safe and a last resort Latour (2007) states, “the resource of fiction can bring—through the use of counterfactual history, thought experiments, and ‘scientifiction’—the solid objects of today into the fluid states where their connections with humans may make sense” (p. 82). In fact, the food truck community has its own fictional accounts and tales. From children’s books in Hawai’i, major Hollywood film called *Chef*, short fiction essays (Food Truck at World’s End), a full novel (Joe College: A Novel), and several television appearances. Latour states, “Here again, sociologists have a lot to learn from artists” (p. 82).

canisters of compressed air or nitrogen, or even the use of protective gear shielding the individual from possible injuries from an experiment gone wrong, but at the end of the day both the food truck kitchen and the brick-and-mortar kitchen are testing the desires of actors within the network.<sup>18</sup>

In any case, the fact that the innovation is happening in a place like a test/lab kitchen suggests there are many trace associations between actors and the interworking of the kitchens. Latour (2007) states, “In these sites objects live a clearly multiple and complex life through meetings, plans, sketches, regulations, and trials. Here, they appear fully mixed with other more traditional social agencies” (p. 80). In fact, the food truck community has left an assortment of paper work, plans, recipes, and stories to trace the food truck actor. Since late 2008 the community has produced food truck-specific recipe books that chronicle food pre and cooking within the truck, offering insight on how to perfect these dishes specific to the mobile kitchen (Harelik 2011; Henderson 2012; Donahoe 2013). In each book, there is an example recipe that blends odd combinations of ingredients and methods that seem out of place in a “truck-kitchen.” By turning the food truck into an actor, we can trace how it mixed up the actor network enough to get the police involved.

Even if the food truck is now considered an actor, there have been older trucks with kitchens serving food to the public and doing working to condition the audience to the mobile food medium in Los Angeles. Therefore, to get a context of

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<sup>18</sup> Experimentation can happen at any time in the kitchen, which makes the kitchen a fascinating space full of inspiration. However, the experimentation in a kitchen “lab” will hopefully produce secondary documents (associations) that assist in producing an ANT text that seek to produce a common worldview of the group the researcher is looking to study.

the new vehicles process of invention and use of the kitchen it is important to reveal an older and more traditional mobile food medium/actor, the taco truck.

Surprisingly, over the years, the communities of taco truckers have faced complaints from all corners of city hall and local authorities. Reston (2009) stated:

For years, the city's enforcement of its prohibition on street vending has been haphazard at best...in the mid-1990s, the council approved the creation of special vending districts, but it took five years for the first legal sidewalk vending district in MacArthur Park to get off the ground, and now none are operational (para. 10-11).

In 2006, a proposal for a citywide system of licensing mobile vendors was also shelved. Some of the “haphazard” enforcement can be explained by the lack of tension between the taco trucks and the brick-and-mortar establishments because both were presumed to serve different communities in 2008-2009. The brick-and-mortars restaurants established patterns of interaction geared to serve the community/actor networks of upper to middle class urban white-collar workers and taco trucks served the blue-collar, working-class Latino community (Contreras, 2011). Therefore, the non-human actor is, in part, a “test kitchen” for an audience of eaters and is framed by taco trucks and its actor network.

Latour and ANT's third type of occasion in which to render non-human objects visible is during periods of transition when the old ways of doing things just do not work and it produces “breakdowns,” “accidents,” and “strikes” (Latour 2007 p. 80). Latour claims that in these type of occasions, “objects become mediators, at least for a while, before soon disappearing again through know, habituation, or disuse” and even “completely silent intermediaries become full-blown mediators;

even objects, which a minute before appeared fully automatic, autonomous, and devoid of human agents, are now made of crowds of frantically moving humans with heavy equipment” (p. 81). The idea is that breakdowns, accidents, or strikes provide glimpse at full capacity of an actor to transport and translate but potential in only a short about of time.

Interestingly, taco trucks—one of the largest grouping of mobile food vehicles in Los Angeles—were not cited as responsible for the grievances of the local brick-and-mortars, nor were any of the other common types of mobile food vending vehicles; roach coach, ice cream truck, or even grease truck. Hermosillo (2010) provides a potential rationale for this, explaining that, “Loncheras, or *stationary* food trucks, are predominantly microenterprises owned and operated by Latino families in their own neighborhoods, contributing to their communities’ economic development by keeping profits local” (p. 6). Often, this is represented as the community taking care of its own and leaving the state and federal government out of their community’s business.<sup>19</sup> In other words, there was very little customer loss to taco trucks because they served different actor-networks within the Wilshire district—or at least that was the thinking in 2009. But who were these mobile food vendors, if not taco trucks? Erin Glenn, chief executive officer of *Asociacion de Loncheros La Familia Unida de California*, an advocacy group for lunch truck operators, claims that it was the “new designer trucks” that drew the attention of

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<sup>19</sup> This is at least the perception of the “illegal” immigrant status of the owners and workers that are frequently associated with the taco truck that helps to root the stereotype.

business owners not the taco trucks (Simmons 2009). This rhetoric of identification clearly demarcates these mobile mediums.

Identifying new designer food trucks during the events along the Miracle Mile represents a larger search for understanding concerning this unique food actor and medium. In other words, the actor network of taco trucks was calling the food truck different and novel. Being called rhetorically different or novel serves a purpose for the ANT by illuminating the second occasion to reveal non-human objects through the use of gazing at an actor or network from of *distance*, in other words through the lens of time and space. Latour (2007) states, “Although those associations might not trace an innovation per se, the same situation of novelty is produced, for the analyst at least, by the irruption into the normal course of action of strange, exotic, archaic, or mysterious implements” (p. 80). The traditional models of mobile food vending had relatively stable codes of interactions between themselves, local brick-and-mortar restaurants, and city officials during the summer of 2009. For example, the *status quo* for taco trucks is taking care of their own and staying relatively out of the way, parking themselves around corners to remain in the background. This practice had been around in its iconic form since the late 1970s in Los Angeles and its historical extension of the tamale carts dating back to the 1870s. Hermosillo (2010) states:

Mostly serving low- and moderate-income areas lacking in adequate food options, these wheeled kitchens are not generally known for directly competing with brick-and-mortar restaurants. They do, on the other hand, provide pedestrians and transit-dependent persons vital foodservices that they may not otherwise easily access. Most lonchera operators (also called “loncheros”) own a single food vehicle and employ mostly their own family

members in the business, answering to their own employment needs while providing affordable, hearty meals to other working-class residents. While frequently called “taco trucks,” the typical lonchera serves an array of other dishes as well, frequently featuring a particular specialty—from a regional brand of string-cheese torta to spicy shrimp cocktails—and occasionally not serving tacos at all (p. 6).

Outside of the taco truck’s inner circle, the mobile kitchens serve a more selective audience. For example, they stay open late to meet the demand of hungry city dwellers coming out of bars or working late or extremely early, much like the first lunch cart operated by Walter Scott in front of the *Providence Journal* in 1872.

Simmons provides a rhetorical distinction between the food truck and other mediums of mobile food vending. She identifies “gourmet offerings” as a quality separate from the taco truck. First “new” and “gourmet offerings” signifies an audience/spokespersons awareness of innovation from what has been traditionally offered in terms of foodstuffs.<sup>20</sup> “Gourmet” was the classification most identified with the French method of food preparation and service dating back to the 1700s (Spang 2001). Large portions of this cuisine has been historically linked to skilled/trained chefs and their places of work— namely brick-and-mortar kitchens. In other words, the food produced in a food truck was something that traditionally was produced in a brick-and-mortar restaurant kitchen, at a culinary school, or in the homes of a few trained and professional chefs or adventurous home cook, not in

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<sup>20</sup> The audience has a distinct ability to recognize gourmet food and also to identify the type of audience that would eat food out of a truck. This seems to be an odd combination, with the reputation of food that comes from trucks as being of poor quality. The quality of the food would be linked to different rationales that range from the person cooking it the food to the quality of the raw materials or lack there of that went into the food, to the locations they frequent.

a mobile kitchen. Its presence as a new medium served as a divergence from the norm.

The food truck group of actors is framed by a culture heavily entrenched in the motor vehicle, a recession, and a bunch of left over taco trucks from which the food truck is distinct from its presumed “gourmet” capabilities. This actor group contains the likes of Bobby Allen, general manager of Green-Truck-on-the-Go, who spoke out after his truck was chased away by the police. He stated, "There's enough [business] for everybody out there and we want to all just work together to make things sustainable. Trucks out here, from the newer ones to traditional taco trucks, can do very well in a day and the more of us there are, the better we all do" (Tomicki 2009 para. 3). In fact, other trucks, while sharing their displeasure as well, have similar opinions that the food trucks and brick-and-mortars can coexist. This is a defense to the confrontational rhetoric of the brick-and-mortars. The test kitchen capability of the food truck, at the very least, works to provide data that allows all actors to react and adapt to changes in the audience’s demands. Gourmet food may be that connecting point between the audience of eaters, the new mobile kitchen, and why the brick-and-mortars fear the food trucks.



## Audience of Eaters

The Miracle Mile has a number of actors flowing through it daily: tourists, shoppers, employees of local businesses and attractions, and a city population of under eight thousand.<sup>21</sup> The audience of eaters and their spokespeople had already suggested making changes that would enrich the food scene prior to the events on the August 19<sup>th</sup>. After the events on the 19<sup>th</sup> it gave those eaters a national platform to rhetorically advocate for change. As Behrens (2010) stated:

The 5700 block of Wilshire Boulevard, where office buildings on and nearby house Variety, E!, G4, SAG and other entertainment/media operations, last summer became ground zero for food truck controversy when an unofficial lunch truck row developed, pitting restaurant owners against the trucks. For office workers, it was a welcome change (para. 2).

One such worker, Michael Schneider (2009), from the blog FranklinAvenue, stated:

Having now worked in the Miracle Mile for a decade—and on Wilshire for a total of more than 13 years—I've been stuck with a vast wasteland of lunch choices for as long as I can remember. When a rare new spot does open up, it's usually quick to disappoint—such as the recent addition of Asian-themed Toshi's, a truly awful, awful place. Other joints in the 'hood have long since lost their appeal: Koo Koo Roo, Johnie's, Baja Fresh. Exciting choices—for 1997. Not so much now. That's why the recent explosion in "designer food trucks"—the Green Truck, Bool BBQ, Coolhaus, and of course, Kogi BBQ, among others—has been so welcomed among the starving Miracle Mile masses (para. 1-3).

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<sup>21</sup> In 2008 and 2009 tourism specifically in Los Angeles had come to a halt. A number of factors contributed to the stagnation, but the most likely culprit was the slowing economy. Dakota Smith, in her 2013 article, reported that the trend was turning around 2010. She stated, "The rise in tourism marks the third year in a row Los Angeles has seen a record number of visitors, city officials noted. The boom also has resulted in a growing number of hotels and hospitality jobs, the officials said. Jason Cochran, editor of the travel site frommers.com, said the city is benefiting from a drop in crime, improved public-transit options, an affordable and eclectic food scene and a renewed interest in the region's rehabilitated historic buildings such as the forthcoming Ace Hotel in the ornate United Artists Building" (para. 6).

To call the row of brick-and-mortar restaurants like Jonnie's Pizzeria, Koo Koo Roo, or Marie Callenders a "wasteland" or lacking "exciting choices" demonstrates that he has high culinary standards to say the least. But, the "Museum Square vs. Food Truck" opens with the narration:

Ahh lunch break. You have been waiting for that moment all morning. So you step out of the office and you just want to choose the best food your money can buy. Once you get out there your choices are limited to three or four restaurant chains. How boring is that? Wouldn't it be great to have all kinds of food choices? After all you work hard for your money and all you want is something tasty and different. But wait, look at all those foodie trucks. How awesome is that? (DeMello 2010)

Both are signals of a group of actors discontent with the current foodscape. The Miracle Mile was and still is far from being a food desert in the sense of not having reasonable access to fresh food and basic foodstuff. Therefore it could be a sign of something larger happening to actors in terms of the way they desire to eat, identifying their motive for acting.

The term "foodie," a brand of new age gourmandism, may help to describe this change in desires of this audience. A Foodie might self-identify as someone who is wrapped up in all the happenings of the foodscape (Johnston and Bauman 2010). A Foodie may appear to the public like the elite French gastronomers turning their entitled plates away from the so-called "low" food, like the traditional American hamburger or potpie. But Johnston and Bauman believe, "terms like 'foodie' have emerged as a counterpoint to the cloistered world of high-culture food snobs" (p. 3). They expand further stating, "while American gourmets are interested in a diversity of cuisines, this does not mean that any and every food is now appropriate for

gourmet connoisseurship” (p. 3). Rather there is a loose codification to standards and values that reflect their circumstances and worldview within the age of the Internet. Johnston and Baumann define the foodie further stating:

Rather than primarily orient themselves to high-status French food, they take an interest in a great variety of foods from many global culinary traditions, especially exotic foods from distant groups or cultures. They frequently feel just as comfortable in an expensive, but casual, restaurant with a celebrity chef, as they do shopping for wild ramps in a farmers’ market, or eating home-made donuts in a Texas truck stop. Foodies treasure food that is delicious, but they also want food that is authentic—foods that are simple, made from the heart, and with history and tradition to back them up (p. 203).

Along with valuing “eco food choices,” foodies have aligned themselves to these unique standards of taste and habits of engaging the foodscape (p. 203). There is also a willingness to play and try the odd food mediums or cuisines, and sometimes the more unusual or rare meal/dining experiences have the greatest value. At the same time, foodies value the culinary history and tradition of the French, and many of the great culinary actor-networks of the past, and their impact on the foodscape. In other words, they do not have a built in basis between food cooked in brick-and-mortar establishments, a home cooked meal, or one from the street.

These actors continued interaction with the food trucks creates more solid figurations of the new food patterns at this center of calculation. A question was posted to forum on Yelp in August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009, by Li J. of Los Angeles about which group of actors should be allowed to serve food along Wilshire. She used the events there to spark this discussion where she stated:

I hear that there is a truck "crackdown" in LA right now. For example, many of the food trucks park on Wilshire near SAG and are now being harassed and

ticketed by LAPD quite regularly. Why park the truck directly in front of a bunch of existing restaurants and piss off the owners? (para. 1).

The question received a stream of comments about actors' individual understanding of the situation on Wilshire, their feelings about it, and asking about the identity of the new food truck. Overwhelmingly the comments reflect a concern about who should be allowed to serve food in that area. For example, R. U. (2009) from Los Angeles stated, "These 'gourmet' taco trucks should not be parking in front of restaurants. Not only is that a dick move, but it defeats the purpose of the taco truck. The taco truck is supposed to go to areas where there's nothing good to eat." R. U. still sees the trucks as being taco trucks and needing work in the areas without restaurants because there was already good food available in the area. But there is also some business ethic/patterns of interaction that were broken in the process of parking in front of a restaurant. Where as Javier J. (2009) from Los Angeles states:

As for not parking near a restaurant, why complain? This is like saying that there shouldn't be more than one restaurant on any city block because it creates some sort of competition. Can't compete with the other businesses then you shouldn't be in business. The idea of them issuing tickets for every little and even some contradictory citations seems like a cheap excuse to generate tax dollars for the city. It is getting towards the end of the month after all. Gotta keep up that quota.

The workers have something at stake. They have their eating habits five days out of the week that are altered by appearance of the food truck. Without the trucks, there were fewer options presented that might have been visited multiple times already and looked less and less appealing in this era of renewed/remixed gourmandism. The actions taken by the brick-and-mortars have built a same resentment from eaters like Javier or Ly J. Nonetheless the actor-network of eaters is a connection

point between the food trucks, brick-and-mortar restaurants, and finally the LAPD. Without an audience to “fight over” and attempt to persuade their actions there would be no need to call in for another party to mediate the situation further.

### **The LAPD**

The department in charge of the food truck and brick-and-mortar patrons within the Miracle Mile is the West Bureau Department, a segment of the Wilshire Division. This division is:

Comprised of a 124 square mile territory with a population of approximately 840,400 residents. The border of WB to the North is Forest Lawn Drive, to the East is Normandie Boulevard, to the South is El Segundo Boulevard, and to the West is the Pacific Ocean. The Bureau oversees operations in the following communities: Hollywood, Wilshire, Pacific and West Los Angeles, as well as the West Traffic Division, which includes the neighborhoods of Pacific Palisades, Westwood, Century City, Venice, Hancock Park, and the Miracle Mile (LAPDonline.com, 2013, para. 1).

In its most romantic ideal, the area is comprised some of the most sun-soaked-palm-tree-dotted and iconic postcard worthy locations the City of Angeles has to offer; Brea Tar Pits encasing the prehistoric, Museum Row studying and presenting novelties and treasures, and the Pacific Coast Highway gently bordering the golden beaches. Also found along the border is Hollywood with its entourage in the television and film industry. Less romantic are the high prices for property and property taxes, the high volume of traffic, and the sky-high crime rates. According to the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports 2008 in Los Angeles states there were about 300 aggravated assaults, 2,000 burglaries, 570 motor vehicle thefts, 8 murders, 22 rapes, and 270 robberies per 100, 000 persons (as cited in TRF Policy Map 2010). Of course, not all of those would be near the Miracle Mile, but the center of calculation

for this study is a highly diverse metropolitan community and the LAPD is instructed to enforce civil behavior.

When it comes to this controversy, there is a need for greater distinction between the LAPD West Bureau police officers and The City of Los Angeles Department of Transit parking enforcement officers. According to The City of Los Angeles website (2015), The LADOT parking enforcement officers “manages all on-street parking in the city and 118 public parking lots and garages. LADOT is also responsible for installing and maintaining parking signs, colored curb restrictions, parking meters, and parking permit zones. In addition, LADOT enforces state and municipal parking laws” (para. 1-4).<sup>22</sup> The parking enforcement was not mentioned in the LA Times article or a majority of the articles referencing the events in August of 2009. The actions taken by local officials were reported as done by “LAPD,” “police,” and even the “Wilshire Division” but not Los Angeles Parking Enforcement. Parking Enforcement officers are not interchangeable with the LAPD.

The natural question is “why did the LAPD handle street citations rather than the Parking Enforcement?” LADOT was shown prior to the events on the 19th, in the mini documentary by DeMello (2010), mediating an event where managers from the brick-and-mortar restaurant requested that “junk cars” would park in the spots outside their restaurants and block the food trucks from using the space. But on the

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<sup>22</sup> The City of Los Angeles (2015) website adds in their Parking Enforcement section, “State and city parking laws protect public safety and advance policy goals such as ensuring parking turnover so that customers can access stores. LADOT traffic officers enforce all parking laws in the California Vehicle Code and Los Angeles Municipal Code. Traffic officers patrol the city in shifts throughout the day and respond to constituent complaints of parking violations. Traffic officers issue about 2.5 million citations each year” (para. 1-4).

19<sup>th</sup> it is reported by Simmons (2009) that armed LAPD showed up on Wilshire Blvd in squad cars with orders to impound vehicles and issue tickets to mobile food vendors at the apparent behest of restaurants with the intent to resolve their rhetorical situation by an exertion of authority.

The most documented actor for the police is Lt. Dan Hudson. The Lieutenant spoke on behalf of the agency and its actor-network responsible for the enforcement of city regulations mediating the foodscape and the other actor-networks.<sup>23</sup> Los Angeles Times reporter Ann Simmons (2009) enrolled Lt. Hudson by recording and reporting the Watch Commander's comments concerning the events on Wilshire Blvd. In those comments, Lt. Hudson explains the actor-networks in the controversy.<sup>24</sup> Lt. Hudson first states, "They don't have city and health department permits...Restaurants complain because the lunch trucks are taking their business, and they don't have [proper] permits" (Simmons para. 6). By "they" and "lunch trucks" he means mobile food vending vehicles. Furthermore, the comment reveals qualities concerning the officer's in-group actor-network, enforcers of city and health department permits, and the two anti-group actor-networks, the taco trucks/lunch trucks and brick-and-mortar restaurants.

For Lt. Hudson, the anti-group of "lunch trucks" was the perpetrator who neglected a city permitting system, committed acts against the civil code, and

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<sup>23</sup> Lt. Dan Hudson is still the Watch Commander at the Los Angeles Police Department within the Wilshire Division as of January 2014.

<sup>24</sup> This was not the first time the Los Angeles Times reported on the "food trucks" or a new form of "mobile food vending" but Ann Simmons' (2009) article is cited heavily in other texts concerning the events surrounding the Wilshire Blvd incident. The article is an actor in the network and has been mediating different actors, this one included by enrolling the well-known Lt. Hudson.

displayed the crimes in plain sight along the streets of Los Angeles that is patrolled by his West Bureau officers. The rhetorical association and identification of the mobile food vendors in this fashion produces two controversies: one that creates immediate financial repercussions' and the other, which tapped into the ethos of the mobile vending vehicles via the legacy of mobile-vending.

The mobile-vending legacy has a close association to historic controversies dealing with the health permits and street food in the United States. The mobile-vending vehicle is made to "talk" via its associations to its humble historical beginnings of outlaw to blue collar and immigrant running and innovating these trucks. Historically, "street food" is a general category of meals served and/or cooked on public streets, at festivals, or community gatherings. While street vending can sell a variety of material goods, street food specifically looks at items that can be bought, sold, and consumed. This distinction also mediates regulatory practices and manages the buying and selling of food within its jurisdiction (Bromley 2000). In other words, not all material goods sold on the street are treated the same. Specifically, food offers a different type of concern for the public. On the one hand, if a person buys or sells hand made bags on the street corner, he can be subject to zoning laws and arrested if he lacks the proper permits, but the trade-off is that he can avoid the bureaucracy surrounding permits or start up capital to properly create a business. The threat to the public is often seen as marginal risk to human welfare, meaning it becomes an economic concern due to the resources are needed to be spent to monitor illegal activity, the loss of direct tax revenue, and the loss of



indirect tax revenue from purchasing a handbag from a street vendor rather than a similar product from the brick-and-mortar business which is subject to greater penalty for not paying their taxes (having to do with volume products being sold is assumed to be greater with a brick-and-mortar and the brick-and-mortar is documented, making it easier to track and monitor their business activity). With food, the public concern is economic in the same regard, but it adds another public concern: public health. Food is a perishable good. In the United States, mobile cuisine and/or street food has garnered the public's opinion, deservedly and also not, of being unsanitary, unsafe, and unfit for many city streets.

To contextualize this to the mobile food vendors, historically, the lunch wagons on the east coast during the boom days of the industrial revolution faced concentrated action designed to limit the number of wagons on the streets. Critics argued that the trucks were unhealthy and unsafe in order to ban them, even if public health was not actually a major factor for removal.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Los

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<sup>25</sup> For more on the history of the lunch wagons on the East Coast see the earlier chapter on the Mythos of the Food Truck or Richard Gutman's (1993) iconic work on the diner. With the Temperance Movement during the early 1900s the lunch wagons were at one time means to try and save the bodies and souls of the workingwomen and men of New York City and across areas of New England, according to Gutman (1993). Women of Temperance bought a few old lunch wagons and would place them in the streets near bars or other heavily traffic areas, and offer inexpensive meals. The price was kept low as a way to compete with the local bars, which according to the Temperance Movement was a large cause of harm many within their communities. The bars would offer very cheap or free food to patients if they came in for a drink—almost like Spanish Tapa. So for the price of a drink you could also eat for free. With conditions in the cities being as they were—low wages, long hours of work in the factory or at the plant, mill, or other industrial complex in the 1900s—feeding one's self and avoiding overindulgence of alcohol were not easy tasks. This is because they had no doors to theoretically keep troublemakers out. For many eateries within the foodscape of the large metropolitan cities in the 1900s, it was not feasible to keep their door open late enough to feed the late-night crowds. As a result, when a mobile food vendor gets labeled "unsafe," the concerns are not only for biological human health (toxic foods), but also the combination of location, customers,

Angeles' tamale carts in the early 1900s faced similar criticism, adding in racial characteristics of the seller as a key marker of the "health and safety" (Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012). There have been many biases formed against street food influenced by the race of the person who is cooking and serving the food and an exaggerated conception of the poor sanitation of mobile food vendors.

This association between the labels of unhealthy and unsafe and mobile food vendors is not only linked by the comments by Lt. Hudson, but in the physical tickets handed out to the trucks to add further associations within the controversy and between actor-networks. LAPD acted by citing, impounding, with the overall attempt to clear the street within their area of operation. In doing so, the officers on scene issued paper tickets to those whom they considered in violation of city ordinances, bringing the immediate issue of lost profits and time back to the surface. Bobby Allen, a food truck manager present at the event, stated that police "gave tickets out within ten seconds of people parking. Some tickets were threatened to be \$5,000, which no one got, but why risk it" (as cited in Tomicki 2009 para. 1). For a food truck, a penalty for five thousand dollars is a significant fine. To put things in perspective, Pou and Bellow (2010b) stated in October of 2010, "Depending on where you live, the cost of owning a successful mobile restaurant can be as low as \$30,000 and can run as high as \$80,000" (para. 3).<sup>26</sup> This would make the city of Los

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and hour of day that seems to increase risk factors of a meal with regards to persons and their belongings.

<sup>26</sup> There are many differing opinions on the cost of starting a food truck and other expenditures that come from running the business. Jennifer Lewis (2011), author of a food truck owners guide *Food on Wheels*, claims, "Realistically, you [food trucker future owner] should plan to budget approximately

Angeles' fine somewhere between six to sixteen percent of the start-up cost for an entire food truck business in the first year of the food truck boom in Los Angeles. Making things worse, the fines were issued to a growing block of entrepreneurs and start-up businesses. As will be discussed in chapter four, the global recession is credited with pushing many individuals out of their former careers and into food trucks (Pou & Bellow 2010a).<sup>27</sup> These huge fines, plus the loss of a customer base, were almost the end of the food truck revolution.

The problem is more complex than just the financial aspect and the inconvenience of addressing the citation. Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman's (1963) claims these actors are a type of identity document. Examples of identity documents include medical records, recorded family history, school records, or arrest records. The identity documents are not in the actor's full control and are left to other actor-networks to create and maintain their usability and viability. These can pigeonhole the actor by using identities that are documented, leaving little room for adaptation from one situation to another. The paper tickets issued on Wilshire Blvd are identity documents, but Latour (2007) might define them as "plug-ins." He claims to have borrowed the term from the web, stating:

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\$50,000 - \$60,000 for a used truck ha doesn't require any retrofitting" (p. 34). Alan Philips (2012), author of *Starting a Food Truck Business*, stated, "In California a commissary runs \$500 to \$1,200 for basic water, electricity, and parking" (p. 20). In other words, the \$5,000 fine can be incredible damaging to a young mobile food business.

<sup>27</sup> Just like in the days of Walter Scott and Samuel B. Jones and the early lunch wagon proprietors along the east coast of the United States during the industrial revolution boom (Gutman 1993).

When you reach some site in cyberspace, it often happens that you see nothing on the screen. But then a friendly warning suggests that you ‘might not have the right plug-ins’ and that you should ‘download’ a bit of software which, once installed on your system, will allow you to activate what you were unable to see before (p. 207).

Therefore, the ANT sees the paper ticket with a city citation written on it as something that makes a once-hidden actor into something visible and identifiable. The mobile vehicles are officially identified with the citations and enrolled with “official and legal papers” that designate it as “being *someone*” (p. 208). For example, Sumant Pard, owner of the India Jones food truck, is free to walk, shop, and spend time on Wilshire Blvd. He may be able to sell a few hot dogs out of a lunch cart tucked away in an out-of-sight location without consequence (Simmons 2009). However, if he added a mobile vending vehicle to the mix, the city would have the ability to regulate his business and even move him out of town. In short, the mobile vending vehicle in the West Bureau is exiled. To better see the importance of identity documents or plug-ins, Latour uses the example of someone trying to move around or work within the European Union without having official paperwork. Only then would the actor-network make visible the significance of those documents, and their many associations within the actor-networks.

So what do the paper tickets mediate for the mobile food vendors within the West Bureau? On one hand, they provide information and instructions concerning the violations, the fines associated with such violations, the information of the officer responsible for recording the violations, and the city for which will be processing and seeing through with the violations all wrapped up in an actor’s

network. In short, the tickets script a variety of possible actions and actors within the network that will be enrolled and further translate the actor-network. On the other hand, the paper tickets are in fact actors mediating the identity of the mobile food vehicles through a specific “plug-in.” Police act as rhetors, identifying qualities such as “criminal,” “law breakers,” “offenders,” and “unwanted.” Furthermore, police act with the ethos of authority, carrying the strength to fill the world with their definitions of groups within the controversy. The citations on the paper ticket are public documents of exile for the mobile vending vehicles. The identity of lawbreaker or criminal may be literal, but mobile food vendors showing up to Wilshire Blvd are not the typical embodiment of “street food,” making it difficult to find applicable infractions on which to cite them.

But what and how many actors-networks are in place allowing officers of the law to act in such a fashion? Remember, Latour (2007) does not believe it is possible to trace every single actor. However, the text needs to enroll enough actors in order to make a strong actor-network of its own. So in this case, it is necessary to acknowledge the association between the police patrolling Wilshire Blvd and the people they regulate. In other words, the foodscape actor-network along Wilshire Blvd will extend to actors within almost all levels of the state and federal government to some extent: politicians, lobbying groups, and judges are a few examples of those who will be enrolled in the issue of mobile food and the streets on which they serve it. As it is, laws as mediate the social when enforced by the individuals within the society. Explicitly, the police in this case are the extended

associations that connect the mobile vending vehicle to the local, state, and federal governments, via city laws, and officials employed to enforce those laws. But what laws became actors when enrolled by the police offices? As Massar (2011) elucidated, the laws regulating the streets and sidewalks in Los Angeles are evolving leading to difficulties for all parties involved. For example:

Sidewalk vending is prohibited altogether, though all one needs to do is visit MacArthur Park, the Westlake District, or Echo Park to see that enforcement of this prohibition is lax. Taco trucks and other mobile food vendors that sell from the road, rather than from the sidewalk, are likewise subject to regulation. There are, however, significant limits on the ability of local governments to regulate these trucks because they fall under the purview of California state statutes, which preempt municipal ordinances. Regardless, such limits have not stopped Los Angeles and surrounding municipalities from repeatedly trying to curtail the operations of the popular taco truck (p. 21).

In fact, the State has not demonstrated concern about the mobile vendors operations within the state limits. Until 2011, there was a wild-west quality to the parties (local city government) invested in controlling the evolving foodscape. The State, from a legal standpoint, remained uninvolved, leaving the local authorities to handle their own mobile vending issues with little oversight. From the events on Wilshire in 2009 through 2011, Massar states, Los Angeles was “struggling to catch up and to deal with the conflicts that arise out of this renewed commercial use of public property” (p. 16).<sup>28</sup> In other words, mobile food vending in 2009, along the streets of Los Angeles, became a window into the political and legal controversy concerning mobile food vending and the local foodscape that helps identify what the food truck

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<sup>28</sup> For more on the legal issues surrounding food trucks and taco trucks in Los Angeles, see Jamie Massar’s (2011) essay, “The Taco Truck Rush: Regulating the Commons in Boom Times” which was written for the California Supreme Court Historical Society.

is and how it got that way. Rhetorically, the LAPD is acting on concerns brought forth by the rise of the food trucks along the Miracle Mile. Their mediation of the events go further than simply moving the food trucks out of the area, but rather, their rhetoric supports negative stereotypes and associations with the new mediums and those that came before it.

### **Conclusion**

The LAPD became involved and attempted to enforce previously undefined rules about who was allowed to serve food on the streets lining the Miracle Mile. This caused a disruption that signifies the tipping point to the larger food trucks movement across the United States. It was an exigence that involved several actors. In getting those actors to address the issues, the actors defined a polarity between the kitchen on wheels and the brick-and-mortar kitchen, with certain branches of the government helping to mediate the situation, and a strong influence from patrons. Thus far, this chapter has started a narrative or Latourian/ANT study text that looks at a moment that represents a changing foodscape in Los Angeles due to the insertion of a new technology/invention. The foodscape of my childhood and young adult life was moving and shifting both literally and physically. Mobile food vendors, something I once saw on occasion or pulling up to the construction supply yard to feed the workers, were now flooding the streets and pouring through my social news feeds.

What propelled the movement within the foodscape is something that Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory is helping to answer. The first step for the Latourian

is ANT to finding a controversy. The food truck controversy started with a police operation, requested by local brick-and-mortar restaurants, to clear 5700 block of Wilshire Blvd located on the historical Miracle Mile in Los Angeles. Within that controversy we have three predominate groups: first, the police, second, the brick-and-mortar restaurants, and lastly, the mobile food venders. In the controversy, analysts followed the actors as they left traces of associations—making a mark on other actors as evidence of their interaction and information about the type of interaction or interactions—as to what occurred and what information that can provide about the foodscape and the actors therein.

So what does the controversy in Los Angeles claim about the nature of the food truck movement sociologically/rhetorically? It demonstrates that the mobile food venders began define themselves when they entered Wilshire foodscape to compete with brick-and-mortar restaurants. Brick-and-mortars asserted that the mobile food venders had unfair advantages—less regulation and less cost to run the business—particularly during poor economic conditions. It is hard to blame the brick-and-mortar restaurants to raise legitimate questions concerning the regulation of these vehicles when it came to health and safety and also the ability to avoid taxation in the cities where the mobile food venders commonly operated. The mobile food business conducted within the Wilshire area may not produce direct tax compensation for the city that provides services to the streets and sidewalks. However, it is more than complex than unfair regulations or the idea that this mobile food vender is not paying their fair share of taxes. In some cases, critics of



the food truck movement talked to the food trucks and pointed out that parking directly in front of their place of business was in poor taste and could cause friction within the neighborhood. Some went to measures of trying to physically block the trucks from parking in areas surrounding the restaurants, they contacted politicians, and in August of 2009 they asked the police to step in. In many ways, several brick-and-mortar restaurants actively sought to force the food vendors out of the area.

The police, specifically the West Bureau of the LAPD, are the mediating force between the restaurants and mobile food vendors within the controversy. The brick-and-mortar restaurants, already at odds with the economic recession, found the arrival mobile food vendors to have such a massive impact that owners had gathered and planned out how to rid the mobile food vendors from the area. Through spokespeople, moving points of association, and critics of the food truck and their anti-groups, more can be learned about how the foodscape operates and what it means to be a brick-and-mortar restaurant, a mobile food vendor, a diner, or even an LAPD officer—and what they all have in common—and the use of rhetoric to make it possible.

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## CHAPTER TWO: FOOD TRUCKS THROUGH THE PANORAMA

“The origin of the hero does not affect the genuineness of his folk quality. He may be historical or fictional. But to qualify as a true champion of the folk he must be the subject of their tales.” ~Richard M. Dorson (1977 p. 201)

After looking at the localized events of August 19<sup>th</sup> 2009, dubbed the “food truck showdown” on the Miracle Mile, the scope of the investigation turns next to the historical narratives of the food truck. This chapter uses Latour’s notion of the “panorama,” which has a “mythic sweep” where relatively more broad amounts of time and space are considered when investigating an actor and its network. Like the panoramas created by Walter Benigneme in the early 1900s, the goal is to see as much as possible. Latour (2007) claims that the ANT version of the panorama is a tool that helps answer “the question of staging the totality” and deploys new sites of controversy (p. 188); in other words, what the food trucks claim as their historical origins sets the stage/frames their ability to act.

Nonetheless, panoramas give the ANT study a bird’s-eye-view of huge amounts of the landscape but being so far back makes seeing the smaller details much more difficult. From a distance, the minor interactions between actors can go unnoticed, even if they accumulate to have more significant effects. Latour uses the term “oligoptica” as the dialectic to panorama. He explains that oligoptica see too little at times, “but what they see, they see well” and they do it from a “sturdy but extremely narrow views of the connected whole are made possible—as long as connections hold (p. 181). This is why Latour and S.O.A require many views of the social/collective--so that they are able to broaden or narrow their focus in order to

get a better understanding of the whole “figuration” of actors. Latour contends that, without finer details to study, like those surrounding a localized scene (e.g. as the Miracle Mile in 2009), the breadth of information during a “food truck panorama” functions as an authoritative sense of being entirely engrossed up-to-date and “real” without any fake mediations. As Latour (2007) states, “Panoramas give the impression of complete control over what is being surveyed, even though they are partially blind and that nothing enters or leaves their walls except interested or baffled spectators” (p. 188).

These stories also function as rhetorical artifacts. When retold by the food truck community, the story produces a hope that the “drama of history redeems the choices” they made while “in the face of uncertainty, fear, and desire” according to Nathan Crick (2015 p. 9). While studying social movements in the United States Stewart, Smith, and Denton Jr. (2007) found that:

Public perceptions and impressions (of, for example, freedom, justice, or equality) are influenced by significant myths and symbols that are emotional, intense, and cultural in nature....The fight for legitimacy is a fight for public perceptions and acceptance. Patriotic, religious, and social myths and symbols are important weapons in this struggle (p. 323).

The food truckers’ stories are rhetorically important to their desired public persona. The personal nature of these stories is the characteristic that greatly appeals to both the audience of possible eaters and to the perceived identity and the virtues of the food truck network of actors. Latour (2007) adds that:

Their [stories] role may become central since they allow spectators, listeners, and readers to be equipped with a desire for wholeness and centrality. It is from those powerful stories that we get our metaphors for what ‘binds us together’, the passions we are supposed to share, the general outline of



society's architecture, the master narratives with which we are disciplined. It is inside their narrow boundaries that we get our commonsensical idea that interactions occur in a 'wider' context (p. 189).

The stories viewed from the Latourian panoramic view of the food truck position it within a larger historical narrative and, thus, execute a rhetorical act by serving as genealogy and model for how it functions and how to respond to it as a new medium.

Unfortunately, the panorama produced by the food truck community is not complete enough to make critical judgments of the phenomena of the rise of the food truck in the late 2000s. Too often, Charles Goodnight's story is overly ascribed and personified for his the famous invention the "chuck wagon" and relation to the heroic frontier myth. Goodnight's story, as told by the food truck community, can ignore the old cowboy as a tyrant while on the cattle trail and rely more on themes of "Goodnight the liberator." In other words, his story can overlook what an actor must do to survive in a pitiless environment. Therefore, it is necessary to substantiate the Goodnight story and incorporate more narrative in order to represent that more aspects of the food truck. There are four different episodes, each of which has some relationship to the food truck, that are used as case studies; (1) Goodnight and a chuck wagon "genealogy"; (2) the origins of the restaurant in the French revolution; (3) the lunch wagon and lunch cart during the Industrial Revolution in New England; and (4) the tamale cart in Southern California and throughout the western half of the United States. Each of these panoramas reveals

shifts that are relevant to the new mobile medium of the food truck; mobility, gourmet cuisine, and attachment to the urban communities and its street food.

### **Panorama of Goodnight and the Chuck Wagon**

In 2012 David Weber, founder and president of the NYC Food Truck Association, owner of four food trucks, self-proclaimed “insider” and author of *The Food Truck Handbook*, claims the modern day food truck is descended from the Wild-West’s chuck wagon.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the emergence of chuck wagons in the United States around the late 1860s and early 1870s was also the emergence of the “mobile kitchen” (2012 p. 2-3). The birth of the mobile kitchen, via the chuck wagon, represents the solution to the problem of how to feed the cowboys on their long cattle drives. Furthermore, Weber assigns credit to “Colonel Charles Goodnight, who ran the Goodnight-Loving Trail,” as the person responsible for the invention and popularity of the kitchen on wheels (p. 2).

Weber’s description of this narrative is very short and matter-of-fact regarding the origin of the chuck wagon. It is important to understand that Weber is restating a heavily circulated claim about the food truck’s inception.<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>29</sup> A small minority of the community traced the food truck’s timeline back to the 1600s where street food became the regulatory interest of the colonies (Weber 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Noelle Ibrahim (2011), in her thesis *The Food Truck Phenomenon: A Successful Blend of PR and Social Media*, states, “Mobile eateries are not an entirely new sensation. In fact, they have been around for more than a century, dating back to the Western —chuck wagons created in 1866...Texas cattleman Charles Goodnight is credited with the creation of the chuck wagon, a mobile kitchen equipped with a cook’s worktable and drawers to hold food and utensils” (2011 p. 3). Ibrahim continues with a description of the scene and the comfort foods found on the trail to help aid while on the wild landscape, describing that “Chuck wagons stretched from Texas to California to feed cowboys as they made their way west to settle on a new American frontier...In the days of trail drives, which required cattle ranchers to live on the open land for months at a time, —chuck was slang for heart-warming comfort food like salted meats, potatoes, beans, sourdough biscuits and

overwhelming number of stories concerning this account of the birth of the food truck has designated Charles Goodnight as a food truck icon and, in doing so, established a loosely historical myth. The myth represents a unified agreement about the framing of the food truck. Jacques Ellul (1973) states, “myth expresses the deep inclinations of a society. Without it, the masses would not cling to a certain civilization or its process of development and crisis. It is a vigorous impulse, strongly colored, irrational, and charged with all of man’s power to believe” (p. 40). Thus, the grassroots nature of the myth represents the food truck community within the larger American industrious, heroic, economic, and technological context and acts as a reflection of how Americans see themselves in during a period of transformation. Furthermore, the stories’ familiar narrative/rhetorical quality makes them easy to follow and retell.

Communities of food truckers are constantly exhuming the narrative remains of Charles Goodnight and his Wild West chuck wagon. In doing so, they rhetorically construct a food truck artifact that can be illuminated by the Latourian panorama. At its essence, the chuck wagon states the food truck is descended from a great patriarch and hero, Charles Goodnight, who succeeded, despite various trials, to construct the archetypal ancestor out of the Wild West earth, the flesh of slain feral

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peach cobbler... (p. 3)” She finishes the story by identifying food trucks as modern chuck wagon, saying, “This precursor to the modern-day food truck revolutionized the cattle industry and set the tone for other food distribution innovations to come...The chuck wagon morphed into other forms of mobile eateries (p. 3).” The Brown Bag blog (2013) is another example of Goodnight’s story, stating, “In 1866, Charles Goodnight (aka “Father of the Texas Panhandle” and a cattle herder, himself) realized that there was no efficient way to cook a meal for the men on long cattle drives, so he took a US Army wagon and installed shelves and drawers and stocked it with water and easily-preserved food stuffs like dried beans, coffee and cornmeal, and dried, salted or smoked bacon, beef or salt-pork (p. 1).”

beasts, and a frontiersman's will and determination. To a large degree, Goodnight's Wild West saga is comprised of a collection of spokespeople retelling the origin of the food truck. Within the collective story, a few patterns emerge: 1) a claim that the first food truck was a chuck wagon, (2) almost universal identification of Charles Goodnight as the man who brought the chuck wagon into existence with his hands-on alterations to the wagon, (3) detailed reports on the food and cookware that the chuck wagon carried along the trail that aided the cowboys by providing comfort food necessary to complete a long cattle drive, (4) historical importance placed on the Civil War, the expansion westward, and/or the rising desire for beef in the north and (5) identifying that the importance of the chuck wagon by its essential nature as a mobile pantry or kitchen.

A particularly interesting food truck origins/historical that gives credit to Goodnight was written by Richard Myrick, the editor-in-chief of MobileCuisine.com.

On March 5<sup>th</sup> 2013 Myrick devoted a web article to this story, titled *Charles*

*Goodnight: The Inventor of Food Trucks* which posits:

The chuck wagon (a cowboy's portable kitchen wagon used on the cattle trails) was invented by Goodnight in 1866 by using an army surplus Studebaker wagon to create what is considered by many as the first food truck. Goodnight purchased the government wagon and had it completely rebuilt according to his specifications in seasoned bois d'arc, the toughest wood available (p. 1).

Myrick's narrative portrays the first food truck birthed out of the strong and functional government wagon and retooled by the mind of a single man and his reason. He specifically praises one modification of an odd "sloping box" located at

the back of the wagon that had a “hinged lid that lowered to become a cook’s worktable” (p. 1). He continues:

The box was fitted to the width of the wagon and contained shelves and drawers for holding food and utensils. Since early 17th Century England, individuals involved in the meat business referred to a lower priced part of the beef carcass as the “chuck.” To the cowboys, “chuck” was food, so the box was called a chuck box and the wagon became known as a chuck wagon...Chuck wagon food was comprised of black-eyed peas, beans, corn and cabbage. Of course, there was lots of beef and bison steaks and stews spiced with chilies, garlic, and onion or the occasional catfish or shrimp caught from the rivers, lakes or coastal waters. Sourdough breads (sourdough bullets), quick biscuits, skillet corn bread and cowboy coffee were served with the meals (p. 1).

The chuck box at the end gave the chuck wagon an iconic form and its ultimate utility. But with the chuck box, Myrick recounts the wagon allowed for the possibility of culinary exploration to occur in even the most remote locations, such as the middle of herds of feral cattle in the Texas badlands, providing both fuel and convenience to cowboy customers. However, from a more broad perspective, the modifications Goodnight made to the wagon were just a few of many modifications to come that lead to the “success” of the chuck wagon on the harsh landscape in the 1860s. Yet, the chuck box and its culinary potential make the chuck wagon indispensable to the food truck community because it set the stage for the mobile food medium.

To add to the Goodnight story, Myrick and Weber’s accounts greater detail of the struggles and context in which the first mobile vehicle was birthed.

Furthermore, Joseph Campbell’s “hero journey” frames the parallel struggles of Goodnight and “modern” food truckers in moments of great transition. Campbell

(2008) writes, “a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder,” whereby “fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won,” only for the hero to come home “from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (2008, p. 23). On the surface, the myth contains three parts, “separation—initiation—return” (p. 23). Regarding the hero’s journey, folklorist Richard Dorson (1977) provides context of American heroic myths and folklore. For example, the myths of the American Heroic Age like “supercowboy” Pecos Bill, Jesse James, Sam Bass, or Davy Crockett. The “American myth” acts as a frame of reference that is unique to trials of its people and environment. With Campbell and Dorson’s knowledge of myth, one can investigate the various phases of Goodnight and the chuck wagon, working as agents, being used to inform or reinforce what is virtuous to the community that supports it in order to build anew. The story is also similar to those of many food truckers and mobile food vendors who needed to make drastic changes in their lives that centered around mobile food vending.

It is not uncommon to hear food trucker stories about feeling lost in life and needing a change. For example, stories like Rob John, of the WhipOut! food truck, a former teacher, who became discouraged by the state of education. Rob looked at what was in front of him—a career, stable paycheck, dental insurance—and walked away. But by walking away and taking that first step, he began a journey that has led to once again find meaning in his work. For Rob, hope came through chef Brett Downey, who brought Rob aboard to help cook “high-end comfort food from a

truck” (Pham, Shen, & Phillips 2014 p. 168). Other owners identified with the need to leave their “good” jobs for something “more.” Eric Chung, co-owner and chef of the 333 Truck, was trained at a culinary school in San Francisco and interned for the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. But, the traditional culinary landscape was losing its appeal and forcing others to make bold choices. For him, “the French-style cuisine wasn’t speaking to him, so he jumped at the chance to work the Asian station in the Apple cafeteria. There he met fellow chef Angle Santos and, together with Eric’s girlfriend Bonnie Lui, they decided to open up a food truck” (p. 106). To leave the comfort of a good hotel job for a cafeteria, although it was for Apple, was perceived as an odd thing to do for a trained chef. To then leave Apple Inc. for the life in a mobile kitchen was an even bolder move. Jay Brown describes that, “Basically, one day I was on the phone with my girlfriend (now my wife) and she said, ‘Well, why don’t you just quit?’ ...I just happened to be feeling ballsy that day, so I quit” (p. 217).

Chef Roy Choi is an apt example of a food truck owner leaving a steady profession in high-end culinary restaurants because of feeling “lost.” When Dave Manguera contacted him in 2007 “he was at a crossroads, having left a cushy chef de cuisine job at the Beverly Hilton Hotel (where he cooked for then-Sen. Barack Obama, Bruce Springsteen and the royal family of Dubai) and most recently moving on after helping open RockSugar Pan Asian Kitchen in Century City” (Gelt 2009 para. 17). Leaving the restaurant represents the magnitude of this choice, in that he would rather fall into the unknown than continue his current trajectory. In moment of such significant loss, it would be a natural urge to try to return home or to a secure,

emotionally safe place. But like Goodnight, what many people return to to is, at first glance, so deeply altered that it is barely recognizable. And it is on this wrecked frontier that Goodnight's story begins.

According to the food trucker's story, Charles Goodnight's (1836-1929) heroic journey begins with his return to Texas and his home ranch in 1865, just after the Civil War ended. Once home, he and others discovered millions of feral longhorns, broken fences and farmhouses, "marauding bands of Indians," and lawlessness everywhere (Haley 1936 p. 34). Like in other heroic tales, Goodnight is met with the challenge of an environment not governed by law and order.

As Goodnight struggled to grasp the destruction, he surveyed deeper into the community, finding that many of his neighbors and friends had packed up or had yet to return from the war, thieves had run amuck, and a several of the locals were trying their best to collect the broken pieces of a once-thriving cattle industry that supplied them with their livelihoods (Haley 1936). Dorson (1977) writes that for heroes like Crocket, the frontier "that bred them belongs to the Heroic Age of American culture, when migratory men lived dangerously on the border strip between wilderness and civilization" (p. 210). Goodnight is no different. The destruction around him was an indication that the old way of doing things was no longer feasible.

Like the modern day situation with food truckers, Goodnight's experience is unsettling, but it represents the step in his (and their own) journey, where they must choose to separate themselves from the wreckage of the old world and move



into the unknown. This unknown presents extreme trials—battling giant monsters, taking on an army, or battling one’s most sinister inner-demons—that must be conquered. For example, the History Channel’s show *Modern Marvels* (2011) claims the food truck dates back to the “edge of rural America,” “Wild West,” and “Indian Territory” all being place of possibility tremendous risk. This is a complex and difficult moment for the hero. Dorson (1977) insists that the other heroic narratives of the time often were outlaw heroes, “The American Robin Hoods,” and the Jesse James, Billy the Kid, and Sam Bass’ of the Wild West. He goes on to state:

Historically they enacted their brief lives in similar environments: the blood-soaked farmlands of western Missouri where feuds of the fratricidal war kept smoldering; the thinly settled territory of New Mexico, rent by a shooting war between rival merchant-gangsters; and the plains of northern Texas, overrun with cattle rustlers and horse thieves (p. 236).

Goodnight’s story has all of the elements of an outlaw American Robin Hood; Goodnight killed men in battle, hunted wanted men, was a good shot, and was in a position where he, his family, and his community may not have the means to survive and so must do what is necessary in order to do so (Haley 1936).

In many ways, Chef Roy Choi takes a cue from Goodnight’s Robin Hood virtue by ensuring to give back to his community or, at least rhetorically, advocate the importance of community and the high level of goodwill a food trucker strive for (as will be explained more in the fourth chapter). Choi is quoted in Jessica Gelt’s (2009) article as claiming that, if one “don’t serve and honor the culture and soul of L.A.’s neighborhoods, what differentiates you from that Marie Callender’s across the street that you are so blatantly fighting against?” (Gelt 2011 para. 6). He is like Robin Hood

in that if the food truck is successful it could possibly take money out of the hand of Marie Callender's—the presumed rich—and up it back into a more community based establishments—the less rich.

Again, the myth or story, when used by a group, can serve as a rhetorical weapon for legitimacy and approval from desired audiences (Stewart, Smith, & Denton Jr. 2007). Dissimilar to Robin Hood, champion of the people, food truckers can also get waylaid in the uncivil, unethical, and oftentimes illegal means of survival. Food truckers, like many other business owners, have to make decisions on where to spend or not spend their money. In Philadelphia two women were killed when the propane tank on their food truck exploded (Lattanzio 2015).<sup>31</sup> The story is incredibly sad, but important in terms of a panorama, seeing everything but nothing clearly. The city of Philadelphia and the state of Pennsylvania do not require inspections of the propane tanks on food trucks. This incident put the responsibility of upkeep and protection on the owners of the trucks. Even without more information concerning the story, it is still glaringly apparent that this decision would have a negative impact. The ramifications of the decision are clear for the two individuals killed. Lattanzio reported that a lawsuit has been filed stating, “If two large propane tanks strapped to the back of the La Parrillada Chapina food truck had been properly inspected, a catastrophic explosion wouldn't have happened and Olga Galdernez, and her daughter, Jaylin Landaverry, would still be alive” (para. 1).

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<sup>31</sup> In March of 2015, another food truck exploded in Lakeville, Minnesota. The fire marshal stated that the explosion “damaged 11 homes and left three families displaced” (Hrapshy 2015 para. 1). The cause of the explosion is still unknown, but bad gas lines are being investigated.

Goodnight, ultimately acted as a Robin Hood archetype. But, for him, it was a test of character. The test was whether he would accept the journey, even with the world crumbling. According to Haley (1936) and other biographers of Goodnight, he was lead to drive a herd of cattle across the badlands of the Wild-West out of fear and dismay because of the radical changes to his own landscape and foodscape brought on by a harsh landscape, war, a fierce native population, border tensions with Mexico, and westward expansion. Therefore, Haley presents Goodnight's motivation for getting on the path as an attempt to avoid, via money and land rights, the collapse of civil order and his former way of life on the ranges of Texas. Once on that path, the question can be asked what type of character would join such a journey and what type of character would survive such a trial?

With little hope left to the old way of life Goodnight's relied on an iron will and desire for adventure and embodies many of the characteristics associated with the "American hero." Dorson (1977) states:

America's idols all rise from the ranks of the common man and exhibit the traits and manners of unwashed democracy, spitting, bragging, brawling, talking slangily, ridiculing the dandy, and naively trumpeting their own merits. All exalt physical virtues, and perform or boast about prodigious feats of strength, endurance, violence, and daring...Each begins his career with precocious deeds of strength and in manhood slays dreaded warriors and monsters (p. 201).

To prove these character qualities, it should be noted that as a nine year old, Goodnight, "rode bareback from Illinois to Texas" and hunted "the Caddo Indians beyond the frontier at thirteen" (Haley 1936 p. x). In other words, the kid was raised to be tough, embraced opportunity, and did not shy away from danger or the

unknown. He also, before the age of fifteen, killed another human being on a “hunt.” From a young age, Goodnight was a paradigmatic heroic character, who bore “the possibilities of life, courage, love—the commonplaces, the indefinables which themselves define our human lives” (Butler 1979 para. 8).<sup>32</sup> Campbell’s (2008) claims the start of any hero’s journey is the call to adventure. At that moment, the hero undertakes “the perilous journey into the darkness by descending, either intentionally or unintentionally, into the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth, he soon finds himself in a landscape of symbolic figures” (p. 84). Thus, Goodnight, while not of divine origins, had entered onto the first step of “hero journey” by stepping onto the mysterious, wild, and dangerous American landscape where adventure and the chance of rebuilding his life and community awaited him.

Moving through metaphorical gates and stepping out upon the American range, the cowboy stands alone, with the world against him. Goodnight was not on his journey long before facing a triad of obstacles threatening to end his heroic quest. Campbell (2008) states, “Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a successions of trials” (p. 81). Goodnight’s first was monster his own ego. This is a test of the mind to envision and build the mobile cabinet. In the process, he

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<sup>32</sup> J. Evetts Haley (1936), biographer of Goodnight, claims, “experience and training had been of an elemental nature” for the young man, and “mentally and physically he was equipped for the wilderness. He was lithe, tireless, and young...yet seasoned in the ways of the frontier and eager to venture where others were afraid to follow” (p. 121). But even for this “ironed willed” man, the future of the Texas panhandle and the rancher’s way of life seemed out of reach. Haley writes, “He wanted money, he wanted range, and he wanted to escape the turbulent Texas border...disastrous Indian troubles, the uncertainties of Reconstruction, and thieving neighbors,” but to do so meant leaving behind, once again, his home and community to take up dangerous and unpredictable cattle trails (p. 120-121).

needed to become a harbinger and find true leaders with whom he could head out onto the dangerous landscape.

Food trucks are not food trucks without an audience to demand their wares. Similarly, cattle drives are worthless if there are no markets to purchase the product. Thus, Goodnight and the first food truckers were set with the challenge of “finding the way.” For Goodnight finding the way meant in the literal sense, locating the markets and recognizing the feasibility of the drive. To the north, Goodnight knew the demand for the beef and the price were high, while towards the south the demand was also high but the price low.<sup>33</sup>

However, the human “cost” of heading north was much higher and thus Charles Goodnight was faced with the heroic challenge of crushing his own ego-self.

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<sup>33</sup> The right market for Goodnight was more of a choice between heading north or south. However, the consequence of that choice was truly a matter of life and death. According to Haley (1936), Goodnight had two realistic choices regarding where to head with the herd: the herd could either head to the south, toward New Orleans, or north toward Colorado or north up through Missouri and Kansas where he could meet the expanding railroad, which took cattle to larger city centers in the north and northeast. To drive cattle down south was considered a less difficult and shorter drive altogether and would have been a destination for many cattle drives out of Texas prior to the Civil War. However, Goodnight “knew, that the Southern States were destitute of cattle” but utterly “bankrupt,” thus eliminating it as a possible destination if he wanted to make money (p. 121). To head north, then, was the only viable option left. On the positive side, Goodnight figured, the west’s population was rapidly expanding and in need of beef and other goods after the discovery of gold in 1849 in California, the national interest in build a trans-American railroad, and the mass relocation after Civil War. In so many words, Goodnight took seriously the idea of “to the victor goes the spoils.” The North’s victory over the South, spurred on by riches being claimed in the mining and industrial revolutions furthered convinced him there was a profit to be made throughout the northwest and the northeast. In fact, it was estimated that, at the time of Goodnight’s drive, had he gone south, he would have received four dollars per head cattle but heading northeast he got closer to forty dollars per head. Even with greater profit to be made, the negative side was blatantly obvious for the experienced cattle men: there were fewer established cattle trails, making them much more difficult to drive a few hundred let alone a few thousand cattle through, the trails were often longer and considered to be more treacherous because of larger native populations, poorer water sources, and vast expanse between any signs of civilization making them rough for even an experienced cattle man and Texas Ranger. In other words, those trails represented the “Wild” in the American Wild West.

Thus, “finding the way” also meant finding a way to defeat the ego. CG Jung (1989) writes, “I myself am the ego of my psychic and physical being” (p. 57). The ego manages conflict with the external and physical world but also deals with the “intrapsychic material” that stream from the unconscious. Jung claims an “obstacle” appears in that ego is manifest into “personality,” and “personality, after all, surely signifies character” (p. 57). In order to command the ego, Goodnight would be fighting himself and what he had experienced up to this point in his life. In this, moment he looked at himself and asked “what I am I going to be?”

To find out who someone will be, it is important to see who he or she was. Goodnight was raised by American pioneers during the westward movement of people--and their ideas--across the expanses of the North American continent.

Dorson (1977) states this persona of the pioneer and early settlers:

Throughout its history involved the basics not so much of classical democracy as of neighborliness and expediency. The nature of the land and environment mitigated against a genuine show of the individualism the more romantic historians attributed to the era. For the rank and file frontiersman, the conformist—not the individualist—personified the folk movement across the continent (p. 35).

Goodnight, in effect, would have to rationalize the benefit of his community over his own well being. The decision to travel north or south was only complicated further by the fact that he explicitly understood the dangers on the trails from his time as a Scout. Haley (1936) states, the scouts’ “place was the most important and the most difficult in a frontier campaign” (p. 35). The Scouts believed that the success or failure of a scout was contingent on his ability to master and possess a few necessary skills: finding water, knowing which foods are edible and which are fatal,

the ability to hear barely-perceptible sounds, being able to trail a horse and identify it by the tracks, and lastly “hav[ing] the faculty of not only seeing Indian tracks and other evidence of the Indians, but a good scout or plainsmen must be able to tell how old the tracks are” (p. 46). These skills are vital to a Scout because the water, or lack thereof, could kill him; the animals and plants could take his life or save it in a dire moment. Horse thieves commonly took horses, leaving Scouts left for dead, and a hundred or so armed natives may be waiting to spring a trap on a Scout’s herd just around the next bend. These are the risks which Goodnight had to consider when making his decision on whether to proceed.

For the food truckers, crushing their ego means carefully and strategically considering their strengths and weaknesses, and examining the emotions that could cloud their judgment when making decisions that affect others. Checking one’s propane tanks is a matter of life and death for those working on the truck and those in close proximity. Owners are warned that they cannot sacrifice the safety of others in order to fulfill their own desires and increase profits. However, once the ego is regulated and responsibilities are prioritized, the food truck community will be able to respond to backlash over its quick rise and the problems it creates.

Thusly, Goodnight’s story acts as a defense against owners without the desired amount of concern for others. Dorson (1977) posits that most heroes are commonly elevated by exalting “physical virtues, and perform or boast about prodigious feats of strength, endurance, violence, and daring,” (p. 35). But for Goodnight and the food truckers, there is a humility that becomes characteristic of

this type of heroic figures and it is largely due to the circumstances in which they were raised. For one thing, food truckers need each other on the street and for another, they need to act as protectors for their audiences that join them on the streets.

To his credit, Goodnight was considered to be a very good Scout and plainsman, but he was aware of his shortcomings. While in the ranger service, not long after being in the scouts, Goodnight suffered a case of measles that, according to Haley (1936), "impaired Goodnight's hearing. The sense never returned in its original keenness, and when he was sick or suffering with cold, his hearing became quite dull" (p. 141). He was flawed, knew it, and eventually learned how to work around it. Yet as flawed as he might have been, Goodnight was set with the task of caring for a new community and guiding it with the welfare of the group as his main priority.

Goodnight ultimately made a choice to take the cattle to the northern market. He concluded that two thousand cattle would require eighteen cowboys to wrangle along the Loving Trail and the miles of trail further north. A few things stood in the way of getting these four to six million cattle north. One, as Haley (1936) states, was that "the cattle of central Texas were different from the longhorns of the border. Many old cowboys, [Charles] Goodnight among them, distinguished the dark, line-backed, mealy-nosed, round-barreled, and well built animals" (p. 19). The cowboys called them Texas cattle, and were most likely a cross-breed of the Spanish and Southern stock. Haley continues:



They were better cattle than the former but every bit as wild. Their horns were long and keen, set forward to kill 'like those of a buffalo' ...Like creatures domesticated from nature, they readily reverted to the wild, and ranged out beyond the settlements of central Texas. Though they were a good beef breed they were actually ferocious. A wounded bull would hunt a man by scent, like a bear, and attack a horseman as readily as a man on foot. In fact, he was worse than a bear (p. 19-20).

In short, the cattle were as rugged as the landscape they would traverse. Taming the bulls was a daunting task, as they were massive compared to any of the other North American continent's land mammals, but Goodnight assigned himself the task, knowing it could be done.

From his early experience, Goodnight learned that having a part-time cook or a cook's two wheeled wagon on shorter drives made them more comfortable by creating a common social area. In addition, it slightly lessened the cowboys' workload by providing some of their meals. But a cook and a wagon could not feed all of Goodnight's crew and both were too slow. Even worse, the wagon set a slow pace for the entire drive. The challenge, then, was to make a fast enough wagon to keep up with the herd.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Adams (1952) claims that on the first cattle drives in the United States, "each man 'packed' his own food in a saddle pocket or a flour sack tied behind the cantle of his saddle" (p. 8). He would pack what he could, but the food was simple and scant. Haley states (1936), "Provisions were meager...For short cow hunts, 'each man carried his three to six days' rations in a wallet behind the saddle'; for longer hunts, wallets gave way to pack outfits and the Texas mule" (p. 18). The provisions included, "some good roasted coffee, a supply of light bacon, and a few hard biscuits, though often the cowboys had no bread" (p. 18). Adams (1952) adds, for those longer drives, "supplies were pooled and packed upon the back of a mule with a regular saddle and alforjas. Before the Civil War, when there was a sizable company, a Negro slave would be taken along to do the cooking, or a Mexican hired hand would be used (p. 9)."

With the addition of a cook and a few extra mules, the food service on the trail operated as a type of commissary. Adams states, “These primitive commissaries served their purpose in furnishing rib-sticking food sufficient for hard riding, and had the advantage of breaking camp quickly” (p. 9). The cooks did not have a large amount of supplies and those were vulnerable due to a lack of protection. Still, they served the purpose of giving the men a bit of extra time to get ready to ride rather than preparing a meal. Later, this type of food service was called a “greasy-sack outfit.” As Adams puts it, “travelling on a trail for months at a time with a bunch of hired hands, through an unpopulated country, called for a conveyance which would hold sufficient provisions for long stretches between supply points” (p. 9).

The next evolution of this commissary style of medium took the form of a two-wheeled cart drawn by two or more oxen. However, the vehicle was “cumbersome” and “too slow to keep up” (Adams 1952 p. 2). The problem was that the working oxen pulling a heavy cart would end up being slower than the herd.<sup>35</sup> Time was money, and time on the trail increased the chances of death, and Goodnight could sacrifice neither men nor money (p. 9).<sup>36</sup> Therefore, Goodnight designed and constructed a new type of vehicle, which would ride with the herd, carry extra supplies, help provide the cowboys with a common gathering place and sense of community along the drive, extra security from thieves and the natives, and

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<sup>35</sup> So the cowboys were left with a few options: they could add more oxen for great speed, go without the cart and settle back into a smaller commissary, or maintain the status quo.

<sup>36</sup> Goodnight had “been disgruntled and unhappy with the proper food” along the trail (Cano & Scohat 1997 p. 23). In doing so, he reached the conclusion that “these cowboys now demanded a real cook and good ‘chuck’ as food came to be known” (p. 23).

lastly, deliver a more efficient means of providing sustenance to the cowboys.

Goodnight planned the wagon to be:

Loaded to its maximum weight of up to two tons and would be constantly on the move, day in and day out for months at a time. It would be so heavy that when fully loaded, it required four mules, and often up to six mules, to supply the power necessary to transport the wagon” (Cano and Scohat 1997 p. 24).

In other words, he was building something faster, yet heavier and more durable than the wagons he had previously used.

He collaborated with a woodworker to put on the finishing touches. They produced an odd vehicle; a four-wheeled retro-fitted army wagon, with new axles and greasing method, the strongest wood used to line the bed of the wagon, and a most interesting sloping box or cabinet at the back of the wagon.<sup>37</sup> Goodnight planned for a team of oxen or mules to pull the heavy wagon, believing the oxen power, plus the modifications, would increase the speed enough to keep up with the herd, still carrying a substantial load, and be durable enough to withstand the dangerous journey.

The back of this wagon acted like a bed of a pickup truck, hauling the heavy equipment and foodstuffs. However the majority of the food was kept in another of Goodnight’s inventions, the chuck box. The chuck box served as the pantry and secure lockbox in the chuck wagon. According to Haley (1936), “For the back end of

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<sup>37</sup> The wagon that met the base specifications, and which Goodnight had access to, was a surplus army/government wagon “used to haul ammunition and supplies, had a heavy metal foundation running gears and broad-tiered wheels” (Cano and Scohat 1997 p. 24). The broad-tiered wheels lessened the chance the wagon would tip over. Cano and Scohat state, “The wide gauge was necessary because the wagon often was top-heavy, and when navigating steep hills or rough deep gullies would otherwise risk rolling over” (p. 28).

the wagon he [Goodnight] built the first chuck-box he had ever seen, and recalled that 'it has been altered little to this day'" (p. 122).<sup>38</sup> The box was placed at the back of the wagon. The gait and a portion of the wagon bed were replaced by its cabinet-like box, which was completed with a flip-down hinged lid that doubled as the cook's worktable. The hinged lid was "built of strong lumber" and could be covered by the tarpaulin or fly to give shade or protect it from the weather (p. 12). The box's door was "supported at the angle by ropes or chains, or, more commonly, by a single heavy prop to the ground..." (p. 12).

Inside of the box were a variation of segmented shelves, partitions, and pull-out drawers. Adam's (1952) claims this "was the original kitchen cabinet" on a mobile vehicle (p. 12). Stored in the box would have been the partly used sack of flour, the bulky utensils ("eatin' irons"), the "coffee, sugar, beans, lard, rice, dried fruit, and 'lick' ...salt, pepper, soda, baking powder, and the less bulky commodities...bacon, molasses, and canned goods" (p. 12-13). Being a protected space, "Every cook reserved a drawer for a few simple remedies such as quinine, calomel, pills, black draught, and horse liniment, the latter to be used on man or beast" (p. 13). Also in that stash was his "private misery" (aka whiskey).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Adams (1952) claims, Goodnight "never received the dignity of a patent, but its use spread over the range and it became standard equipment" (p. 12).

<sup>39</sup> Fastened to the chuck box was the coffee grinder. According to Cano and Scohat (1997), the coffee grinder was "one of the most important and most-used pieces of equipment" during a cattle drive (p. 25). In fact, the first provision to go on the chuck wagon was the coffee. Adams (1952) claims that the cowboy regarded it as essential at every meal, and when he could get it between meals, it contributed to his contentment with life" (p. 67). The coffee served on the range was strong and black. For one thing, sugar was not a staple item on early drives. Secondly, Adams (1952) claims, even "when sugar became more common on the market, a few wagons carried it, but it was hard to keep in usable shape" (p. 69). Furthermore, the cowboys had an "aversion to milk and cream" (p. 68). He claims this

One of the last modifications to Goodnight's mobile cabinet was an unusual barrel attached to the side of the wagon. Growing up, Goodnight's mother, Charlotte Goodnight, would keep a jar in the sunlight outside or in the window. Inside the jar, there would lay a pillowy-dough, sourdough to be exact, never seeming to spoil, and would almost magically replenish itself when she took a hunk off to make sourdough biscuits. The memory of his mother's sourdough jar was so ingrained in Goodnight that when it came time to build his mobile cabinet, he placed a transferable large jar (his was more of a barrel) of sourdough on the side of the wagon facing the sun.<sup>40</sup>

The addition of the sourdough barrel to the wagon had a symbolic quality about it that rendered Goodnight's mobile cabinet into a mobile pantry. Cabinets can be in bedrooms or bathrooms, but the pantry is almost always connected with the kitchen, the place where one cooks. The idea of a wagon acting as a pantry fit the ultimate utility of the vehicle, which served as the main source of food storage and part-time food preparation station. Immediately beside the pantry would be the cook's fire and main prep-station, or, "cattle drive kitchen." Before embarking on its

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may have "stemmed from the fear that it might lead to a milking job if its use became general" (p. 68). Additionally, "Drinking milk...might make his [the cowboy or cooks] breath smell like a young calf's and he wanted none of that, though he thought nothing of its smelling like whiskey and tobacco" (p. 68). Specifically, the chuck wagon carried Arbuckle's coffee, because coffee beans kept much longer and tasted fresher. In fact, according to Cano and Scohat (1997), "Arbuckle also popularized the use of merchandise coupons that could be redeemed for a variety of merchandise, including aprons, watches, window curtains, Western story books, and even a .32-caliber revolver" (p. 28-29).

<sup>40</sup> "The sourdough [keg] was usually tied to the outside of the wagon where the heat could keep the contents in proper fermenting temperature" (Cano & Scohat 1997 p. 29-30). In the case of wet or cold weather, the keg was placed in the cradle or attached to the underside of the wagon. Haley (1936) states, since at the first use of the sourdough it "has become a favorite institution, even as the biscuits it has produced have become fragrant memories" (p. 122).

first cattle drive, word had spread about the vehicle Goodnight had constructed. In conversation, cowboys and cattlemen would simply refer to it as the “chuck wagon”—chuck taking after the inventor’s first name (Hayle 1936). In addition, the box at the end of the chuck wagon is the “chuck box” and the food one might eat off a chuck wagon is called “chuck.” The news of the chuck wagon and the service it provided had an added benefit--one that even helped solve the third obstacle in Goodnight’s hero journey.

Rhetorically, the chuck box is a defining visual trait. It is logical for the food truck community to highlight this aspect of the Goodnight story if they wish to use it a “weapon” against critics. To many people today, a full pantry can symbolically represent provision and security. The food trucks rolling around a food desert, a residential area does not have reasonable access to fresh produce and other food-stuffs, could also be a sign of safety and security that nutrient rich and diversified foods get out to those who lack access.

Another obstacle Goodnight faced was finding a crew of eighteen cowboys and a cook. All of the men were to be qualified enough and/or social enough to make it through the entire journey without killing each other. While there were plenty of men looking for work, hiring a crew was not an easy task. The skills necessary on a cattle drive, such as Goodnight intended, were often the ones that could not be taught; being calm or levelheaded when a band of horse thieves closes in, moving quickly enough to dodge a stampede of buffalo, or dealing with the smell of dead and rotting buffalo after a herd failed to find water. Ultimately, hiring any cowboy was a

gamble with very high stakes, in that betting on the wrong man could mean the loss of life and the loss of the herd.

The role of the cook and the need for a strong figure in charge of the food is a factor with which the food truckers are intimately familiar. The creation of the chuck wagon was also the creation of a new job on the cattle drives-the role of the “cook.” The cook, or cookie, had the main responsibility of providing service and comfort for those on the drive. He needed to know how to prepare and serve up to twenty meals in harsh conditions, set up camp, drive the wagon, care for the oxen, mules, or horses pulling the wagon, have some medical knowledge (as he was often the trail doctor) and have the social skills necessary to keep the more impulsive cowboys civilized while out on the trail for months.<sup>41</sup> Adams (1952) states:

Although the chuck wagon’s chief duty was to furnish food, it performed many other functions and was responsible for the most pleasant memories of the cowboy’s life. It was his bed as well as his board; it was his wardrobe, his social center, his hospital, his recreational rendezvous, and his home (p. 6).

The food truckers also require their cooks to be social with his or her crew and customers. Furthermore, both Goodnight and food truckers look to hire “educated” cooks. For Goodnight, an educated cook meant having basic math, reading, and writing skills, so that they could better keep track of inventory. If Goodnight was lucky, the cookie could write to the next stop to make sure they had the necessary supplies ready and provide more up-to-date information to other parts of the operation. Therefore, for their specialized skill set, the cook was often paid more

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<sup>41</sup> There is one mention of a woman cookie on used on cattle drive. Her name was Betty "Six Fingers" Mill according to Luster (2012).

than any other cowboy and better respected amongst the men. Cano & Scohat (1997) state that the cook “commanded up to four times the pay of ordinary hands” (p. 34).

However, as the word of Goodnight’s invention grew throughout the community of cowboys, the demand greatly increased. As it turned out, the prospect of better food, lighter workload, and a cook on the journey made for a popular idea and was worth a gamble for the cowboy. Goodnight had solved the riddle of how to get men willing to risk their lives and livelihood, and unlocked an entire frontier and six million heads of cattle. In many ways, Mark Manguera and Roy Choi, who will be detailed more in chapter four, are two figures that unlocked the riddle of a complex economic crisis for this generation’s mobile food trailblazers and combined it with an educated cook.

With everything in place, as the story goes, Goodnight headed down into town to get the last bit of supplies before the first chuck wagon voyage. Goodnight’s path into town crossed Oliver Loving’s campsite and the two men struck up a conversation. Goodnight enthusiastically laid out to the older and more experienced cattleman the entire plan and the wagon he created to see it through. The more Goodnight explained, the more Loving was drawn into the venture. Campbell (2008) states:

The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess, back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may rebound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds (p. 167).



Telling Loving about the wisdom behind the chuck wagon and its abilities represents the symbolic return and sharing of the boone with the community. Furthermore, the aid and support Loving gave was a confirmation of the magnitude of the rewards. In fact, after their first journey north, they inspired a whole new generation of cowboys and cattlemen. Haley (1936) states, "News of the success of Goodnight and Loving had spread and a number of daring cowmen were planning to venture upon their trail." (p. 162).

For the food truckers however, Goodnight's creation brought with it a new world of possibilities when it came to mobile food vehicles. It set the stage and framed the scene for them to arrive in the late 2000s. For example, food truck owner Kim Ima stated, "I could see it all of a sudden one day: the Treats Truck" (Pham, Shen, & Phillips 2014 p. 191). Even for being early on the scene, she claimed "It didn't occur to me to be intimidated...when you really want to try something, it's probably good you don't have the whole picture. The unknown is one of those ingredients for opening yourself up to what you can do" (p. 191). Goodnight sharing idea with Loving is a valuable lesson for modern food truckers. The use of Twitter and social media give food truckers greater tools to cross paths with many people to share their stories, sparking interest and contributing to the process of greater culinary possibility.

The food truck community is using the story of Goodnight to establish and build further credibility. It is the attempt to associate the virtues of the American Wild West romantic spirit with those food truckers riding their trusty Chevrolet P-

30, just bought off ebay.com for thirteen thousand dollars, rolling down the streets looking to make a living and survive on the urban range.<sup>42</sup> However, the story is not without complications. Like other stories or loosely historical myths of the American Wild West, the imagined and stylized portrayals of the period is often romanticized and sanitized, blurring the realities of men and women, native or otherwise, who did what was needed to survive. They are a border population living on the edge between civilization and the wilderness. At this edge they experience constant xenophobia, destroy the local environment in the name of their own prosperity, and operate within a semi-lawless and privilege business landscape. At the same time, their actions can be seen as fending for one's life against his fellow man and unforgiving nature. But by doing what they needed to do to survive, they also gave themselves an *ethos* as struggling but overcoming community of hard-nosed entrepreneurs.

With a less romantic version of Goodnight's story, the food truck community can gain more *ethos* from a mass audience. To start, the modern food trucks can benefit from the blend of American outlaw and the "frontier yeoman" or "sober aspects of pioneering" (Dorson 1977 p. 34). As will be seen with Roy Choi in chapter 4, there is a value to having one's vices displayed for the public. For example, chef Anthony Bourdain (2001), who claims that it was the images and stories of the underbelly and nefarious actions of the "bad boys and girls" in the culinary world was directly responsible for persuading him to get back into the kitchen and start

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<sup>42</sup> Food Truck up for sale on ebay.com: [http://www.ebay.com/itm/Food-Truck-Fully-Equipped-Catering-Truck-/181228941913?pt=LH\\_DefaultDomain\\_0&hash=item2a32163259](http://www.ebay.com/itm/Food-Truck-Fully-Equipped-Catering-Truck-/181228941913?pt=LH_DefaultDomain_0&hash=item2a32163259)

cooking for a living, while still being “real.” Timothy Abell, chef of the Flat Iron food truck, was inspired by culinary bad boy Anthony’s 2001 book *Kitchen Confidential*-- so much so that he decided to “trade in the pen and papers of his academic life for the pan and spatula of the kitchen” (Pham, Shen, & Phillips 2014 p. 26). The balance between outlaw and sober frontiersman is a closer representation of the current *ethos* of the food truck, in that lines of legality are themselves blurry and at time discriminatory, leaving food truckers dodging potential legal landmines and/or use the legal “gray zone” to their advantage. The fact remains: taking their wagons out means stepping into a mysterious landscape that needs more than a sanitized romanticism for its survival.

Secondly, the enriched story more closely identifies with current struggles in the food truck movements and how they have found that working in a collective is a critical part of their identities. What would a food truck be without the food truck round-ups or the food truck gathering that take place everyday across the country? Goodnight redefining his self-ego in favor of the collective ego is a close and important source of identification for the food truck community. Lastly, the food truckers are simply enriched by a more in-depth historical account of the events and times of Charles Goodnight to draw from and utilizes in establishing greater credibility and the development of community identity and character.

However fortified the study is by the story of Goodnight, it does not do enough. While there are many positive virtues attached to the Wild West Romantic brave cowboy or even the noble outlaw, the fact remains that it is still just one side

of the historical coin. On the other side of that coin are the negative accounts that see Goodnight not as a hero but as a villain. The Anglo movement west was traumatic for the land and the native inhabitants of the land. Goodnight's zeal to wrangle as much of the cattle as he could in order to make a profit can be seen as an impious act against established native principles regarding the relationship between themselves, the land, and the creatures which inhabit it. In short, Goodnight is not a hero for everyone, even in the food truck community. Thus, if Goodnight were the only hero in the tale, it would be far too narrow to represent the whole of the community as it stands today. Therefore, two other major phases or stories in the food truck community will further expand the scope of the food truck historically to address issues of the working class, urbanization, immigration, and its multiethnic heritage.

### **The Story of the Lunch Wagon and Tamale Cart**

In the article *America's Best Food Trucks*, author Jeanine Skowronski (2010), describes that in New England, "The first diner, established in 1872, was actually a food truck. Creator Walter Scott parked his horse-drawn freight wagon in front of the Providence Journal offices and sold hard-boiled eggs and sandwiches to its workers" (para. 1). Her enrollment of the story of Walter Scott deploys a new site of actors and the traces of association. For most food truckers, the narrative often starts where Skowronski did: the first voyage and Walter Scott. Most stories, including hers, conclude with cart/wagons becoming a permanent establishment,

called the diner, rather than continuing on a mobile one.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, The Entrepreneur Press and Rich Mintzer (2011), state:

In 1872, the first diner was established. It was a trailer. Diners—complete with service counters dominating the interior, a food preparation area against the back wall, and floor-mounted stools for the customers—were a means of bringing restaurants to new locations in the 1920s and '30s. Many were modeled after railroad dining cars. Some took on the art deco design of the time, and most were pulled on flat back trucks (p. 2).

Richard Myrick (2013) repeats the 1872 date and claims, “The first diner is set up in a horse-drawn freight wagon” but he adds in that in 1894 “Sausage vendors [would] sell their wares outside the student dorms at major eastern universities (Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and Cornell), and their carts became known as ‘dog wagons’” (para. 2). Weber (2012) puts the whole story into perspective when “Walter Scott in Providence, RI” opened his little cart to sell “breakfast sandwiches and pies to workers at nearby establishments,” but, in fact, he was establishing the “first traditional ‘food truck’” (p. 3). Just as the chuck wagon was a mobile pantry, the lunch cart and later wagon were entire mobile kitchens.

In Ibrahim’s (2011) master’s thesis, she continues with the narrative framework of Myrick and Weber, but also expands on the magnitude of the medium via business success, building a network of other early food trucking pioneers, and the expansion and improvement of technology. She states:

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<sup>43</sup> History Channel’s show *Modern Marvels* (2011) stated in reference to the chuck wagon’s rise on the American range, “On the other side of the country, in the cities of New England, another kind of kitchen on wheels was taking off-- the lunch wagon...Horse drawn streetcars were joining the ranks too. As these wagons became obsolete they were often retrofitted into food venues.” When they lost their wheels, they gave birth to the American diner.

The chuck wagon morphed into other forms of mobile eateries. For example, the first recorded diner was actually a horse-drawn freight wagon in Providence, Rhode Island...Food wagon owner Walter Scott would park his mobile eatery in front of the *Providence Journal* offices and sell hard-boiled eggs and sandwiches to its workers. The success of selling cheap and quick food to factory workers was imitated by many others...the lunch mobile spread in popularity throughout the northeast...In the early twentieth century, the owners stopped driving the carts and parked them on empty spaces along the street, so they could put in bigger kitchens (p. 3).

These food truckers' narratives are representative of a multitude of other actors within the food truck community and retell Walter Scott's part of in staging/framing the rise of the food truck.

Within these stories are common historical/genealogical points that aid, like they did in the story of Goodnight, in recognizing turning points and impactful associations that set the stage for the food truck. First, the carts appeared in the 1870s, in New England, and are often credited to Walter Scott of Providence Rhode Island. Secondly, before long, carts inspired the use of the lunch wagon, which was mobile and allowed customers to dine inside, becoming the first full mobile urban kitchen. Furthermore, the rise of the mobile kitchen spurred new laws to regulate things like the lunch wagons hours of operation or where they could park (Gutman 1993). The community advocated against these measures, but ultimately make physical changes to the lunch wagon to sidestep the laws. The events would lead to the establishment of the iconic American diner, when the wagons took off their wheels, effectively avoiding the new laws. The following sections will broaden and add to the historical scope of both branches of the story, illuminating the details and

significance of the social context and historic role in the mobile vending cabinet in framing the food truck of today.

The Industrial Revolution and the food-needs of the community set the historical context for the food truckers' stories. As late as 1890, the United States as a whole was still considered to be rural, living outside of city centers. From a foodways' perspective, Megan Elias (2009) states, "the majority of its population living close to their food sources and personally involved in the production and processing of food" would be the main characteristics (p. 2). Susan William (2006) states that the changes to the American meal happened "dramatically during the nineteenth century" (p. 13). She continues:

At the outset of the Victorian era, a world where most Americans lived on farms and in small towns and villages, many families grew much of their own food and processed it at home. What they did not grow themselves, they were generally able to purchase from local shops or trade for with neighbors (p. 13).

This was a vastly different scene from the dusty and dangerous cattle trail where preparing dinner often involved wrangling a meal off of the prairie or eating from the chuck wagon while trying to dodge a buffalo stampede.

Like the Internet Revolution, the Industrial Revolution was a mass movement to capitalize on a wealth of natural resources, new technologies, and a growing population and consumer market. Pedrocoo (1999) claims, the "Industrial growth was based on the factory system and was accompanied by a process of urbanization" and in the wake, a "massive migration of population" clamored from the country into towns (p. 481). The opportunities for work, increased immigration,

resettlement from the country to these urban and industrial centers, an increased birthrate, and the potential for a better life contributed to the rapid population of northern cities and urban area, similar to the circumstances surrounding the first food truckers.

The massive influx of people and the expanding distance from food sources presented some inherent difficulties; for example, groups of displaced, often poor, and home sick individuals looking for familiarity in something that tasted like home. But as Pedrocco (1999) notes, with rapid population growth in the northeast, “The ‘reproduction cost’ of the new urban workforce...was very high, owing to the difficulty of supplying food to all towns—not only industrial centers but also commercial ones” (p. 481). The results being “living conditions for the urban working classes became particularly harsh” in that “Food supplies were scarce and expensive, primarily because of the inadequate distribution system in the large cities” (p. 481). The chuck wagon was on its way, bringing millions of heads of beef to the cities (Haley 1936). Yet, as stated by Tannahill (1988), “The meat was there in plenty, but although the industrial towns of North America and Europe were desperate for it, the price—because of packing and transport overheads—could not be brought down far enough to stimulate the really steep increase in consumption the ranchers needed” (p. 317).<sup>44</sup> In other words, the fuel required in order to sustain the influx of workers was expensive to import, and, therefore, was often out of reach

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<sup>44</sup> This statement added a level of complexity to Charles Goodnight’s assumption that the North could pay the highest price for the cattle, which he used to rationalize heading that direction with his cattle through a dangerous landscape.



for many in these in new urban communities.<sup>45</sup> The limited goods prevented these communities from being able to cook their own traditional meals, forcing them to learn new ways to make cheap and limited food supplies taste good and nourish their bodies.

In the early 1900s, a medium, the mom-and-pop brick-and-mortar restaurant, helped these urban individuals feed themselves. To do this, the restaurant provided means for the commuting workers who travelled ever-growing distances to get a hot meal. Their location served many individuals that were “too far away for the midday meal” (Flandrin 1999 p. 437). Along with the distance between producer and consumer, the working conditions of northern cities varied greatly, but one thing in particular was true: masses of people were working unconventional hours in an attempt to maintain the immense output of material goods and services needed to fill the demands. The mom-and-pop restaurant, increased distances to work, and scheduled work shifts created a unique alteration to the social/collective patterns of actions. Specifically, in Providence Rhode Island, historian and the guru-scholar on the diner, Richard J.S. Gutman (1993) stated that a

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<sup>45</sup> Jean-Louis Flandrin (1999) claims the Industrial Revolution affected the foodway in a number of other ways. He states two things in particular that are changing the foodways: (1) the food-processing industry and (2) women entering the workforce. The food processing industry was revolutionizing the ability to mass produce, transport, and preserve food making food cheaper, accessible to larger populations, and last longer. Furthermore, “The Industrial Revolution, together with changes in social relations and a narrowing of the income gap between rich and poor...contributed to a drastic reduction in the number of household personnel” which, in turn, meant “Increasing numbers of working class women chose factory or office work over domestic service” (p. 435). This shift “made it much more difficult to combine work with household chores and child-rearing” (p. 436). To fill the domestic work void, the food processing industry intervened and offered its services of canning and preserving, and used its “powerful influence” on the development of household-appliance to lessen the workload of the home’s caretaker (p. 436).

problem developed because “nighthawks, late-night workers, and carousers couldn’t get anything to eat anywhere in town after eight P.M., when all the restaurants closed for the evening” (p. 12). To solve the problem, a mediator needed to step in and alter the situation. Walter Scott and the appearance of the lunch cart served as that historical mediator, according to Gutman and the majority of the food truck community. The lunch cart—and later the lunch wagons—were natural extensions of the restaurants which provided a service for the men and women working the night shift.<sup>46</sup>

When chef Roy Choi first opened his food truck to late night crowds in Venice Beach, California in 2008, it was as if he honored Walter Scott for making a similar late night journey to feed late night hungry crowds. The street corners both have symbolic meaning to the food truck community. Regarding Walter Scott’s story, a multitude of references from the food truck community have articulated that the first street corner covered by the mobile vending cabinet—the early version of the lunch cart—was parked in front of the Providence paper, the *Journal*, in 1872. Gutman (1993) states, Walter Scott (1841-1924), his horse, and a small handmade cart, during late night hours, “trundled down Westminster Street...in a light horse-drawn wagon laden with tasty sandwiches, boiled eggs, pies, and coffee” en route to

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<sup>46</sup> Not far removed from the food processing industry was another medium, the restaurant, aimed at helping these urban individuals. To do this, the restaurant provided, in part, means for the greater and greater distances between the workplace and home by feeding many individuals that were “too far away for the midday meal” (Flandrin 1999 p. 437).

that street corner (p. 12).<sup>47</sup> It is a triumphant moment in the story, as it recounts the hero parading down the path into the unknown, but coming prepared...with food. The imagery is also similar to Goodnight's cattle drive armed with his new chuck wagon.

However, the story of the lunch cart offers a different and important addition to the Goodnight story by taking it out of the Wild West and moving it into the city and urbanization. Gerald Warshaver (1983) identifies five principles, as he calls them, that aid in defining the nature of urban or city folklore and myth; (1) takes place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "the era of the beginning of modern industrial urbanism;" (2) "Must be socially inclusive;" (3) "Urban folklore views the city as a social organism, it seeks to discover and analyze the types of customary behavior and traditional beliefs that are shared as a result of city dwellers' participation in their everyday urban world" (163); (4) "Urban folklore relates the repertoires of street folk to the ecology of the city," looking at "environmental competence: their ability to effectively modify their performances to meet the needs of particular environmental conditions;" (5) The city has "multiple realities, a state of mind" (162-165). Scotty's story is very much a product of urbanization and industrialization and is present as such in the food truck communities' narratives.

In the story of Scotty the hero, he strives to work with the intent to escape poverty and pursue a life of ease by seeking his riches in the big city, using the new

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<sup>47</sup> Walter Scott was inducted into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame in 2009 (the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame 2011). Also, Gutman (1993) is cited many times of United States Department of the Interior's National Register of Historic Place, specifically addressing the diner.

means of business or technology during the Industrial Revolution. Robert Walker (1983) states that the hero “reads, observes, and learns, undistracted superficial explanations or traditional usages. Sooner or later—perhaps abetted chance—he discovers a process or a product this significantly alters his professional setting; a more flexible alloy or a more lasting paint, a system of profit-sharing or a new method of underwriting credit” (p. 68). Dorson (1977) claims the rags-to-riches tale is a “modern American folktale,” because of its often “comic exaggeration of American business values: getting ahead by knowing the right people, by having ‘contacts’ in high places” (248). The challenge of the hero is avoiding being tempted by the means of success in the business world and then accepting the consequences of said success. Greed, dishonesty, and the abandonment of one’s virtues in exchange for fortune are beasts of epic proportion and to conquer them is a feat of heroism. The threat of failure to defeat the beasts still acts as a warning of the big city, big business, and big internal struggles of wealth and power.

Scotty’s story—specifically of selling hot food to the workers—was said to have made “good business sense,” and, therefore, put him face-to-face with the struggles of success or failure in the streets. According to Garbin (2005), “Scotty noticed that all the restaurants in his native Providence, Rhode Island, closed after serving dinner. Meanwhile, the factories stayed open all night, and the workers inside still needed something to eat” (p. 1). The story explicates that Scotty was endowed with business savvy, combined with the desire to serve the people around him by providing for their needs. The story idealizes the win-win scenario of making

a profit while serving the community. It was an act motivated by profit and goodwill, which lead him to fund his survival in the city, while promoting innovation and transforming that innovation into an empire of wealth and power.

Scotty, prior to parking the first mobile vending cabinet, got an early education in street vending and the newspaper industry. Gutman (1993) states:

At the age of eleven, in 1852, Walter sold newspapers, fruit, and homemade candy on the street to help support his family...When he later got a job working as a compositor and pressman, he stated making the rounds of all three providence papers—the *Journal*, the *Star*, and the *Herald*—peddling sandwiches and coffee between editions (p. 12 & 14).

As such, Scotty was aware of the potential of these late night “markets.” The first of Scotty’s cart was a small box on wheels with room to seat only one person. In fact, Scotty had to modify and install a “cover, out of which he cut windows openings to face both the sidewalk and the street” and when “customers ordered from both sides at once Scotty could hand out the victuals and collect the money with both hands” (Gutman 1993 p. 14).<sup>48</sup> Gutman believes that Scotty’s cabinet was similar to Edgar Miller’s street-vending cabinet (patent no. 496,663), which would be patented on May 2, 1893. These early versions of the mobile vending cabinet display some of the earliest forms of serving food from a contemporary food truck, conducting business from within the truck while the customers stand outside.

Like Goodnight before him, and the many food truckers roaming the streets thereafter, Scotty needed to remake or transform vending technology. He needed the ability to move from site to site while carrying product, protecting the food

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<sup>48</sup> According to Gutman (1993) the cart was similar to a design patented by an Edgar Miller in 1891.

goods, and serving those goods to customers in an efficient manner. Luckily, he had the goods and resources to construct his modest mobile food cabinet. According to the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame (2011), “Scott was nearly alone in selling his victuals to night shift workers. Most of the other street vendors worked out of stalls in the first floor of the Market House” (para. 1). Therefore, Scotty’s advantage was being able to meet or find his customers whereas the stationary vendors depended on foot traffic and relative location to the industrial areas with large work forces. Current food truck communities have those same advantages. The cart also had an advantage over the walking vendors because, while both could travel, the speed and distance travelled would be vastly different. As mentioned, one of the problems with massive growth of a town or city was that the consumer and the producers of foodstuffs grew further apart. As the Industrial Revolution grew, so did the distance between places of work, places of residence, and places to find sustenance. The mobile vending cabinet had the ability to carry and protect larger amounts of supplies and use its one horsepower to get those items there faster.<sup>49</sup> The Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame (2011) stated, Scotty took street vending “to a new level by offering his wares from the back of a wagon, which carried more and moved from workplace to workplace” (para. 1). The last advantage over the walking vendor was a cart was a shelter from the elements.<sup>50</sup> Publishing the *Providence Journal* did

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<sup>49</sup> Today, the advantage for the customer seems obvious. For many, it is hard to get a good meal with limited time to eat during work hours, particularly if one has to travel farther than just outside one’s place of work.

<sup>50</sup> According to Gutman (1993), “An Ethiopian man named Tom Jay was Scott’s first competitor, peddling food at night in the streets of Providence” (p. 15).

not stop when it was cold and rainy. Employees still needed to work and, of course, needed to eat. Even in harsh climates, the cart could weather the storm.

Scotty not only provided hot and homemade food to a growing number of workers, but also set a new standard for street vending in the New England area. He made it a priority to provide good food at a fair price, according to Gutman (1993). Similar ideas related to the quality of the product and their food being “home cooked” are also part of the ethos for many current food truckers. In other words, prioritizing the quality of the food over profit helped Scott overcome greed. Functionally, Scotty was able to keep prices down by serving “only homemade items” and passing the majority of the cost of the product onto himself rather than the customer (p. 14). According to Gutman, for “twenty-five years Scotty baked his own bread” (p. 14). At one time, the entire menu stated that, for a nickel, a patron could buy a diverse number of items; a ham sandwich, a “Chewed sandwich,” a boiled egg with a slice of buttered bread, and a piece of pie, which was not “just a slice of pie, a regulation cut was *half* of a small pie” (p. 14).<sup>51</sup> The food truck community has selected a hero with a rags-to-riches story which is augmented by his educated business decisions; keeping prices low so as to serve the working people ethically and keeping the food local both in its source of culinary inspiration and sourcing of food.

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<sup>51</sup> The “Chew Sandwich,” according to Gutman (1993) was invented by Scotty, “consisting of scraps left over on the cutting board chopped still finer, and spread with butter or mustard between two slices of bread” (p. 14). Furthermore, “He told the Providence Sunday Journal, ‘For my chicken sandwiches, roster fowl was always enough, I bought the best native birds and cooked them under the best condition. Nobody ever kicked at a chicken sandwich that I passed out’” (p. 14-15). According to Gutman (1993), Scotty sold five different pies: apple, mince, squash, huckleberry, and cranberry.

Most likely, however, Scotty did not do any “cooking” within the vending cart--meaning that no large flame was used to heat the food. For one thing, it is unclear if there was method available for heating up menu items rather than keeping them warm. To heat something up takes a larger amount of fuel and there is little to no evidence that Scotty had fuel or the equipment to do so. Rather, within the mobile cabinet, Scotty did some of the food preparation and tried to keep the food hot/warm.<sup>52</sup> But it is logical to suspect that the hot food items may not have been in the cart long enough to get cold because there was a finite amount of storage and, thus, food commonly ran out.<sup>53</sup>

With regards to early mobile vending pioneers, Gutman (1993) claims that it was a former patrolman named Ruel B. Jones that took the mobile vending cabinet and transformed it into the lunch cart. Gutman states, “Sometime in 1883, he [Jones] turned in his badge and nightstick, and by August of that year he was operating a healthy business making the rounds by horse and wagon to clubrooms and saloons”

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<sup>52</sup> Robert H. Putnam “created the California Chicken Tamale Co. in 1892 with the desire to send San Francisco-style tamale vendors nationwide” (Arellano 2012 p. 42). On the streets of Chicago, Putnam sent out the tamale men with a steam pail that had a fire source on the very bottom, boiling water in the middle, and the tamales were kept on top. It is not known if Walter Scott might have used a steam pail like this on this first cart to keep his food warm.

<sup>53</sup> Food getting cold or running out of food were not the only concerns that Scotty and the current food trucks that serve late-night meals share. Gutman (1993) goes into detail, stating, “Scotty had to devise ways to protect himself against the sorts of rowdies who would eat and run, without paying” (p. 15). Gutman continues that, “Over the years he developed a good eye for whether a customer was apt to pay or not” (p. 15). In some cases Scotty would “reach out from the wagon” and grab a man’s hat, “holding it as security until the bill was paid” (p. 15). As many of the early lunch cart, tamale cart, and current food truck workers know, working late nights comes with whole new set of obstacles as these cabinets became a gathering grounds for the working and out-of-work communities between the hours of eight in the evening and daybreak. But the problems are outweighed by the natural fit of the mobile vending cabinet and the hungry late night urbanized community. However, like any good/profitable idea, it does not take long for others to catch on. Garbin (2005) claims, “lunch wagons appeared” in the New England area “just about anywhere a crowd might gather” (p. 2). In other words, Scotty had a growing competition of mobile vending cabinets.



(p. 16). Like Scotty, Jones, and many of the current food truckers, these stories also display similar struggles and adaption in their attempts to attain at a better way to make a living and fulfill that calling by serving late night food out of a wagon.

Jones is an actor who is sometimes left out of the narratives of food truckers, but he should be mentioned because he helped establish the lunch wagon movement within the New England area, which consequently helped establish an entire industry of mobile vending, mobile vending construction, and mobile technology. It was from these first lunch wagons, and with the help of Jones and other New Englanders, (like T.H. Buckley, Charles H. Palmer, and Samuel Messer Jones, Ruel B. Jones' cousin) that the movement of mobile vending made an expansive push southward and westward and it made exponential progress technologically (Gutman 1993). Gutman claims, "The lunch cart operators came from every trade....They were men—and only men—who wanted to work for themselves and make their fortunes" and many held previous jobs as "Shoemaker, carpenter, laborer, wire-worker, stage manager, stonecutter, baker, and foreman...With this diversity of backgrounds, the lunch cart operators provided a milieu that was comfortable for the working-class people who ate there" (p. 37). These pioneers had the earliest mass-appearance of the sophist-like food-truck-itinerants in the food truck stories. The fact that many of the first food cart and lunch wagon individuals had other skills and professions before getting into mobile food service is significant to the number of actor associations, and this demographic is being traced to the historic center of calculation the lunch wagon.

Food truckers today claim that they will feed anyone who patronizes their trucks and will go wherever there is a demand, no matter how remote the location. They follow the tradition of the early lunch wagons. In fact, the contemporary lunch carts and wagons are not just feeding the “night owls” working the late shift; wagons are showing up at any time of day where there are places to park and a famished gathering of hungry individuals, and hopefully make a profit. The lunch wagon represents an inclusive clientele base in that wagons serve almost anyone and even seek out new customers. The centers of calculation include so many people/actors in its fold that its popularity has brought attention and wealth to a mobile food empire.

In the early 1900s the late night feeding party was the focus of legal investigation. In areas around New England, laws began appearing, taking aim at the swarms of lunch carts and wagons popping up. For example, in Providence Rhode Island, where Walter Scott rode out to feed the workers in his new vending cabinet, some of the first laws were implemented. Gutman (1993) states, “nearly fifty of the ‘floating’ restaurants were roaming the streets by 1912” which caused the city to crack down and “declared that the wagons had to be off the street by ten A.M.” (p. 38). For the brick-and-mortar restaurants and the area traffic, this was a welcome sign. The problem was that for the operators of the carts and wagons business was good after ten in the morning. So, rather than send everyone home from the party,

the mobile community simply changed the location and invited everyone to join.<sup>54</sup> Or, more accurately, wagons became more permanent by removing their wheels in an open spot and avoiding many of the new laws. The idea of becoming permanent was representative of a legal change in location. The wagon was now a brick-and-mortar, established like any other restaurant, and not subject to a different set of laws and regulations (Gutman 1993).

Food truckers today will also seek to drop some the wheels for a brick-and-mortar, though becoming a restaurant brings its own problems. The wagons and food trucks alike have a unique understanding on how to feed customers. The wagons and carts grew out of the ideology that it is paramount to meet your customers at any location and at any time. Therefore, if the location became permanent and well-established, it became prudent and necessary to stay open as long as there were customers--a business model the competition brick-and-mortars had yet to adopt.

The twenty-four hour a day diner was the hero's boon to the end of Scott's rags-to-riches journey. The "Diner" is an iconic and established fixture to the American food landscape; almost every town in America has at least one. The diner is ironically linked to the American love affair with cars and the open road, and they are symbolic of a nostalgic geography with working classes communing over a meal that will keep them going throughout the day or night.

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<sup>54</sup> Jones et al adapted quickly and began selling prefabricated lunch wagons that would be wheeled into place and the set permanently (Gutman 1993). Furthermore, they produced literature on how to make the conversion for mobile vendors that wanted to transition to stationary structures.

The diner is symbolically rich and has played a role in the modern day culinary landscape, but why is this important for the food truck community? It is because, as in past generations, current food trucks (and nearly all mobile vending) must also adapt to the regulations that constrain their business operations, but help them fit smoothly within the mobile food network. And, like other new laws, some are well-intentioned and some are not. However, the story offers nuggets of knowledge in survival within the city and trappings of business. It therefore acts as a guide to “making things happen.” The lesson is thus one of adaptation and continued growth.

Scotty also models a life of doing what one loves, doing what is stable, and doing one’s job as long as there is a need and a will. As Garbin (2005) states, Scotty’s contribution goes farther than his courage and business foresight and goodwill. It seems that “Scotty hardly invented the idea of serving meals from a mobile structure, the stars aligned around his initiative, spawning imitators and an industry. The simple converted freight wagon evolved into an ornate, enclosed, rolling lunch counter, complete with seating” that transformed the American culinary landscape and dining culture on the road and in the cities (p. 1). Like the rags-to-riches hero, he promoted innovation and turned it into an empire.

In 2010 Ta-Nehisi Coates, a senior editor at *The Atlantic*, was “astounded” to find out that “no one’s written a definitive history of taco trucks” (para. 1). The reason Coates seemed so shocked two years after the 2008 appearance of the food truck was that if you spend more than a day or two in Southern California or

anywhere along the southern border with Mexico, there are many visible taco trucks (otherwise know as the *loncheras*), roaming the streets or camped out in parking lots. Not only that, but there has been a flurry of popular media, corresponding social networking websites, scholarly articles, and even a master thesis or two have been written on the taco trucks, yet there is not official origin story like that of Goodnight or even Walter Scott. Arellano (2012) suggests it could be the King Taco owner Raul O. Martinez who in 1974 “sold tacos out of a former ice cream truck jury-rigged to support a stove and grill” (p. 163). The other possible start-up was in New York in 1966. There, “two housewives opened Tic-Taco, a taco shop...and also a minitruck with a canopy that they used to cater parties” (p. 164). Regardless of its exact origin, the taco truck represents a community’s ingenuity to deliver tasty food to hungry people.<sup>55</sup> However, even with a smaller reference pool than the lunch wagon and the chuck wagon, many within the food truck community consider the tamale carts (and what seems to be its modern day representation, taco trucks) to be part of the food truck’s historical framing of the scene.

In a *Los Angeles Times* article from 2011, Gustavo Arellano finds that “The origins of the city’s tamale sellers remain murky, although newspaper accounts place them as far back as the 1870s” (para. 1). But as “murky” as the beginnings in Southern California are, the significance of having and acknowledging a deep culinary tradition and history allows for the adaptation of these framed tools to be

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<sup>55</sup> However, there are two full texts, Pilcher (2012) and Arellano (2012), chronicling a cultural and culinary history of the Mexican and Hispanic cuisine and its rise in the United States starting in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, they each have sections of their books directly addressing the taco truck’s place within the culinary history of the region.

used by current food truckers. The collection of Los Angeles' downtown food trucks at the Miracle Mile is a scene reminiscent of the horse-drawn tamale carts that appeared around the time of Charles Goodnight in the late 1800s and then were forced out of their locations. It seems to be a logical progression for an actor like David Weber (2012) to enroll the tamale carts into the story/history of the food truck. He states:

As far back as the 1870s, *tamaleros* (tamale carts) were extremely popular in Los Angeles, and by 1901 more than 100 tamale wagons roamed LA, some even creating mobile kitchens by tapping into city gas and water lines. These wagons were the precursor to the *lonchero*, or the 'taco truck,' which dominated Los Angeles for most of the twentieth century (p. 3).

Another actor, Philips (2012), author of "*The Complete Idiot's Guide to Starting a Food Truck Business*," claims that "Los Angeles was ground zero for the food truck revolution. The mobile food business began there with the taco truck back in 1910, thanks to the influx of Mexicans into California, with East L.A. receiving the highest concentration of immigrants" (p. 5). Julie Fishman (2011) adds,

A motley metropolis, with strong Asian and Mexican culinary influences, Los Angeles is home to trucks serving everything from gourmet burgers to sushi burritos to Native American fry bread. With a long history of street food—taco trucks have dotted the landscape for decades—and a car-centric culture, no city was swept by the food truck phenomenon quite like L.A (para. 1).

From these stories and others, the significance of the history of the tamale cart can be broken into three parts; (1) the tamale carts appear as early as the 1800s, but most accounts claim they made a national appearance around the 1870s during a time of cultural transformation and the expansion of the west; (2) the birth of the tamale cart is important to the Hispanic culture in Southern California but

represents a racial and cultural rift between Hispanics and Anglos; and (3) the tamale cart is tied the evolution of the taco truck.

In 2008, food trucks went viral throughout public media and inspired a wide variety of individuals to show up and start cooking out of a mobile kitchen. On a much larger scale, in 1848, the discovery of gold produced a massive viral wave of westward migration to the Pacific coast. Williams (2006) states, “Eighty-five thousand men (and a few women) rushed to prospect for gold the following year” (p. 141). She continues, “Once they arrived in California, many migrants, especially the miners, survived on beans, bacon, and cornmeal mush, washed down with whiskey” (p. 142). The cuisine was very reminiscent of the “chuck cuisine” along the expanding cattle trails to the east of California. Thus, the first Anglo cuisine in California was not New Englander or Southern, but rather the diet of the Wild West and Charles Goodnight’s chuck wagon, mixed with the food of an expanding diverse population.

In fact, San Francisco had “vibrant restaurant culture” by 1849, with the opening of Poulet d’Or and in 1850 with the Tadisich Grill (p. 142). However, the cuisine at these restaurants was expensive, and “most residents...ate whatever they were served in the numerous small hotels and boarding houses that dotted the city. There, the fare offered combined traditional Anglo-Saxon tastes with Spanish-Mexican and Chinese influences” (p. 142). In other words, by the 1850s California starting to establish its iconic “fusion cuisine,” and it was done in brick-and-mortar restaurant kitchens.

But fusing cuisines can be damaging both during the process and afterward, thus representing a rhetorical situation. Pilcher (2012) states, “Once the Southern Pacific connected...formerly remote cities to national railroad networks in the late 1870s, newcomers no longer felt the need to integrate themselves into the local society and instead began to assert their cultural dominance” (p. 107). Furthermore, Pilcher asserts that, more so than the Chinese or Native Americans, “nostalgic images of Mexican food began to take shape, based on the belief that local [food] vendors would soon disappear, or remain at most a colorful spectacle within Anglo cities” (p. 107). Based on fear of an increasing Anglo population, action was taken by communities of concerned individuals. Ethnic foods were being used rhetorically to articulate cultural/racial tensions between Hispanics and Anglos.

The chili stand and their “chili queen”—the woman that cooked and operated the stand—and the tamale pushcart in Southern California, became dominant symbols of a Mexican national cuisine in the United States and are still active in mediating the distinction of food truck and taco truck (Arellano 2012; Pilcher 2012). In other words, these individuals and their professions provided a “rhetorical space/stage” for a public discussion concerning race and distinction (Flores 2003).<sup>56</sup> This historical account will follow the evolution of the tamale carts, because the chili queens are, for all intents and purposes, not a “mobile vending operation” but, rather, a stationary stand. Tamales are believed to be “related to its Aztec progenitor

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<sup>56</sup> Flores (2003) investigates the Mexican immigrant body becoming a “rhetorical space” for a national discussion in the 1920s and 1930s, tracing the impact of the discussion through immigrant narratives.



only by name” and “created somewhere in the vast expanse north of the Rio Grande when the area wasn’t the state of Texas but *Tejas*” (Arellano 2012 p. 30).

Furthermore, “Unlike the classical Mexican tamale, stuffed with meat steeped in salsa, these also came with olives, a legacy of Franciscan fathers who brought the tamale from Mexico and the olive tree from Spain” (p. 41). In effect, the tamale is a very practical food, in that it was easily made and transportable. For this reason, the tamales are ideal for eating while in transit, making them prime street foods.

Arellano claims that, by the 1890s, the United States was in the “midst of a tamale man invasion that strolled hand in hand with the chili con carne craze” (p. 38).

Similar things are said about the food truck movement and the increased visibility of the taco trucks as well. Increased visibility of the food trucks, whether in social media or on the street, helps familiarize the larger population with something new. In the 1890s, tamale men all over the country--from San Francisco to Chicago to New York--were walking the streets in droves, selling their “ten-cent treasures” (Arellano 2012 p. 42). The popularity across large areas made a substantial impact on the perception of the tamale like it did with the food truck.

However, the popularity made it difficult to maintain a united symbolic perception. The expansion left it to the Anglos, who were unfamiliar with the tastes, to classify and control its identity. In one case, “Robert H. Putnam creator of the California Chicken Tamale Co. established in 1892, desired to send San Francisco-style tamale vendors nationwide” (p. 42). Rather than wearing stereotypical style of Mexican clothing, “Putnam created a uniform for his workers,” consisting of a white

linen coat, overalls and a hat. Arellano believed that the change in style “brought, if not class, at least an assurance to the public that these vendors cared about appearance and sanitation” (p. 42). Even with some tamale pushcarts wearing the uniform, the entire community benefitted from an increase in public credibility. Pilcher (2012) states, the tamale carts represented a “form of ‘safe danger,’ allowing tourists to indulge the momentary thrill” of hot and novel food, “but within a folkloric setting that seemed to pose little permanent risk to Anglo society” (p. 107). In the contemporary food truck and taco truck communities, there is still a battle to create a distinct identity for themselves without giving too much control to outside entities, such as critics and doctoral scholars.

It was not long before the “safe danger” of the tamale men transitioned to Southern California from San Francisco. Arellano (2012) states:

Given Los Angeles’s spread-out geography even in those embryonic days, wandering tamale men didn’t take hold in L.A. as they did in the rest of the United States; a cart or wagon was necessary, not only to travel from home to downtown but also the better to procure a spot on the bustling streets (p. 55).

Before long, Pilcher (2012) states, “Los Angeles became the capital of tamale pushcarts, for the poor” (p. 108). Furthermore, “Having posted the bill of fare at dusk, the vendors fed a succession of newsboys, office workers, and finally, ‘as midnight grows near all shades of humanity come on to the scene’” (p. 108). The influential reach of the tamale cart was growing.

However, like the food trucks and the lunch wagon, the tamale cart faced a number of similar obstacles. As Pilcher (2012) states, “Although the tourism

industry benefited from chili stands and tamale carts, many officials sought to purge these picturesque vendors” (p. 108). In some cases, “Urban reformers advocated the creation of green spaces to uplift the masses and replace the squalor street life” and “In the 1870s, the Los Angeles city council transformed the main plaza into a park and launched a campaign against tamale wagons and other lunch carts, imposing ever more burdensome restrictions on operating times and locations” (p. 108). In other words, “This meant closing off traditional uses of urban space” as a means of cultural separation (p. 109). It was both a rhetorical and physical separation. Furthermore, like in Walter Scott’s hometown of Providence, “The city council had already restricted street vendors to the night hours so that their tables would not interfere with business traffic” (p. 110). This is similar to the obstacles faced in the city of Los Angeles in 2009, as discussed in Chapter 1.

It is very likely that the origin story of the taco truck will be revealed soon, due to the community of taco truckers experiencing a rise in popularity. However, the impact of the taco truck is quite visible, both in terms of continued racial and cultural tensions and in the popularity in media and literal visibility in many cities around the United States. For the food truck community is also a divided line between understanding their heritage, as Wild West cowboys, eastern businessmen, and western Mexicali invention. The inability to recognize the similar struggles of the taco truck and the food truck as separate classifications causes people to miss a valuable history lesson. When prejudices based on nationality or ethnicity are enforced regarding who can and should serve food out of a vehicle, the entire food

truck community must be on guard because it is an attack on their community.

### **Conclusion**

Rhetorically, the stories told by the food truck community help to showcase virtues and identity markers they have embraced and advocate to the public. A story can act as a weapon to help legalize the movement. Furthermore, a panoramic ANT lens helps analysts practically understand the influence of new mediums within a foodscape/network of actors and, thereby, better predict and control the influence of new mediums like the food truck.

The success of the food truck has influenced many spokespeople to help define what the mobile kitchen is, what is it doing, and why it might function the way it does. This chapter discussed some of the origin stories told by the food truck community. They start with the story of the chuck wagon and its creator Charles Goodnight somewhere in the 1870s. Joseph Campbell's classic "hero journey" provides an outline for the story and overlapping characteristic between American Cowboy Goodnight and today's food truckers. The first overlapping quality is that most food truckers believe they are stepping out into the harsh and dangerous landscape in order to improve their (and the community's) situation. Many food truckers between 2008 and 2015 have quit their former jobs and/or professions to try their hand at running a mobile kitchen. This choice is risky and can cause hardships, making the decision to step out into the wilderness an important one and, thus, a telling characteristic for food truckers. Both also value the ability to overcome one's weakness and limitation for the good of the community and for

themselves. Goodnight and the food truck community also share the positive quality of constantly improving upon old culinary techniques and equipment in order to fit their specific and unique needs. In other words, Goodnight built the prototype for a mobile kitchen that could provide food for hungry people in a multitude of places.

When running a food truck or chuck wagon, there is also value in being educated. For the “cookies” this meant that they had at least rudimentary ability to read, write, and not burn the food and coffee. For food truckers, this is also applicable, plus being a skilled cook, creating an aesthetic brand for the food truck, and keeping up with social media. All of this allows the food trucker to do as Goodnight did, and also market the mobile pantry. This is a social function of the job relating to the cookie’s need to operate as “good hosts and caretaker” for this cowboy crew/customers.

But, even if there is virtue in a social attitude, it does not mean cookies were pushovers or “nice guys.” In fact, there is a benefit to having a gruff persona, much like food truck pioneer Chef Roy Choi. The ability to wrangle cowboys or drunk bar-goers takes a certain type of personality, and those individuals are not always pacifists. But sometimes even the agitator or American pioneer personas are over-romanticized and lead to vices of which the community is aware and looks to avoid. Specifically, the community is concerned with eliminating the controversy of gender issues, xenophobia, the cost of surviving in the “wild”.

But there is more to the food trucks story than a turn-of-the-19<sup>th</sup> century American pioneer. First is the story and myth of the lunch wagon on the east coast in

the early 1900s representing the expansion of the myth out of the west and into industrialism and urbanism. The heroic figures of the lunch wagon story, specifically Walter Scott, had overlapping virtues with Goodnight that also reflect the modern day food truck community's ethos. For example, all three value stepping out and trying to make a better living for themselves, their family, and community. They would try to do this by filling the bellies of blue-collar workers. They also had a willingness to make adaptations to a two- or four-wheeled vehicle with the purpose of producing more aesthetic and efficient means of serving food. Some of the food that they served was a way to remind them of home. For Goodnight, it was taking a sourdough keg with the chuck wagon. For the lunch wagon, it was the idea of "home cooking" for the many immigrants and transplants to the city.

The lunch wagon has its own ideal outside of its overlapping characteristic with Goodnight. First, it provides an urban perspective, something with which the chuck wagon and the food truck have nothing in common. In the urban setting, lunch wagons and food trucks consider it important to go out into the street to meet customers where they work or where they congregate. This takes knowledge of the cityscape and the individuals inhabiting it. Therefore, both the food truck and lunch wagon share approaches to handling customers--particularly those that are part of the "late night" crowds.

Working with people at night takes a certain level of composure and bravery. Working in the city took a level of bravery to engage with the many different nationalities, races, smells, languages, and customs of an ever-increasing population.

In fact, the diversity of chefs and cooks based on experiences make the first lunch wagoners similar to the food-truck-sophists in today's foodscape.

Dealing with issues in the city made the lunch wagons understand the importance of adapting to laws. Their ability to adapt led to the advent of American diners. Similarly, the food trucks of today are finding new and unique ways to serve food on the street by constantly looking for loopholes in the regulations or new, unrestricted places for parking and cooking. The cooking in particular has a reputation of being high-quality and being "home cooked." Food truckers place importance on locating and serving quality products while blending the home cooking with educated gourmet cuisine.

The tamale cart myth and narrative summary represents the West Coast early mobile pantries and kitchens, and also the story centered around non-white people. The story helps to establish a historical link to today's *loncheras* and taco trucks that have served as inspiration of many current food truckers. Tamale cart story, like the lunch wagon, has overlapping values with that of Goodnight. For example, there is significance placed on bringing tasty treats wherever there were hungry individuals, and the tamale is a very convenient food to sell because it is easily made, transportable, and eaten.

The tamale cart myth also has its own set of values that it contributes to the modern day food truck community. One of the most noticeable is the emerging fusion cuisine of California, alongside more nostalgic traditional cuisines. Today, taco trucks and food trucks are found together trying to feed the same crowds and

provide a similar diversity of fusion and traditional. This represents both the food trucks and tamale carts doing the best they can to serve their communities the food they desire. In the process, the trucks make a profit and can continue to serve the community. The ability to serve one's community through the food they cook and serve is also a virtue because it acts as "rhetorical space" for a public discussion concerning race and other important issues.

The tamale cart myth narrative also helps to draw attention to a few of the vices with which the food truck community should be concerned. In the "rhetorical spaces," issues of racism and prejudice are brought to the surface and exposed. Today, as in the early 1900s, the images of unhealthy and risky behaviors were constantly being misplaced on these mobile pantries and kitchens.

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### Chapter Three: Unique Form of Experiencing Food

“The fastest growing thing in food isn’t a cuisine, it’s a vehicle, the humble food truck.” ~Chef Gordon Ramsay 2012<sup>57</sup>

The last few years have felt like an exigent moment in that food and foodways has become fashion. One can see this through a large communal search for new and diverse foodscapes. The moment in history is experienced by unique audiences of hunters, seekers, and journeyers heading toward new modes of culinary experience. For the purpose of this chapter, there is a moment where this audience enters into a cultural convergence where excellent and gourmet food is happening on the streets and in parking lots, for which were formerly dominated by traditional, functional, and less aesthetic forms of the mobile food medium. There is kairotic timing to this complex set of factors—unique audience, timing, food, and leadership—running into each other that is worth further investigation towards significance of the situation.

I found myself in this convergence in 2010. It was about 7:30pm on a Thursday night when I looked on Twitter to find out where the Kogi BBQ truck was planning on stationing itself that evening. The tweet read as such: OC LATE DINNER 930PM-11PM: NARANJA @Juke Joint (735 N Anaheim Blvd, Anaheim)” (Kogi BBQ Twitter 2015). Earlier that week, my friend Alex had advised me to head over to a mobile kitchen that was serving a fusion of Korean and Mexican food wrapped in a burrito or taco. He warned me that people gathered there in droves and that I could

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<sup>57</sup> As cited on the television show *Master Chef* (2012).

plan on waiting in line in the cold. I almost stopped him there. I hate waiting for a seat or take out at crowded restaurants and fast food establishments. I will go out of my way to dine at these locations during their non-peak hours. To overcome my worry, Alex raved at how the chef of the truck could turn these two radically diverse cuisines into something magical. He claimed that eating that magical food outside created the effect of dining in a far-off land. There was a passion behind his desire to have me eat at the truck and see what was possible in terms of new flavors, smells, and textures in a rediscovered environment for dining. He assured me that the food and the experience was worth whatever discomfort I would have trying to navigate crowds of people in an area I did not frequent.

Using the address Kogi BBQ provided on their Twitter account, I searched Google Maps to pinpoint the locale. The map directed me to a small dead end street in a part of town that I had never visited. With two friends in the car with me, we drove through town, ready to explore. We finally turned onto the street (which looked more like an alleyway) on which the truck was said to be serving their food. The street was located between two strip-mall complexes and their empty parking lots. Making things more difficult was the fact the truck had not arrived when we turned onto the street. From their Tweet and my Google Map alone we could not tell where the truck was going to set up. Questions like “will they use the parking lot” or “will they park on the street” were not answered and had us uncertain about where we needed to be.

Luckily for us, a line had formed along the north side of the street. Interestingly, part about the crowd forming its own line knew right where the truck was going to park without a physical address. Upon seeing the line, we decided to park across the street in an empty bank parking lot. There were signs informing us that both the strip mall and bank had parking “for customers only” and we had no desire to get a ticket. But we ultimately decided that the bank was closed for the night, and the safer location to park.

The line seemed to be about fifty people long and it was loud. I began to listen with the intent to get a better idea as to whether or not this was the line for the food truck and when (or if) Chef Roy Choi and his truck were going to show up. It was common for a truck to breakdown or to make multiple stops in a night, giving the experience an element of risk. From the Twitter account it stated the truck should be there about 9:00pm and as the hour approached the conversations around me were becoming excited at the possibilities that lay ahead, although some were worried it might not even happen. The people in line tended to be there in groups. This allowed a few people to sit down on the curb or lean against a wall while holding their place in line, often requesting “is it cool if I sit down and can you hold my space?”

The truck arrived relatively on time to the applause of the crowd. A few people yelled, while others, seeing the truck, hurriedly got out of their cars. While we waited for the truck to start service, the cooks inside were starting food prep. The staff can’t work while they are on the move and they can only prepare a limited

amount of the food in advance. The sight of steam coming out of the grill top lifted the mood of the crowd; I could hear more laughter, cheers, and applause start to break out. There were also a greater number of conversations happening between groups of people. Different parties started talking to each other about the last time they were at the truck, what they had ordered, the difference between the type of crowd that shows up closer to Downtown LA compared to the suburbs, the best thing on the menu, the rumors of other trucks in the area, and what they had given up/traded that night to make it out to the truck and stand in the cold. Overall, the conversations that I had and the ones overheard were positive and cheerful, people were generally excited. I got the feeling that once the truck arrived, we had become part of the same underground club—I had passed the test to find the truck and was now part of the same in-group and thus the conversation was much more open between parties.

Before the truck opened its side windows, I remember looking around for any police that might shut the truck down because of the amount of the people standing in line and the number of cars filling up the lot. If there were fifty people in front of me when I arrived, there were now another fifty more behind me. If the police did not shut the truck down I started to worry that some of those at the back of the line would not get any food and become upset. The limited space on the trucks limited the amount storage they were able to bring to each location. I asked the couple in front of me, (who claimed to be “pros” at the food truck hunt), “What if the truck gets low on supplies?” They explained that in some cases, they had seen a



pick-up truck or a car pull up and unload more foodstuffs. Other times, they said, the truck just calls out to the customers that they have a limited supply of an item or that they have run out, verbally eliminating each item as their supply dwindles. With no police in sight, I looked at the line ahead of me and now feared that I may not be able to order what I had wanted because of the limited capacity. Each person ahead of me suddenly became an enemy of sorts—but as I looked at the joy of the couple in front of me I could tell they were not worried about their place in line. However, I did better understand the warning Alex gave me about the lines being a struggle and the benefit of being familiar with the normal place where the truck stopped.

When the line first started to move, I felt the need to double check the menu and determine what I wanted to eat. My two friends held my place as I walked to the front of the line and glanced at the menu located on the side of the truck. While there, I saw that the truck was only accepting cash, not credit or debit cards. I double-checked to see if I had any cash on me and found I had a hidden twenty stashed away. I checked the menu again for the prices to make sure I had enough to cover the cost of my items plus a drink. I was just fine. As I walked back to my friends, I told them that it was cash only. One friend signaled that he had no cash. Luckily for us, we had parked in the bank parking lot, so he ran over to the ATM and pulled out the cash needed. By the time they got back, the line had only moved a few feet.

The food truck service was slower than I had expected at first. The menu was fairly small and most of it seemed like it could be prepared quickly. The wait times

began to raise questions and theories in the line. Maybe they were making most of the food by hand, meaning there was a good chance the food was fresh or it could mean we had an inexperienced crew that would ultimately spoil the adventure. I started to pay more attention to the customers receiving their food through the side truck window. You could see the speed of service start accelerating. Burritos, tacos, and fusion hot dogs start to pour out the window. The smell of the grill also intensified and I could only assume this was due to the large amount of food it was heating.

At the window, a man smiled at us and waited for us to shout our orders over the noise of the crowd and the cooking equipment. His smile and silence was odd. I figured he would hurry us through and become irritated at my wide-eyed look of “what should I say right now?” With a calming tone, as if he had this experience before, he kindly asked if we were ready to order. I started to blurt out what I wanted and he kindly asked me to speak up. So, I yelled my order of a kimchi quesadilla and kalbi beef burrito louder at the man—and at that point, I really noticed the chaos behind him. At least four people were working: chopping, grilling, saucing, and wrapping the items at an ungodly pace in very tight and hot quarters. I was shown a team that could cook together to feed a line of people outside on a street corner. My experience with roach coaches as kid in my grandfather’s place of business seemed miles apart. The smells of cooking beef at the Kogi BBQ truck alone made my mouth water, which was a physiological reaction that enhanced the

experience whereas the roachcoach's items, such as a tasty pre-wrapped sandwich, did not produce these sensations.

By the time I got my food, we had waited for about fifteen minutes. Our group of three sat on a low wall during this time and watched those that went before us unwrap and consume their meals while others headed back to the cars to eat somewhere else. Those that stayed to eat had the challenge of creating a space to actually eat. The Kogi BBQ truck did not have tables or chairs. Rather the crowds repurposed parking blocks as chairs and the asphalt as a giant table.

Once I got my food and found a spot to eat, the experience felt ironic. The food out of the truck tasted nothing like food out of a truck should taste. It tasted like food I would get from an upscale fusion restaurant. For example, my kimchi quesadilla was a complex dish. The difficulty to blend the power of the fermented flavors of kimchi with the smoothness of the cheese, the starch of the tortilla, and the spiciness of the green salsa was something designed by a skilled individual. All of those ingredients needed to be chosen specifically in order to get the tastes to fit together. But as I ate my food standing up, leaning over the hood of my car, in a bank parking lot, I understood Alex's desire for me to experience this new mobile kitchen. This little truck changed my perception of what a mobile kitchen could produce in terms of tasty and complex food—but maybe more importantly, it turned a dark unfamiliar parking lot into a lively place where people felt compelled to venture and seek out.

This chapter is about defining the food truck not by its network, not in terms of its past and origins, but in terms of a food medium that promises to communicate to those who interact with it a unique aesthetic experience. In the introduction of the dissertation, a local resident of Granada Hills was quoted stating the food truck gathering “is literally walking distance from my house and it feels like a street fair, it feels like a happening” (Hovater 2011). Her surprise, like my own, at the ability for a few trucks to make this large of an impact was noteworthy. A person’s reaction expresses the notion that eating at the food truck is an event that is set apart and distinct from other dining experience and the experience of interacting in public spaces, like along Chatsworth Street.

All over the country, food truck events have taken place and continue to operate on an almost daily basis and are visible signs of a response to a convergence of factors. New audiences are continuing to patronize food trucks, suggesting that what they offer is making a positive rhetorical appeal by persuading them that mobile vending, when done with style and artistry, offers a rich aesthetic experience that makes the actual purchase and consumption of food but one component of its total form. As discussed in earlier chapters, the food truck was once lumped into the category of taco truck and roach coach. These traditional mobile vendors’ negative public personas could not stop the viral spread of audiences looking to eat at these unique food mediums. What is the appeal? In some cases, the food trucks are a pragmatic appeal—like the more traditional mobile vendors—by offering solutions

to the unfulfilled desires of the audience of eaters along the Miracle Mile. Larry Olmsted (2012), in his Forbes article, noted:

Admittedly in some markets, like LA, food trucks can serve a real purpose, bringing quality dining selections to extremely pedestrian-unfriendly areas, especially near office buildings where nothing else is available within walking distance. But these practical food trucks are nothing new – such trucks and carts and sidewalk vendors always existed (para. 5).

The combination of these mediums in those locations acts as a rational adaptation to the situation with a history of success. But that renders the food truck what Latour would call an “intermediary,” or a mere method of transmission that leaves the content unchanged. However, the woman from Granada Hills did not share the same pragmatic desires as the audience of eaters on the Miracle Mile. She stumbled upon it, and the experience appealed to her for its aesthetic qualities of making her feel good and enriched after it was over. My first experience at a food truck led to this dissertation. However, not everyone has such a rewarding experience. For many others, as will be mentioned throughout the chapter, the experience can be less pleasurable, less beautiful, and more disturbing. The food truck experience functions as a rhetorical appeal to patrons by offering them not simply mobile food but the promise of an experience that when it achieves form persuades them to adopt certain attitudes and habits over others.

## Dewey and the Food Truck Experience

To give a better understanding of what is meant by *experience*, it is beneficial to address American-born philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952), who provides a model for describing and understanding aesthetic experiences.<sup>58</sup> It is important to see Dewey as a native of Vermont, knowing that he lived large portions of his life surrounded by dense forest, wilderness, and Lake Champlain (a giant body of freshwater that, at one time, was considered part of America's Great Lakes). I recently visited Dewey's hometown of Burlington, the state's largest city and home of the state university on a recent conference trip. From the moment I flew into the city, I felt consumed by the deep greens of the plant life growing along the ground and climbing until it faded into the tall and sharp granite mountain peaks. Nature was all around and, ultimately, was a sign of intimidation and wonder. I would like to think Dewey (1934) felt similarly when he stated that we are *in* and *part of* nature rather than something outside of it. Nathan Crick (2010) states Dewey's understanding of "To be 'in' nature means that we are no longer 'observers' of something external; we are ourselves parts of nature" (p. 30-31). Nature, in other words, was doing something to humankind, and humankind to it.

Dewey's understanding of humans as "nature" means perceiving humanity's relationship with its surroundings without separations between mind, body, and environment. His term "experience" is meant to represent a total, holistic

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<sup>58</sup> Tom Leddy (2013) writes Dewey has had "a great deal of influence in aesthetics and the philosophy of art. His work *Art as Experience* (1934) is regarded by many as one of the most important contributions to this area in the 20<sup>th</sup> century" (para. 1).

relationship that sees time and space, body and mind, in terms of continuity.

However, “*an* experience” is something different than just everyday experience. “*An* experience” stands out from this continual flux and removes itself from the sense of fluid oneness. He claims that “an experience” is a temporal event that is wrapped up by a cohesive theme “when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and only then is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experience” (1934 p. 38). To have “demarcated in the general stream of experience” is another way to claim that something has “form” (Crick 2010 p. 151). For example, Dewey playfully uses his own experience of eating a giant Maine lobster as an aesthetic experience. After the meal Dewey would look at eating that lobster as “complete in itself, standing out because it marked what went before and what came after,” producing its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency (Dewey 1934 p. 37). He continues, stating that “an experience” takes place within a continuous temporal arch seamlessly marching forward encountering obstacles along the way. These obstacles, even in the constant movement, will “punctuate and define the quality of the movement” according to Dewey (p. 36). He states, “A river, as distinct from a pond, flows. But its flow gives a definiteness and interest to its successive portions greater than exist in the homogenous portions of a pond” (p. 36). In other words, what might make an experience worthy of its distinction are the obstacles it flows past and the way it overcomes those obstacles in relation to the end goal. Aesthetic experience thus involves a temporal flow that has a beginning, middle, and end.

Of course, not all experience of this type is purely pleasurable. Aesthetic experience involves both pleasure and pain, resistance and fulfillment. Dewey (1998) describes that the lobster produced in him “present enjoyment and future indigestion” (p. 244). Its unique aesthetic experience lies in its ability to produce “enjoyment and indigestion” giving it a “dual potency” (p. 246). Through the encounters and struggles with obstacles, Dewey believes that an experience will be filled with drama, due to the struggle. There is beauty in the means that lead to the end for Dewey. The aesthetic, for him, is in the “raw” moments that can hold an audience’s attention. Dewey (1934) states that an aesthetic experience, like that of a dramatic play, can have “a satisfying emotional quality because it possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement” (p. 39-40). The play need not be the same show, but its beauty rests in its ability to produce a live-action drama or comedy happening on a stage in front of a crowd. Reflecting on Dewey’s notion of aesthetic form, Crick (2012) states:

Aesthetic form is a quality of all experience that achieves some level of consummation and participation that follows a ‘phase of disruption and conflict.’ Activities as diverse as the development of a scientific theory, the running of a race, the cooking of a meal, the give and take of a conversation, the planting of a flower, the fighting of a battle, or the balancing of a checkbook all thus achieve form when they achieve some degree of qualitative unity that makes its completion also a pleasure and satisfaction (p. 152).

Accordingly, experience often starts with tension, moves through some obstacle, and has some type of end or resolution. It is as if at the end of the experience, one simply says, “yes, this was a really impressive moment.”



These experiences/events/moments are also rhetorical. According to Crick (2012), experiences can be used to urge the public to play a role. The aesthetic character of the experience of the food truck functions for the customer as a persuasive attempt to construct the perfect atmosphere where all of its great qualities are exposed and negatives underplayed or hidden as much as possible. If the trucks get it right, the reward will be high for them, the customer, and the local area. But Crick also claims that these strategic deployments of the rhetoric of aesthetics can be a can also be seen as insincere

for the very reason that form is taken to be simply the means of delivering the substance rather than being the substance itself. An audience leaves feeling the weariness one gets after shaking the hand of a quick-talking salesman—a sense that by being seduced by appearances, one has just been duped into swallowing a bad deal (p. 144).

In other words, to hamper the aesthetic experience the food trucks can rhetorically “impose” the form they desire. Thus, forcing the aesthetic of an experience to match an ideal can break the audience member out of the current moment of feeling enriched to feeling tricked. The idealized journey/aesthetic form of the experience is therefore important in order to show how the food truck community markets its experience as unique.

In many popular media reports and social media reviews of the “food truck experience,” is often recognized as being the most rhetorically persuasive element during a food truck experience. As Larry Olmsted (2012) points out in the *Forbes* article America’s 8 Worst Food Trends,

Food-wise, there is nothing new about trucks, which serve foods you can already get in countless restaurants, albeit it with much more limited menus.

People act as if tacos, dumplings, or brick oven pizza have somehow been “discovered” by food truck cooks. One major magazine recently suggested that food trucks had brought affordable ethnic cuisine to the people of Los Angeles – seriously? LA has always had hundreds of brick-and-mortar eateries serving exactly this kind of affordable ethnic cuisine (para. 4).

There is no denying the fact that the gourmet food served from the truck is a very important characteristic. In fact, it is a subject matter that will be discussed more in-depth in chapter 4. But, as Olmsted points out, the fact remains that the food served by the truck is not truly unique as a style of cuisine and should not be privileged as it has been in the press and social media.

As Olmsted (2012) indicates, eating gourmet food, the type of food cooked in food trucks, was once an exclusive and unique experience in the 1700s in France, but is not very common now. At its most basic form, it is a cuisine that uses an enlightened/educated approach to the art of cooking (Trubek 2000; Spang 2001). A refined approach to food and its presentation differentiated gourmet from rustically flavored meats and veggies piled on a single plate and placed on top of a long table. The gourmet cuisine was highly influenced by the cultural revival of the sciences, which included growing knowledge of biology and food/medical science. Old meat dishes were not longer simply boiled until thoroughly cooked as to prevent illness. Rather, gourmet cuisine sought to more accurately temper the meat as to both kill the bacteria while providing a more pure and vibrant taste. The changes could be seen in the dinner service of courtly or elite diners in France after the 1750s in which it transformed from the meat piled high on the table to an *al la carte* service of individual plates where every dish and portion was controlled by the person

doing the cooking (Trubek 2000). Traditionally, gourmet food was a luxury, making the experience rare for many in the general public.

As gourmet cuisine became more diffused throughout the world according to Trubek (2000), and, “the discourse and practices of the French, or what is said and what is done, have always provided the framework for action far beyond France: the French invented the cuisine of culinary professionals” (p. 3). Today, top chefs throughout the world are most likely products of the gourmet ideal and its institutions, like the Culinary Institute of American—also know as the C.I.A. In the United States and before Julia Child, it was struggle to make the cuisine and, therefore, needed to be experienced within brick-and-mortar establishments. But, more recently, cooking gourmet food has become a more accessible venture. The techniques and training for gourmet cuisine have made it into homes because of Child, increased access to information, and the availability of international goods at the local supermarket.

Therefore, gourmet food is not a new characteristic that impacts the experience as being “an experience.” Instead, it is the adaptation of a cuisine to this new mobile food medium and the experience it creates that makes it unique. Does this mean that a Jack-in-Box mobile kitchen can create a food truck experience? Maybe. The food truck environment may produce a unique experience, but not always. With a Deweyan spirit, the aesthetic experience should be a total encapsulation of all it working parts in which the food is just one, be it an important one. Those interested would have to expose more of the workings behind this

experience in order to determine if something like the Jack-in-Box mobile kitchen could appeal to the audience as a food truck because other forms of the brick-and-mortar restaurant have done it.

Take, for example, Josh Wolken, the owner of a brick-and-mortar restaurant called Steuben's, located in Denver, Colorado. He is able to cook successfully for a brick-and-mortar establishment using gourmet techniques and standards. But in 2010 his brick-and-mortar restaurant jumped on the growing trend of mobile kitchens. The culinary concept for the mobile kitchen was not overly complex. Stated on their Facebook.com page, Steuben's Pearl food truck has been geared toward "Faithfully recreating the dishes served at the brick-and-mortar establishment" (Steubens 2015). They wanted to, and successfully did, import their brick-and-mortar menu items into a kitchen with wheels.<sup>59</sup>

By adapting and transporting the brick-and-mortar menu items into a food truck, Steuben's took the same content and put it into another medium. The business and culinary venture proved successful, in that the Pearl is considered "one of Denver's first food-truck stars" serving "bronzed fries dripping with gravy, a pulled-pork sandwich with sticky-sweet sauce, and a green-chile cheeseburger that is classic Colorado cooking" to a hungry audience (Utterback 2014 para. 1). Alyse

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<sup>59</sup> On the brick-and-mortar menu are the reflections of "America's cuisine and American interpretations of the dishes of our diverse cultural heritage" according to the restaurant's webpage (Steubens Website 2015). This would include items like macaroni and cheese, grilled salmon, Memphis ribs, or the chicken potpie. To boot, all of this can be washed down with an egg creams and root beer floats. The menu and its execution produced the dining guide Zagat (2014) to advise, "Ditch the diet, 'bring your tats' and 'be prepared to enjoy the hell' out of the 'decadent' American 'regional favorites' like 'heavenly' chicken and waffles or 'lobster rolls right out of Maine' at this 'trendy' Uptowner from Josh Wolkon (of Vesta Dipping Grill and Ace Eat Serve)" (para. 1).

Bradway (2013) of the local 303 Magazine wrote, “The southern comfort classics that you have come to love from Steuben’s are at the forefront of the truck’s menu. Although the truck version can’t serve the entire brick-and-mortar menu they make sure to dish out the best sellers” (para. 1). Bradway points out Steuben’s brick-and-mortar menu is much larger, which does contain a variety of options that are not the quintessential gut-bombs-of-greasy-goodness but with a gourmet backing. However, these descriptions do provide evidence of a restaurant’s ability to produce similar content served through a different medium.

If it can be believed that the food/content served from either a food truck or brick-and-mortar are roughly the same product, then what makes the dining off a food truck unique, making an audience walk away feeling as if it was “an experience?” Yelp.com, a social media website where users can post ratings of establishments, can help answer. Signe Rousseau (2012b), a media and food scholar from the University of Cape Town in South Africa, states that sites like Yelp.com provide digital space for consumer reviews. She finds that in these spaces, “There is no doubt that a great number of people find some sort of validation and appreciation through sharing stories about food, and that often the communities that grow out of that shared space come to rest on pillars that are stronger than just food” (p. 36). In other words, social media amplifies and congregates the voices taking part in the experience and wanting to share and contribute to the food truck community that keeps those experiences going.

As mentioned earlier, many of these online food reviews make the food/content center stage, stating a combination of what was ordered, what the food tasted like, if the person liked or disliked the food, and maybe a critique or two.

A short and sweet example comes from Monty B. (2012) stating of Steuben's:

I was pleasantly surprised by their burger. When I got it, it didn't look like much. The shredded iceberg lettuce kind of turned me off. But then I bit into it and was glad to be proven wrong. Thanks for putting me in my place, Steuben's. This is the second best burger I've had in Colorado. The top ones have come from food trucks. Come on brick-and-mortars, where you at???

Bad reviews of the same sort are also part of the dialogue. Anhers M. (2010) review of the brick-and-mortar restaurant stated:

The ultimate comfort food is mac n cheese. Steuben's is considered a great comfort food restaurant yet they can't even make a decent mac n cheese didn't sit well with me literally. They put so much butter & oil in their food that I literally threw up grease afterward. Things I tried: skirt steak w. fries (thin piece of skirt steak w. fajita seasoning). chicken & mash potatoes decent but just not fantastic. meat w. grits (the collard greens looked like the swamp man). cheese sticks were pretty good...battered and double fried grilled cheese sandwich, but I think that's what made me throw up. The place is adorable but not worth the money.

The food for these customers, in other words, set this truck part from brick-and-mortars, yet the food is supposed to be virtually the same.

There are also comments where actors talk about the other "things" that make the experience whole as opposed to seeing the food as a text locked in glass and separate from its more natural environment. Angela A. (2010), from Denver stated:

Steuben's on wheels, what can I say?! All my favorites from the restaurant on wheels. And those wheels... this food truck is the pimp mac daddy of food trucks, they got it all goin on here! This is one of the coolest food trucks I

have ever seen. Yummy nom's and super friendly staff. What more can you ask for?

Kate G. (2010) from Denver stated:

Friendly crew playing fun tunes. I felt a little silly carrying my open paper tray of food back to my office and got lots of stares but that's because it was a beautiful sight - a ginormous fresh-cooked cheeseburger on a toasty, soft Udi's bun piled high with hand-cut salt-crusteds fries (\$2). Greasy, salty, out of control messy and good. I swear I could taste the "truck" in the burger which is not a bad thing, just different. Hell, I bought my food in the street, I'm not complaining. I'm motivated to check out the real Steuben's which I'm embarrassed to say I haven't yet.

Evey M. (2010) from Denver, wrote:

You pop right up to Pearl's order window, place your order, pay (and yes they do take credit cards), and wait maybe 5 minutes then tada your food is ready. You can choose to eat it in the park (which has undergone a huge face lift) or take it elsewhere.

In these last three reviews can be seen greater contextualization of what it means to experience Steuben's food, but in a very different type of environment. Angela's review articulates an aesthetic quality of putting a kitchen on wheels, the sheer beauty of the physical body of a mobile kitchen, and its influence on the experience which seems to be friendly and cool or hip. In other words, seeing the kitchen and the happening inside affects the experience. Kate writes about what might make the truck cool, specifically its friendly food truckers and their music in the background. She also claims she could taste the "truck" in the food. The food truck, in other words, was not just a dirty engine dusting the food with exhaust fumes or a hint of motor oil in the salad dressing; rather the truck was part of an experience that infused itself to the aesthetic quality of the food. Evey's comments describe the characteristic of the experience being quick and easy, even at first when it seems

overwhelming when trying eating your food on the run or in an unfamiliar spot, even if it is a newly renovated urban park.

Besides its sheer ability to acquire content and produce content, audiences have reported their food truck experiences on social media as being something intrinsically valuable and different. John Dewey's perspective helps us define further what "an experience" and the different forms the food truck events create. In doing so one can see the idealized aesthetic experience the food trucks are advertising to local, national, and global audiences. Rhetorically, these ideals serve to "form appropriate attitudes that were designed to induce corresponding acts" (Burke 1966 296). The next section will lay out the stages/form of typical food truck event and how the rhetorical aesthetic informs actions within the experience.

### **Three Stages of a Food Truck Experience**

The idealized form of a food truck experience can be roughly mapped out into three general stages: (1) discovery/hunt, (2) meshing into the environment, and (3) the return. Each stage represents a general container for related patterns of experience that unify the food truck experience. As with most experiences there is a starting point. The food truck experience starts with exposure. If someone came across a food truck in 2011, according to a survey conducted by the National Restaurant Association, their paths crossed either as it was roaming the street or parked in a location with other food trucks, word of mouth (like in my case), or through social media. Audiences become aware of the truck and started the process of recognition and construction of a "map." The map is symbolic inasmuch as it



represents the movement into a stereotypical representation of the experience. As shown, those stereotypes linking the traditional trucks to these new ones are not credible. Nonetheless, the stereotypes still provide a working outline of how to potentially locate the medium, and then interact with it during the event.

From the very first communication with the audience, the food truck functions rhetorically to “facilitates something beyond itself in future situations” (Crick 2012 p. 149). As reported in the Huffington Post by Arthur Bovino (2011), “Competition can be fierce. For this reason many [food trucks] incorporate gimmickry. Catchy names and witty slogans are effective ways to win attention. It's also the only time you could name an eatery Shrimp Pimp or Me So Hungry, and expect business not just to survive, but thrive” (para 1). These two truck’s rhetorical aesthetic, in their names alone, extend the food they cook past its function and dive into social memes swirling around topics like racial stereotyping and misogyny. The art of creating the right aesthetic, according to Crick, “enriches and expands experience by directing attention to itself within the present moment” (p. 149). Therefore, these names can help to enrich the experience through their ironic use of otherwise offensive names. They want the audience to stay in the moment and feel the pleasure that would produce the motivation for further action like becoming a returning customer. As John Poulakos (2007) notes, historically the rhetor or poet understood that the audience was “not only as capable of communal judgments based on subjective perception and personal belief but also as subject to a wide

array of feelings ranging from delight and pleasure to fear and terror, to joy and ecstasy” (p. 336). He goes on to write,

Insofar as art is analogous to oral discourse, it functions rhetorically, that is, it displays the sort of discursive “force and elegance” that affect the senses and the emotions of the beholder. More than anything else, then, objects of art speak, and in speaking they communicate ideas of beauty. When those ideas are communicated to another, it is always possible that they will evoke similar feelings of delight in the other and, in so doing, elicit the other’s approval (p. 350).

Thus, the better a food truck can clearly identify itself rhetorically, it provides the audience “a map of crude stereotypes” that aims to to guide them along the journey (Crick 2012 p. 145). Upon finding the trucks a template is formed and will then aid in judgment of their experience in the present moment as being either beautiful or not.

Having a map and stereotypes is great, but using the physical map to find the food truck is a whole other obstacle contributing to the overall aesthetic experience. The very nature of the food truck is that it is mobile, creating problems in locating it from hour to hour. Moving around so frequently requires effort on the part of the audience to constantly check on its positioning. Even when a Tweet goes out notifying an audience that their food truck will be located at the local mall’s parking lot, it does not mean the food truck will be there at that time and location. Mobility comes with the variables of traffic, breakdowns, or even getting lost, potentially producing chaos for the food trucks meeting up with their audiences.

Normally, these are characteristics of “poor service” and do not bode well for a hospitality business. But as stated by Joe Kim of the Flying Pig food truck, “It hasn’t

been easy. Even if there's a long wait and service falls at the truck, people still give you faith. In a restaurant, there's very little room for mistakes" (as cited in Hsu 2011 para. 6). Therefore, the plan has been to capitalize and potentially overcome some of the line-waiting and struggles to find the truck. Alice Shin, Kogi BBQ food truck's in-house blogger and Tweeter, used the situation to create a unique form of participation with the food trucks. Shin noticed that finding the Kogi BBQ truck was "kind of like a treasure hunt" (McCarthy 2009 para. 5). She incentivized the hunt with a reward system. When customers "checked-in" to a food truck location, using social media application FourSquare, they received a discount on food or digital trophy. Founder of the Wafels and Dinges food truck, Thomas DeGeest, stated, "Sometimes we have a secret password, or sometimes we have a challenge. One of my guys came up with a challenge earlier this week to come and do an impersonation of a peacock" (as cited in McCarthy). The article goes on to state, "The reward is typically a free topping (or "dinges," the Belgian term for it), and DeGeest said that yes, people actually show up and do it" (para. 10). All across the country food trucks continue to use a hunt and reward system to persuade audiences to visit their mobile kitchens.

Competition is part of the food truck rhetorical aesthetic appeal during this part of the experience. Susan Cohen's (2011) states "Hunting down food trucks has become a popular sport" (para. 1). She goes on to write that like most sports "There's an art to finding food trucks." How each hunter prepares and executes the hunt will help determine what takes place in this aesthetic experience. The reward

of finding the truck is materially minimal, but the social capital and ethos are high, particularly amongst social groups like foodies. In sum, the food trucks rhetorically used a weakness of the truck's lack of consistency in location relative to brick-and-mortar restaurants and transformed it into a positive and unique characteristic.

Even with all the extra work of having to keep track of the mobile kitchen, there are audiences willing to do it. For example, Joe Ryan (2012) took the time to film and edit a three-minute video of himself and a female partner hunting down the Kogi BBQ food truck. The video begins with text stating, "They are hard to find and you must track them down," followed by "They don't make it easy." The video follows the two driving across Los Angeles, finding the truck, standing in line, eating the food, and heading home. Joe Ryan and other audience members like him are a variety of food truck hunters who venture off into the wild and try to track their prey. In this case, the audience is looking for the food truck and not the food truck looking for them.

There are two primary ways these hunters operate when looking for food trucks. The first way is to boldly but blindly drive or walk into the city and search out areas that look promising for the trucks to show up, using a skill set to locate possible grazing areas but this time without much set-up or research. This method requires using stereotypical and common-sense information to guide the journey. Food trucks can then position themselves into environments that are traditionally locations for mobile vendors. Thus, bars and industrial areas are common locations

to venture out to. At these locations, the traveling hunters will interact with the localized hunter.

The other way these tracking hunters' work is with tools like websites, digital applications, and other services that locate food trucks. These tools function as central-hub for collecting local food trucks' twitter feeds and GPS locations then linking them to a digital map. On the digital map the food trucks are like moving targets that have temporarily stopped to graze in a pasture or cool themselves by a watering hole. The use of these tools was unique to these mobile mediums at the time of their debut and they have now become important communication tools. Ryan Whitwam (2014) stated the NomNom Finder app's "tracks food truck nearby in real time. The map view is good for getting the lay of the land – to plan your hunt of the wily food truck" (para. 1). The food trucks, in other words, rhetorically guide the audience through the city and to locations that best amplify the food truck aesthetic.

There is also a type of hunter that likes the prey to come to them. The reward of finding the truck is not very high but having the truck in locations they frequent is valuable. In this case, food trucks need to identify key locations with heavy foot traffic and hungry bellies. Dating back to the first food trucks in Los Angeles, these locations have been outside of bars or late night establishments and business/industrial areas (Shouse 2010; Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013). For example, a late night hunter might step out of their usual establishment on a Friday and/or Saturday night and see a field of trucks cooking food. The trucks are drawn there by

the call of many hungry individuals looking to grub before heading to their next liquor filled adventure. EricW (2013) explains that on a recent trip:

Food trucks in Colorado have no liquor licenses. BUT, just about every bar, brewery, or distillery tasting room (yup, there are some distilleries with tasting rooms) that does not serve its own food will have a food truck parked outside on almost any night of the week. While it varies from place to place, with some bars having the same food truck every night, or at least on a regular basis, others offer a different truck for that nightly nourishment (para. 1).

The aesthetic experience is driven by this combination of late night drinkers and the food filled trucks. Drinking on the streets in most states and cities is illegal, but having a food truck outside brings elements of the “bar” aesthetic to the sidewalk.

To make the experience a positive one, the trucks need to offer the crowds something worth standing in line for, working to keep the peace with a mob of customers, while at the same time continuing to fuel to the excitement of eating on the street. As Chef Roy (2013) states in his autobiography, “I could see the empty corners filled with people. People with their guard down, ready to relax, ready to smile” (p. 297). These locations are incredibly valuable and chosen with an artful eye. To identify those locations becomes a learned skill and part of the art form of food trucking. Mike’s BBQ truck (2014) stated his *techne* for making this aesthetic possible:

I think it’s pretty simple...it’s the old rule, ‘the company who knows their customer wins!’ So apply it to whatever you’re doing. In this case, we’re selling food, mobile. Where do they work, shop, etc. Also being a cash only operation is not customer friendly. Everyone uses a debit card. And last, know your competition!” (para. 10).

In other words, not every location is staged similarly for the food truck actors to perform and interact. Food truckers must learn this early or face the fears of many nights and days without a steady supply of customers. Every location is a new journey for the food truckers to apply their rhetorical aesthetic. Each spot where the truck stops has potential pitfalls; the legality of selling food on the street, parking limitations, rival competition, and dealing with environmental issues such as crime and weather. Teri Fermo (2014), owner of Bohemia: Moveable Feast Caterers in Tulsa, Oklahoma, writes, “In my opinion food trucks fail for a number of reasons. I think people are under the impression that if you set up somewhere, people will just flock to you. You have to do the time in order to establish a presence” (para. 4). The success of the experience on the customers’ end is impacted by how the food truck struggles through the obstacles and presents an experience that is inviting rather than aggressive.

The last type of hunter is the one that likes to hunt in high-fence operations—that is to say, those with the “game” safely confined within a fence. These hunters can act like food truck tourists. Guided tours of the mobile-dining-hot-spots have popped up in areas like Vancouver, British Columbia, and Columbus, Ohio. This has created a more structured type of food truck hunt experience as opposed to just setting out onto the road and hoping for the best or using a RoamingHunger.com to help track them down (Columbus Food Adventures, 2015; Vancouver Foodie Tours, 2015). In short, the providers of the food truck tours do the work of finding the food trucks and researching the times, style of cuisine,

general atmosphere of location, then placing it all into a marketable package. This style of bringing people to the food trucks operates as a means of sustaining business throughout the year and even week-to-week. Working in conjunction with tour companies and capitalizing on the fashionable appeal of the food trucks they provide greater access to the food truck and as advertisement for the entire movement. The problem, however, becomes maintaining an aesthetic that does not seem “imposed.” Guided tours are often stereotyped as imposing a perspective on how an audience should experience an event. Therefore, the tours walk a fine line between over-playing their rhetorical influence and creating an event that is memorable and pleasurable.

As these three character types arrive at the food truck, overcoming difficulties, they enter the second stage of the experience. This becomes the trial-by-fire and climax to the narrative arc where they attempt to mesh with the environment staged by the food truck. They must interact with the surroundings, food, and community. Rhetorically, this is a moment when the food truck and audience become rhetors together to make the experience. The term perception, not recognition, is defined as a moment where the audience has the potential to create something new (Crick 2012). Crick states, “perception first requires an act of ‘surrender’ to something within our environment...What surrender does for us is open up our whole field of awareness to the subtleties of a thing that we may have passed over in our haste to ‘recognize’ it” (p. 146). The food truck experience needs the participation of the audience to make it unique. For example, after visiting



Shell's Coastal Cuisine in St. Louis, Missouri, Vince L. (2013a) stated "My friend and I were the first to the truck at lunchtime. I had a lot of questions about nutrition and cooking methods. Everything was answered in detail and with enthusiasm. They really like their food and love talking about it." The food truck experience ideally wants this level of interaction with the audience. If the audience is not talking to the chef or staff working the mobile kitchen, it needs lines of people talking with one another and the loud music being remixed by the noise of generators and spatulas against grill tops.

Joaquin Contreras (2011), an ethnographer studying mobile kitchens, stated, "As a mobile kitchen moving around the region of greater Los Angeles...a field of texture, urban sight, sound, and tactile experiences" are produced (p. 1). In doing so, the trucks produce "sights that some may see as threatening, as their productions of emerging urban textures that operate 'outside' the temporal and spatial norms of what urban planners had envisioned the built landscape could (and would be) used for" (p. 1). For example, an average parking lot attached to a strip mall on a Wednesday evening in spring. Soon the sunlight will be gone and the parking lot will finish emptying out, leaving only a few cars, highlighted by the fluorescent security lights laid out fifty feet apart in a grid pattern. The empty parking lot in a strip mall is a familiar sight. But when the gourmet food trucks arrive, the parking lot becomes something strange—even "threatening" in some cases.

The once empty strip mall parking lot is transformed into a "pop-up" style festival serving a variety of gourmet food out of roaming kitchens. The sheer

intensity of trying to pick food items from the diverse choices of food is only overshadowed from the radical changes to the environment and the adjustments one needs to make in order to make it out of the experience. For example, gourmet food trucks are often equipped with floodlights, neon signage, and lit menu boards providing contrast and color to the strip mall parking lot. The lights illuminate the show ahead where lines of people will hover around watching the chefs perform inside their tiny kitchen. Dewey (1934) states:

Even the pleasures of the palate are different in quality to an epicure than in the one who merely “likes” his food as he eats it. The difference is not of mere intensity. The Epicure is conscious of much more than taste of the food. Rather, there enter into the taste, as directly experienced, qualities that depend upon reference to its source and its manner of production in connection with criteria of excellence. As production must absorb into itself qualities of the product as perceived and be regulated by them, so, on the side, seeing, hearing, tasting, become esthetic when relation to a distinct manner of activity qualifies what is perceived (p. 50-51)

Many hunters will watch the performance amongst the chaos of the impromptu dining room floor, which is a hodge-podge of few tables and chairs, a few trashcans if patrons are lucky, people sitting on parking blocks or on the asphalt enjoying what is offered throughout the experience enriching the palate and its future possibilities.

To some, finding space to eat is a positive challenge, while for others it represents the worst of the experience. Before starting his food truck blog WanderingShepard.com, Art Sheppard was blown away at his first experience with the trucks. In an interview with Mobile Cuisine (2014a), he stated, “No fancy tablecloths, fine china or anything to signify a ‘high quality’ experience other than the flavor pushing my boundaries on my enjoyment of a tofu taco” (para. 5). In other

words, the experience stood out enough to persuade him of the possibility of this medium and to continue to interact with the community and explore this unique medium and the aesthetic it creates. The Mobile Cuisine article also states, “Sheppard was motivated by the stories of these small business owners that took pride in serving their passion. He wanted to share it as much as possible” (para. 7).

Whether caused by chaos, confusion, or novelty, conversations and discussion will typically break out about what this truck does and how it functions. Guy Romo, owner of Moto Chef Mobile, stated:

Food truck customers interact more, not only with one another, but with the chefs and cooks that are preparing their orders...We know the names of our regulars, their tastes and preferences. We shake their hands and welcome them back, and I believe that sets food trucks apart from the day-to-day restaurant grind (as cited in Malone, 2014, para. 27).<sup>60</sup>

In other words, the experience, at least from the point of view of a food truck owner, is a process of relationship building, and wrapped up tightly in the spirit of orality. Even if a person is not a talker, Vivian Choy (2011), in her ethnography of the Kogi BBQ food truck, points out that some individuals will be “without a specific person or conversation to keep them occupied (although some immerse themselves in texting or in music)” and, thus, “are able to be much more attuned to their surroundings. Consequently, they are also more inclined to eavesdrop” (p. 17). The aesthetic experience, in other words, functions to encourage discourse.

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<sup>60</sup> Chef Romo must have made an impact with his performance and demeanor. When it was announced on Moto Chef’s Facebook page on July 12<sup>th</sup> 2014 that the truck would close up shop, Shella James Cockerill, a customer, exclaimed, “NO!!!! You are the only reason we go to H&8th! We hunt you down and stalk you just to eat your amazing food!” (<https://www.facebook.com/MotoChefMobileDiner>).

Alongside lines of people, there come other waves of sounds projecting out of the trucks. In some cases, trucks are loaded up with everything from a basic stereo system in the truck for the cook's listening pleasure, to huge sound systems capable of providing sound for a small rock concert. For example, when designing one of the most technologically advanced mobile kitchens, Peugeot, a French car manufacturer, went out of their way to incorporate high-end sound capabilities. According to Focal Car Audio (2015) they stated:

To meet foodtruck demands, 8 Flax cone medium speaker drivers and 32 inverted dome tweeters have been installed in the huge side doors of the vehicle. In addition, a system composed of 8 woofers reinforces bass for a complete deployed auditorium. Foodies will thus be able to taste in sound and images all the chef's gestures and techniques to enjoy even the faintest sizzle of the food on the stovetop. A unique sensory experience! At night, two Focal floorstanding speakers, especially designed for the set up will be hooked up to le Bistrot du Lion turntables with the famous French DJ's Adriano and the Reflex.

They are trying to amplify and incorporate many more sounds than just music into the experience. All gourmet food trucks will have some sort of power supply system attached to the truck that will make its share of noise, the most common being propane or gas generators. These generators are not known to be quiet, but rather produce a constant drone much like a running lawn mower. Once the kitchen is powered up, the cooking really gets started and the noise only gets louder and more diverse. Inside the mobile kitchen, the cooks will be yelling at one another, fryers crackling, grills sizzling, stainless steel pots and pans being slammed onto of a flat grill top, along with the other thousands of sounds that come out of a working kitchen. Along with the show inside the kitchen are a plethora of smells hanging and

wafting through the air. There might be the smokiness of the BBQ combining with the roasting of garlic and fermented greens from the skillet of an Asian fusion truck.

Robert Sietsema (2014), a New York food critic states:

Somehow, turning a corner in an unfamiliar place, smelling the smoky fragrance of an improvised cook-fire, and hearing the sizzle of a delectable snack you have to Google to identify routinely stimulated my salivary glands more surely than a well-marbled steak with a pat of herb butter melting on top (p. 71).

The smells are a bazaar for the olfactory system, kicking other senses into gear. The unique and new combinations formed by multiple kitchens firing all at once mix and send their scent over the audience. Together the taste, sights, sounds, and smells, combined with the level of communication skill needed to maneuver through the food truck scene is both inviting and frightening. Obstacles and fears will surface, creating struggles that punctuate the experience as it all moves towards its conclusion.

But the food truck aesthetic also fails to appeal to audiences when they are not properly invited into the experience. David T. (2011) writes:

I predict, and many may disagree, that the whole food truck thing, especially in Denver, is a fad, not a winner. We've already seen some fail. As with all "trends" most lose momentum after the "new" wears off. Honestly, standing in line, squatting on whatever is convenient to eat overpriced food is not a strategy I'd be investing in. How many people do you expect to show up at your truck in the winter? It's seasonal at best. Maybe some strategy to combine a truck with a brick-and-mortar business, but stand alone in this climate?

David is expressing many concerns that the experience is just a moment of novelty.

In terms of my experience in Southern California, the relatively cold night would be undesirable to experience on a day in and day out basis. The food truck experience

requires a different level of participation and effort. To add volatile weather conditions into the mix can make it that no matter how much excitement, wonderful the is smell, or pleasant the sounds are coming from the food trucks, it will not be enough to have everyday customers visit these locations in the rain or cold to eat lunch. The aesthetic of the food truck is thusly dependant on the weather, making places like Southern California and other mild climates ideal.

When the ideal climate is not available, then the food truckers need to find other ways to alter their aesthetic. Kate G. (2011) from Denver Colorado stated, “A lot of trucks do work all winter. They park outside of many bars and clubs, just a lot later at night.” In my experience, traveling to food trucks in cold climates like Minneapolis or the East Coast, I can confirm the teamwork between these establishments allowing year round operation without the loss of the aesthetic of eating at a mobile vendor. But eating food from a food truck at a bar does change the way I interact with the chef and what I am exposed to during the cooking and ordering phase. The physical food truck can be forgotten in this combination as it operates more like an extension of the brick-and-mortar. The food truck falls into the background and cannot be witnessed acting by the audience of eaters. This blindness is an enemy of aesthetics according to Dewey. He claims the “enemies of the esthetic are neither the practical nor the intellectual. They are humdrum; slackness of loose ends; submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure” (as cited in Crick 2012 p. 153). Meaning, the aesthetic experience of eating at a food truck is to physically eat at the truck, not the extension of the truck’s

dining room. The experience of eating the truck's food in a bar is almost too familiar and allows the audience to fall into old habits of action rather than the experience creating a desire to participate further in the creation of the experience. Maybe a food truck can damage the aesthetic appeal simply by putting out too many table and chairs, effectively mimicking an aesthetic of a "diner" or "café."

Once the audience has gone through the meshing stage, the audience will start the culmination process of the meal and the last stage in the food truck experience. The total consummation of an experience might happen after an individual leaves the scene or finishes their food at another location. In some cases the experience drags out when the consumer becomes a producer within the community, getting involved by doing a Yelp review providing further feedback about the experience. For example Vince L. (2013b) writes, "Walking back to my office and NOT eating was tough. It smelled wonderful. back at my desk I poured a bit of syrup on it and ate away. It was good. I am glad I just got one because it was VERY filling." Nonetheless, as much as it might extend, the experience does end.

The end or the fulfillment of an experience for John Dewey is exemplified by distinguishing "an" experience as its own within the constant flow of new experience and backlog of memory. Dewey (1934) writes "There is that meal in a Paris restaurant of which one says 'that was an experience.' It stands out as an enduring memorial of what food may be" (p. 37). Just replace Paris restaurant with roadside kitchen and his sentiment gets pretty close to expressing the goal in people

reporting their own food truck experience. For example, Bong E. (2010) of Los Angeles, California stated in a Yelp review:

I'm not one to track down these trucks but every 2nd Thursday of every month, LA Artwalk happens...Somehow it turned from Artwalk to Food Truck / Get Faded walk...but on this particular night, I had my mind on consuming calories with food rather than booze, so I decided to give White Rabbit a shot. Luckily for me, I came with someone who was hungry as a hostage because not only did I get to try my sisig burrito, I got to try the pork tocino burrito, chicken adobo tacos and some fries. I'm glad I went with my order because I definitely liked the sisig burrito over the other types of meats (chicken adobo, beef steak or pork tocino), but I would not be against trying something new the next time I see the truck. The line was pretty slow, but I guess it's something you gotta deal with anytime you're in this type of atmosphere. If you haven't figured it out ... I'm a fan. I might even start tracking down trucks, not really but it sounds good.

Bong E. was thrust into an interaction with food trucks. Using skill to maneuver the scene they select a single truck for experimentation. A “hostage” was used to order a larger selection of food to try while likely spreading the cost across two parties, limiting the risk of having a “foodie failure” where all of the food turns out to be unsatisfying. Even with long lines, the strategy turned out to be successful in producing a “fan” of this type of dining experience, living up to what eating at a mobile kitchen can and should be. The experience for Bong E. was not just about the food, but was a process of interaction with this new medium and ending with a positive and unique experience that goes beyond having him become a return customer.



## The Non-Aesthetic

Not every experience with a mobile kitchen will be ideally aesthetic, nor can every food truck construct the perfect aesthetic for all audiences and occasions. In fact, there are many experiences at mobile kitchens that resulted in failures to produce enriching experiences. Not every experience needs to be pleasurable in the moment. Rather, the quality of the aesthetic experience, according to John Dewey (1934), needs to provide audiences with opportunities to make it meaningful in their own way. Dewey sees, for example, a poem “existing in unnumberable qualities or kinds, no two readers having exactly the same experience, according to the ‘forms,’ or manners of response brought to it” (p. 112). This means that every individual brings to an experience a different manner or form. For some people, the form produced by interaction with the food truck is a liberator. For others, not so much. This is the realm of the “non-aesthetic.” When applied to the rise of the food truck, Dewey’s notion of the “non-aesthetic” can help locate a few areas in which these mobile kitchens struggle when trying to create an experience and failing to do so.

For Dewey (1934), non-aesthetic experiences will fall somewhere on a polar scale between having no form and having a too rigid form. He claims:

At one end of the pole is the loose succession that does not begin at any particular place and that ends—in the sense of ceasing—at no particular place. At the other pole is arrest, constriction, proceeding from parts have only a mechanical connection with one another (p. 41).

In other words, going too far on either end of the scale produces a non-aesthetic experience. He adds, “Enemies of the esthetic are neither the practical nor the

intellectual. They are the humdrum; slackness of loose ends; submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure” (p. 42). Crick (2012) states that Dewey’s theory of the non-aesthetic acknowledges the fact that certain “events lack aesthetic quality” based on either form being “absent” or “artificially and coercively imposed upon an event” (p. 153). Mobile kitchens fall into this spectrum when they appear either to be randomly or chaotically thrust into a situation or when they become overly aggressive and structured that they lose their interactive character.

This section will focus on the second of these threats to the aesthetic, namely by the feeling that food trucks have imposed themselves upon the environment and audience. This occurs in particular with the “coercive imposition” of large corporations into the mobile food marketplace, ranging from Costco to the Gap to Jack-in-the-Box (Beato 2012; Hahnefeld 2012; Spiegel 2014). The debate centers not on whether these versions of the mobile kitchen should be able to sell their products on the street, but rather with the question of whether large corporations produce the same aesthetic qualities as a gourmet food truck. In other words, can Jack-in-the-Box or Taco Bell mobile kitchens produce the same type of aesthetic experience as Kogi BBQ or the Grilled Cheese Truck?

A number of voices have weighed in on this debate. Large corporations in late 2010 or early 2011 believed that market popularity of the new mobile food medium was ripe enough to try it out for them selves. According to Jack-in-the-Box spokesman Brian Luscomb, “The ‘Burger Truck’ is... a great way to promote our brand. Participating in these kinds of events [food truck gatherings] gives us an

opportunity to go places where our guests are but our restaurants aren't" (as cited in Robinson-Jacos 2013 para. 3-4). Editor of Mobile-Cuisine.com and author of *Running a Food Truck for Dummies* Richard Myrick claims that Jack-in-the-Box is not the only company to use this medium to their benefit; Burger King has also used the new medium rhetorically to "get the public to realize that they had changed their menu for the better" (para. 11). Myrick adds that he "think[s] it's a great strategy. You're able to get your food out for taste tests" (as cited in Robinson-Jacos para. 12-13). For businessmen like Brian Luscomb and Richard Myrick, promoting the huge marketing appeal in combination with the relatively low startup cost and investment for a small fleet of mobile kitchens made this an opportune (or kairotic) moment.

The form adopted early on by many of these corporations is one of mimicry of the first new gourmet food trucks. They intentionally designed their trucks to look and sound like all the others. As cited by Anneli Rufus (2011) the Jack-in-the-Box mobile kitchen was:

Inspired by retro '70s silk-screened vans, the 34-foot vehicle bears a bold "lifelike" image of Jack in chest armor, helming an ancient Roman-style chariot borne by a tiger and a bear, their fangs bared. Its outside is equipped with a window for ordering and pickup, and a menu displayed on a flat-screen TV. (The Munchie Mobile will offer a limited selection of burgers, fries and tacos.) Its interior is outfitted with a grill, fryer, and toaster.

The design of the truck would blend in at any food truck rally across the country.

For early adopters, the benefits were seen early on. Beyond Traditional (2013), the marketing team for Jack-in-a-Box's mobile kitchen, claims that after Jack's Munchie Mobile was in its second year, it had:

Served favorites from the Jack In The Box menu at over 100 events in Southern California...generated a robust die-hard fan base, and received requests, (nay, pleas) from consumers nationwide for a national road tour. Over 6,000 fans on Jack's Munchie Mobile's dedicated Facebook site with over 130k active monthly users and 2.2 million views (para. 3-4).

As these numbers indicate, there were more than a few customers enjoying this form of the mobile kitchen experience. In terms of the personal experiences, customers in the promotion video on Jack's Munchie Mobile's (2013) Facebook.com page are shown lined up and excited to get their food. However, social media sites like Yelp.com, Chowhound.com, or Zomato.com, three of the most popular social media restaurant review sites, contain no content that provides customer feedback for the corporate mobile kitchens of Jack-in-the-Box, Taco Bell, or TGI Fridays.

If there are personal experiences shared about corporate mobile kitchens, they are shared in opinion sections of newspapers or on blogs. Their common concern is directed at how these mediums do not "fit in" or act like this the new gourmet food trucks. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, many types of mobile kitchens are pragmatic in their appeal and form such as the taco truck, grease truck, or roach coach. These types of trucks are easily identified and their form can be processed accordingly by an audience. If this were a debate over a brick-and-mortar, it is difficult to imagine a McDonald's restaurant that could successfully mimic an experience had within a mom-and-pop brick-and-mortar restaurant. Even if the corporation could hire the best production team to craft a setting that looked, smelled, and operated as a small-scale restaurant, many people believe they could still tell the difference. McDonald's may get very close, but there is still something

about those restaurants that sets them apart from almost every other restaurant in the way they are perceived. Similarly, it is believed that the same effect holds true for large corporations trying to mimic mobile kitchens and the events they produce.

The criticism over corporate mobile kitchens trying to “fit in” is fueled further by their rhetorical advocacy regarding their likeness to new gourmet food trucks but functioning at a core level like a highly traditional mobile kitchen. The outcome is said to produce a less appealing aesthetic when visiting this version of the mobile kitchen. For example, NPR writer Mandalit del Barco (2011) said some people have expressed a “fear the underground spirit of the gourmet trucks is being co-opted” (para. 12). In the Huffington Post Alison Spiegel (2014) sums up many of these voices by stating, on the one hand:

Food trucks are one of those trends that may be overblown, but are still pretty awesome. Food trucks are usually really unique, offering specialty food items we may not have seen before or may not get very often. They can give cooks and food manufacturers a cheaper way to sell their products and establish themselves in the increasingly competitive world of restaurants and dining (para. 1).

However, on the other hand, larger food corporations are:

Trying to capitalize on the homegrown, artisanal roots of food trucks. You can't fake artisanal, however. Just because you're driving your products around in a truck, doesn't mean they're small-batch, handmade or otherwise. It's one thing to use your food truck to get the word out and to reach new customers. It's something different entirely to use the truck to persuade people of your "hand-crafted" or "artisanal" quality (para. 2-3).

The debate for those like Spiegel or Barco hinges on large corporations failing to mimic the form of gourmet trucks and then trying to assert themselves falsely into

the food truck community. Edwin Goei (2011) laments the Jack-in-the-Box food truck stating:

That's all fine and good, but seriously, what masochistic gas-wasting noob will really want to follow its Twitter or Facebook to find out where it will be next? I admit, those mystery-meat tacos are mighty tasty at 99-cents for a twofer, especially when it's late at night and you're bleary eyed and delirious, but where the heck are you if you're not within a mile of a brick-and-mortar Jack In the Box? (Goel 2011 para. 3).

At the heart of these complains is the notions that corporate mobile kitchens are not aesthetically pleasing, but rather, as Dewey stated, a continued "submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure" when it comes to rhetorically articulating themselves and their food in public. As the co-owner of the French-Asian fusion truck and restaurant Komodo Eric Tjahyadi states:

There's a lot of food trucks that are out there that we started with that have already gone out of business...So now, it's kind of like survivalism. If you're gonna be a random hot dog truck vendor or whatever, you will be eaten alive by the competition. But creating a product that's compelling and unique helps (Barco 2011 para. 14).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter began with my first trip to a food truck. The experience did not simply fall into the background of my mind but, rather, stayed present and altered the way I ate in my foodscape. It also led to this investigation and dissertation. This chapter then looked at eating at a food truck as a unique experience. The experience is rhetorical inasmuch as it persuades customers to join in, using its uniqueness to market themselves and create an identity. The movement continues to grow and it is in part due to its aesthetic appeals. This new medium is not only producing quality gourmet food but also producing an environment in which audiences are important

co-creators. This means that the food trucks cannot over-apply or impose their aesthetic form to the experience upon the audience. Rather, audience members need to take part in the experience in a way they would not have to with more traditional forms of public dining.

In trying to define the food truck experience American philosopher John Dewey has provided a lens through which to view the nature of “an experience” and informed his readers about a means of educating one’s own food knowledge through direct experience, for which he was a major advocate. Through his definition of an experience—a temporal thematized event that stands out from all the others—one can construct a better outline of the form, also known as the stages, of the food truck experience.

The experience is used rhetorically by the food trucks to advocate for the public to play a part in the drama they are trying to stage. The better a food truck can articulate itself to the audience, the clearer the roles are for the audience. But, again, there has to be balance to the demand placed on the audience to act according to the roles they set out. There are limits to what an audience in a food truck experience can be forced into in terms of rigid roles. For example, Mark Murphy (2011) enjoyed a more laid-back role in the eating of gourmet food at a food truck stating:

Everything has gotten a little more casual nowadays. You see a lot less tablecloths. I can imagine the people who wash linens can probably tell you that. They’re probably washing a lot more napkins and less tablecloths these days. I think that’s a good thing, and food trucks play a big role (para 3).

It's as if Mark is throwing away the formal behaviors expected of an old French gourmand and has found pleasure with replacing some of it with an inspired street-food etiquette. The food trucks are therefore critical in establishing, transforming, or maintaining those behaviors.

While the food is important to the overall aesthetic of a food truck experience, it still only represents one part of the whole. Chefs like Josh Wolken of Steuben's located in Denver, Colorado has proven that a chef can take gourmet food and successfully put it in a mobile kitchen. His food truck and restaurant are highly respected in the area for providing quality food. But the gourmet food itself is nothing new. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the other elements of the food truck experience; smells, sounds, textures, struggles, and interaction with other audience members.

To lay the experience out, it was divided into three stages. Each of the three stages—hunt/discovery, integration, and culmination—represents the temporal progression through the experience. The first stage has the audience discover and/or hunt the food truck. Not all hunters are the same so the chapter defined three different types of food truck hunters. Hunting works as a metaphor because trying to find this new medium requires a different set of skills not often necessary to acquire dinner. Food trucks understand the difficulties in hunting a moving kitchen in large urban landscapes. Kogi BBQ food truck and others then use “rewards” when customers find them, turning the hunt into a type of competition as well. Other food trucks have recognized a type of hunter that will not go particularly



out of the way to find them. Therefore, food trucks need to search out a potential audience to target. Since the first few days of the new gourmet food truck, late night hangouts and corporate downtowns have been prime locations to stage a unique food experience. If customers do not want sit around and wait for the food truck but they also do not want to do the heavy work to search them out, they can turn to tour companies to help them track the prey. Companies have gotten on board with the movement and set up businesses that bring audiences to the food truck experience. In cities across the United States and Canada, food truck tours are operating year round, informing audiences where to go, how to get there, and even what to order at specific locations.

Once the audience has found the truck, they begin the process of integration into the environment. The food truck and the audience in this stage start to function together to create the overall aesthetics of the experience. The long lines that can form during a food truck experience are a good indicator of how well the audiences are going to interact with the medium and environment. For example, if a person is critical of food trucks when they take too long to produce their food, they are in a successful role during the experience. However, if someone is disturbed by the long lines, noisy atmosphere, or any number of other things considered “bad service” at other brick-and-mortars they are likely not in a successful role. The reason being that the desired audience is one that adds and co-creates rather than becoming disassociated. Audiences will need to think imaginatively and work with the food truck and other audience members to even begin to figure out where to sit down

and eat their food. When it all comes together, the event can take an unused parking lot and turn it into something more like a festival.

After integrating into the food truck event, the final stage happens with the culmination of the experience. This culmination of the experience can be with the finishing of the meal or with the sharing of the event on social media. Either way, the end of the event, according to Dewey (1934), has a feeling of fulfillment and the desire to carry the experience past the present moment. In other words, the personal experience of interaction and communing with the food truck acts to change the perception and action of audiences because of its uniqueness as a new food medium that seeks to unify mind, body, and cultural taste.

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## CHAPTER FOUR: THE SOPHISTICAL RHETORIC OF ROY CHOI

Imagine every chef in every city was doing their restaurant but also creating a kiosk in a working-class neighborhood, working with the purveyors to bring the prices down—so, instead of fast food, there would be chef-driven fast food.”  
~Roy Choi (as cited in Schonberger 2013)

Korean-born but long-term Californian Roy Choi and the Kogi BBQ Truck hit the foodscape in 2008. It was on the streets of Venice that Choi displayed a prominent rhetorical identity of the new mobile kitchen to national audiences. Social media accounts and news agencies from around the country covered the happenings, and when the cameras came around, Roy was ready to grab the spotlight. Once he was in view, his charisma, creativity, and very public rhetorical style made him the recognized spokesperson for the community of food truckers. In Richard Myrick’s *Running a Food Truck for Dummies* (2012) Choi is called “the godfather of the food truck revolution” (p. 262). Referenced implicitly by food scholar John T. Edge (2012), he states, “And so it goes in Los Angeles, where some new immigrants carry forward that taco truck tradition. And other new immigrants forge an edible revolution, trackable by all who follow Twitter” (p. 245). In 2014 CNN hired Choi to host a show titled “*Street Food.*” Officially CCN.com (2015) states:

In *Street Food with Roy Choi* we go along with one of the food world’s hottest young chefs as he explores the unique worlds of influencers and trendsetters. Roy dips into the lives of cultural tastemakers to get their perspectives on cultural movements around style, food, entertainment and more, and talks to them in their native habitats (para. 1).

Both CNN and the food critics recognized the impact of Choi’s work in successfully advocating on behalf of the new gourmet mobile kitchen, the food truck

movement, and a larger shift in American foodways. The fact that he was offered a platform on national news in order to make arguments about what is blameworthy and praiseworthy in contemporary food culture is indicative of the rhetorical potential of making one's name known in the food truck community. This is not to say he is the only voice in this community articulating these views; but he is one of the loudest, one of the first, the most controversial, and charismatic enough to captivate an audience.

As the godfather of the food truck revolution (or as he prefers to be called, "Papi Chulo") his growing iconic status and the viral timing of this new medium afford him a platform from which he can advocate for more than new gourmet qualities. For example, in 2013 Choi gave a speech at the MAP3 Conference and a follow up interview in Firstwefeast.com. In both artifacts, he makes arguments about how, by exploiting the potential of the medium of the food truck, chefs with a social conscience can act as agents of social change and social justice. In the case of his speech, he argues in particular that food truck chefs are uniquely positioned to aid in exigent situations such as hunger. In the interview with Firstwefest.com (2013) Choi stated, "Five years ago, when we started serving tacos on the street [at Kogi], and connecting it with Twitter, we were able to change the scope of how we can make food accessible. We were able to give food a voice and made it fun and young. Now, 14-year-old kids are interested in it, because Kogi is more than just food—it really is from the street, it represents skateboarding, graffiti, hip hop, angst, being on the outside, the underground, not fitting in, loneliness" but still as a whole

he and others “in this age of hyperawareness and connectivity” are “still only feeding the people that can afford our food at the end of the day” (para.10-11).

As an entrepreneur himself, of course, Choi does not condemn business owners for seeking to make a profit in a capitalist economic system. Indeed, his rhetorical audience consists primarily of these entrepreneurs and business owners whom he believes can work within the system to further worthwhile aims: “There’s nothing wrong with that system because it’s an economy, but the premise of my argument is that our whole nature as chefs is to feed people. We are very maternal...I just want to change patterns” (para. 9). In fact, Choi recognizes the degree to which even his chief economic rivals—the fast food corporations— are some of the few businesses to cater to the needs of poor and hungry populations. As he points out, fast food businesses are the de facto “chefs” of the inner city, setting the menus and culinary tastescape/foodscape for entire communities. But the comparison is rhetorically strategic; he is praising a much-despised form of food preparation and distribution in order to shame and inspire his community of food truckers and entrepreneurial chefs. He makes use of his own moral ethos to argue that chefs should make pragmatic use of their skills and available resources, like that of the food truck, to serve a community of people looking for better options in their foodways.

But it is hardly surprising that not every food truck that rolls up to an event is inspired by such a noble aim and led by such a charismatic actor. The individualistic, romantic, and heroic ethos that Choi exudes is by no means a

characteristic of all food truckers. His ideal of the artistic and activist chef exists in tension with the rhetorical persona of the industrial food trucks such as Applebee's, Taco Bell, and Jack in a Box. For example, Applebee's rolled out their food truck for the "Burger Contest" in Colorado in 2011. According to Patricia Calhoun (2011b), "AmRest, which owns and operates over a hundred Applebee's in eight states, had challenged its Colorado stores to create the perfect 'Colorado Burger'—ideally, one that incorporated 'Stinkin' Good Green Chile, created by Bronco Mark Schlereth, spokesman for this campaign" (para. 1). The truck was therefore used by the company rhetorically to frame Applebee's' as having a hip side by hopping onto mobile food trend and the appeal of the street gourmet.

The spread of these corporate mobile food mediums has not been without its criticism. The major complaint stems from the mobile kitchens sticking to their more traditional corporate roots of marketing and advertizing by using the viral nature of the food truck movement as another avenue from which to market their products. As the Huffington Post (2011) reports "Applebee's loves to adopt restaurant trends a few months after everyone else—and food trucks are nothing if not a trend" (para. 3). As Maynard (2007) reported for the New York Times, "Americans' growing venturousness poses challenges not only for restaurant chains but also for specialty food producers, who must move more quickly to keep a grip on markets they once had to themselves" (p. 2). Applebee's did produce a mobile medium that from the outside showed their skills to mimic the style of the Choi-like mobile food mediums by showing up to the same occasions, looking like the other

trucks around them, and producing similar sounds and tastes—even though they could not produce the same aesthetic experience or connection with the community.

Although there are many potential characteristics—physical, aesthetic, nutritional, economic—that might be used to distinguish corporate from entrepreneurial food trucks, it can be argued that one of the most important distinctions is rhetorical. This is not to suggest that the truck itself is rhetorical in the way the previous chapter described it as being aesthetic, but to say that the food truck creates a unique kind of stage or rhetorical platform by which messages can be distributed and most importantly by which chefs can create a unique rhetorical ethos that can carry beyond the food truck itself. What is notable about Choi, for instance, is that he used the food truck as a stage for his own creativity and advocacy. Choi sells food but he also sells ideas, arguments, and culture. He acts not only as an itinerant chef but as an itinerant teacher and speaker, using the mobile medium to reach diverse audiences and expose them to new possibilities--not only of eating, but of how they relate to a wider diverse food culture. In contradistinction, Applebee's views the truck simply as a delivery mechanism for food that has been tailored for maximum gratification of the senses based on demographic research that does not challenge but simply flatters popular tastes. Whereas Choi uses the food truck to enhance his own personal message and engage directly with particular audiences, their problems, and their possibilities, Applebee's uses its food truck to mimic popular styles and maximize profit margins by appearing only at major events in which the message is simply that one should eat at Applebee's.

What becomes apparent in the distinction between the two forms of the mobile kitchen is a case of two views of the rhetoric—one that might be classified as Platonic, the other can be called Sophistical. On the one hand, Applebee’s corporate mobile mediums can be seen to employ the kind of rhetoric that Plato criticized as “pastry baking.” From a Platonic perspective, industrial food trucks operate more as vehicles of propaganda for industrial food corporation that take advantage of the desires of the audience, sell gratification by providing short-term pleasures, and flatter rather than challenge the tastes of the people. On the other hand, Choi might best be viewed as a more creative form of Sophistical rhetoric insofar as he uses the food truck rhetorically as a form of possibility to respond to moral, social, and political rhetorical situations that happen outside the creative works of the gourmet food truck. Like the original Sophists, Choi is primarily an itinerant and creative artist who revels in promoting new possibilities, making the weaker argument and making the stronger, and embracing a strong ethic of competition and aesthetics of performance to seek excellence.

This chapter will use Plato’s view of rhetoric to interpret the Applebee’s food truck and use sophistical rhetoric, as defined by John Poulakos (2008), to interpret Choi’s rhetoric. It will show the potentialities of Choi’s model of food-trucker-as-Sophist in order to show how the food truck can be used as a platform to make arguments beyond the boundaries of the food truck itself, while at the same time it will use Plato to recognize the pervasive temptation to simply use the food truck as just another medium to maximize profit at the expense of public taste, health, and

well-being. That said, there is nothing necessarily virtuous about the food truck as a medium. Its rhetorical potential is actualized only when it is put to use creatively by individual chefs who feel willing and able to balance the need to make a living with the desire to challenge and reform culture in whatever way possible.

### **Platonic Critique and Applebee's Mobile Food Medium**

When people look for a connection between rhetoric and food in the classical rhetorical tradition, they don't have to go far. It was Plato in the *Gorgias* who first made this connection quite famously right at the very origins of rhetorical theory. In the dialogue, Socrates confronts the aging but quite famous sophist Gorgias to determine what is the nature of rhetoric—the art that he says he possesses and can teach. In the back-and-forth between Socrates, Gorgias, and two other sophists, Polus and Callicles, Socrates makes the bold assertion that rhetoric is not, in fact, in art at all, because it does not have a clear rational method that has been derived at both through experience and through reason that can achieve a determinate and virtuous end. Medicine, he says, is exactly such an art, whereas rhetoric is more akin to “pastry baking,” which he believes to be simply a knack for giving people what they want, even if what they want is completely unhealthy and only does damage to their body. The problem, however, is that most people can't tell the difference between one and the other. Indeed, “there are many people who appear to be physically fit, and unless one is a doctor or one of the fitness experts, one wouldn't readily notice that they're not fit” (Cooper 2014 464a). This problem becomes even



worse when it is such an ignorant audience making decisions for themselves and for others. Socrates goes on to explain:

Pastry baking has put on the mask of medicine, and pretends to know the foods that are best for the body, so that if a pastry baker and a doctor had to compete in front of children, or in front of men just as foolish as children, to determine which of the two, the doctor or the pastry baker, had expert knowledge of good food and bad, the doctor would die of starvation (464d).

The reason Plato makes this comparison is that pastry baking appeals to the sense of taste to inform ideas of good health for the body and soul. However, the use of taste as informing of health and fitness is subpar in terms of understanding the body based on more scientific/philosophic methods of knowing. Socrates calls this method of oratory “flattery”:

Flattery, and I say that such a thing is shameful...because it guesses at what’s pleasant with no consideration for what’s best. And I say that it isn’t a craft, but a knack, because it has no account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies them, so that it’s unable to state the cause of each thing. And I refuse to call anything that lacks such an account a craft (465a).

The knack of pastry baking, then, as with rhetoric, is simply an effort to flatter the senses through short-term pleasure in the assumption that what the audiences find pleasurable is also good for them even if they are without any real knowledge or truth of the subject or object in question. As John Poulakos (2008) states, Plato through the voice of “Socrates attempts to convince his interlocutor that the promise of the sophists—eloquence and the power to that comes with it—is not worth considering because it can only deliver worldly goods acquired by conceptually questionable and ethically reprehensible means” (p. 79). Plato worried these were the means of creating a dangerous power-grab by these sophists—

educators, orators, politicians or speechwriters for the politicians—over the demos of Athens. But this is the same type of critique that is often heard against any powerful individual or group that is using a combination of flattery and gratification to sway behavior and judgment of the masses.

There are two specific criticisms that Plato makes about rhetoric that are useful when we analyze the kind of corporate marketing strategies that we associate with companies like Applebee's. First, rhetoric is a knack based on being familiar with the wants and desires of the audiences without having true knowledge of whether those wants and desires are good or bad. To Plato the sophists prioritize mere belief (*pistis*) or mere opinion (*doxa*) rather than true knowledge (*episteme*) of the subject or object at hand. For Plato truth was not relative, as many of the sophists preached, but universal and found in the forms (Herrick 2013). Anyone making such a statement of mere belief or opinion in Plato's eyes would be considered ignorant or a liar and could not be trusted. As Poulakos (2008) points out, Plato defined a Sophist like Gorgias as one who "does not know the difference between pleasant and the good; that he cannot explain what he does to another; that he teaches false wisdom; and that he caters to the crowds" (p. 93). To Plato, it took long periods of time to gain true knowledge or wisdom--longer perhaps than the human lifespan would allow, but certainly longer than the time it takes to do a taste test.

The second critique of rhetoric is that it is successful simply because it reflects back to the audience what it already desires and called it good.

Consequently, rhetoric was unconcerned with long-term consequences or ultimate goods, but was only concerned with understanding the immediate desires of an audience and finding ways to gratify those desires as quickly and easily as possible—all the while flattering an audience by telling them that what they desired was the best. Plato saw this rhetorical strategy particularly at work in the political assemblies and law courts. Poulakos (2008) explains:

In politics, the eloquent politician could sway crowds at will, without considering the soundness of his plans or the long-effects of his policies on the State and its people, For their part, the crowds, always unruly and fickle, were all too eager to be persuaded by anything that sounded good, and too ready to disregard the consequences. In the courts, mob rule was the order of the day as the causes of justice suffered indignities in the hands of large ignorant juries and shrewd orators reciting the rhetoric of unscrupulous logographers. In state festivals, orations had turned into idle shows of linguistic dexterity without regard for the moral refinement of their audience (p. 98).

Plato thus acknowledged the power of rhetoric to move the masses to action; he only questioned its moral quality and instrumental efficacy. Plato understood that rhetoric was “a potential force behind all symbolic operations. Yet, because it is disorderly and self-contradictory, it can only promote its listeners to act in socio-politically incoherent ways” (p. 80). Plato’s criticism of rhetoric were akin to pastry baking. Both were considered a knack and not a craft, and through flattery and other appeals, they created false appearances of the body and soul’s health and fitness. Plato claimed that popular orators aimed toward personal gain over the good of the audience by using type of “sweet talk” and used the ignorance of the audience to guide them into great depths of false belief about the world in order to take power

in the polis. In other words, what Plato accused orators of doing is precisely the type of criticisms leveled today at multinational corporations like Applebee's.

### **Applebee's Ad Campaigns**

Applebee's is an American brick-and-mortar restaurant that went through a massive overhaul of their food and dining experience in 2009-2010. This process has centered around a "revitalization" of the aesthetic appeal of their dining rooms and menus by letting the "neighborhoods" from which a restaurant is located inspire the taste, look, and feel (Applebees 2015 para. 13). According to Ashley Lutz (2014), Applebee's move was a rhetorical response away from the status quo aesthetics in order "to differentiate from competitors like Chili's and Buffalo Wild Wings" while also facing "mounting competition from fast-casual brands like Five Guys and Panera Bread" (para. 3). To keep their brand alive, the corporation has created a rhetorical strategy to capitalize on the changing values in the foodscape.

In one example of the company's rhetorical strategy they use the concepts of fresh, local, gourmet, tech savvy, and better customer relationships as a way to familiarize themselves with the tastes and values of the foodscape. Applebee's president Mike Archer stated, "'See You Tomorrow' is how we will tell our story, literally every day, in every booth and on every plate, in a new and welcoming environment that invites guests to focus on our high-quality ingredients, prepared perfectly for them" (as cited in businesswire.com 2012 para. 5). According to Businesswire.com, "Applebee's is doing whatever it takes to make sure they see customers tomorrow, which means keeping it fresh, always, and using new

ingredients, new preparations, new combinations and new flavors, combined with everyday value that encourages regular visits” (para. 2). Applebee’s is going so far as to “place tablets at every table in every one of its U.S. Folks can use the tablets to pay whenever they want—and to order things like appetizers, desserts or even play video games” (Horovitz 2013 para. 2).

Another way the corporate brick-and-mortar restaurant is familiarizing themselves with the crowd is use the “food truck movement” as a sign of their shared values. A Colorado chain of Applebee’s held a contest for local franchises to design a new burger based on “local” rather than “national” tastes and values. Out of twenty-seven entries five were selected as finalist. The winning burger was a “the Chimichanga Burger (Arvada), with Jack-cheddar cheese, roasted veggies and a beef patty wrapped in a tortilla and fried, then topped with green chile, sour cream and pico de gallo” (Calhoun 2011a). According to Mike Muldoon, a brand president for AmRest (the parent company of these Applebee’s), “The ‘Colorado Burger’ is Applebee’s first state burger, and it’s unique in that Coloradans created it with other Coloradans’ tastes in mind” (as cited in Calhoun para. 5).

To unveil the new burgers AmRest used a “food truck” (Calhoun 2011b). In part this shows Applebee’s was also responding to the pressures of the food truck movement, along with the changes to fast-casual dining and their more direct competitors. According to Hudson Riehle of the National Restaurant Association during this time period “the majority of restaurant industry sales growth has come from what the industry calls ‘off-premises occasions’—that is, takeout, delivery,

drive through, curbside and now mobile. There's really no more convenient solution from a consumer perspective than having the restaurant literally come to you" (as cited in Beato 2012 p. 3). The food truck fits right into the ability to bring the food to its customers and their neighborhoods.

At the event in Colorado specifically Applebee's Neighborhood Eats Truck was the medium from which they could market their "gourmet" and yet local/neighborhood inspired changes to the aesthetic and brand of Applebee's. As Dennis Suh, operations director of Mobi Munch, company from Southern California that leases and sells "custom-configured food trucks," states, "Food trucks are like having a roaming billboard in whatever city you're in" (as cited in Beato 2012 p. 2). As Beato states, corporations are starting to understand that "these aren't merely billboards but highly interactive ones, dispensing comestibles, aggregating customers and enlisting target audiences in their sales pitches" (p. 2). Applebee's intent for the Neighborhood Eats Truck was to fit into these markets and co-opt the values of those original food truckers, like those along the Miracle Mile. To show their skills the mobile kitchen they built was wrapped in green vinyl with light grey sketch-like drawings filling the background. Some of the sketches were of an apple, football helmet, to-go fast food cup with straw, and a globe (Calhoun 2011b). In the middle of the truck was the logo of a signpost, the post being a fork that was stuck into a pavement of a road. The sign read "Neighborhood Eats." The truck had a full kitchen and was being run by Applebee's executive chef Shannon Johnson (Calhoun). His ethos as an executive chef was an intentional appeal that tried to

equate him with the same kind of independent character like Choi and many others within the food truck movement who were educated and/or very skilled chefs. His ethos was there to help the audience trust the food Applebee's produced on their mobile medium was of the same character and that the company held the same values as the food truckers.

However, the execution of the truck and perhaps the fact that an industrial food corporation was attempting a gourmet food truck received large amounts of criticism. The Huffington Post (2011) and Bon Appétit (2011) both ran similar articles and critiques of the Applebee's mobile food medium when it premiered at the "Burger Contest" in Colorado. The Huffington Post titled their article *Applebee's Food Truck Kills Mobile Dining's street Cred for Good* and Bon Appétit titled their article *Applebee's Food Truck Death Knell of Once-Fun Trend*. According to Kim Conte (2011) at the blog, *The Stir*, the criticisms stem

from the fact that some very vocal foodies believe food trucks should be owned by mom-and-pop type establishments that serve up authentic, one-of-a-kind food items—not by a national restaurant chain. In other words, the entry of Applebee's into the food truck craze signals that perhaps the trend is on its way out (para. 1).

For television shows, the phrase "jump the shark" often means that the show has past its realm of believability. The writers, directors, or producers added some element into the show, often as means of responding to bad rating, that goes too far astray from its original or more characteristic qualities. From that point on, all of its plotlines and characters are judged within this frame of being unbelievable and fake. In something similar, corporate mobile kitchens are viewed as something

cognitively disparate from its “original intent.” For example, it is unbelievable to many that these giant food corporations can enter into the habits of actions and frame of mind of a mom-and-pop type establishment. As Greg Beato (2012) states, “To die-hard fans, ‘corporate food truck’ may be an oxymoron along the lines of ‘caffeine-free energy drink’ or ‘eco-friendly SUV.’ Food trucks are in vogue precisely *because* they are an antidote to corporate chains, with their dull, processed and, more often than not, unhealthy eats” (p. 2).

Within these criticisms lies a similar Platonic refrain--that they are using strategies of pastry baking in order to sell something unhealthy back to the people as if it were new and beneficial for the sake of power and profit. Critics claim that first and foremost, Applebee’s rhetorical strategy is criticized in part because of its corporate profit motive and its perceived loyalties to its stockholders and not its customer’s long-term well-being. Josh Hiller, co-owner of the of Road Stoves, which “leases and promotes custom-equipped trucks to Kogi and a dozen others,” commented that early on in the food truck movement large amounts of people, which includes many corporate food brick-and-mortars, started looking to start up their own Choi-style mobile food mediums (as cited in Del Barco 2011 para. 13). Hiller states, “We’ve had all the calls: ‘We want to do Korean Mexican fusion, just like Kogi” (para. 11). However, he feels that the food truck movement distrusts this motive to simply copy or mimic. He states, “You don’t just knock someone off” but as in this case “the cat’s out of the bag, and people with trucks just want to make a buck. People sort of got in like the gold rush and a lot will fall by the wayside” (para.



11). Hiller critiques the idea of “corporate fast food chains like Jack in the Box and Domino's” intention for moving in on the mobile food medium movement as a means of familiarizing themselves with food trucker audiences. Hiller commented, “some fear the underground spirit of the gourmet trucks is being co-opted” (para. 13).

As identified by Haltiwanger, Jarmin, and Krizan (2009) corporate food companies fit into the category of Big Box Store which are often comprised of “a large structure with a substantial number of employees, offers either a broad spectrum of goods or great depth within a specialized line of goods, and is (usually) operated by a nationwide chain that earns very high revenue levels” (p. 7). These corporations have access to resources and a general ability to quickly co-opt trends they see as valuable. However, not every trend they glom onto is successful. As Raul Ortega, owner of Mariscos Jalisco food truck, states, “They [new mobile kitchen owners] don't understand this kind of business. It takes a lot, a lot of work. A lot of patience, too” (as cited in Del Barco 2011 para. 18). In other words, many in the community of food truckers and outside of the community believe Applebee's, like other corporate brick-and-mortar restaurants, do not have the desired mindset to wait on an idea to mature but will mine whatever they can and get out when things start going downhill. This belief is anchored in the perception that at the end of each fiscal quarter the bottom line of the business needs to show growth—leaving little room for patience to find the right unique location, develop new and interesting culinary flavors, or create large-scale social change. For them, to make the most

money and without having to change the corporate model, the mobile food mediums tend to mimic the ethics, values, and style of food trucks like Roy Choi's.

But as the critique reveals, Applebee's mobile medium did not really do as Choi and others did. Instead of hitting the streets of Denver, Colorado or its surrounding towns, the mobile medium was only going to be used for specific events, meaning that they were not going to be hanging out with the locals on the street corner or in some parking lot on a Tuesday night (Calhoun 2011b). This limited their connection and capacity to learn from (and also educate) the audience as means of finding what was really desired and also beneficial to the community. Applebee's was guessing at the desires and wants of the audience. Only showing up for the large events separated them from their intention of creating a "neighborhood" or community feel with their mobile medium.

Applebee's use of the mobile food medium can thus be critiqued for its use of flattery as a means of instant gratification and pleasure. Pleasure is a cheap but effective way to influence the audience--particularly if you can clothe it in a cloak of morality (Herrick 2013). It works in a way that offers the public a cheap and quick way to feel that they are helping to alter problems within their community and, at the same time, indulge in unhealthy food. The use of the mobile food medium allows the corporate food industry a rhetorical outlet to educate the public according to their ideals of style, ethics, and taste. If the corporate food industry is able to capture the audience's attention, they can use it to further dictate what communities need and should eat. At the end of the day, they are looking at the food truck simply as

one more medium by which to deliver a mass-market product tailored to gratify the immediate desires of a mass audience, irrespective of whether or not their product or their message is beneficial to the community.

### **The Character of the Sophists**

When Plato criticized rhetoric, he also criticized the class of teachers, intellectuals, and practitioners who were most responsible for the rise of rhetoric in classical Greece—the Sophists. The Sophists arose in the fifth century BCE in Classical Greece when political conditions brought about the need and opportunity for citizens to acquire the skills to participate in the new democratic empire. In providing education in *logos* (meaning reason, argument, and critical thinking) for a fee, the Sophists filled a need for citizens to be educated in the new form of power in a democratic political culture. Because they were often foreigners to the cities, like Athens, in which they lived and taught—the original Sophists being itinerant teachers from all over Greece—they did not seek political power because they were not citizens. Rather, they were primarily entrepreneurs who made a living boasting that they could turn the weaker argument into the stronger. For an aristocratic political conservative like Plato, however, this boast was empty. He claimed that this class of “itinerant teachers, their claims as intellectuals, and their impact on those they instruct” was directly linked to “mundane tasks rather than focusing on the principal task befitting all free persons, the improvement of the soul” (Poulakos 2008 p. 89-91). To turn the weaker argument into the stronger is actually to turn the worse argument into the better and thereby deceive the people.

In the analogy used in this chapter, the food trucker who rolls into town is a kind of “Sophist” susceptible to a similar critique—especially that that food trucker is an employee for a giant multinational corporation interested in turning margaritas and cheese fries into a virtue. However, the analogy is applicable in a more positive light as well. According to Poulakos (2008), for instance, the Sophists were in fact a class of creative artists whose boast to make the weaker argument the stronger was actually a praise of experimental possibility and social mobility. For Poulakos, by their claim they simply meant that what is “weaker” (*to hetton*) referred “to that argument or position which commands less power because the majority shuns it or is not persuaded by it,” and “stronger” (*to kreitton*) referred “to that argument or position which is dominant because the majority has found it more persuasive than other alternatives.” From such a perspective, the function of sophistical rhetoric is to “reverse in some measure the established hierarchy of things” by employing “the resources of language and its surrounding circumstances to move what is regarded as weaker to a position of strength” (p. 65). This said nothing about the morality of the position. It was simply a praise of being able to look at things from a new and different perspective.

Although there are limits to this comparison, it can be argued that looking at someone like Choi through the lens of sophistical rhetoric as defined by Poulakos brings out important possibilities of the food truck that can be motivational for others who wish to use it for extra-economic ends. In this first case, the Sophistical comparison brings out the democratic, competitive, and performative potentials of

the food truck in terms of its character. According to Poulakos (2008) the Sophists' general character can be understood as being "shaped by the logic of the circumstances, the ethic of competition, and the aesthetic of exhibition" (p. 4). In the second case, it is evident how the circumstances evoke a similar type of rhetoric focused on the three components of opportunity, playfulness, and possibility that characterize the creative, entrepreneurial, and itinerant character of many food truckers who revel in making the weaker argument the stronger.

The first thing food trucks and sophists have in common is that they both took advantage of a similar logic of circumstances that focused on the rise of the urban middle class. For example, Athens, along with many other larger city-states, was experiencing a growing middle class that was acting as a forces of change culturally and within the inter workings of the *polis*. Poulakos (2008) writes this was "a class defined by newly acquired wealth and occupying the mid-point between the land-owning nobility and the serfs" (p. 15). Athens was also shifting "from an agricultural community to a thriving commercial community resembling a cosmopolitan city" in which the "loss of political monopoly by the landed aristocracy to a new commercial group which looked favorably on the acquisition of wealth" (Simmons 1969 p. 519). Consequently, as Kenneth Burke (1969) observes, the sophists became "closely allied with the rising business class" (p. 29). Similarly, food trucks originated in an urban environment that catered to a rising middle class tired of old habits and eager for new ways of regulating their time and managing their social networks.

Secondly, the sophists were shaped by an ethic of individual competition that one can see as being rife in the individualistic food truck community. Long was the tradition of competition and athletics in ancient Greece. As Gagarin and Woodruff (2004) state, “even in the time of Homer and Hesiod the Greeks were engaging in contests in non-military settings” (p. xxviii). Edith Hamilton (1993) states provocatively, “If we had not other knowledge of what the Greeks were like, if nothing were left of Greek art and literature, the fact that they were in love with play and played magnificently would be proof enough of how they lived and how they looked at life,” nothing like the Greek games was “conceivable in Egypt or Mesopotamia,” and “the brutal, bloody Roman games had nothing to do with the spirit of play” (p. 25). The Sophists simply took this competitive spirit into the rhetorical sphere. Poulakos (2008) claims:

It is skill in language that determines the rhetorical strength or weakness in a specific game. But within the broader game of language, there are no winners or losers—only players; therefore, it does not matter whether an argument is judged stronger or weaker. What does matter is the continuation of the game (p. 68).

When Gorgias or Protagoras wowed a crowd in the Assembly or in court, it drew great attention to what the sophists had to offer because it was as in the framework of competition. Similarly, food truck chefs like Choi make their names only by achieving victory in the highly competitive environment of food trucks in which many of them are known by name and style and personality.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the aesthetic of exhibition was a true marker of the sophistical character that carries over into the food truck

environment. The fact that they were from the outside gave the sophists a unique characteristic of loving performance and exhibition. The sophists were not “boardroom” executives. They were street performers who could stand before crowds and woo them into an almost magical trance (Herrick 2013). In order to give an engaging performance, the Sophists drew heavily from the drama of the theater and used the mediums oration and writing to advocate the power of words. It was the sophists’ way of using what the Greeks already loved and understood to their advantage. Poulakos (2008) notes that words for the sophists “are not only instruments of representation or vehicles of meaning but also actions performed on stages of their own making” (p. 39). In other words, just calling forth a rhetorical speech in the middle of a street could turn that space into a stage for the words of orator to perform upon. Poulakos goes on to state, “The listeners of the rhetorical event saw the orator display his words in full public view, conjuring up linguistic images that created virtual experiences, in effect focusing their sight onto his discourse and away from the discourses of others” (p. 42). One can see how this ability to create one’s own stage and to make a performance that draws a crowd was instrumental to someone like Choi, whose personality and rhetorical character was very much a part of his success.

If one turns from their circumstances to their rhetoric, one can see that the Sophists developed a form of discourse that emphasized the virtues of what Poulakos (2008) calls opportunity, playfulness, and possibility. For Poulakos, *opportunity* signifies a *kairotic* attitude that attends to situations as potentially

unique and unrepeatable and deserving of a creative and even unprecedented response. In such situations, “what is generally regarded as appropriate or inappropriate has no necessary bearing on a discourse uttered in a specific temporal, occasional, or situational context” (2008 p. 62). Understood as an attitude, opportunity recognizes contingency as a *real* component of the world rather than an illusion as well as the freedom to violate standards of the appropriate when the right time (*kairos*) arises. Opportunity as a rhetorical quality is thus tied to the “sophists’ itinerant predicament did not permit them to teach rhetorics born out of and tied to local traditions” (p. 18). Poulakos goes on to comment, “Faithful to no singular perspective, loyal to no given institution, and committed to no specific political system, they can be said to have lived and worked more according to the circumstances they encountered and less according to established custom or principle” (p. 25). In other words, they had to take what they learned elsewhere and discover on the fly what worked for an audience of Athenians and a growing group of foreigners.<sup>61</sup> This was a sense of opportunity their view of rhetoric allowed for them to move away from the common appeals and move into more unique form of persuasion and guide their audience to the best means of communication in a relative context and occasion.

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<sup>61</sup> The itinerant sophists were in the process of becoming, in part, Athenian by molding themselves to Athenian ways but also having to adapt or shun what they had learned prior. Poulakos (2008) states, “Clearly, the sophists’ geographical and intellectual itinerary suggests that they often thought both about where they were and where they were not, who they were and who they were not, which doctrines were dominant in the stations of their trails and which had yet to be expressed” (p. 25). They were constantly adapting to their surroundings.



With the acceptance of contingency comes a *playful* approach to adapting fluidly to changing circumstances. As embodied in the Sophistic claim to make the weaker argument the stronger, playfulness means to accept that “no argument or position, no matter how entrenched, can dominate the mental world of an audience once and for all” (Poulakos 2008 p. 67). In other words, because practical knowledge is always undergoing reconstruction in a contingent world, one must learn how to play with available resources in order to exploit unique opportunities. To be playful meant to have a willingness to abandon hierarchies, to mix things together, challenge the status quo, and enjoy the process. In the concept of play, there is not a requirement to reach any particular end. It is free to continually reinvent itself.

The notions of opportunity and playfulness naturally culminate in the attitude that most sums up the Sophistical movement—that of *possibility*. Poulakos (2008) contrasts the notion of possibility with that of *actuality*, as represented by Aristotle, and *ideality*, as represented by Plato. In actuality, emphasis gets placed on “what is believed to be known and understood about reality” such that future actions are “construed as natural extensions of necessary implications of the way things are” (p. 68). This does not mean that a rhetoric grounded in such an attitude simply argues for the status quo. Rather, as with Aristotle, it views future possibilities as actualizations of present potentialities and views current problems as dysfunctions or aberrations from the normal progression of affairs. By contrast, the attitude of ideality looks toward a “world that can never be made actual” but

whose impossible realization is “construed as worthy of endless pursuit” (p. 68). Whereas actuality grounds itself in extension of and accommodation to known facts, ideality freely engages in utopian projection based on the nobility of universal values.

If ideality assumes an already perfected universe we hope to enter and are dutifully bound to worship while actuality “assumes a rational universe...whose structure and causes man needs to know and understand,” then possibility “assumes an incomplete universe, a universe that man must bring closer to completion” (Poulakos 1984 p. 223). The attitude of possibility thus assumes a universe in the making that may alter depending on choices made in moments of transition. This embrace of the contingency of nature and the constitutive power of human choice allows the attitude of possibility to respect the lessons of the past and express desire for the future without beyond bound to either. The attitude of possibility therefore “posits that the world need not be inhabited only by pedants and dreamers” (Poulakos 2008 p. 69). Therefore there exists a third way of the experimentalist with the creative confidence to step forward into the unknown.

### **Choi’s Sophistical Character**

Like the sophists, Chef Roy Choi does not see the Kogi BBQ Truck or himself in a Platonic light—that is, as a means to flatter and gratify the masses for profit and power. For example, he exhibits goodwill towards his audience by teaching them to make educated food choices and judgments on matters of style. Rather than exploit the short-term desires of the audience like the corporate mobile food medium, he

wants to correct the situations through a more true understanding of the complex issues found in the foodscape (Choi 2013). Choi's desire to aid in solving social problems is closely linked to his hometown, his immigrant identity, and the cultural drama of the Los Angeles in which he grew up. His story resonates with his audience in a way that goes beyond short-term pleasure and flattery. As Shouse (2011) puts it, "His story has been told a thousand times by a thousand people" (p. 18). This not to say that he is the only ambassador or advocate of the food truck movement (Shouse 2011; Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013). But his story and sophistic character is anecdotally representative of many other food trucker's stories and involvement in the movement.

One of the most immediately sophisticated characteristics of Choi's personality is his "itinerant" character that always made him something of a wanderer and outsider to mainstream culture. Roy was born in South Korea but raised in Los Angeles California in the 1970s. From the very early days of his life, he remembers how his Korean parents did not "baby the baby and there was no such thing as 'baby food'" (Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013 p. 10). With this cultural practice he claims his parents started to expose his malleable palate to the whole kitchen worth of taste experience and memory. He recounts times when there was straight "feedings from the pan" or right out of the hands of his parents. They were, in fact, encouraging him to "try this, taste this, eat that" (p. 10). This attitude of learning, educating about, and fostering positive relationships around food would be a virtue that would shape Choi in his adulthood.

All of Choi's early learning and positive reinforcement of his food worldview would be challenged when he left the safety of his parent home and into the public school system. He quickly learned he was different and an outsider compared to the other kids in school (Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013). In this way he had the sophistic characteristic of being an itinerant. In an interview in 2014 Roy stated, he had "insecurities about growing up as a Korean kid" and "feelings of worthlessness" stemming from "the pressure from the community and never feeling like I measured up" (Kang 2014 para 6). That outsidership did not break Roy, rather it provided him, like it did with the sophist, a unique experience that would inspire creativity and exploration. Like any Sophist, he was able to take his outsider status and use it for the spirit of *dissoi logoi*—that sense that there are always two sides to every argument, and that sometimes the best argument is to come up with a third.

Roughly three miles from the Miracle Mile, heavily steeped in LA car culture, Choi grew up in as diversified of a place as you could get almost anywhere in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. The area of Los Angeles where Choi grew up was referred to as K-Town or Koreatown for its large South Korean expat community living in a three-square-mile of urban Los Angeles. His parents emigrated from South Korea in 1972 following Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 where people from all over the world, particularly those coming from the Asian continent and islands could more easily gain access and citizenship in the United States (Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013; Chin 1996). Los Angeles and the rest of west coast of California were immediately infused with radically different looking

people, with different worldviews and habits, and, most importantly, different foodways. This meant great things for the availability of unique foodstuff to grow up around. Choi would take advantage of expanding his network of people, places, tastes, and flavors while the rest of the world United States glanced over the food of Choi's Korean community (Bourdain 2013). He understood what it meant to have a foodscape that offered hand crafted unique food that had history and local or indigenous tradition.

By 1992, when Choi was a young man, K-Town would be within the epicenter of civil unrest. After the acquittal of five white police officers responsible for the beating of a black-unarmed-male named Rodney King, riots broke out all over the city. The public was in shock over the perception of institutional racism by the LAPD and the court system in charge of policing the police. This was followed by an outpouring of civil protests and eventually rioting in the streets of Los Angeles.

Among the many communities affected by the civil unrest and rioting was the Korean community. As noted in Kang's (2014) article, Choi believes Korean American culture living around in K-Town was:

Built around clear divisions in wealth and status. For the middle-class immigrants who came to Los Angeles in the '60s and '70s, the dream was not to build Koreatown into a vibrant, livable neighborhood, but to move as quickly as possible to the white suburbs, away from the immigrant mob (para. 7).

When the mobs started showing up at the doorstep, Choi told Anthony Bourdain (2013), his parents and many of his other Korean neighbors did not leave. Instead, they stayed, put their lives on the line, and guarded the only Korean market in town

with shotguns and any other weapons they could get their hands on. Choi talks about this moment with pride and expresses the impact the values and action of unity and togetherness could produce positive results in the face of danger. In their struggle to protect their lives and livelihoods they made the choice to contact the police for protection. It seemed a sensible thing for the city to send a few officers, even during a full-blown riot, to help look after the one Korean market and the few other important establishments for the Korean community. But the calls were ignored, leaving Koreatown to experience its share of looting and burning, which including the eventual loss of the market. The Koreans in the community watched on television or read in the papers the next day that a large unit of police lined up with full swat gear to protecting high-end and posh clothing and jewelry businesses along famed Rodeo Drive (Bourdain). In other words, Choi at a formative age saw first hand the sweeping devastation of a divided community, but also the power of community stick together to protect itself against threats and then rebuild itself. This was the power of rhetoric in action.

The rebuilding of Koreatown ultimately made it the home to the largest South Korean population outside of its national border. More importantly, it was the foodscape on which Choi based his early years of culinary training. Los Angeles is itself a fusion of culinary traditions that operate as a tasting-sampler of the best the world has to offer. Bourdain (2013) on a trip to Los Angeles stated, “LA is Mexican, Central American, Pilipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Samoan, Bangladesian.” In other words, the cuisine represents a complex and diverse set of old and foreign cuisines

inserted into a relatively progressive community of transplants from across the country. Choi has deeply embraced his own culinary heritage and the diversity of the local foodscape, which happened to include a deep love for the taco truck (Bourdain).

However, to stand out in such a complex foodscape, there was a need for an aesthetic of exhibition. Choi's love for the food and foodway of his hometown would provide a career path, even at the dismay of his parents, who would have preferred him to be a lawyer or doctor (Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013). After high school, Choi would attend college completing his four-year degree and continuing onto law school, but left after one year to pursue other opportunities to make money and live more independently. For him, this meant taking a three thousand mile journey to Hyde Park New York and the Culinary Institute of America (C.I.A.), where he would learn the culinary arts that would allow him to showcase an aesthetic of exhibition in both his food and personal style. As Kathleen M. German (2011) states:

As in language, the use of this set of culinary symbols establishes the 'speaker' in relationship to the subject by way of the action indicated. Thus the articulation of recipes becomes much more than a mundane routine. It is invested with significance providing a measure whereby one can evaluate one's place in the world. As a result, their place in the story of one's life becomes pivotal (p. 141).

Having the skills to cook well and for diverse audiences provided Choi the base skillset to perform as a chef. It would also inform his oratory skills through his grasp of the culinary language. From there, he could add onto his skills a flair that further separated him from other traditional mobile vendors and brick-and-mortars.

He would also learn that in order stand out in a place like Los Angeles, one would have to compete for the attention of people. Every day is a day to win people over and convince them they can change the way they eat or think about food in general. Choi conveys his struggles and success as a sign of a changing culinary prospect on who gets into the profession and what happens behind the scenes. Twenty years ago his tattoos and Korean heritage may have limited his channels to large public audiences. But in the current foodscape, Choi (2015) celebrates his own outsidership stating, “the media wants to portray me as a gangster sometimes. lol. because I wear a fitted or smoke weed or wear j’s. fucking stereotypes.” In short, it was okay, and encouraged, to be real or everyday as possible because, as Bourdain helped do in 2001 with his book *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly*, the kitchen and its crew were never that elite and proper to begin with. If we take George Orwell’s account of the kitchens in Paris during the 1930s, in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, those kitchens looked nothing like an idealized place of high art and pristine hygiene, but rather a hotter-than-hell basement full of grumpy, dirty, and overworked men. In both cases, they resembled what Anthony Bourdain called a crew of pirates, load up with the drugs, booze and ready to steal anything that was not nailed down and very little like the as elite, clean, and respectable chefs and crews in those historic French kitchens.

Considering that the food truck is a very visible and open medium, chefs develop a different relationship with their customers than those at a traditional brick-and-mortar restaurant. On a food truck there are very few places to hide and,



therefore, the chef is constantly performing. The performance, which will be discussed in more detail, is also one that is benefited by having the persona of the “everyman.” For instance, Choi recounts times when, after college, he descended into habits of drugs, gambling, and general self-destruction. Stints with recovery early on failed and he would eventually lose his job and be forced to move back home. The haze of the experience would continue on for a while longer until Emeril Lagasse, in the moments between waking up and dreaming, basically told him to “wake up and get your shit together” (Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013 p. 184). Choi states, “That was it. I made up my mind. I was done with the anger, the shame, the mistakes, the self-pity, the pain. For real this time, I was done. I peeled myself off the couch. Got up, went to the bathroom, and took a hard look at myself. You fucking low-life SOB. Get your shit together. Get your shit together” (p. 185). It is this type of story that provides a street ethos and credibility that sets him apart from chefs from Applebee’s. In this aesthetic exhibition, Choi can be a “bluntly honest quick-talker who drops f-bombs as often as he stamps out his cigarettes,” moves “with a saggy-pants swagger that goes hand in hand with his cooks calling him ‘Papi,’” and he can even expose the tattoo on his forearm of foods like green beans and mushrooms or the one that “reads ‘Kogi Por Vida” (Shouse 2011 p. 18). In other words, the ethos of the French Chef still needs to be part of the image but it cannot be the only image the audience notices. So Choi lets his everyman flag fly but he also backs it up with education and experience.

Although Choi is clearly not a Sophist in terms of teaching the art of public speaking, he shares with the Sophists certain characteristics that help us set him apart from the field. Like them, he is a habitual outsider who nonetheless works on the inside. He is the embodiment of an itinerant, traveling from place to place and picking up skills as he goes while interacting with the public and determining their needs while identifying their challenges. Choi is able to make use of the altering urban economy and cater to a rising middle class that supports and appreciates his experimentalism and his desire to challenge the status quo and make the weaker argument (or in this case the taco) the stronger. Like the Sophists, he thrives in a competitive environment in which he can be challenged and overcome obstacles not through exerting money or power but by sheer creativity and strength of will. And he is as much a performer as any Sophist, drawing on his own life experience and performing on stage wherever he goes.

### **Choi's Use of Sophistical Rhetoric**

Not only does Choi have a sophistic character but he also uses sophistic methods of opportunity, playfulness, and possibility in his speech and his action to further issues that deal with public concerns and not just short-term pleasure. He is rhetorically responding to public concerns such as hunger and the role the chef for communities in need. Roy has a history that demonstrates that he has seen this rhetoric and its contributions to the health and wellbeing of a community during times of crisis; recounting the need of community bond during and after the 1992 riots in Los Angeles or dealing with city government officials in Wilshire District and

members of the Miracle Mile during the 2011 crackdown on mobile vending (Bourdain 2013). His appearance at the MAP3 Conference had to do more than selling Korean tacos out of a truck. To get to that stage Choi had to find the rhetorical center between a position of staying with the same old patterns (the gourmet) and the position that street food is elite food. To argue his points, Choi had to do a lot of ground work to alter the logic of the foodscape, specifically about their views of the food produced and sold from inside mobile food mediums, such as taco trucks, grease truck, or roach coach.

In early 2008 Choi had a meeting in Koreatown with friend Mark Manguera that would end up changing the direction of his life for the next seven years and the foodscape of not just Los Angeles but nationally and internationally. Mark had seen something in circumstance between the downturn/recession economy, chefs working with new combinations of flavors served in different ways, and a desire for better and more diverse food. The economy had made available mobile kitchens, which limited the risk of loss in starting up a brick-and-mortar restaurant. During the meeting the two discussed and, eventually agreed, to give Choi a chance to play, experiment, and create a new menu of items that could communicate lived experience and creative opportunity.

Similar to what the sophist did with words, Choi first reinvented the idea of what food could and should be when produced on a mobile medium and then took his new art on the road to educate and inform the public. The food form that inspired Choi was the taco. But his taco would be done with a twist that directly

reflects the cuisine of Los Angeles and Choi himself. We can see this symbolically in that the taco was a great starting place for a revolutionary idea due to its wide audience appeal and malleability to different culinary styles; basically anything can go into a tortilla and be called a taco (Arellano 2012; Phicher 2012). For Choi the symbolic nature of the taco packed a powerful punch. He states his taco is:

Los Angeles on a plate. Maybe not everyone's L.A., but it was mine. It was Koreatown to Melrose to Alvarado to Venice to Crenshaw crumpled into one flavor and bundled up like a gift. The elements looked like city blocks. The flavor tasted like the streets. And the look said home (Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013 p. 296).

In the quote he poetically uses the theme of the city and its streets as home. In an article by Zach Behrens (2008) Choi is quoted explaining further this idea of the taco representing the street as home:

We're Korean, but we're American and we grew up in LA. It's not a stigma food, it's a representation of who we are...Everything you get in that taco is what we live in LA. It's the 720 bus on Wilshire, it's the 3rd street Juanita's Tacos, the Korean supermarket and all those things that we live everyday in one bite. That was our goal. To take everything about LA and put it into one bite... It's Mexican, it's Korean, it's organic, it's California, it's farmer's market, it's drunk people after midnight (para. 3).

In other words, it is fusion cuisine that blends Choi's Korean cuisine and Los Angeles Mexican street food.

For many critics, what Choi did with the taco, and with the larger ethos of street cuisine, was set up against a backdrop of opposition in the form of the culinary elite and their standards of taste and style. Having grown up eating the street food of Los Angeles and having a culinary degree allowed Choi to produce his own form of education by *dissoi logoi*. In other words, he had a method of testing

arguments in favor of constructing a new street food culture and the arguments in favor for making sure the gourmet elite standard stayed in its more aristocratic corner of the United States foodscape.

Located in the Hudson Valley, Choi attended the Culinary Institute of America, also referred to as the C.I.A, receiving elite level training in a variety of culinary techniques and traditions (Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013). But most importantly, he was drilled on techniques and methods established during the French culinary revolution and its haute cuisine (Trubek 2000). This idea of the trained chef is an important contributor to the ethos of the food truck. Foodies advocate the use of training and discipline in the culinary arts. Their thinking is that the overall quality or standard of taste is, in part, dependant of the ability to use a set of informed skills. Flavor and visual beauty in cooking are products of a type of invention or pondering on the subject, maybe doing some research but often it comes down to the execution and execution requires training and practice. Both Myrick (2012) and Weber's (2012) advocate, in their "How To" styled books, that new food truck owners take the advice from Roy and the foodie community that execution is key.

The resume Choi built before leaving school is impressive. The training at the C.I.A would prove Roy had a talent for the art of cooking, but an apprenticeship with award-winning restaurants like Le Bernardin in New York City put the cherry on top. Combine that with his parent's culinary training as a youth in Korea and learning that the tastes and standard of the audience are important gave him a

foundational ethos based on the old guard's standards of excellence and the experiences of an outsider to that regime of thought (Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013 p. 232). The arrogant attitude he got from the early success would supposedly go away, but when Choi jumped into a mobile kitchen, his ethos followed.

In 1998 Roy left the Northeast and headed home to California (Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013). He would land work in a few French style kitchens, cooking food for the country club-type crowds—not the most exciting of work for a young chef with ideas needing to be expressed. But the constraints of the situation once again reminded him of the audience and their values when it comes to their food. So rather than explore his own cooking, which would most likely lead to his removal from the position, he pushed himself to learn and master the other elements of running a kitchen and a restaurant; making sure hundreds of plates went out on time and properly garnished, how to handle getting into the weeds and working himself and his crew out of it, and most importantly how to earn respect. After a pretty explosive dinner service and a confrontation with an employee, Roy stated:

What knocked the wind out of me were his tears and honesty. All the that time, I thought being a chef meant the white apron, the soigné sauce and spoon, putting what I thought was my Midas touch on dishes before they were sent out...Boy, I was I wrong...it wasn't pot throwing and the bullying that made a chef a chef...Respect came from working hard, supporting your crew, showing love and leadership, and having their backs (Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013 p. 233-234).

With lessons in hand, Roy was set to move on to the next challenge of learning more and eventually creating a menu of his own that people enjoyed.

By 2001 Roy had a successful stint as head chef of a sleepy resort town country club restaurant to his name, but his next job would see him put the whole package together into a successful venture and then take him to Japan to learn the art of working in small spaces. Choi had a long look at what the kitchen could look like outside the French influence. He talks specifically about his experiences of working briefly as a cook at the restaurant Kaishoko Michiba, an original masterchef, located in the Ginza district (Choi, Nguyen, & Phan 2013). He states that working in the kitchen of Master Michiba was eye-opening to a different way of thinking about the organization and roles within a kitchen. Choi understood:

In theory, the kitchen had a brigade system similar to that of Le Bernardin and other French kitchens, where each cook had his own place in the hierarchy. But the Japanese way is teamwork over the self. So, regardless of assigned stations of official title, we all worked together and everything blended into one harmonious entity” (p. 244).

In other words, in Master Michiba’s kitchen, Roy saw a set of skill and method of discipline needed to work in a cramped space, and it inspired him. It was a style of teamwork that could make a little space into an efficient food-producing machine. This style of kitchen operation will later frame the interworking or mobile kitchen. The space of the truck’s kitchen is incredibly limiting, even for someone who was trained to work in kitchens. Pham, Shen, and Phillips (2014) state:

If you haven’t stepped foot onto a food cart yet, you should make a point to do so. You won’t get a sense of how amazing it is for chefs to cook in such a small space and sometimes with less equipment than the average household until you’re standing inside one. Often, there are no tables at stops and you need to adapt your food to make it easy for customers to while standing. Creativity is bred out of necessity. From this it’s easy to see why fusing two ethnic cuisines (such as putting variations of delicious fillings in a burrito or taco, for example) is only logical (p. 132).

Entirely new techniques had to be discovered and built from the ground floor, starting with new ways to move one's feet in order to get around in something the size of a suburban walk-in closet. John T. Edge (2012) visited Roy Choi in LA while researching his book on food truck cookbook. In his account of the experience states:

Since the first Kogi truck hit the streets in late 2008 selling *kalbi* tacos to late-night club goers, a devotion to the democracy of street life has informed the Kogi approach. 'I cook food for the guy fixing your house, the guy in the tow truck,' Roy told me. 'I'm feeding everybody, from Nancy Silverton to nine-year old girls and five-year-old boys' (p. 212).

It is this need and desire to invent new techniques for a new environment, to teach others those techniques and to challenge existing hierarchy.

It was not until the MAP3 conference in 2013, however, that Choi prominently displayed his Sophistical rhetoric on a formal public stage. The MAP conference is a "not-for-profit organization that works to expand knowledge of food to make every meal a better meal; not just at restaurants, but every meal cooked and served" (MAP 2015). Over the past three conferences, they have set out to further discourse through having speaker provided perspectives topics that range from the "Psychology of a Meal and How to Make a Meal Memorable" to "Zero Foodprint" and even "Between Nature and Culture: Appetite as a Guide" (MAP). As the MAP site states in the abstract for the speech, it was a "call on chefs to use their skills and influence to help those their restaurants typically don't reach" (para. 1).

During his public speech, Choi took the stage, advocating to the chefs and other agents in the audience within the foodscape that they need to work "to expand



knowledge of food to make every meal a better meal; not just at restaurants, but every meal cooked and served” (MAP 2015). Roy’s talk at the conference was “A Gateway to Feed Hunger: The Promise of Street Food.” In his speech, Choi asked the following question to the chefs and the larger food industry representative who were present: “What if every high caliber chef, all of us in here, told our investors as we’re building restaurants...for every fancy restaurant we build, it would be a requirement to build a restaurant in the hood as well?” But he knew the response already: “We [chefs] lie to ourselves that food is accessible to everyone. It’s not true, you guys” (Choi 2013). He goes on “It’s a magical magical place where I come from. But I also come from this Los Angeles...where there is over five million who are hungry and close to starving. In the area I represent, South Central Los Angeles, 44% of the children, that is 65,000 children, live in poverty” (Choi). To many, these statements could be heard as confrontational by going against the *to prepon*, general agreement, particularly when dealing with an audience filled with elite culinary chefs and others tied intimately with all aspects of food and the foodscape. They have been trained to serve a specific clientele with a specific set of standards and Choi is asking them to break with tradition because the need is so great and they have the technology to implement these changes.

But to many in the audience that night, Choi’s speech was powerful. Schonberger (2013) went so far to state, “It seemed that one of the most poignant moments of the festival was a rousing speech from Roy Choi about hunger and malnutrition in South Central L.A.” (para. 1). In other words, his message seemed to

resonate in a way that in the early 2000s the message would have been received as a boldfaced attack on the culinary elite rather than a needed corrective.

The needed corrective for Choi is a closed gap between the ideals of feeding people by the culinary elite and the pragmatic application of those ideals. Choi specifically points to food deserts as a location of need. Food deserts are defined as urban and suburban geographical locations with scarce access to fresh and diverse produce, fish, and meat (Choi 2013). The lack of access could be due to a variety of reasons, such as lack of transportation on the individual's part or the unwillingness for grocery and other food establishments to enter into these areas. Choi sees the culinary elite as having a privileged position to alter the situation in drastic ways.

The two major contingent issues to closing the food gap in areas of need like Los Angeles, according to Choi (2013), are first, there are “no chef-driven restaurants” located in these areas and second fast food chains, gas stations, and liquor stores are the primary institutions that fill the gap currently. He goes on to praise the fast food establishments, something that would be considered ironic to a crowd of elite chefs and others in the culinary world, by stating, “They got the 'guts' to go in” (Choi). Choi metaphorically turns the perceived *aprepes*, the inappropriateness, of the fast food chains willingness to prey on the weakened economic class into a more courageous act by their willing to aid in the problem of hunger. The argument stands that, in these food deserts, fast food restaurants, for better or worse, are the most visible and functional mediums for feeding people and providing a service to the community. Therefore, in the hood, these fast food and

other convenient-style food establishments set the common agreement on what tastes good and how much it should cost.

To confront the exigence of hunger in Los Angeles, Choi and the students at Jefferson High in Los Angeles created 3 Worlds Café. The students co-operate this brick-and-mortar establishment in a low-income area and in what can be classified as a food desert. He states, "It's not a restaurant with marcona almonds and sea urchin and the things that we're able to access. But it's a start" (Choi). The hope is to use what the children and residents are already eating and start building from there. Find a way to bring in the flavors of highly processed, sugary, and salty into the fold of the "gourmet" and "elite culinary" standards and methods not the other way around.<sup>62</sup> In other words, the taste of the food should be more audience-minded and that meant leaving some of their more elite gourmet and traditional values behind.

The 3 World's Café project is also representative of Choi's playfulness in rhetoric. The store was rhetorical in that it acted a symbol of change by "serving fresh fruits and smoothies next to liquor stores and fast food" (Choi 2013). As noted earlier play, in the sophistic sense, is free to continually reinvent itself. In a similar fashion, Choi wants his audience to be playful by still doing the "avant-garde and fine dining," but challenges them by stating, "what if every chef also balanced that by making food more accessible? And not just feeding the hood, but also challenging

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<sup>62</sup> This is Choi's correction of Jamie Oliver's attempt in 2011 to turn around a school lunch program in Huntington, West Virginia. Choi believes the importation of culinary ideals and tastes needs to be in better proportion to the lacking voices/tastes of the community. Had Jamie Oliver joined up with Choi in 2012, after Choi made a public request to meet up with him, they could used their combined knowledge and fame to go far in rethinking and revamping how communities feed each other and themselves (Choi 2012).

fast food” (as cited in Schonberger 2013 para. 13). This is akin to taking the sophist’s speeches out from the Greek stadiums and moving them in the courtroom or Assembly.

The MAP3 conference had an audience that included celebrity chefs Rene Redzepi of the restaurant Noma in Copenhagen Denmark, Daniel Patterson of the restaurant Coi in San Francisco California, and David Chang of the restaurant Momfuko Ko in New York City. It was as if Choi was talking to Hall of Fame basketball players Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, and Earvin Magic Johnson about how they could help bring basketball to new audiences and help their communities in the process. All of the chefs mentioned are not only owners of multiple respected restaurants, but they are also award-winning chefs, respected authors, and well known television personalities. These individuals represent the best of the best of the culinary world that could compete for influence and a stronger voice within needed area with the foodscape. In Sophistical style, Choi also added the corrective that they needed to let their guard down “a little bit and stop being so fucking hoity-toity about shit” (as cited in Schonberger 2013 para. 17). With them on board and with a less “hoity-toity” attitude, Choi believes they can go into these communities and listen to the people’s likes and desires and try to create something they would love, too.

In order to do all of this, Choi turns to the aesthetic of exhibition to produce a rhetorical quality of possibility. In his speech, Choi states, “we may not be the rich people, but when a chef talks, people listen, what a chef does, people follow” (Choi

2013). He gives the example of a “chef calling a pre-shift meeting,” trying to round up line cooks and other kitchen staff, but the staff refuses to pay attention, looking at their phones and saying “naw its cool we will get to it later chef” (Choi). The response of the chef would be an emphatic, “HELL NO, hell no. A chef can command people in any circumstance,” according to Choi. With that command, Choi calls the audience to take their ability to capture the audience's attention and take your stage to streets, like with the 3 World’s Cafe. He states, “my brothers and sisters are starving out there on the street. Generation after generation, children are getting no support. Schools are being shut down, programs being cut, we are feeding them chemicals that are corrosive. You know, fuck you, world” (Choi). With that “fuck you attitude” Choi believes those in the audience can leverage their investors to make changes with how and where they built their restaurants. Choi’s call is to “just started serving food in the hood” (Choi).

In many ways, Choi’s speech at MAP3 is epideictic for its dramatic nature. Poulakos (2008) notes the rhetorical aim of most epideictic speech deal with are “issues demanding rhetorical choice, a choice, that is, between competing and conflicting discourse” (p. 42). In the speech, Choi (2013) talks about a choice he had to make when confronting these issues. He showed picture of the Kogi BBQ Truck and the audience broke out in applause. The images showed many people waiting in line for street food. The audience understood the impact of those images as being a point of struggle and overcoming the logic of the circumstance. The turnaround was not an easy but as he proves it was possible. Choi stated it was possible to:

Take all his training as a chef...and change the way I cooked...in order to get the food to them, so that they would wait in line like that I had to break the rules. I had to go against a lot of the things we believed in as chefs. And that's mixing technique with process food, mixing emulations with canned meats, mixing candy and junk food with intense purees of organic vegetables.

For Choi, it was about combining those things together in order to get something new. That "something new" was then left there for the audience to make critical judgments about their how they should continue on their own path.

### **Conclusion**

Chef Roy Choi is not unique in using this form of sophisticated style and rhetoric in combination with the new gourmet food truck. The character and rhetoric in both Ancient Greece and modern day North America is forged in the logic of circumstance, ethic of competition, and an aesthetic of exhibition. Through those factors a sophistic rhetoric builds on the concepts of opportunity, playfulness, and possibility. There are others making similar rhetorical interventions into the exigencies of their communities. They are examples of the larger sophistic movement of mobile food truckers like Matt Geller, David Weber, and Joan M. Clever.

Matt Geller is of the co-founder and CEO of the Southern California Mobile Food Vendors Association, a former restaurant owner, legal author, and new member of the board of the National Restaurant Association (Ibrahim 2011; Myrick 2015). Geller's sophistic character and sophistic rhetoric is seen in 2009-2010 through his part of putting together a "118-member association of mobile vendors in Los Angeles who lobby against cities' rules limiting food truck operations. The

association itself has helped lobby against restrictions by making use of its Twitter-mobilized fan base to participate in e-mail campaigns to legislatures” (Ibrahim 2011 p. 54). The campaign was unique and it was able to tap into the verging technology of the time. It used social media and a message of community rallying together to battle the more established institutions and their status quo views of the mobile food medium. Geller has also been active legally in the community, adding to his sophistic character. As Sax (2014) reported in the *Los Angeles Times*:

Armed with his phone, a law degree and a garage packed with boxes containing health and vehicle codes, Mr. Geller has established himself as a voice for the nation’s food truck movement. Through lawsuits and advocacy, he has written the playbook for how independent owners leverage their popularity to shape laws in their favor. That includes adhering to codes on waste water and collaborating with the city agencies that were once his adversaries (para. 2).

Geller uses the food truck as a stage to call the acts of water waste and dumping “absolutely disgusting,” along with “a state, federal and county violation” as a means advocating for more ethical practices (para. 1). His work has recently been rewarded with a seat on the National Food Truck Association board. “Six years and over 4,500 gourmet food trucks (across the United States) later, the National Food Truck Association has become a real thing” in it had a lot to do with the voice of Geller (Myrick 2015 para. 1).

Also on the board of the National Food Truck Association is David Weber. Weber from New York where he runs of the Rickshaw Dumpling Truck, is the co-founder NYC Food Truck Association and founder the NYC Food Truck Network, and lecture (Myrick 2015). Weber has been greatly involved in the development of the

food truck community through its use of Sophistical rhetorical practices. For example, “Weber and his business partner Kenny Lao initially considered the food truck ideal for testing the viability of expanding their Flatiron District dumpling establishment to other parts of the city” and thus were using the sophistic rhetorical practice of using the possibility of food truck as its appeal (Bell 2013 para. 2). But he was also very much in tune with the logic of the circumstance in that he “could sense that the regulations for street vending were incredibly outdated, and he wasn’t alone in the sentiment” and therefore “organized with other food truck entrepreneurs and the NYCFTA” (para. 2). Weber has also contributed by writing a book on running a food truck or food cart.

Joan M. Cleever is a chef, culinary student, author, attorney and owner of the Chow Train in San Antonio, TX (thechowtrain.com 2015). She is another unique sophisticated voice in the food truck community. She sees the food truck as a means for possibility. What Joan has done is “serve the hungry, food insecure and homeless residents of San Antonio, gourmet, restaurant quality and healthy food on the streets of San Antonio” (para. 1). She also uses the food truck to “educat[e] the public about the issues of hunger and homelessness” (Roaminghunger.com 2015 para. 1). That means that she understood the needs of the community before Roy Choi did and acted accordingly. She was also ahead of Weber by sending out her truck to local areas affected by natural disasters in that “in September 2012, The Chow Train traveled to La Place, LA serving the residents and first responders to Hurricane Isaac and, two months later, in November 2012, were in Brooklyn, NY



serving hot meals to residents and volunteers for Hurricane Sandy” (thechowtrain.com 2015 para. 5). The use of the truck in this fashion has lead her to further her work with appearances on Rachel Ray television show and other profiles throughout social media and local media.

These individuals are not what Plato had in mind when he critiqued the Sophists as being nothing more than pastry bakers. In Plato’s the Sophists operated on self-interest, flattery, and the pursuit of short-term pleasure without concern for true knowledge. However there are mobile food vendors that do act like Plato’s version of the Sophists. These are the corporate mobile mediums. Large industrial food companies have been using the rise of the food truck to market their same products under the disguise of a “hip” new trend with a set of principles and values that aligns with the audience members within the foodscape. This chapter looked at Applebee’s Neighborhood Food Truck. The mobile food medium was beautiful and fit in appearance-wise with very other food truck on the block. They even used their executive chef to give it an ethos of gourmet.

Both of these rhetorics outlined—that defined by Plato and by Poulakos—are operating in the foodscape and sometimes hard to tell apart. But there is a difference worth making. If the community of food truckers want to make sure they can keep the movement going they will need to be vigilant to the very changing circumstances of the foodscape and its eaters. To do this they cannot fake the interaction and feedback present by the consumers. If trained chefs can continue to keep that sophistic practice as a priority they are always sitting on the frontlines of

change, while the larger industrial mobile food mediums are still trying to make decisions from a much more removed position of having to think of national brand identity and consistence. Unfortunately, change rarely spawns at a national level first, but at the local level is where change starts to boil. Therefore, to be a food truck sophisticatedly one has to be with the people, entertaining the people, and educating the people.

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## CONCLUSION

As a medium, the new gourmet food truck is not simply a vehicle for selling “content,” whether it is banana jam smothered biscuits or grilled mac & cheese sandwiches. Rather, the food truck represents the introduction of a new tactile medium. As is indicated throughout the dissertation, the arrival of the food truck broadcasts the message that the scale, pace, and pattern of life in the town, state, or even country is going to endure a transformation. As food trucks become ubiquitous, the speed by which food is sold and consumed increases and the habits of action are radically altered.

For example, my brother and his partner recently moved up to the Pacific Northwest and made Portland, Oregon their new home city. They both claim the move was made because it was a financially affordable location in the United States and produced a lifestyle and value system that fit their own. In particular, the population of Portland share a desire for a diversified, accessible, and affordable foodscape. One way Portland communicates this value is through their unique street food culture. Portland has for many years maintained a vibrant food-cart industry (Shomler 2014; Southworth 2014). The food carts can be seen throughout the downtown area and surrounding suburbs. Unlike the roach coaches and taco trucks, these traditional food truck mobile kitchens were seen as a relatively fringe place of dining, but at the same time important to the notion of “keeping Portland weird,” much in the same veins of as Austin Texas’ desire to stay weird.

But recently there is national attention gazing on the Portland mobile foodscape. According to Tiffany Harelik (2014), author of *Trailer Food Diaries Cookbook* series and someone who has spent time documenting the national scene of food carts, “I feel confident in saying that Portland is true Mecca of food carts because of their longevity, diversity and commitment to uniqueness in the market” (p. 12). In a report created by the National League of Cities (2013) stated, “Portland is known as the food truck capital of the world” (p. 27). To capitalize on their ethos the city has recent used “progress policies on food vending” transforming “dead urban spaces into gastronomic magnets that attract crowds,” according to Michael Southworth (2014 p. 37). In other words, the city has social recognition along with institutional recognition of the value to their food cart subculture and to people like my brother it helps reinforce the cultural identity marker Portland “staying weird” and a unique foodscape.

In comparison to the new food trucks like that of Roy Choi, the Portland food carts aesthetically look much more like the lunch carts and wagons created by Walter Scott of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Many of the carts are not independently drivable and need to be hitched to another vehicle. This makes them less mobile and more prone to becoming being permanent in their location, unlike the newer food trucks and more traditional taco trucks. While their outside appearance stylistically appears to look like the carts of old, their insides are much more modern with fully functional kitchens (National League of Cities 2013). The combination of having more permanence in a specific location and having a full

kitchen has allowed entrepreneurs to open their food establishments, operating very similar to a brick-and-mortar restaurant, with less startup capital and daily expenses. With less risk involved, the food cart provides a space to experiment with culinary ideas, try out odd combinations of flavors, or revamp old classics. The combination of a large audience of gastronomically minded, institutional freedom to operate, and low start-up costs are the primary reasons I agree with Harelik's impression that Portland functions as a Mecca for food carts and, potentially, the larger mobile kitchen network.

Interestingly, Portland's food-cart scene was a relatively internal phenomenon. Prior to 2008, people outside of Portland (except maybe the small but growing foodie community) knew very little of Portland's food identity. Therefore, if one accept the claim that the Rose City is now the Mecca of mobile dining, one would have to make a caveat stating that the majority of street food and traditional mobile dining outside of Portland were not looking to it as a holy land. Maybe this was an intentional strategy in order to keep the secret to themselves; but more likely, it was some other phenomenon that opened up the gaze of the national audience to the happenings of the Portland foodscape, bringing people like my brother and his partner to move to there.

Reported by the National League of Cities (2013), the city of Portland did not start making large scale institutional changes to the urban foodscape until after Roy Choi and Kogi BBQ Truck in Southern California were making massive impacts through the social media buzz. It is hard to ignore the videos of people standing for

hours in line on the street waiting to try to Korean tacos out of a truck. The report states, "In 2009, the city proposed the use of vacant lots as pods, or areas for food trucks to cluster. The idea was to use vacant lots as catalysts for economic development, deterring blight and encouraging vibrancy in the process" (p. 27). Prior to the move by the city, mobile food carts were relatively unregulated and underground, making large-scale food truck lots and more upscale facilities legally unmanageable. But with the institutional changes to the foodscape, the city is symbolically and financially invested in these mediums and the investment is highly visible today when driving through the city and its suburbs. As

FoodCartsPortland.com (2015) states the food carts and lots are helping to:

Create a vibrant downtown and central city by bringing what planning geeks call a "social fabric on the street" which is great in cultural terms, but in economic terms also attracts other spenders, retail outlets, and restaurants and cafes. Food carts also often illustrate the delicious benefits to a growing ethnically diverse community, as many immigrants own and operate them and make and serve some pretty tasty ethnic specialties.

These little pods, or clusters, went from looking like run-down shacks in a small parking lot to looking like artists' colonies of brightly painted carts gathered together with foraged tables and chairs scattered around.

In order to see what really drove my brother and his partner to Portland, I headed up to see him and take up the opportunity to get in some more fieldwork data at the local food trucks and food carts. My mother, youngest brother, and close friend also joined in on the trip. My mother in particular did not want to miss an opportunity to see her son in his new place of residence. During the trip, we were able to eat at carts like the Grilled Cheese Bus, Moberi juice cart, and a handful of

the other food carts and trucks that were increasingly visible, at least from what I remembered from prior trips to the area.

On the last night of this most recent trip, we ventured out to have a final meal together. It was getting late and our options were starting to run out as restaurants were closing up or were all booked up. I went on Yelp.com, searched for celebrity chef and travel television host Anthony Bourdain and referenced it against my current location. The website pulled up a list of all the locations Bourdain had visited in the area and one of them happened to be a food truck named Potato Champion (Best Anthony Bourdain 2015). Using Bourdain's ethos and the host of positive reviews of the food truck on Yelp.com, I persuaded my family to take a chance on this mobile kitchen to be the location of our meal together (Potato Champion 2015).

Using the GPS location system built into the Yelp.com app, we navigated to the food truck. To our surprise the food truck was part of a food truck court and we happened upon their outdoor movie night event. There were about seven trucks parked along the outside of a paved lot. The food options ranged from Bourdain's recommended potato inspired truck serving different versions of poutine, to brick oven pizzas and even Peruvian chicken and house-cut yucca fries. As it turned out, this was the permanent location for a few of the trucks and carts and they held events like movie nights. In the center of the parking lot were twenty picnic tables that were mostly occupied with guests, and a large projection screen at one end of the lot. We picked a table located at one of the corners farthest from the screen, not

by choice, but because it was one of the few still available. After having a table to act as a hub of operations, we set out to try the culinary options these food trucks and carts had to offer. As each of us chose our meal for the evening, we were able to watch the movie and enjoy the aesthetics of the environment.

The very beginning of this dissertation focused on the story of the city of Granada Hills' trying to manage a food truck movement that was getting out of hand. A fleet of food trucks had taken over Chatsworth Street two nights a week and in the process caused: (1) the local businesses to complain and resent the new mobile kitchen; (2) worse driving conditions along the road; and (3) a large amount of trash and pollution that was not being managed efficiently or with great care. The resolution of two of the problems came after a few key figures started to manage the cleanup efforts and alleviate some of the road congestion. However, it took the business owners a while longer to finally see the medium's full message. As Marshall McLuhan might say, the owners were slightly "numbed" to effects of the medium and treated the arrival of the trucks as simply more food "content." But from the altering social habits of eating to the ever-changing aesthetic tastes of consumers, the message of the medium was that the foodscape status quo was in flux and they needed to adapt. This produced a moment of being startled "awake" to a new way of life. The key factor of change came when they saw that the foot traffic brought in by the appeal of the food trucks was also an audience open to persuasion and could be influenced into trying their own food—if not on that trip to Chatsworth Street, maybe the next.

Sitting in the food truck lot in Portland, I could see what the struggle Granada Hills went through and the amount of communicative action it took to bring the working parts into order was now bearing fruits. The story frames many of the questions that have inspired the writing of this dissertation. The questions stem out of a curiosity about how social transform occurs when a new medium produces surprising and often difficult changes to the habits and actions of humans. To answer this large and overarching question this dissertation looked at different elements of food truck movement that includes its actors' rhetoric and the situation in which it was created, framed, and/or sustained.

The food truck movement was in position to act during the right conditions, within the right communities, and with the right rhetor to articulate the value of this new mobile food medium as it evolved into new forms, adapted to new conditions, and gained new co-producing consumers that helped to refashion the old aesthetics of the mobile food medium into something new. The process is a marriage of these interacting parts. Lloyd Bitzer's notion of the rhetorical situations operates as a method in explaining the food truck movement's success in achieving a "convergence" within the large public discourse. We also make a distinction to Bitzer's rhetorical situation stating a rhetorical situation has a moral conflict that "cannot be resolved by logical reasoning alone" (Crick 2012 p. 42). The public is therefore tasked with listening to rival moral claims about this new medium and its role in the foodscape.



Rhetorical situations have been popping up around food and foodways since the first Greek writings. For example, Plato in the *Gorgias* talks about pastry baking and its function as flattery of the sense. Later Greek atomist Epicurus used food to educate and rhetorically to articulate the means to achieve the *goodlife* all with his Garden School (Asmis 2010; Rist 2010). Today, food and foodways still play a crucial role in helping people articulate the world around making food and foodways rhetorically powerful and key to understanding shared experiences, because they are often linked together through foodways. In many ways, the rise of the food truck reveals constraints in terms of what can physically, legally, and persuasively be produced within the foodscape by audiences of agents with the power to alter dire situations in their communities.

### **Chapter Breakdown**

Chapter one discussed the situation along the Miracle Mile as police, brick-and-mortar owners, an audience of eaters, and food truckers existed together within a site of struggle. At this site of struggle, it compiled the discourse of parties involved and found that the food truck as an actor and new medium produced a series of events that tip the situation from stable/matter of fact to unstable/matter of concern. In other words, an established pattern that had remained silent was broken. Parties involved were tasked with putting their social world and foodscape back into a more familiar or advantageous position. Through an analysis of the actors' discourse prior and after the event of stability, chaos, and rebuilding on the Miracle Mile, one could more closely state what happened within the controversy,

what participants or actors had significant roles, what their communication habits during the events said about them, and what were the interpersonal relationships that were assumed to be stable but were found to be faulty.

The second chapter stems from questions about the food trucks discourse concerning their mythology and historical lineage. In this realm of the food truck movement's discourse, one can see how they identify themselves while also providing a model for how other food truckers can take action as a new medium within the foodscape. During the three major forms of the "proto" food truck—the chuck wagon, the lunch cart/wagon, and the tamale cart—different mythic narratives were showcased and it became apparent how the food trucks have adopted similar characteristics or virtues into their current identity. The chapter not only goes into greater detail about each specific early mobile medium, but also expanded and enriched the depth of these myths and how they speak to the pitfalls and positive outcomes happening within the current situation.

The third chapter examined the question of what it is like to eat at a food truck and what the new medium has to do with the aesthetic experience of the audience/consumer. To answer this question, it looked at how the food truck has advertised itself and how the overall form of this aesthetic experience plays out ideally and or in non-aesthetics fashion. Therefore, in laying out the form of an aesthetic experience, one can see potential reasons why so many people have tried these new mediums and have had experiences that stood out as being unique.

Chapter four looked at the rhetorical actors in that food truck functions as a stage for advocacy and deliberation, and also marketing and propaganda. First drawing on the work of Plato, the rhetorical style of the food trucks can be seen as acting simply to maximize profit by gratifying the senses and flattering an audience. Yet it also showed that corporate mobile food mediums like Taco Bell or Applebee's can mimic the aesthetics of the trucks but still fail to capitalize on the same values and desires which the gourmet food truck can. The food trucks also have a sophisticated character and style that looks more like John Poulakos' (2008) view of the sophists. His conception of the Greek sophists was as traveling entrepreneurs, educators, and performative actors and spokespeople. We can see food truckers, like chef Roy Choi, who take a sophisticated spirit and use their position to advocate for change and defend his community.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Sitting in the Portland Oregon food truck lot was an event that will stick with me for the rest of my life and, to me, sums what the movement represented. As my mother, two brothers, and a friend all got back to the table we gathered our findings and gazed at them in wonder. Before we could truly dig into the food, my mother laughed out loud at the movie screen. It was the scene in the original Blues Brothers film when Elwood Blues turns to a man and deadpanned the line, "We are on a mission from God." She was not the only one amused by the scene. Some other individuals in the food truck park yelled out in anticipated excitement. Inside several of the seven food trucks surrounding the picnic tables, the food truck crews

could be seen laughing out loud or jumping around, and some smiled and went back to work wiping down the counter top or helping the customer in front of them.

As the laughter calmed down, my mother turned to me and directed my attention across the street. There was a brick-and-mortar restaurant that stylistically looked like a fast food restaurant with large windows. The windows were so large that we could see the plastic tables and chair nicely aligned while uniformed workers milled around. The brick-and-mortar was open for service but there were no signs of customer life. As we turned back to the food truck park, we were taken aback by the amount of action and enjoyment happening in this space. A mobile food medium provided this for my family and me. It showed me the power of rhetoric to call a community together in order to address and resolve some of our collective concerns be it with our food and foodways.

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## **VITA**

Bryan W. Moe received his Bachelor's degree in Speech Communication from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, and his Master's in Human Communication from the California State University at Fullerton. His research is split between rhetoric and foodies. He is particularly interested in these discourses as they intersect with various public spheres and discourses. He hopes to continue his research on a more particle and ethnographic level.