

The Taco Truck: Morphology and Assemblage of an American Object

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

Joaquín Alvarado Contreras

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

Lisa Sun-Hee Park (Advisor)

August, 2011

© Joaquin Alvarado Contreras - 2011

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my committee members for their support.

Contents

v	List of Figures
1	Introduction 1
4	Theoretical Matter 4
6	Methods
10	Part 1. Taco Truck, Portal / U.S.- Mexico Border in Motion Taco Truck, Banditry in the Borderlands Citizen Taco Truck
36	Part 2. Food Blogs Culinary Adventures Tacoing the Margins Indexing Difference, tacoing 1 Staging the Margins, tacoing 2 VendrTv
67	Part 3. Foodie Truck / Conclusion Staging Vitality Gaming Acts Pairing Acts
79	Bibliography

List of Tables

14	Fig 1	Immigrants using the street and sidewalk as a dining room.
16	Fig 2	Nativist protesting against the operation of a Mexican food truck.
30	Fig 3	Citizen Taco Truck as encampment operating as ephemeral corner restaurant
31	Fig 4.	Citizen Taco Truck (vendors) encampment operating out of a school parking lot.
32	Fig 5.	Citizen Taco Truck as encampment operating on/near Bank of America in East Los Angeles.
33	Fig 6	Citizen Taco Truck operating encampment as an outdoor dining and living room.
35	Fig 7.	Citizen Taco Truck as an operating on street corner.
42	Fig 8.	Blogger captures a Tijuana vendor using a “novel” type of roasting spit not seen in L.A.
49	Fig 9.	Food blogger captures a “novel” or “authentic” technique of cooking meat, wrapping meat in maguey leaves.
53	Fig10	The food blogger captures “her” vendor that introduced her to Atole.
54	Fig 11	The food blogger captures native relics making tacos in an “exotic” location.
55	Fig12.	The food blogger captures primitives vending in an “exotic” location: out of shopping carts and in the muffler shop parking
56	Fig13.	Selling tacos on the grounds of a public school (AKA Citizen Taco Truck)
57	Fig14.	A scene of vending architecture as it produces “exotic” rhythms and sounds of taco production (AKA a vendor placed in the <i>colonial gallery</i>)

Introduction

My experience growing up as a kid in southern California seared into my mind's eye an image. That image is a mobile object, and it has recently received much national attention. I am talking about the catering truck, the "*lonchera*," aka the "lunch truck" or as many people refer to it, the "taco truck," as I will call it in this paper. As a kid I saw many nomadic taco trucks pass through the evolving housing developments in the greater Los Angeles region, including Riverside, San Bernardino, and Orange County. In retrospect, I remember the taco truck as an object of stainless steel, an object that moved to construction sites, to various popular spots, following a Latino/a clientele. I also remember how the object took on a racialized significance in the southern California vending landscape as people called taco trucks "roach coaches."¹

The taco truck primarily serves a Latino/a immigrant workforce. Back when I was a kid, the taco truck was neither a fetishized nor a desired or spectacular commodity fetish in the southern California landscape. If anything, the taco truck carried with it an *aura* and a *trace* of difference, a specter of migrant "illegality." As a mobile kitchen moving around the region of greater Los Angeles, the taco truck, like other vendors in the vending environment, such as auto vendors, tent vendors, sidewalk vendors, push cart vendors, asphalt vendors, carriers who carry anything they can sell, *Los Moscas* (flies or day laborers as they are called), and *Mariachis* (Mexican Musicians), produces a field of texture, urban sight, sound, and tactile experiences in urban public space.² The vendor in the landscape of southern

¹ James Rojas, "The Enacted Environment of East Los Angeles" *Places: Forum of Design for the Public Realm*, 8, no.3, 1993, p.44-45. As of April 23, 2011 "roach coach" is still a figure in popular discourse. This is evident in one article posted in the LA local guide section in *About.com*. Kayte Deioma proclaims in her article "Gourmet Food Trucks in L.A.: This Ain't No Roach Coach." The term "roach coach, appears on a blog post that was made on March 8, 2009 on *AMP Radio.com*, (see post, "Kogi Taco Truck – Not your Average Roach Coach,") accessed April 23, 2011. Also, the term "roach coach" still resides in common urban lore. "Roach coach," comes up in *Urban Dictionary.com* (last accessed April 23, 2011). And, one can still find many videos titled or having in the title the term "roach coaches," (see video clips posted on *Google.com*, last accessed on April 23, 2011 and *Youtube.com*, last accessed April 23, 2011).

² Rojas, "Enacted Environment." Margaret Crawford, John Chase, Kaliski John, *Everyday Urbanism*, (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999).

California produces 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. Street vendors use the common public sphere to inhabit the city and express their existence in ways that are not planned but lived.”³ That is, they seize the public and put it to use when the opportunity arises and they turn public space into “their” space for “their” use values as subaltern inhabitants of the city. To assume and practice one’s right to the city as a peddler is not easy. This process, is above all, one that is conflict ridden and between the city and its subaltern vendors, who, as vendors, inhabit the public sphere yet receive civic backlash to remove their presence as street vendors – such as what happened to the “*Chili Queens*” in San Antonio who inhabited the public plaza.⁴

For example, around 2008, the taco truck was highlighted as part of the so-called “taco wars” when the LA County Board of Supervisors passed a law requiring all mobile food units (taco trucks) to move every thirty minutes or else risk a \$30,000 fine. As Gloria Molina, an East LA Board Supervisor, said, the taco truck does not help make LA a “livable community” because it is a nuisance and disruption to brick and mortar business.⁵ Meanwhile, around this time in 2008, the taco truck had its second round of entry into the national media spotlight and in new media. A different type of taco truck “breed” (if you will) emerged in Los Angeles and later migrated to other American cities. I am talking about the *Kogi Taco Truck*, which sold “gourmet/fusion” style tacos, incorporating “Korean flavor/ingredients” into how they made tacos. “Korean tacos” became hype and spread as a new fashion, Almost a year later, other food trucks began selling their own style of gourmet food, which took on the image of “street” or “gourmet.” By 2010, food trucks sold just about everything. I call this type of food truck the “Foodie Truck.”

³ Rojas, “Enacted Environment,” 53. Crawford et al, *Everyday Urbanism*.

⁴ Jeff M. Pilcher, “Who Chased out the “Chile Queens”? Gender, Race, and Urban Reform in San Antonio, Texas 1880 -1943.” *Food and Foodways*, 16: 173-200, 2008. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans.Donald Nicolson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell, 1999).

⁵ Rebecca Winters, “The Great Taco Truck War” *Time Magazine*, April 25, 2008, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1735104,00.html> (accessed April 23, 2011).

This thesis examines the distinctions between two ideals for taco trucks. Part one covers the tri-dimension of the traditional food truck. I am calling this food truck the “taco truck.” The taco truck has three strains and primarily serves the Latino/a immigrant population. It comes in various styles other than the traditional food truck. Therefore, I include in my definition of the taco truck vendors selling food out of carts, vans, and cars. In the first strain, I argue that the taco truck exemplifies a “ground zero” and a “portal” to the U.S. - Mexico borderlands; that is, the taco truck serves as a moving picture of the unfolding politics of belonging and immigration in the nation. The second strain enacts a figure of Mexican banditry in the borderlands. I call the third strain “Citizen Taco Truck.”⁶ This argument suggests that the taco truck is a mode of political action since it carries out a spatial operation by re-appropriating public (“planned space”). As a spatial operation, Citizen Taco Truck produces a new urban public space that expresses their identity as inhabitants of the city.⁷

Part two of my thesis looks at the material environment of the taco truck, where it carries out commerce, and how the food blog as a colonial technology extracts difference via a mode of representation I call *tacoing*. Tacoing, as a colonial gesture, does two things. First, tacoing represents and places vendors as exotic native specimens of difference in the colonial exhibition, the food blog. That is, tacoing indexes difference. Second, tacoing stages the margins.

Part three will look at the other end of the spectrum of the taco truck, what I call the “Foodie Truck.” Through different means than the taco truck, the Foodie Truck, similarly is a performative act, carrying out a different spatial operation on the city. Citizen Taco Truck uses urban space to set up camp, articulate its political presence, and sell informal, while the foodie truck finds something else of value in urban space and enacts a different gesture. It puts urban space and does what I call “gaming space.” It makes urban space an affective resource by gaming itself as a

⁶ In reference to Viki Ruiz, “Citizen Restaurant” *American Quarterly*, 2008.

⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), 94. Rojas, “Enacted Environment.” Crawford et al, *Everyday Urbanism*.

mobile object to be had (and found) in the urban space. It games space by playing on and with communication games that affectively engage with customers about the whereabouts of its location. It's style of commerce is thus a gaming gesture. Thus, the foodie truck games city life and in turn pairs urban space and urban milieus. Pairing as such charges urban space and milieus, thus making the city fun or like a game like space for consumption.

Theoretical Matter

This paper is full of theory and I will set up my terms here. I use terms that sociology may not use. Terms such as "space," "performance," "spatial operation," and "gesture." Other theoretical terms arise when they are useful, but these terms are my most important terms that I use. I also use other theoretical terms as well, which matter a lot in my paper. I draw from the literature on foodies and use the notion of the figure of the foodie, that is, behavior that is expressive of foodie thought and action. I also use the notion of colonization to argue how the food blog is a colonial technology.

Space, as a keyword to me, means a few things. One, it is something that is produced by human action and interaction both locally and "afar." Space is not something that is a box or container; I am not thinking of space as a *tabula rasa*. Rather, space is something in movement (fluid) and it contains pores. As such, space, is open to things to move in and move out, so space is not static. Rather, space is dynamic, and at times, it is fleeting or ephemeral. But moreover, space is social since humans sustain and give character and texture to space. I use a variety of ways to look at space in my paper. In the section of street vendors (Citizen Taco Truck) and urban space, space is all of these things mentioned above, but more than that, space is inhabited and lived. That is, as inhabitants, people (vendors) make space fit their own use values and needs in how they produce space through their labor on the built environment. For instance, parking lots were planned to hold cars, but Citizen Taco Truck makes them serve a different purpose for their own

needs; they produce inhabited or lived space. This way of thinking of space, then, gestures towards other things that make up space. Space can be a discursive arena for political articulation. As such, space is produced by articulation and that articulation is not always verbal but bodily, as seen in how actors with their labor weave (produce) a web of bodies, actions, materials, and things, in the urban environment. They do these things to make (articulations), what I de Certeau calls “operations.” They are operations because of how vendors arrange space and make new forms of urban space. It is because of this behavior that I use de Certeau’s term “spatial operation” on the city. As such, a spatial operation is a political enunciation. Why? It’s political in how actors in their labor (action) or appropriation of space, make use of urban space for new ends or use values, as they reappropriate space to assert their identity and lay claim to the city.

As for the term “performance,” performance entails a few things. I take performance to be taking something and making it fun, exotic, staged, and exuberant. The “space” if you will of performance is on screen. I look at embodied actors on film (screen) how they talk; I look at filming as a space that represents objects in the margins. Performance, then, is about showing, and doing.⁸ Performance can be as simple as making an action via a verbal speech act (“This is Taco Town!”). As a speech act, this statement enacts a lively performance action, stirring wonder and excitement or awe. To perform is to “to do, to behave, and to show.”⁹ Performance can be something as simple as and embodied action that translates the street food experience to the viewer, such as when an actor points a taco at the lens of a camera and then tilts he head back, eats it, and then acts all “in love with the food” by saying how good it is, as an embellished action. Performance can mean how the vending scenes is staged and choreographed to produce a spectacular effect that turns (represents) the margins into a desired consumptive arena since it has been performed to look as an exotic site full of “adventure” via the

⁸ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 22.

⁹ *Ibid*, 32.

action of culinary consumption. That is, sounds, images, and how films are made can be elements in the production of performance. To take food as performance means to do, to execute, and to carry out. Because of this, the space of performance is located in the food blog as bloggers perform taco vending/cooking and its “exotic” environment, what I call *tacoing*.¹⁰

I mean by gesture the styles of acting where gesture belongs to “gestural regimes” that come with them expressive movements. Here I am talking about the act not of indication but of evocation, what one movement evokes. By movement, I mean not just physical movement but force of the production of some affective (felt) trace from other times, from history, what I call figures.¹¹ As Sociologist Charles Lemert notes, “There are things in these worlds that are social through—and—through; and not, thereby, susceptible to distillation or reduction into any other sort of reality.”¹²

Methods

I followed the term “taco truck” from May 29, 2010 to January 26, 2011. I collected news alerts from *Google News* and searched for articles and media material using the search engine of Google. I searched web links (websites and blogs) and followed links if they pertained to street food, tacos, Mexican food, food trucks, and taco trucks. Using Google news alerts to collect media pertaining to the “taco truck,” I compiled a personal archive of a variety of sources: web links (blogs), articles, and other materials. I decided to allow Google news alerts to send me sources since the search engine is a powerful contributor of the content Americans read in the blog sphere.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid, 33.

¹¹ Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness, *Migrations of Gesture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), xvii.

¹² Charles Lemert, “Durkheim’s Ghosts in the Culture of Sociologies” in *Durkheim’s Ghosts: Cultural Logics and Social Things* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 13.

¹³ Andrea Mubi Brighenti, *Visibility in Social Theory and Social Research* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2010), 96-97.

I looked at food blogs because they are anthropological and social. They are anthropological in that bloggers record/collect and represent their encounters with difference and street vendors and relate to a new budding movement of “street food” or “street cuisine” emerging alongside notion of urban dining. And they are social since people visit and engage other with social commentary – blogs are a space for the performance of “eating on the margins.” Furthermore, the food blog mediates ones encounter with places, and the market. Blogs offer a way to see how the margins are being valorized as sites for “street foods” in the performative space that is visual, audio, and akin to a space that allows one to “travel,” even if they are doing so by their computer terminal. The food blog offers a way to see the world/the margins and opens up a pore in the universe to “see” and “connect” to geographies that are now being valorized as sites for novel/exotic “street food.”

I was looking at a variety of things. I was primarily looking at discourse on the city, streets, and taco trucks, and food trucks (including Mexican food peddled by street vendors). I looked for a variety of things: tenor, gesture, style, materiality, design, fashion, affective communication, and paired objects that come with the taco truck, street food, and foodie trucks. Put simply, I looked not at one thing but at a thing that constitutes an assemblage.

I collected data on the basis of discourses that began to form patterns, as well on the basis of “impact,” as objects/images moved me or winked at me or, as Walter Benjamin said, images “stir (move) and commodities “wink” (emit a “force”) that people in the marketplace experience when they move about the Arcades. I take the food blog as an Arcade.¹⁴ Renato Rosaldo adroitly notes in *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, social science analysis is not all 100% objective. Rosaldo notes that it is a myth that all social science is carried out objectively because the “detached observer” the scholar attempts to embody is a decided position to take. One can still do “science” even while being “attached” or reflexive

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 206, 537, 542.

about what one is studying.¹⁵ My method evolved as I went along because I was not completely sure what I was studying, and I wanted to allow flexibility in method so that I could deal with the complexity and nuances that arise. I also recognize that I am not only a researcher but a perceptive researcher who experiences and perceives “my” object of study. I assumed I did not “know” my phenomena but wished to get to know it, so I approached it as uncharted territory.

I incorporated uncertainty and spontaneity since my object was something I wanted to “relate to” and experience as a thing. That is, that is I wanted to feel the “object” of my study as an embodied researcher. I took a phenomenological approach. I tried to immerse and get to know and take into account how I experienced “my” object of study.¹⁶ I had no intention of studying Mexican banditry in the borderlands but the image of the taco truck as outlaw bandit compelled me to go there, as Machete, evoked borderland banditry and figure of the past that roamed and terrorized the California borderlands but also sought social justice and operates as an oppositional aesthetic/consciousness.¹⁷

I went this route because I think of my object as fluid and in motion. Like fluid substance, it moves and can move in many (directions and it can move back in time). I seek a *processual* analysis. That is, I seek a method that allows me to move about and be flexible, since I assume my object is in motion. For this reason, I seek a multi sited approach. This allows me to pursue a processual approach. A processual approach is not always linear or set up to find “the truth” about one facet of a “thing.” This is because the processual approach sees a thing as having a janus face or a multiple (moving/fluid) facets. As Renato Rosaldo notes, “Processual analysis resist frameworks that claim a monopoly on truth. It empathizes that culture requires study from a number of perspectives, and these perspectives cannot

¹⁵ Renato Rosaldo, “Subjectivity in Social Analysis” ch. 8 in *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, (Boston: Beacon, 1989), 193-194.

¹⁶ David Seamon, “Phenomenology, Place, Environment, Architecture,” *Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter*, http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/Seamon_reviewEAP.htm.

¹⁷ Robert, Mc Kee Irwin, “The Many Heads and Tales of Joaquín Murrieta” Ch.2 in *Bandits, Captives, Heroines, and Saints: Cultural Icons of Mexico’s Northwest Borderlands* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 76.

necessarily be added together into a unified summation.”¹⁸ My engagement with the visual medium of blogs and my time spent in the visual field to me, can present a cultural object that has more than one subject “situated neither quite here nor quite there.”¹⁹ So, my method is eclectic and allows me to see the many angles and faces of the “object” under review, a sort of tabulation of the many variants and frequency of meaning(s) that I am able to tabulate at this time.

I had to step “outside” of digital media to analyze my unit of analysis (the taco truck) as new media includes many areas in its ecology; often these areas are outside of new media. While film and TV are not blogs they are social spaces that offer one way to see an object in discourse and in the popular imagination, which I assume that the taco truck, street vending, and foodie trucks are moving into now. So, I followed them there and took these locations as social sites to study my object. While my study began in Google and was focused on new media, TV and film offer a connection back to new media. I focus a lot on image and vision. This is because discourse not only has a language component, but a visual component, and that component “has a social dimension.”²⁰ And blogs are social space.²¹ As Max Weber notes, action is social if its “subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby orientated in its course.”²² Food bloggers aim their action to a readership and the world and express their affective encounters, as their social action exhibits what Max Weber calls “affectual” social action.”²³

¹⁸ Renato Rosaldo, “Putting Culture into Motion” ch. 4 in *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, (Boston: Beacon, 1989), 93.

¹⁹ Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 155.

²⁰ Andrea Mubi Brighenti, *Visibility in Social Theory and Social Research* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2010), 4.

²¹ Rettberg, Jill. *Blogging* (Malden: Polity Press. 2008), 21.

²² Max Weber, *Economy and Society: and Outline of Interpretative Sociology, Vol. 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978,) 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 25.

I. Taco Truck, Portal / U.S.- Mexico Border in Motion

As urban scholar Diana Harris writes, “The spaces we daily visit ... all provide detailed design cues about who we are and where/whether we belong.”²⁴ Diana Harris’ knowledge about architecture offers a way to think about the Taco Truck as a portal to the U.S. Mexico Borderlands. Objects, such as the taco truck (as architecture/object) can be a politically contentious location for politics. As Diana Harris notes, “...Landscapes, and architecture, are never ‘neutral.’ ... [but] are powerful symbols and containers of cultural values...”²⁵ Extrapolating from what Harris says about landscapes and objects/architecture, the taco truck and its social context are social spaces that most Americans would know “they” do not belong to. In popular lore the taco truck is an object depicted as “dirty,” “not orderly,” and associated with the racist term “coach roaches.”²⁶ The taco truck has a social context that may send the message that it is a site of border crossing and migrant illegality.

This is particularly evident in one example; the case of the agricultural labor camps in Northern San Diego County.²⁷ Like most of California, San Diego is balkanized along racial fault lines. The north is primarily white, upper middle class, and affluent. However, there are agricultural fields where a significant migrant/immigrant workforce works. This has caused homeowners to butt-up against migrant labor camps, making the place an essential “ground zero” for anti-immigrant politics since migrants dwell near residents who live in new community housing developments in the suburbs. Residents not only interact in the public sphere but

²⁴ Dianne Harris, “Seeing the Invisible: Reexamining Race and Vernacular Architecture,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture: Special Anniversary Issue* 13, no. 2 (2006/2007), 100.

²⁵ Diane Harris, “Race, Space, and the Destabilization of Practice,” *Landscape Journal* 26, no.1 (2007), 4.

²⁶ Rojas, “Enacted Environment,” 44.

²⁷ See Carolyn Marshall, “Proposed Ban on Taco Truck Stirs Animosity in a California Town” *New York Times*, June 15, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/15/us/15taco.html> (accessed May 27, 2011).

share the same location that each calls home.²⁸ This sharing of the landscape means they visually notice each other and are aware of each other's presence. The undocumented migrants construct their homes in Northern San Diego and visually exude their presence as subalterns. That is, they make dwellings made of scrap material like cardboard, crates, tin cans, and plastic tarps, they live without basic household amenities, such as proper kitchens.²⁹ In their canyon communities of shacks and tents, an outdoor chapel exists to serve them. It serves not only as a chapel but a meeting ground for San Diego State students (who like myself) to teach migrants Spanish (to indigenous migrants) and English (to migrants who speak some Spanish). And the chapel is a testament to their presence as inhabitants.³⁰ Years ago, Carry MC William noted in his famous book *Factories in the Field* (1939), the living conditions of migrant farm workers. He described their housing conditions as composing "shanty towns and jungle camps."³¹ Today, in Northern San Diego, migrants still live in "jungle camps," yet they also live on the borderlands with affluent residents who live in the new housing communities at the interface of farmland, suburbia, and the hillside dwelling encampments that are situated in nature.

The public sphere makes the migrant body in northern San Diego obvious, as migrant laborers visibly move around the public sphere heading to work in the fields, standing out due to their differences from affluent (predominately white) residents, and owners of expensive cars. The migrant looks phenotypically "different" compared to most North County residents. In a place where many residents drive nice cars, many migrants do not own an automobile. While most residents use the sidewalk for recreation or suburban promenading, migrants use sidewalks to commute. While the roads host nice cars moving about, the sidewalks will host migrant commuters moving about. This creates a public juxtaposition of difference.

²⁸ See "Invisible Mexicans" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfHbmeF1I8c&feature=related>

²⁹ "The Invisible Chapel" posted July 8, 2007.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHilgW4BQvY&feature=related>

³⁰ "The Invisible Chapel" posted July 8, 2007.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHilgW4BQvY&feature=related>

³¹ Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, (Boston: Little & Brown, 1939), 6.

Hence, their very movement and use of public space in the landscape can attract attention and may evoke Nativism. The Taco Truck, too, is visible like the migrant body.

In fact, the taco truck has been known to appear in those locations where migrants in Northern San Diego County work and live. The taco truck is part of the community of migrant labor, farm/labor camps, and the greater affluent (often white) public who live in expensive homes next to migrant squatter camps, whose homes are set up at the interface of nature and track home developments.³² Therefore, the taco truck is a visible actor exuding difference. In the Anglo-American imagination, “it” moves into the area (and presumably) the residents know what “it” is “doing” in the area: feeding “illegal aliens” who dwell by squatting in the canyons.

Mexican migrants eating and standing around a taco truck can emit a visual gesture that gets at the heart of the politics of belonging and the nation. That is, the gesture can signal a message encoded “we” are here and dwell amongst “you” to the white/affluent homeowners of Northern San Diego County. This message is encoded in how migrants use food trucks and public space and not just in Northern San Diego County but in larger regions (figures 1& 3-14). Because of this, it is perhaps possible that some nativist homeowners may see the taco truck as a place of border crossing, given how the taco truck has seized the public with its presence (figure 1& 3-14). Homeowners in areas like Northern San Diego County may conceivably view the taco truck as an enabler of migrant “*illegality*” – a truck that spurs “illegal” migrant border crossings simply because “*it*” is there to lend a service to migrants who do not have extensive kitchens or refrigerators to store foods that they can cook, nor cars that can easily enable them to stock up on groceries. It is in this context that the taco truck has a latent function. “It” enables “*illegal*” border crossings along the U.S. - Mexico border. “It” is a portal to the U.S. Mexico border,

³² Miriam Pawel “Lunch truck operators sell food, extend credit, translate documents and call for help” *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 2006, <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-helpers8jan08,0,4962347.story> (accessed June 3, 2011).

one that moves and attracts migrants, and helps migrants settle in “Al Otro Lado,” and make “La Frontera” their home. The *Los Angeles Times* noted this when a taco truck operator began her business and operated out of a car in North County San Diego:

“They call her the rice and beans lady. Eight years ago, Barbara Perrigo loaded up her car with homemade food and pulled up at a clearing on the side of Cannon Road, less than a mile from the turnoff for Legoland. She sent her sons into the scrubby bushes, down steep paths dotted with hidden shacks, shouting “comida,” or “food.”³³

This passage evokes “going deep” into the shadows of American marginality where the subaltern live and inhabit the margins as migrant labor. “Going into scrubby bushes,” evokes a trace or essentially a “ground zero” of the borderlands as the Taco Truck goes in to help migrants carry forward in their border crossing by settling in “Al Otro Lado.” Coming out of their “hidden shacks” the migrant subaltern move into the field of visibility in the public sphere and congregate around the border as signified by the taco truck (figure 2) thus producing new forms of spatial texture in the environment. Beyond that, the social uses of the taco truck and the reactions it can stir (figure 2) show how race is a “social transaction” that can occur in the ordinary everydayness of life: in the things we do, what we eat, how we use the city, or in the case of my paper, how food is sold in the public and how foodies blog about the street food vending environment.³⁴

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Vicki L. Ruiz, “Citizen Restaurant: American Imaginaries, American Communities,” *American Quarterly*, 2008, 1.

1. Immigrants using the street and sidewalk as a dining room.³⁵



The migrant congregates near the taco truck and produces a portal to the U.S.- Mexico border as their cultural practices denote a location not in the U.S. or the city but a site located someplace else, say in Latin America – since these practices are common in the public sphere in places like Mexico (figures 1 & 3-14). Migrants via their building/vending have the ability to turn space into an “ethnoscapes”– to evoke Arjun Appadurai.”³⁶ Through these vending architectures and productions of urban space the street/neighborhood appear on the horizon located both “here” and “there” (here in the U.S. or in the city) but also someplace

³⁵ Mac Kane, “Taco Trucks,” in *Polar Inertia: Journal of Nomadic and Popular Culture*, Web site, photography, January / February, <http://www.polarinertia.com/jan06/taco11.htm> , jpg file 11, located at: <http://www.polarinertia.com/jan06/taco14.htm> (accessed April 25, 2011).

³⁶ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 182-183.

“else” (Mexico). These building of localities by laboring vendors in the U.S. can provoke nativist reactions against the Mexican immigrant and the taco truck since the Taco Truck serves as a relational and contextual object, as locality or ethnoscapas assume both a “here” (the U.S.) yet are also located someplace “else,” like Mexico.³⁷ (figure 1 & 3-14). Like the inhabitants that use the taco truck, I too, come to view it as a symbol of the U.S.- Mexico border (figure 2). As Gloria Anzaldúa writes, the Frontera is where “The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.”³⁸

As seen in figure 2, the militant garb coupled with waving flags sends a message. These protestors raise American flags and enunciate that they are “holding the line,” or “stemming the tide” by flagging the taco truck as the site and location that spurs illegal migrant border crossings. This gesture of protest, seems to evoke the message that the taco truck is “the” site of the U.S. border, a key location, a “ground zero,” if you will, of the politics of the nation. It is as if they send the message that they see the Taco Truck as a signifier of the actual U.S. – Mexico border fence and thus a key site to carry out a spectacle in public to demonstrate their dislike of Mexican – Americans and Mexicans in the U.S. and their desire to secure the border.

³⁷ Ibid, 178.

³⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), 3.

2. Nativist protesting against the operation of a Mexican food truck.³⁹



The U.S.–Mexico border, like the taco truck, appears as a border in motion. It follows the flows of migrants in the city and around the United States, which reflects Gloria Anzaldúa statement regarding the border being in “a constant state of transition.”⁴⁰ This means the taco truck as a border in motion will collect and bring with it migrant bodies as it follows migrant labor flows. As it moves, it can awaken Nativism which tries to keep the “purity” of the nation and “local” “free” from the influence of the “Other.” This sort of nativist response towards the taco truck emerged in New Orleans. After Hurricane Katrina many Latino construction workers sought work in New Orleans.

³⁹ DFO, “Neo-Nazis Picket Mexican Stand Again,” photograph, Huckleberries Online, posted January 28, 2011, on *The Spokesman Review*, <http://www.spokesman.com/blogs/hbo/2011/jan/28/neo-nazis-picket-mexican-stand-again/> (accessed April 23, 2011).

⁴⁰ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 3.

As a moving kitchen and signifier of the *La Frontera*, the Taco Truck can be caught up in border politics, as well as the politics of whom/what belongs and whom/what is a “threat” to the “purity” of the nation. New Orleans cast the taco truck as a threat to the city’s culture and food “traditions.” This is what City Council President of Jeff Parish thought as he lashed out at the taco truck when he asked, “How do Tacos help gumbo?”⁴¹ Taco trucks in New Orleans bring to mind the cognitive affective image (memory) of where that “border” is located and what “should be” or “should not be” included in the domain of the U.S. – or the “local.” As race and food are linked and are markers of difference the moving border in the form of the taco truck touches on the politics of the nation/belonging in the borderlands. The taco truck, as Viki Ruiz writes, “Symbolizes the rapid demographic changes that have occurred since Hurricane Katrina,” and like a foodscape, the taco truck, is a marker of difference and the politics of exclusion. As marker of difference I see the taco truck as embedded in the U.S – Mexican border and the memory evoked by borderland social relations. As Viki Ruiz further notes, “memory mediates history,” and I would add that Taco Truck relates to the image of the U.S. – Mexico borderlands the politics of the nation, also.⁴²

The aforementioned nativist reaction by Jeff Parish reflects a representation of the taco truck as a ground zero situation and an imminent “threat” on the horizon and in the backyard of New Orleans. That is, the Taco Truck, having moved the U.S. - Mexico border, appears to have “arrived” in New Orleans. And judging by the reaction it seemed to have signified or accomplished what New Orleans feared; a U.S. - Mexico border fence that folded/absorbed New Orleans into the territory of “Mexico.” The “tide” overcame the U.S. – Mexico border fence in New Orleans. As anthropologist Leo L. Chaves poignantly noted in his book *Covering Immigration*, popular images of threat and danger are practices that nativists use in their rhetoric to shape views towards the politics of the nation. The image of “water-flood imagery”

⁴¹ Miguel Bustillo, “Hold the Tacos, New Orleans Says” *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 2007, <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/jul/14/nation/na-tacotrucks14> (accessed May 24, 2011).

⁴² Ruiz, “Citizen Restaurant,” 7.

is a metaphor connoting “flood,” which is an image that expresses a nativist imagination.⁴³ On July 2, 2007, the *Associated Press* sounded the nativist alarm in this headline: “New Orleans dealing with a flood of taco trucks.” The deployment of the term “*flood*” can engender unfavorable images of the taco truck. Furthermore, “flood” carries with it associations of other negative terms, like breach, incursion, threat, and invasion – all words that nativist discourse use to cast immigration as out of control and the border as “under siege.”

Taco Truck, Banditry in the Borderlands

Like a *coyote* (migrant smuggler) that spurs, channels, and enables “illegal” border crossings, the taco truck is like a roving bandit running loose in the borderlands. Again, a threat to the “purity” of the nation arises from this image of the taco truck as bandit – and not just any bandit but a legendary outlaw bandit, like Joaquín Murrieta and his horse “gang” who terrorized the borderlands during the days of the California gold rush. The movie *Machete* (2010) produced by Robert Rodriguez evokes this figurative trace of the taco truck as outlaw bandit roving in the borderlands. *Machete* is a movie about undocumented migrants and immigrants taking up arms and killing racist/nativist in Texas. They did this because they wanted to seek justice and were tired of being oppressed by corrupt politicians and a racist group which kills migrants for crossing the border to enter the U.S. (Minute Men).

The movie preview came out and made a bandit gesture that takes the form of being a social bandit. That is, the movie was cast prior to being released as a movie that had a political edge/message, since it made a gesture to showing disapproval of Arizona’s strict anti-illegal immigration bill, SB 1070. At the time SB 1070 was in the news as national topic. *Machete* (played by Danny Trujó) made a political gesture when he stated in the movie release, “This is *Machete*...with a special Cinco De Mayo message. To Arizona!” Since *Machete* was about revolt the

⁴³ Leo L. Chaves, *Covering Immigration: Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation*, (Berkeley:University of California , 2001). 73

aforementioned message “To Arizona!” performs an attack like a bandit; it has a force that comes with the message – and affect that should be read and taken as public pronouncement, one that says “fuck you,” to all racist/nativist and white supremacists who wish to “hold back the line” by supporting SB 1070. Of course, the right wing went nuts and immediately said that the movie if released would incite a “race war” and that the movie was an overt Chicano political gesture that was calling for the implementation of the *Plan De Aztlan*, which seeks to return the former U.S. southwest to Mexico. In fact, Fox News contributor said, “The Reconquista is here— at a theater near you.”⁴⁴

In the movie *Machete* (2010), most of the plot revolves around an Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) stake out of an outlaw figure: the taco truck. The operator of the taco truck, played by Jessica Alba, uses the taco truck as a cover up to help migrants obtain identification, migrate, and settle in the U.S. In *Machete*, the Taco Truck functions as a conduit to offer aid, jobs leads, and emergency medical care, and to ensure migrants have a safe passage, as they enter the U.S. As such, the taco truck operates out of the logic of social banditry but, in the eyes of nativists, as a “bandito” outlaw aiding and abetting “illegal aliens” to enter the U.S. However, in reality this has some factual support. The truck in Northern San Diego, for example, was translating documents, extending credit, and calling for help for migrant laborers⁴⁵

In one showdown Alba’s character, and ICE agent, confronts the Taco Truck operator, played Michelle Rodriguez. The ICE agent probes the taco truck owner by saying, “Got your papers?” She soon notices a poster of a revolutionary figure hanging on the wall inside of the taco truck. It says “She” (a play on words for the revolutionary figure “Che Guevara”) and looks like a Che Guevara poster. The ICE officer then probes deeper, asking the taco truck worker, “Who is She?” Michelle

⁴⁴ James P. Pinkerton, “The Reconquista is Here,” *Fox News*, opinion, Sep. 3, 2010 (last accessed: <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2010/09/03/james-p-pinkerton-machete-movie-review-drug-war-mexico-reconquista/>).

⁴⁵ Pawal, “Lunch truck operators sell food, extend credit, translate documents and call for help” *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 2006.

Rodriguez fires back with, “How the hell do I know? I just make tacos and sell them to the workers of this world. It fills their bellies with something other than hate.”⁴⁶ Just as “She” was a popular legend who offered hope and symbolized resistance to oppression to the undocumented, in the 1850s during the California gold rush and during the 1960s when Chicano activists appropriated the figure of Joaquín and inserted his spirit of resistance in a political manifesto in the epic poem *Yo Soy Joaquín!*, the Taco Truck as seen in *Machete*, assumes and brings back the figure of Joaquín and places the oppositional gesture of Joaquín into the character of *Machete* and the location of the banditry figure, the Taco Truck. Like *Machete*, Joaquín Murrieta was such a wanted public figure that after his death his hands and head were exhibited in a jar of alcohol and displayed all around California.⁴⁷ Like in *Machete*, nativism and white supremacy and corrupt Anglo-Americans drive Machete to go from ordinary figure to outlaw “bandito” in order to achieve justice. In the case of Joaquín, Anglo-Americans violently took Joaquín’s gold mine and lynched his brother, raped, and then lynched his wife. Joaquín was forced to witness these acts of aggression.⁴⁸ Therefore, as Humberto Garza points out, and just like Machete, Joaquín had no recourse but to be a bandit. And these acts propelled one to become a revengeful “bandit.”⁴⁹

At the time nativism was directed at foreign miners in California, with the enactment of the “Foreign” Miners’ Tax Law of 1850, which require \$20.00 on the head for any Mexicans or any person of Latin American descent to work in mines. This put many “foreign” miners out of the mining occupation.⁵⁰ Other racist laws applied structural violence at the Mexican and Latin American miner. Humberto Garza’s interpretation of the racist and imperialist laws, CA Law 394, and Federal Land Law of 1851, sheds light on how immigrant miners where compelled to seek

⁴⁶ Robert Rodriguez, *Machete*, 20th Century Fox, Trouble Maker Studies, 2010.

⁴⁷ Daniel Griesbach, “Rough Justice: For Farmworkers: The Specter of Joaquín Murrieta in Raymond Barrio’s *The Plum Picker*,” *Western American Literature*, 44, no.1, 1999, 23.

⁴⁸ Humberto Garza “Joaquín Murrieta: Part 1” uploaded Feb. 15, 2011, *youtube.com* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZdVt7mlgWk>).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: the Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 70.

social justice via armed (violent) action in the borderlands. As Garza notes, these laws made it legal for any Anglo-American to settle on land they deemed as “vacant.” Therefore, any Anglo-American in the state of California had the right to take any land they wanted via strong arm (violent) means to expel skilled and often prosperous Mexican, Chilean, and other Latin American miners who worked in the mines of California. If Mexicans or Mexican Americans refused to give up land, whites could legally use violence to achieve their ends to take lands and lucrative gold mines. Mexicans were not allowed to take whites to court nor file charges against Anglo-Americans.⁵¹ Hence, Mexicans/Mexican-Americans would have no recourse for justice unless they took the law into their own hands.

Machete and Joaquín mirror each other; both have the same semblance concerning the social/political context which gave birth to their subject formation. That is, both are figures driven to be the law in order to seek justice for Mexicans and Mexican–Americans living in a racist, nativist environment in the U.S. Machete has to witness the violent murder of his loved one, just as Joaquín had to witness Anglo-American oppression kill his loved ones (brother and wife) in the 1850s. This act of violence seared into their minds the image of brutality and drove them to seek revenge and justice, thus setting the stage to become legendary social bandits. Joaquín Murrieta’s story is woven into a larger history of racialized banditry and racism in the borderlands. As one scholar remarks of racial lynching’s, Joaquín Murrieta’s story is “Symptomatic of one of the most turbulent periods in California’s history, a period in which more Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and persons of Latin American origin or descent died at the hands of lynch mobs than in any other period.”⁵² Just as the state of California declared open season on Joaquín, the Minute Men and a corrupt politician, in Machete declare open season on Machete and “illegal aliens” trying to cross the U.S. –Mexican border.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynchings in the West: 1850-1935* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 175. Quoted in Daniel Griesbach, “Rough Justice: For Farm workers: The Specter of Joaquín Murrieta in Raymond Barrio’s *The Plum Picker*,” *Western American Literature*, 44, no.1, 1999, 39.

In the movie *Machete*, the nativist politicians equate the undocumented as a threat to the nation, juxtaposing the image of the immigrant to images of a nest of coach roaches and maggots. The message was clear: the undocumented are a threat that will infest the nation until freedom and the American way of life are non-existent. In the film, a wedge was being made, lines were being drawn of who belongs and where the “fault lines” of civilization run, processes reflective of Samuel P. Huntington, the nativist political theorist and pundit on immigration and cultural wars. The taco truck is a location on those “fault lines” of civilization along the U.S. - Mexico border, a place to be kept under surveillance like the U.S. Mexico border itself (figure 2). But the heightened surveillance and pestering of the taco truck and the day labor site it parks at enables something else: a space and sense of hope.

Social critic of migrant labor history, Carey McWilliams, writes, “Borderlands unite as well as separate.”⁵⁴ In the movie, *Machete* the taco truck symbolized a space of hope as it offers shelter and aides in moving and incorporating migrant border crossings. It acts as a foundation of revolt, a coyote aiding the masses of the undocumented; not as a truck but as a social bandit seeking justice and human intervention for the lives of the oppressed. The taco truck, as a figure in the borderlands, helps unite a people: undocumented immigrants. In *Machete*, the taco truck is the location where a critical mass of migrants (gardeners, janitor, and other the subaltern figures) come to join in a collective grievance and press a demand for justice. It is at the location of the taco truck parked at a day labor work site that the masses of undocumented workers or migrants call for a revolution.

The taco truck is ground zero for their revolution. It is there, coupled with the images of angry undocumented people who are marching to seek justice by armed revolt, that the taco truck marches along with them and takes center stage in leading the revolution. Images of the undocumented, such as garden tools and leaf blowers, along with the taco truck, serve to make the taco truck a bandit.

⁵⁴ Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York, Lippincott, 1949), 62.

What makes the taco truck in *Machete* appear as a bandit? The taco truck commands the underground network that smuggles Mexican migrants into the U.S., and the Immigration Customs Enforcement tries to catch the taco truck as they stake it out. What is more interesting, though, is the way the taco truck appears and leads the insurrection. It exudes a gesture that brings a trace of Mexican banditry in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands.

At one point the revolt was announced in a style reminiscent of Mexican banditry, where a brave bravado gesture was enacted to enunciate one's defiance and rebellion. This gesture brings to life the figure of the famous borderlands cultural icon of the California bandit, Joaquín Murrieta, and his band of men that terrorized Anglo–American towns. What is interesting is that Joaquín Murrieta was enraged when he witnessed the death of his brother and the rape of his wife.⁵⁵ Joaquín's wife, like the wife of Machete, mirrors the same tragic story that makes a Machete/Joaquín go from ordinary migrant border crosser to outlaw bandit seeking revenge. Early in the movie, Machete faces a similar an onslaught Anglo-American violence that catapulted Joaquín from immigrant to legendary social bandit or savage bandit, depending on the view one takes. Another instance brings the trace of Joaquín and positions it with the taco truck in *Machete*.

This happens in a scene of murder. Machete, just like Joaquín, had to watch his wife be violated (raped and killed in the case of Joaquín Murrieta; and left alive to die in a burning house in the case of Machete). By this point in the movie, Joaquín takes on a hue of banditry as Machete turns into a bandit seeking revenge, just like Joaquín did in the 1850s. The Anglo-American powers that be (politicians and Minute Men) and the state mobilize and set out to hunt town the taco truck (Machete), to put an end to his roaming bandit aiding and abetting migrant illegality in the U.S. nation state. These dynamics offer a trace of Joaquín, and the figure of banditry as the taco truck operate as an “illegal” and “outlaw” entity in the borderlands and takes sides with and helps the oppressed. Just as Joaquín's wife

⁵⁵ Carlos F. Ortega, Review. *Joaquín Murrieta: A Quest of Justice* by Humberto Garza (San Jose: Chusma House, 2001).

was a victim of Anglo-American brutality, this same brutality transforms Machete from ordinary citizen into a social bandit.

An early scene set in the La Frontera of Mexico on the Mexican side of the border depicts a burning house, a dying women trapped in the home, and a helpless Machete, who is forced to encounter brutality from a group of nativist/racist Anglo-Americans. He then becomes so enraged he moves to Texas and later takes up arms seeking justice for the group in charge of killing his wife. Joaquín, like Machete then takes out revenge on Anglo–Americans and seeks justice for the mistreatment of Mexican immigrants. Just as Joaquín the bandit helped the Mexican immigrant in the borderlands and raided the Anglo-American towns, the taco truck in Machete takes a similar symbolic gesture; it moves on the public operating like a bandit figure on a raid. And like a bandit, the truck is on the run from the state and nativist/white supremacist mobs who declare open season on Mexican migrants, hunted and chased down like Joaquín and his band of men in the 1850s.

The Taco Truck in *Machete* takes on a hue of resistance, taking on the hue of the banditry figure of Joaquín, when at the climax, Jessica Alba (the taco truck operator) from atop of a taco truck directs her rage to a day labor crowd, saying “we didn’t cross the border...the border crossed us.” This gesture of resistance then mobilizes the crowd of undocumented laborers to carry an armed attack to seek justice. In fact at a turbulent time in the American history, in 1968, Joaquín was brought back to life and harnessed for political ends as a figure of resistance to Anglo-American oppression. Here they cast Joaquín as a precursor to the Chicano/a movement.⁵⁶ The famous Chicano poet Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzales announced the new spirit of resistance in the Chicano consciousness in his famous *grito (call out)* in an epic Chicano movement poem of the 1960s, titled *Yo Soy Joaquín*. This poem offered a cultural performance of history, culture, and memory of the Chicano/a. It also was a social statement and social history of the Chicano/a people documenting

⁵⁶ Robert McKee Irwin, Ch. 2 “The Many Heads and Tales of Joaquín Murrieta” in *Bandits, Captives, Heroines, and Saints: Cultural Icons of Mexico’s Northwest Borderlands* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 80.

their struggle on both sides of the border. *Yo Soy Joaquín* galvanized the radical elements of the Mexican American youth seeking justice (and crystallized in them a confrontational identity) during the turbulent 1960s and was used as before Chicano political rallies and meetings to stir collective sentiments. It was also a bow to the California bandit Joaquín Murrieta.⁵⁷ Images of banditry and attack appear in *Machete*, summoning forth the images of social justice or social banditry by figures of resistance. This is evident when thinking of the poem *Yo Soy Joaquín* and thinking about the charge/attack in *Machete*. The poem has many parts that show this image of banditry and offensive attack. For instance one part of the poem reads “I am Joaquín. I rode with Pancho Villa, Crude and warm, a tornado of strength.” Another part of the poem reads:

All men feared the guns of Joaquín Murrieta.
I killed those men who dared
To steal my mine,
Who raped and killed my love
My wife.
Then I killed to stay alive.⁵⁸

As George Hartley astutely notes about the ending of the poem, “Joaquín is thus a complex and contradictory identity,”⁵⁹ yet all of these opposing facets nevertheless unite as one against Anglo-American oppression and aggression. The key to survival, the poem ends up declaring, is endurance and revolutionary faith—offering a space of hope, like the taco truck.

This is evident in another part of the poem:

*And now the trumpet sounds,
The music of the people stirs the
Revolution.
Like a sleeping giant it slowly
Rears its head
To the sound of*

⁵⁷ Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales, “Yo Soy Joaquín,” in *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, ed by Illan Stavans, Edna Acosta-Belén, Harold Augenbraum, and María Herrera-Sobek, Rolando Hinojosa, and Gustavo Pérez Firmat, (New York: Norton, 2011), 787.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 788-799.

⁵⁹ George Hartley, “*I Am Joaquín*: Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzales and the Retroactive Construction of Chicanismo,” <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/hartley/pubs/corky.html>.

*Tramping feet
Clamoring voices
Mariachi strains
Fiery tequila explosions
The smell of chile verde and
Soft brown eyes of expectation for a
Better life.*⁶⁰

In *Machete* the specter of Joaquín comes to the fore as the 12 million undocumented ‘the sleeping giant’ rises from being a silent group ‘foreign’ to be confrontational and participatory as a group – a group that assumes an oppositional stance because they are sick and tired of being excluded and kicked around in U.S. society as they are treated as foreigners, second class citizens, people who are kept away or slowed down from reaching full legal naturalization as citizens. The taco truck assumes a public stage for appearing as a figure of Mexican banditry. This is because as a figure of Mexican banditry, it exudes the image of the mother ship or command and control center of the armed revolt of undocumented workers. Hence, the taco truck assumes the position of being an outlaw bandit figure operating in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands. Soon after this scene, images of workers in armed undocumented immigrants took to the streets, leading a charge of “banditry” to violently achieve justice.

Images and sounds of gardeners armed with their garden tools, mechanics, and nannies, and pretty much all of the iconic figures of border crossing and illegality came forward to execute a violent attack for justice. And in this charge come images of Joaquín leading his people on cross border cattle raids and violent pillages on Anglo–American settlements. In the images of gardeners and images of men wielding leaf blowers and all of the implements of difference that are attached with laboring bodies in the borderlands, to me, one can see and hear the cries and “gritos” (cry outs or shout-outs gestures of rebellion) from the subaltern. These gestures of revolt/dissent and revenge are in *Machete* as the taco truck and Machete lead a revolt in unity with a critical mass of armed undocumented. The

⁶⁰ Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales, “Yo Soy Joaquín,” in *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, (New York: Norton, 2011), 788-799.

undocumented, 'the sleeping giant,' awakens (again) and takes to the streets, turning the streets into stage to express discontent towards the politics of immigration and national belonging. This scene is so powerful that even the priest not only helps lead the revolt but is there to aid and lead, offering weapons and putting aside faith for human rights and armed justice. The sleeping giant did not only turn his head; he stood up. He marched forward and carried out justice. Machete and the taco truck, like Joaquín and the sleeping giant, emerge as figures of the past, the present, and the future, offering a glimmer of hope.

Machete is barbaric and out for revenge, his image evokes the gesture of Joaquín Murrieta. As the famous *corrido* (popular folk song) titled *Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta* mirrors *Machete*, as a figure of fear, an outlaw bandit on the move to seek revenge.

*I took money away
From the greedy rich.
I took off my hat
To the humble and poor.
Oh, these unjust laws
That label me a bandit!
Murrieta doesn't like
The lies told about him.
I came to avenge my wife,
I'll say it again,
Carmelita so beautiful,
How they made her suffer.
I spent time in cantinas,
Punishing Americans.
"You would be the captain
Who killed my brother.
You came upon him unarmed,
Such a proud American."
My career began
With a fearful scene.
When I reached seven hundred,
My name was infamous.
By twelve hundred

My name terrifying.
I'm the man who subdues*

Even African lions.
Which is why I'm on the road
Killing Americans.
It is my destiny:
Watch out, whoever is nearby.
Pistols and daggers
To me are just toys.
Gunshots and knifings make me laugh.
Another part of the poem:
I've wandered through California
Around the year 1850,
My silver saddle,
And my loaded gun.
I'm that Mexican
They call Joaquín Murrieta.⁶¹

Citizen Taco Truck

As Gloria Anzaldúa adroitly observes, “The U.S.–Mexican border es *una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds...”⁶² The border as something that bleeds because it is a site of social relations, a site produced by conflict. Conflicts over the use of the city offer a view into that border that grates and bleeds; that is, the streets of the city where the subaltern work offer one location of that border. However, the border offers a common resource and a site of hope and a means of expressing one’s identity and political presence. The street becomes a site for one to make a *grito* (cry) for justice, as one looks at the spatial labor of street vending itself, in which subaltern street vendors seize, intervene, and inhabit the public. That is, their labor speaks or makes a political enunciation. This enunciation is what I will call *Citizen Taco Truck*.

After dark, when the health department closes down and stops enforcing health code standards, vendors rise to the surface of the city. To start, the taco truck comes in different modalities, but it emits new textures in the urban environment as it

⁶¹ “Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta,” in *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, (New York: Norton, 2011), 2467-2468.

⁶² Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* 1987, 3.

builds a new architecture of the city by allowing people to empower themselves through the way they re-arrange and use streets to express their identity.⁶³ That is, architecture, to evoke Walter Benjamin, is not static rather it is dynamic as “architecture has never been idle” since architecture is a “living force.”⁶⁴ By ‘architecture’ I mean not only physical buildings/structures but the social context of human and non human interaction. The kind of architecture I am talking about is *social*. This type of architecture makes the city ‘architecture’ have an ephemeral yet dynamic and sensory quality, one that is produced by social actors who turn physical architecture on the ground into a web of materials and bodies that produce their own use of space, and thus allowing architecture to unfold. This type of social context/space is ephemeral.⁶⁵ The architecture of street vending comprises the materiality of place: the sounds and uses of the built environment, the social scene, the sensory aspects of making vending a location of sociality a fleeting social context that comes and goes and props up in the city. Therefore, Citizen Taco Truck as a spatial operation on the city unfolds the city.⁶⁶ It does this because those who produce it construct/alter the city to their aims as users and inhabitants of common public space. It is through the architecture of vending that Citizen Taco Truck enables the subaltern to point cannon back at the city and the anti-immigrant voices who wish to see immigrants out of the public and out of the nation state. This is every more important as the material environment of the built landscape offers raw material the subaltern to make political tools by which they can deploy to express identity and gesture a political demand. As Walter Benjamin notes, “Streets are the dwelling place of the collective.”⁶⁷

⁶³ James T. Rojas, "The Enacted Environment of East Los Angeles," *Places: Forum of Design for the Public Realm*, 8, no.3. (1993), 53.

⁶⁴ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production" in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* trans by Harry Zohn, edited by Hanna Ardent (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 242.

⁶⁵ James T. Rojas, "The Enacted Environment of East Los Angeles," *Places: Forum of Design for the Public Realm*, 8, no.3. (1993). Peter Eisenman, "Unfolding Events: Frankfort Rebstock and the Possibility of a New Urbanism" ch.1 in *Unfolding Frankfort* (Berlin: Aedes, 1991), 9-10. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 879.

3. Citizen Taco Truck as encampment operating as ephemeral corner restaurant.⁶⁸



⁶⁸ Mac Kane, "Taco Trucks," in Polar Inertia: Journal of Nomadic and Popular Culture Web site, photography, January / February, <http://www.polarinertia.com/aug07.htm>, jpg file 14, located at: <http://www.polarinertia.com/jan06/taco14.htm> (accessed April 25, 2011).

4. Citizen Taco Truck (vendors) encampment operating out of a school parking lot.⁶⁹



⁶⁹ Exile Kiss: Culinary Journeys Around the World, “The Exiting, Weekly Mexican Street Food Fair! (a.k.a., The Mouth-Watering Beef, Pork, Chicken and Goat of Breed Street!),” entry posted October 12, 2008, <http://exilekiss.blogspot.com/2008/10/exciting-weekly-mexican-street-food.html> (accessed April 24, 2011).

5. Citizen Taco Truck as encampment operating on/near Bank of America in East Los Angeles.⁷⁰



One way to see how Citizen Taco Truck takes public space and makes a political enunciation comes in the form of how they set up “encampments” in public space. I define “encampment” or “camp” as political terms, in how they interfere with space and carry out a spatial operation on the city. Simply put, selling food from a truck or from out of the back of a van is a political act, an insurgent spatial operation on the material landscape of the city. What makes it an operation is how the truck takes space and reappropriates it as it sets up camp, squats, and becomes an

⁷⁰ Exile Kiss: Culinary Journeys Around the World, “The Exiting, Weekly Mexican Street Food Fair!” (a.k.a., The Mouth-Watering Beef, Pork, Chicken and Goat of Breed Street!)”

ephemeral restaurant in the fabric of the city ⁷¹ (figures 1& 3-14). By doing this, the taco truck, and peddlers who sell from mobile carts and vans produce a new kind of urban public space, akin to what bell hooks calls, “a space of opportunity.”⁷²

6. Citizen Taco Truck operating encampment as an outdoor dining and living room.



⁷¹ Charlie Hailey, *Camps: A Guide to 21st – Century Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 60-61.

⁷² Bell Hooks, “Architecture in Black Life: Talking Space with La Verne Wells-Bowie,” in *Art On My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: Norton, 1995), 156, 162.

7. Citizen Taco Truck as an operating on street corner.



Figure 3 shows a scene of sociality near downtown Los Angeles, where the taco truck is probably selling to garment workers. This taco truck seizes a corner parking lot bordering on a busy intersection in an industrial zone. It sets up an encampment, putting the space around it to a new use and setting tables up to make the parking lot an outdoor dining hall for industrial workers.⁷³ What makes it precisely political is that the truck is reappropriating the city space that planners had intended as a parking lot. Parking lots are for parking lots according to the spatial regime of urban planning: they are not for restaurants. However, the subaltern sees a different use value in a parking lot and seizes the opportunity to employ that use value to fit their needs (figures 3-14). Hence, they perform a spatial operation on the parking lot, turning it into a space for their needs. They set up an ephemeral restaurant, even

⁷³ As industrial trucks have multiple but fleeting stops, lasting about 15 to 20 minutes at a time, this scene in Figure I, although in an industrial part of town, may be a *Lochera*, a more lingering permanent station that is not a hypermobile as the industrial taco truck. See Hermosillo, *Locheras: A Look at the Stationary Food Trucks of Los Angeles*, MA Thesis, UCLA Urban Planning, 2010, 16-17. (<http://www.labor.ucla.edu/publications/reports/Locheras.pdf>).

going so far as setting up a small seating area to invite traffic to come sit and eat or putting lounge chairs and a television on the sidewalk (figure 3 and 6).

Figures 4-7 show how street vendors as a counter public taking public space and making a political inscription on it by conducting their spatial operation, changing the architecture of the city, producing new social spaces, and establishing ephemeral restaurants. They are taking and inhabiting space and, as such, are producing “lived space.” As Henri Lefebvre remarks, lived space “...is not only the space of ‘no,’ it is also the space of ‘yes,’ of the affirmation of life.”⁷⁴ These vendors are affirming their right to belong and make a living out of the common the public sphere. They do this because they reappropriate the common material infrastructure of the city (buildings, streets, street corners, sidewalks, fences, and its ornaments like stop signs) into a new use value. These figures show a political action.

In their spatial operation on the public sphere, Citizen Taco Truck and vendors bring their own home items: food, tables, chairs and other items, and with them Citizen Taco Truck appropriates space, making the public an extension of their private lives; their kitchens and objects from home merge in the public sphere, emitting new texture into city life, as a school parking lot becomes transformed into an outdoor carnival, unfolding the planned city. Through their spatial operations, vendors make the public and the private overlap. The public is turned inwards to be a private space, because Citizen Taco Truck is inhabiting and producing new textures within public space. Citizen Taco Truck merges the intimate/domestic and public. This is evident when one looks at the actual vending environment and its social context. For example, children are present, and home items enter to the public space: home pots and pans serve as commercial instruments, and cars and vans transport goods and private items from home that enter into the public marketplace. Additions such as chairs and television sets make inhabiting the public as “lived space,” easier and more intimate. In Los Angeles, this sort of vending is not permissible, yet it happens as the subaltern have learned to assert and lay their

⁷⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 200–201.

claim on the city with their laboring presence as Citizen Taco Truck to assert their right to the city.⁷⁵

The taco truck and its informal taco vending social contexts are spaces that allow another actor to enter into this thesis. For years, prior to the internet, the subalterns have been making tacos and the public did not conceptualize these locations as places of value. But the internet, shall we say, changed the way people communicate. In particular, the food blog changed the way we look at the margins and difference and the “other side of the tracks” in the city of difference.

II Food Blogs

If there is ever a time to make a rip or scratch in the spinning record, it is here, in this section. I walked you through the meaning of the taco truck in the previous section. Many of the images I used were found on food blogs. The taco truck, and its informal taco-vending context, allows another actor to enter into this thesis: Foodies. Foodies valorize authenticity. Authenticity to them has various elements. As a concept, authenticity is associated with a variety of elements: social distance, usually connected to being “ethnic,” being “simple,” as in making tortillas with just maize and just few non processed ingredients, and a hand press machine, for instance. Authenticity is also associated with a geographical location, as in tacos from Sinaloa. And the notion of tradition and history matter in framing what is “authentic.” In this paper, the term authenticity is close connected with its “ethnic” component, which signals social distance.⁷⁶

For years, prior to the internet, the subalterns had been making tacos, and the public had no point of perspective on these locations and social scenes. The internet, however, radically transformed the way people communicate. In particular, the food blog changed the way we look at the margins, difference, and the “other

⁷⁵ Exile Kiss: Culinary Journeys Around the World, “The Exiting, Weekly Mexican Street Food Fair!”

⁷⁶ Josee Johnston & Shyron Baumann, *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*, (New York: Routledge), 74, 76, 88, 90-91, 107.

side of the tracks” of the city. Operating within the food blog are a discourse and figure who identify and define the desired margins and difference as locations to seek out “travelling” or as they say, “adventure.” One need not travel to the “far off” lands but simply “head to” the ethnic enclave, where difference is packaged as “authentic,” where ethnicity offers something to be had, tasted, or consumed, and where the subaltern and their ethnicity, like vending tacos, are now being more commodified and marketed in the age of ethno-capitalism as part of the city’s experience economy.”⁷⁷

Reading the food blogs devoted to street foods, one thing rises to the fore: the figure of the foodie. The foodie blogger will focus in on something from afar, represent it, and bring it into view. And when they bring that “thing” (plate of food or mode of cooking, for example) into vision, food bloggers open up a space: a pore in the universe where one geographic location, like a street location in an ethnic enclave, suddenly moves into virtual space and the field of vision of a larger collective imagination (American Culture). When blogs link to blogs, this pushes the image of a location further into the field of visibility as more than what is “seen” but what is also knowable in the world.⁷⁸ Consequently, foodies may flock to the spaces that are represented in the food blogs, acting on tips and wanting to “travel.”

The food blog, like a portal, allows one to see a “their” by reading about new and “exotic” foods, but it also is a form of technological colonialism functioning in the world system. It is a technology that encourages what Lisa Heldke calls “culinary colonialism,” or what I call *tacoing*. Here the food blogger “heads” to the margins of the city and extracts that which is a raw material (difference). This raw material is then valued via the procedures of writing and representation that occur by food

⁷⁷ Jean and John Comaroff, *Ethnicity Inc*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1. Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 23-36. Arlene Dávila, *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City*, (Berkeley: University of California, 2004), 97-98.

⁷⁸ D.N. Rodowick, *Reading the Figural, or Philosophy after New Media*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2001), 53.

bloggers. Tacoing is a visual and performative technique/process to make something appear valued and turns it into a commodity fetish.⁷⁹

Culinary Adventures

The street food scene in East Los Angeles, offers one example of street foods becoming a target of culinary adventurers by foodies operating under the logic of culinary tourism. Over the past few year a collective group of street vendors have taken over streets, parking lots, and other public and sometimes private spaces (parking lots of banks) to operate as a food service for the community of East Los Angeles, which is what I called Citizen Taco Truck in the previous section. Food bloggers have branded this collective vending body as “The Breed Street Scene.” This implies that the space has been visited and consumed and turned into a commodity fetish by way of culinary travelling and representative acts such as travel writing, which happens in food blogs. While Breed Street is an actual street where many vendors sell, the immediate neighboring streets and locations in the vicinity constitute Breed Street depending on when the vendors congregate to sell and thus bring forth “Breed Street” into being with their presence as vendors. Some of the vendors have their own twitter account to communicate their whereabouts to a following of over 1,000 twitter customers.⁸⁰ While many bloggers have set their target on Breed Street, and while the *Los Angeles Times* has covered the scene, I would like to offer a glimpse into how the street vending scene Food bloggers use the blog as a platform to offer their readership a space to “travel” and to show how the communication space of the food blog is colonial in its mode of communication and expression.

Under the banner of “culinary adventures,” which is the tone and gesture of eating out in the margins and writing up one’s encounter with difference as a food

⁷⁹ Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

⁸⁰ See Nina’s Foods @ BreedStscene <http://twitter.com/#!/Breedstscene>

blogger, resides a rhetoric of colonialism. It goes something like this: the food blog takes the readers on a journey into the “cracks” and locations “off the grid” of the city, which to most readers is an “unknown” and “far off” place where one can “be” someplace “else” outside of the “here” of the U.S. nation state. There are two metaphors that will help illustrate my point. One has to do with creating spaces of connection that shape one place when it becomes in contact and thus sucked into a field/stream of relations with another place, that is when one place becomes open to forces/flows from some other location from afar. Or restated that place is positioned in a hierarchy of the other places. This being embedded in a hierarchal connection with other places opens up a pore or whole, allowing the other places from afar to send and take matter/resources or in my case images and symbols from a particular place that it establishes relations with – and these relations open up a space of flow (connection) between two isolated places, putting one place in a new position in the world economic system. That is a “worm hole” comes into existence as two entities come into contact and relations. The food blog, like a worm whole, is also a space of communication transaction, as it establishes contact, shapes space, and places the margins into contact and into a new postionality with respect to the center. Writing about Captian Cook sailing and establishing the first contact between Hawaii (margins) and England (center), the notion of worm whole arises. Geographer Eric Sheppard astutely notes:

“Notwithstanding their apparent rarity in physics, such space/time structures are much more common in our global society. Captain Cooke’s journey to Hawai’i was tedious, by today’s standards. Relative to contemporaneous space/time conventions, however, particularly those of Hawaii’s inhabitants, it constituted a wormhole. For Europeans, the possibility of traveling so far was quite radical, much like current views of space travel, and for Hawaiians it was a quantum leap beyond dugout canoes. A connection was made between geographically distant places for the first time that transformed the

movement of people, capital, and ideas between the two places and introduced a phase-shift in the trajectory of Hawai'i as a place.”⁸¹

The above passage helps illustrate my point about connection opens up spaces of flow and exchange and spurs the mobility of objects/symbols, matter, and energy, material to move out of one location and into another and thus sets up one place to be altered by this form of exchange. The food blog does this too. It alters the relationship between the margins and the center, sends flows of things out of the street and into virtual spaces. And it sets up relations between “outside” the center and the margins, as people value and then seek to enter into the margins to dine out on street food, or write up reviews about outdoor vending locations. So, my second metaphor is this: “Film” it not “build it” is what matters more in today’s case of street food and creating a worm whole. “Film it and they will come” should be the adage that applies now. When I say “film,” I simply mean take a photograph, maybe upload a video clip, blog about an exotic street food “scene.” Or, if it is not labeled a “scene,” label it one, and people will read it and feel compelled to make another “trip,” as food takes on auras of tourist attraction.⁸²

Take, for instance, the blog “Exile Kiss.” Exile Kiss’s blog title reads “Culinary Journey Around the World.” Reading the food blog closes the gap of space and time and spurs one to travel to a place: the street. Exile Kiss has one post about East Los Angeles, where she acts on a tip from a blog she read, “Streetgourmetlosangeles.” Streetgourmetla, reviewed Breed Street Vendors, which inspired Exile Kiss to do her own visit and review of the vending scene. When she read about Breed Street, the blog encouraged her to conjure up feelings and images of “travelling.” Exile Kiss writes,

“When streetgourmetla first mentioned Breed Street to me, I had visions of the Night Market and various Lu Bian Tan in Taipei that a Taiwanese Guide

⁸¹ Eric Sheppard, “The Spaces and Times of Globalization: Place, Scale, Networks, and Positionality” *Economic Geography*, Vol. 8, issue 3, 323.

⁸² Lucy M. Long, *Culinary Tourism* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 11.

had shown me on a trip through Asia a few years ago. In Taipei there were vendors on the streets, setting up little carts and stands with various food and drink, and most of it was absolutely delicious!:)”

She continues on to make the reader see Breed Street as “outside” the space of the “here” or the “city.” Her blog post makes it clear that she has made a voyage to a “there.” She writes, “I wasn't sure what to expect as I arrived on the corner of Cesar E Chavez Avenue and Breed Street, but what ensued was a wonderful evening exploring the street food of Mexico and beyond.”⁸³ At best, this blog offers us a window to see “travelling” as something that can occur in the space of food blog. Exile Kiss – notes the aura of the place she is adventuring into. At the heart of her narrative of her encounter with the Breed Street vendors, she emits in her voice an image that she has in fact “arrived” at a her “destination.” She writes, “We parked in the Bank of America parking lot (right on the corner of Cesar Chavez and Breed Street), and as we stepped out, I could smell delicious aromas wafting into the air. There were small street vendors set up all along the block and off we went! (^_^).”⁸⁴ This is not just a narrative/ recollection but a discursive pitch that palpably connects the reader to feel as if they “went there” as “travelers” re-encountering her culinary adventure in East Los Angeles’s Breed Street vending scene.

Skilled as a writer, Exile Kiss, moves the reader further “into” the deep march down the path that takes them along “with” her as she meanders and encounters various bends and turns in her culinary adventure, that is, in her eating and assessing of the various vendors that, to her, are “there” for display and to offer her raw material to blog about. Her write-ups evoke in the reader a sense that they are “with” her while she recounts her day’s trek into the margins. This is because of the way she engages with and represents her subjects. She writes up her responses to each vendor, showing a picture of each one, and then talks about what she liked or did not like. There is linear foot stepping or tracking back of her “travels” to the street

⁸³ Exile Kiss: Culinary Journeys Around the World, “The Exiting, Weekly Mexican Street Food Fair!”

⁸⁴ Ibid.

as if we were following and reliving her experience through her footsteps. This mapping and representing of the margins creates a picture and trace of travel into “otherness” where one can encounter the Oriental.”⁸⁵

8. Blogger captures a Tijuana vendor using a “novel” type of roasting spit not seen in L.A.⁸⁶



For Exile Kiss, the street vendors never appear as humans but as objects for collecting, viewing, and display, to serve as exotic objects upon which she can gaze

⁸⁵ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 30.

⁸⁶ Image from, Exile Kiss, “Mexican Food That Rocks Your World (or 18 hours of in Tijuana, Mexico).”

and extract something in order to produce a good blog narrative. In fact, her colonized gaze is so powerful that the vendors are not even part of the picture. She used the word “vendor” a few times. And this “vendor,” as it appears, like the other vendors, is a trace, a ghost, and simply backdrop figures or spectators in the landscape.⁸⁷ While this place is impoverished, it holds “treasures” that foodies “hunt down.” Breed Street, like other zones of vending in Los Angeles, such as the industrial part of the L.A. (South Los Angeles) make up the post industrial “underbelly” or “armpit” of Los Angeles.”⁸⁸ In these places the ethnic enclave has emerged. This part of Los Angeles offers a place for vendors to build – to evoke what Arjun Appadurai astutely deems as “the production of locality” – where locality is not scalar or spatial but “relational and contextual,” as seen in the way street vendors inhabit and produce urban space.⁸⁹ However, it sets up the context for food blogging about “street” foods.

What makes up the value of the margins is the effects which the food bloggers produce as the raw material that adds value to the location/practice of street vending. What allows for the desired effect is the social context: the vending environment and the social scenes and the aesthetics and sensory aspects of eating and cooking street food. That is, food bloggers take the margins (difference) and stage it by producing a desired affect, creating a commodity fetish, packaging a cultural practice that comes from the margins into a commodity.⁹⁰ Capitalism thrives on what it can extract and produce as new values for new desires. These desires

⁸⁷ On native figures in the landscape, see Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 57. On postindustrial Los Angeles being a site for the public expression of street vendors taking hold and seizing the public sphere for their needs, see Enrique C. Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa *Latino Los Angeles Transformations, Communities, and Activism* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press).

⁸⁸ Myrna Cherkoss Donaho, “Economic Restructuring and Labor Organizing in Southeast Los Angeles, 1935-2001” Ch. 5 in Ochoa *Latino Los Angeles: Transformations, Communities, and Activism* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press), 87-88.

⁸⁹ Arjun Appadurai, Ch. 9 “The Production of Locality” in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 178.

⁹⁰ Arlene Davila, *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City* (Berkeley: University of California, 2004), 97-98.

and modes of communication are evident in the blogging of margins, ethnic foods, tacos, on which I will focus. As I mentioned before, I call this “*tacoing*.”

Tacoing the Margins

Tacoing the margins turns difference and ethnicity into value. As Jean and John Comaroff astutely observe in their book *Ethnicity Inc*, capitalism takes ethnicity as something to use in the branding process and to turn the sensuality and materiality, as well as the taste/food, found in the margins into a desired affective commodity, one based on immateriality and attachments:

“...The widely noted shift in the production of value from the material to the immaterial – to the sale of knowledge and intellectual property, of experience, affect, and modes of self that once eluded it. It also underlies the fact that commerce, *sui generis*, now far exceeds the mere sale of goods and services. To a greater extent than ever in the past, perhaps, it involves the fulsome cultivation of highly charged attachments, at once emotional and cognitive, to chosen lifestyles... Commodity exchange and the stuff of difference are inflecting each other, with growing intensity: just as culture is being commoditized, so the commodity is being rendered explicitly cultural – and, consequently, is increasingly apprehended as the generic source of sociality.”⁹¹

This passage assumes difference can be a raw material since it is part of the value process of making ethnicity/culture into a valued commodity. These things come with affective attachments “charged attachments.” However, food bloggers create these feelings by the way they go street vending locations and then represent their adventure. This mode of representation gestures a cultural/ethno-safari, a pillage in “search” of raw material, a colonial gesture, that Lisa Heldke calls “culinary colonialism.”⁹² As Joanna Fabian writes,

⁹¹ Comaroff, *Ethnicity Inc*, 28.

⁹² Lisa Heldke, *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer*, (New York: Routledge, 2003). 7

“...the Other, as object of knowledge, must be separate, distinct, and preferably distant from the knower....we do not “find” the savagery of the savage, or the primitivity of the primitive, we posit them, and we have seen in some detail how anthropology has managed to maintain distance, mostly by manipulating coexistence through the denial of covalence.”⁹³

In her blog, Exile Kiss presents her encounter with vendors are placed collected and placed on exhibit. Vendors are described as “the first vendor” or “a vendor selling” something and not as human subject, but as marginal figures who make excellent food. What she focuses in on is food, plates of food, cooking apparatuses, and vending stands. Exile Kiss’s work of culinary adventuring is valued and praised by readers. After reading the write up of her culinary adventure, one blog reader proclaims “What a feast! I HAVE TO go down there and try the pupusa, tripa, lengua, chivo.... I actually took notes from your post. haha.... which vendor and what to get. So much food. I don't think I can eat everything I want in 1 trip. Great price, too! Thank you so much for this post. I know where I am going next Saturday night ^^.”⁹⁴ Another blog post respondent comments, “While I am still full from all the tacos I have eaten in the last week, your post still makes me want more. That looks like the perfect thing to do on a fall evening. I feel myself heading in that direction sometime soon.”⁹⁵ Another blogger notes, “This is really a stellar piece of investigation. Beautifully done. I hope it will get folks over to that great part of town that's well worth exploring. Many Thanks!”⁹⁶ To another adventure, someone writes, “What an amazing adventure! Who knew that Tijuana had all this to offer!”⁹⁷ While another states, “Awesome! If I ever decide to do a food tour of Tijuana, I'm using this post as a guide!”⁹⁸

and 48-49.

⁹³ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 121.

⁹⁴ Exile Kiss: *Culinary Journeys Around the World*, “The Exiting, Weekly Mexican Street Food Fair!”

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Exile Kiss, “Mexican Food That Rocks Your World (or 18 hours of in Tijuana, Mexico)” blog post, Sep 13, 2009. <http://exilekiss.blogspot.com/2009/09/mexican-food-that-rocks-your-world-or.html>. (last accessed June 22, 2011).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

The colonial mentality and attitude of Exile Kiss is so impressive, yet other blogs do this same sort of exposition in their representation of “travelling” afar to a “there” that “we” can and should venture into to see and eat for ourselves. When one reads the blog, they can trace her footsteps, as she present a linear step of her eating “adventure.” The food blog shares the same semblance with a travel narrative. A John Cruz notes, travel narratives entail “visits to strange and distant places,” and they provide “reportage of voyages to places hitherto experienced,” as narratives “map...new experience.”⁹⁹ Exile Kiss’s eating adventures gesture a step-by-step march through the “thick” of the streets and evoke other colonial adventure images of colonial agents “going in” and “chopping down weeds and trailblazing a path,” into the heart of deep blackness on the antipodes of “civilization.” While Food bloggers do not cut down weeds they still leave a mark; they eat one vendors food after another, sampling, looking for something – a gem or treasure, something to consume and then exhibit one chomp at time. Then they leave a mark by posting their account of their voyage, almost like making a claim to “virgin” places, like Anglo homesteaders going to the “wilderness” or “frontier” on native American lands and with their labor tilling the ground, and thus making it “developed” and thus their property. That is, they seek out public space and the vending environment (a common resource) and with their acts of tacoing they turn the margins (and its vending architecture) into something much more valued, that is, they develop it, and thus place it into something akin to private property.¹⁰⁰ Here she presents her subjects in order and orders knowledge in linear fashion, recounting her steps in her adventure, putting knowledge into categories. Other blogs do the same. They order knowledge, represent the margins and classify it by ordering it by streets, nation states, or ethnic cuisines, mapping, spatializing it in the blog and uploading accounts that act as a travelogue of adventure. As a representative tool the blog as a “colonial

⁹⁹ John Cruz, *Culture on the Margins: Black Spirituals and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 92.

¹⁰⁰ John Locke, “Of Property” Ch 5 in *Two Treaties of Government* ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: University Press, 1988), 288-289.

order” representing the margins as though it were an exhibition before the gaze of the foodie¹⁰¹

These culinary adventures are on display, as if in a gallery, for readers who visit the food blog. In other food blogs the streets and neighborhoods are codified and labeled for their properties and exotic dishes, and their taco trucks. On a wider scale, the food blog captures and defines the streets for their food offerings in “Asia,” “Africa,” and other areas. Images of key sites or key words that label and locate food in a specific context are colonial acts that food bloggers employ as cartographers of colonialism. In one case, tacos are found in “East Los Angles” or “South Los Angeles” and in another case, tacos are found afar in New York. Other blogs include “Asian” street food and each “part” of “Asia” is identified and presented as a specimen: “Thailand,” “Japan,” “Vietnam.” “China,” and “Grazing the Streets of Tokyo.”¹⁰²

Indexing Difference, tacoing 1

Zooming in and targeting is a form of tacoing that makes cultural practices and food ways in the margins visible to a larger, predominately white/foodie audience who may read food blogs. Here the food blogger unleashes a “picturing” of the margins that makes them something to be conceived and grasped as a target for one to experience a culinary “adventure.”¹⁰³ The food blog places difference on display, as if it is a specimen from an exotic land to be housed and examined as a source of knowledge that can be indexed for use later on to better examine its properties, comparative structure, and potential use value. When colonial expeditions went to the margins of the world, they sent not only armed agents but scientists who brought back images and specimens of native plants to be examined

¹⁰¹ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 13-14.

¹⁰² Street Foodie, UK. “Travel,” <http://www.streetfoodie.com/travel/>.

¹⁰³ Rey Chow, “The Age of the World Target: Atomic Bombs, Alterity, Area Studies,” ch. 1 in *The Rey Chow Reader*, edited by Paul Bowman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 7-8.

and put on display.¹⁰⁴ Just like those botanists of the colonial era who placed their plants in a museum or gallery, today's food blogger places "native relics" of difference on display on their food blog, a museum of sort for all to see what is and has been "brought back" from the distant lands."¹⁰⁵ As Joannes Fabian observes, "knowledge was thought to operate by collecting, comparing, and classifying impressions, the notion of mind as a naturalist's collection or cabinet encouraged further extension of the visual bias towards the spatial."¹⁰⁶ Food blogger mimic's this same production/culinary colonial mode of knowledge production and the food blog as communication device is also a visual and spatial medium that can be used to produce knowledge.

What enters into the food blogger's colonial space of the gallery is the materiality of the whole food vending experience – right down to the "exotic" materiality and the architecture of cooking. This is evident, in Exile Kiss's blog adventure to Tijuana, Mexico:

"Chef Victor Torres is so dedicated to his craft of cooking Barbacoa de Borrego the proper way (traditionally in a Pit, slow-roasting overnight), that he *built* a standing pit that could be properly sealed up to slow cook his Lamb overnight, maintaining the right amount of heat with his custom-built setup...

Taking a look into the pit, Chef Torres wraps each Lamb in Maguey Leaves and slow cooks them overnight. It smells beyond delicious...

And with that final Lamb sendoff, we headed back across the border with full stomachs and heavy hearts knowing very well that the equivalent types of dishes in L.A. fall far short of what was experienced in these 18 hours in Tijuana..."¹⁰⁷

As this passage demonstrates, the margins appear on display because of their perceived ethnic exoticness and social distance, which is equated with authenticity,

¹⁰⁴ Melvin E. Page, *Colonialism: An International, Social, and Political Encyclopedia*, (ABC-CLO, Santa Barbara, 2003), 31-32.

¹⁰⁵ Heldke, *Exotic Appetites*, xxi. See Francis Harvey, "Knowledge and Geography's Technology Politics, Ontologies, Representations in the Changing Ways We know" in ed. Kay Anderson, Mona Domosh, et al 2003. *Handbook of Cultural Geography*. New York: Sage. pp, 532, 537.

¹⁰⁶ Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 120.

¹⁰⁷ Exile Kiss, "Mexican Food That Rocks Your World (or 18 hours of in Tijuana, Mexico)."

something adventurous foodies seek to consume.¹⁰⁸ As the reader views the scene from afar, as if looking into a telescope by way of reading the food blog, one can see this dynamic of difference being on display. That is, the encounter for something else, a constant search for “novelty,” “the exotic” or “the authentic,” falls in line with a mode of colonial exposition and presentation of thought and action as “attitudes” as practices and they take on “culture wide ideologies.”¹⁰⁹

9. Food blogger captures a “novel” or “authentic” technique of cooking meat, wrapping meat in maguey leaves:¹¹⁰



Part of placing native objects as specimens of difference into visual (spatial) technology of the food blog comes by acts of translation. By this I mean how one shapes the context or represents it. For example, as part of her culinary adventure in

¹⁰⁸ Josee Johnston & Shyron Baumann, *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*, (New York: Routledge), 111.

¹⁰⁹ Heldke, *Exotic Appetites*, 4-5, and 17.

¹¹⁰ Image from Exile Kiss, “Mexican Food That Rocks Your World (or 18 hours of in Tijuana, Mexico)”

East Los Angeles when Exile Kiss comes up against a new encounter, she shapes it into something “new” or “exotic” which are key things that foodies seek.¹¹¹ A culinary adventurer in their act of *tacoing* will translate back the native objects/primitive people that they encounter. This act of translation assumes a gesture of culinary colonialism:

“It was quite chilly in Southern California this weekend, and while perusing their Aguas Frescas (they had the ubiquitous Horchata (Sweet Rice Drink), Naranja (Fresh Orange Juice), amongst a few other choices), a chatty woman sipping on a drink enthusiastically recommended to me their Atole de Guayaba. I had never had an Atole before, and the vendor happily poured me a sample. An uncontrolled smile came over me. I quickly placed our order.”¹¹²

The colonial exposition appears in the narrative of pointing out, labeling, and translating “new” things for a white/foodie audience by writing “Naranja (Fresh Orange Juice)” and so on. Categorizing these objects and naming them in list form or a catalogue displays difference as “exotic,” native relics on display.¹¹³ It is colonial because of how it is appropriated and used: it is used to convey the desired affections for an “exotic” landscape on the margins. That is, bloggers venture into the margins and do not just eat with everyone else, they snap photos and bring “those” images “back” to the “center,” allowing foodies and people from afar to see what goes on in “those” “exotic” or “far off” localities. These specimen images of vendors and objects contained in the vending environment that food bloggers gather from their adventures are not just neutral images brought home to the food blogger; they are images yanked out of context from one location and re-installed in a different space, that of the colonial gallery of the food blog. Lisa Heldke points out that colonization via food is a manifold process when she notes, “Colonizing is not a

¹¹¹ Heldke, *Exotic Appetites*, 17. Josee Johnston et al, *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*, 107-111.

¹¹² Exile Kiss, “The Exiting Weekly Mexican Street Food Fair”
<http://exilekiss.blogspot.com/2008/10/exciting-weekly-mexican-street-food.html>

¹¹³ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 13-20.

unified set of activities with a single goal, but a many-tentacled activity with diffuse—sometimes competing, sometimes supporting—goals. Indeed, its diffuseness and variety account for its tenacity and resilience; there is no single front on which to attack it.”¹¹⁴ Exile Kiss goes in as a cartographer of difference and surveys the objects in their environment, names them, translates their meanings, and even catalogues her own affective encounter with these objects of difference – evident when she writes of tasting Atole for the first time, “An uncontrolled smile came over me. I quickly placed an order.”¹¹⁵

Through the act of translation, the colonial adventurer will make sure to tabulate that specimen into their gallery and thus index difference. For instance, Exile Kiss, feels compelled to capture her affective encounter with the novelty and “exoticness” of Atole. She decides to snap a shot of the vendor pouring Atole (figure 10). She displays this vendor as trophy on her blog, to prove that she was “there.” The figure of an anonymous street vendor enters the colonial display as he pours (and poses) as a native relic for Exile Kiss’s culinary adventure. Here, the exotic drink (Atole) that when consumed, produced “an uncontrolled smile,” has been identified as an object of difference, an object worthy of capture for sharing to the world what she has “discovered” in the margins of Los Angeles. As Diana Taylor notes, adventures always enact the “scenario of discovery,” which is a theatrical act. Bloggers like Exile Kiss do this same enact this scenarios of discovery in their theatrical acts as food blogger. They proclaim in public their “discovery” of street vendors. As Diana Taylor notes about this theatrical act, the scene of discovery, will “enact specific movements and recite official declarations in a spectacle backed by visible signs of authority.”¹¹⁶ As Diana Taylor notes, everywhere the Spanish landed they enacted this same “scenario of discovery” as an act of appropriation and colonization of the native and their lands. They planted flags, carried out rituals, erected the crosses and monuments on “discovered” lands to proclaim that they had

¹¹⁴ Heldke, *Exotic Appetites*, Xx-xxi.

¹¹⁵ Exile Kiss: Culinary Journeys Around the World, “The Exiting, Weekly Mexican Street Food Fair!”

¹¹⁶ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). 56-57.

“discovered” new lands. The “drama of discovery” as a scene of encounter was thus a scene of theatricality but one that had a function to assist in the making the Spanish achieve possession of lands and native peoples.¹¹⁷

The way the food blogger represents street vendors is an act of culinary colonialism. They portray them as “primitive” people (figures 5-8 & 10-14). They are not worthy of engagement but simply referred to as vendors, if anything at all. They are there as native relics, meant to entertain, and operate as symbols that prove that the food blogger has indeed “gone” on a “travelling” experience and had an encounter with difference. Figure 8-14, for instance, show the exotic aspect that foodies find attractive/appealing in the architecture of street food vending. These are objects that are not mass produced but are a result of the ingenuity of the subaltern who harness the common infrastructure and built environment of public space to make a new use value to meet their survival needs. The manner and objects used by vendors, however, to appropriate the city become objects offering an “exotic,” or “authentic,” or “novel” sense and experience, and, as such, they enter into the food blog as specimens of difference.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 56-63

10. The food blogger captures “her” vendor that introduced her to Atole:¹¹⁸



¹¹⁸ Image from Exile Kiss: Culinary Journeys Around the World, “The Exiting, Weekly Mexican Street Food Fair!”

11. The food blogger captures native relics making tacos in an “exotic” location:¹¹⁹



¹¹⁹ Delicious Coma: Food Adventures In Los Angeles, “Boyle Heights Food Fair,” blog entry, http://www.deliciouscoma.com/archives/2009/04/boyle_heights_food_fair.html

12. The food blogger captures primitives vending in an “exotic” location: out of shopping carts and in the muffler shop parking lot:¹²⁰



¹²⁰ Image from, Exile Kiss, Exiting Mexican Street Food Fair,
<http://exilekiss.blogspot.com/2008/10/exciting-weekly-mexican-street-food.html>.

13. Selling tacos on the grounds of a public school (AKA Citizen Taco Truck):¹²¹



¹²¹ Ibid.

14: A scene of vending architecture as it produces “exotic” rhythms and sounds of taco production (AKA a vendor placed in the colonial gallery):¹²²



For example, Figure 11 denotes this colonial aesthetic. There is a back alley entrance to a taco peddler who uses a warehouse after business hours to turn that space into a taco shop. Here the back allies of the interstices of the city offer a “hunt” for the culinary adventurer. In figures 11-13, Exile Kiss “stumbles” upon a scene of “primitive” peoples, selling food, almost outside of time and space of city. This perceived novel/exotic native relic (taco vending context) enters the cage of the food blog as a specimen object on display – open for viewing and gaze. She appears as if she has moved from into the deep bush to see and find waiting is an exotic primitive vendor peddling food. To evoke Walter Benjamin, an aura or “unique phenomena of

¹²² Delicious Coma: Food Adventures In Los Angeles, “Boyle Heights Food Fair,”

distance, however close it may be” comes to the fore of the photograph.¹²³ The space of the food blog with its visual images allow us to move to go “there” since the food blog is a medium that showcases films about the margins. That is, film allows us to “go travelling.”¹²⁴ This form of “travelling” by reading culinary adventures and seeing the images of food adventuring and seeing the back allies of taco vendors who sell in “distant” far off lands of the margins, shows and plays on the notion of authenticity, and searching for “authentic” places, people, and food. A vendor selling tacos in a “primitive” “simple” way, often with aura of authentic, since simplicity is associated with “authenticity” in the foodie mind.¹²⁵ Nothing but a cooler and a “simple” table and seeing the canister of propane probably a bar-b-que denote an authentic/fresh/ experience with exotic tacos.

This is a much more exotic and authentic experience and adventure than going to Taco Bell or a brick and mortar-taco shop. This is more about the eating and experience of sensory inputs outdoors and in the open city, where textures mingle with food, creating an exotic streetscape, maybe to Mexico or someplace where eating out in public space from informal vendors is part of the city life and image. Here one is not eating simply food but perhaps may be eating Los Angeles via eating the aesthetics of everyday life (rhythms of pedestrian movements, urban vibrations, sight, sound, smells, feeling,) offer up the city as an outdoor dining room?¹²⁶ Simple things in vending space such as signs telling customers what is on sale, and how those signs are attached to the vending environment, what those signs are made out of, and how they are attached to walls, fences, buildings add to the texture of “exoticness,” which the food blogger captures by taking a photograph.

Tacoing looks for “far off” native relics and laboring bodies in their “natural” environment and as such, the food blogger by tacoing represent the vendor as out of

¹²³ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production” in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* trans by Harry Zohn, edited by Hanna Ardent (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 224.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 238.

¹²⁵ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production,” 226

¹²⁶ Others have made notice of this new dynamic emerging in urban culture. See Jeffrey Cody, “The City as Dinning Room: Dinning in Hong Kong” *Architectural Design* Vol. 75 Issue 3, 2005. See Nisha Fernando, “Taste, Smell, and Sound: On the Streets of Chinatown and Little Italy,” *Architectural Design* Vol. 75 Issue 3, 2005.

time and space of the city. In their imagination the vending environment in the city can be really “thick” and “deep” in the margins, meaning, “new” or “strange” sights and cooking modes as well as food will be “found.” As a agents of colonialism, the food blogger treks in the bush and “peels back” the trees and brush, hoping to find a “lost” tribe or band of vendors, who have been untouched by other food bloggers, who are “fresh” and new and thus ready to be captured, tabulated, and then represented out to the food blogger readership. Part of conveying this urgency of finding something “new” is in how the food blogger represents vendors as if they are outside of the city and nation state and temporality. While Exile Kiss does not flat out say this, the images of her food blog and the way she takes the photographs and what she targets convey that she has “found” a far off distance “primitive native” doing something, that to her, seems “exotic” as the figure prepares tacos in the heart of darkness. Culinary adventures come with them images of one “stumbling” and “discovering” exoticness. But these images are on exhibit for – to evoke Walter Benjamin, their “exhibition value” in the colonial space of the food blog.¹²⁷

In figure 11 specifically, the wall appears as a bush that has been peeled back to allow a new field of vision to arise. The food blogger now sees a whole “new” way of everyday life on the horizon, as vending tacos on the margins offers a visual thing of spectacle to their visual and affective consumptive encounter with difference. In figures 11-14, the food blogger peels the leaves of the bush apart, creating an opening and revealing the “exotic” appearance of street vending on the margins. There, Exile Kiss gazes on the primitive. It appears as a kind of covert filming of the native, as peoples’ backs are turned, the vendor does not appear aware, as laboring taco vendors are in the distance. Furthermore, the wide angle depicts the view of the whole scene of primitive native selling of tacos. This photograph enters into the blogs as a specimen of difference, something to take “back home” to the public as a picture of what the primitive native and the taco vending adventures in the margins of the city look like. In figures 11-14, Exile Kiss

¹²⁷ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production,” 226.

brings the reader close up to see the newfound primitive vendor, offering the blog followers a picture of her culinary encounter with difference located in some place “far off” in the margins of the city where consuming Otherness via eating and seeing offers a means of “travelling.”

Staging the Margins, tacoing 2

To evoke Arjun Appadurai, the objects and materiality of a landscape can become an abstraction (a value) because of their affective qualities that shock and entertain foodies. Things in the margins “stir” people to see that place as a destination since they offer affective and entertaining experiences with difference found in the margins of the city.

“Things meld into bodies, especially in Indian society, where objects provide the material for people to sleep on, to live in, to rest on, to buy, to sell, to store, to repair, to trade, to scavenge, and to display. In this endless profusion of things, two important features may be pointed out. There is hardly any interest in minimalism, any more with things than with people. In regard to both things and people, what is sought and desired is the warmth of profusion and the enchantment of multiplicity. Thus even the most forceful contemporary Indian art has little to do with standard European minimalist traditions, and when it does, it takes its force from its shock value in a context where crowding is a source of delight.”¹²⁸

Objects and materiality displayed on the food blog are not dead but contain social relations. As Arjun Appadurai astutely notes about things and materiality in place, “All things are congealed moments in a longer social trajectory. All things are brief deposits of this or that property, photographs that conceal the reality of the motion from which their objecthood is a momentary respite.”¹²⁹ The food blogger puts things

¹²⁸ Arjun Appadurai, “Arts in Circulation: The Thing Itself, Profusion” *Public Culture* 18, no. 1, 2006, p.17.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

and materiality on stage and sets them on a trajectory toward being valued as desired objects to be consumed in the city. As objects, they carry with them the quality of convertibility and the ability to be a means to achieve some other end.¹³⁰ Food bloggers, as writers, stage the margins by tacoing. They film materiality in the ethnic enclave and turn it into an abstraction via a process that values difference as “exotic,” “adventurous” or “authentic.” That is, the food blogger visually and theatrically stages them by casting difference found in the margins into a valorization process. What I call “tacoing” does two things: one, it enters “native” relics of difference into the colonial gallery for display, and two, it stages the margins. As Arlene Dávila skillfully points out, these perceived “unique” things of particular places vest these places with value as destination, where difference/ethnicity is couched in the form of “diverse cuisines.”¹³¹ As one blogger proclaims:

Picture it: open-air carts under bare bulbs where men and women chop meat and fashion dough into breads. Savory steam escapes from mostly-covered pots kept warm on flat-top griddles. Children run around playing games and there's a quiet roar of banter and joking, punctuated by sounds of "mmm!" and "ah!"...Just five minutes from the skyscrapers and gleaming palaces of upscale Occidental cuisine in Downtown, just off the corner of Breed Street and Cesar Chavez, one block west of Soto, is a nightly feast of Mexican -- REAL Mexican -- street food.¹³²

Urban ethnic rhythms that are produced by materiality such as light, colors, textures, graphics, smells, and forms and modes of cooking and eating, are all open to be staged as the difference found in margins of the city. This difference is valued and presented as adding “dynamism” and “vibrancy.”

¹³⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹³¹ Arlene Davila, *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City* (Berkeley: University of California, 2004), 98.

¹³² Das Ubergeek, “Review: Breed Street Vendors, East Los Angeles” Chowhound Blog, posted September 20, 2009, http://chowhound.chow.com/topics/653629?tag=footer_recommendation%3bboard_discussion_module_small (accessed May 1, 2011).

VendrTv

A further location to see this staging of the margins can be found on the food blog called VendrTv. While the food blog is not a moving image per se, it is a food blog. I will call it a food blog because, like a food blog, it targets vendors and turns street objects (vendors/food) into staged objects into staged objects. Blogs have no set definition, they are about form and style.¹³³ With the staging of making tacos, sound enters into the narration of the culinary adventure of tacoing. Food bloggers use their cameras to hone in on and target the labor and sound that is emitted when vendors make tacos. It is as if these images appear as an assembly production. Food bloggers will embellish and present difference in term of a staged performance. Food bloggers present city's taco vending environment as "entertaining" environment. Carey McWilliams notes how the "Spanish legacy," in the southwest is used to market and brand the city for touristic purposes. The food blogger erect the Spanish legacy, not in content but in form, as food bloggers present "their" vending figures on public display for tourism.¹³⁴ By valuing street vending performance via staging, street vending neighborhoods invites readers to see neighborhoods as sites of culinary tourism.¹³⁵ But what is staged is difference (ethnicity) as a commodity fetish in the world of ethno-capitalism.¹³⁶ VendrTv performs the objects and materiality of the place via the medium of the food blog. It makes the street and the people and objects there figures of entertainment to be "found" in the city of Los Angeles.

VendrTv, is affiliated with a sponsor, Hungry Nation, which goes by the mantra "We're not trained chiefs or professional restaurant critics, just real people with a real love for food."¹³⁷ That desire or love for "real food" translates into a

¹³³ Rettberg, Jill. *Blogging* (Malden, M.A.: Polity, 2008), 21.

¹³⁴ McWilliams, *North From Mexico*, 37-38. See Pilcher, "Who Chased out the" Chile Queens"

¹³⁵ Long, *Culinary Tourism*, 11.

¹³⁶ Comoraff, *Ethnicity Inc*, 1.

¹³⁷ "Hungry Nation: Working Class Foodies," <http://www.hungrynation.tv/wcfoodies>

desire for seeking out “real authentic” street food experiences in the margins. Guide, Daniel Delaney, takes viewers on a culinary journey as he films street food stands of industrial Los Angeles. Here, he takes viewers into the night of the postindustrial city, where he meets up with a local food writer/blogger and shoots what he calls a “Taco Crawl.” He opens up with, “Hey I’m Daniel Delaney and I’m travelling the world tasting the best street food around. Tonight we are hanging out in Atwater Village, a district of Los Angeles. And I’m going to meet up with a buddy of mine, a food writer, we’re going to do a *Mexican crawl* all throughout the neighborhood! So stay tuned. This is VendrTV [emphasis added].”¹³⁸ After making this gesture of staging the street and neighborhood, Daniel and the producers move to make the travelling experience a theatrical experience. After announcing “This is VendrTV,”¹³⁹ show time begins. Music enters the film; it’s a very fun piece that goes “do dut dut dut da” and is coupled with a variety of moving images of the city and food carts. The closing theatrical act shows the moving image (again, full of graphical theatrical gestures of sound, light, and movement), says, “VendrTV: Curbside Cuisine,” and has a background noise of screeching car tires hitting the pavement.

Act two opens up with what writers have noted about ethnicity and city life. Mexican vendors are packaged and valued to fit the image of “Spanish heritage legacy” as exotic and romantic figures, full of flamboyant señoritas and merry “Spanish” dons who live the romantic glorious pastoral life in the borderlands which is a fiction and an erasure of the power dynamics and the oppression unleashed on the native and mestizo inhabitants in the borderlands.”¹⁴⁰ Today, the food blogger is no different in how they act but they do not say “Spanish,” their gestures and actions of culinary colonialism bring the trace of a “Spanish” heritage legacy to the panorama of food blogs devoted to life on the margins of taco vending. Although the

¹³⁸ Daniel Delaney, “Taco Crawl w/ Dylan Ho (Los Angeles, CA)” Vendr Tv, <http://vendr.tv/video/taco-crawl-dylan/>.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Carey McWilliams, “The Fantasy Heritage” ch. 2 in *North from Mexico: Spanish – Speaking People of the United States*, (New York: Greenwood, 1968), 36-47. Victor M. Valle and Rodolfo D. Torres, “Mexican Cuisine: Food as Culture,” in *Latino Metropolis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 78.

discourse of the Spanish fantasy legacy exists in the discourse of design, construction, and marketing, it manifests itself in gesture as it happens in tacoing.

This gesture is illustrated best in Act 2 of the VendrTV's "Taco Crawl," in Los Angeles. The background sound conjures up images of romantic and groovy Spanish or Latin Jazz again arousing the Spanish heritage legacy of a gracious exotic Spanish romantic life into the borderlands. The images of fire, reddish glares, night backdrop, vendors moving carne asada around and sending billowing clouds of steam into the dark night, cars passing by, automobile sounds, laughter, and people hanging out waiting for their food, vendors chopping and carving meats, and of course the common sound of "chop chop chop chop chop" that taco makers produce. All of this is a staged performance. Daniel meets up with "his" native informant local food blogger. He says Los Angeles is "full of taco trucks but I tend to veer towards the taco tables and stands because we can see what they are cooking..."¹⁴¹

In their first round of eating Daniel asks his informant to translate the environment; Daniel then asks Dylan what they are about to eat. He goes on to explain what things they are about to eat: "we got the pig stomach (which is called buche), we got tripas (which is pig intestine), we got lengua (which is the tongue), and then you got cabeza (which is cheek meat)."¹⁴² Of course what would a staged performance be without a zoom in on the cooking meats in a pot, showing bubbles, steam rising into the night air, and texture of meats stewing with onions and of course Mexican/Latino immigrants eating in the background, and of course in the background, is a loud chopping noises of a *tacqueiros* chopping meat. At that moment, Daniel stands silent with a bodily presence of openness and he has a serious look on his face indicating that he really wants to "learn" from his native informant about tacos. Yet, his filming stages the margins by filming the streets, as if it a resources that they have the right to appropriate and value via tacoing. Food

¹⁴¹ Delaney, "Taco Crawl."

¹⁴² Delaney, "Taco Crawl w/ Dylan Ho."

bloggers will think the raw materials of place/people, since, as Lisa Heldke notes, “colonization happens through food.”¹⁴³

Daniel takes a taco and slightly moves it forward towards the camera. Then, he pulls it back. This performance continues on as he cocks his head back, but to the side so he can show the audience his fist bite into a taco. He then adds his own value/mark to the performance. He then chews, and proceeded to talk with his mouth half full with a taco, and at the same time, he begins smacking his lips in between tasting and then describing his taco. While doing this, the staged choreography includes a musical sound of journey/groovy and exoticness in the background. He then moves to interpret and convey the eating encounter: “I love it! And I love that guac sauce! A little sweetness in the guac and a lot of like (hands moving and facial processing of taste) spice on the front of your tongue.”¹⁴⁴ “Guac” is a stamp/gesture denoting the term Guacamole but is a theatrical word, denoting how food can be fun when you play with the words making a Spanish word “guacamole” something simplified to Anglo-American milieus.

Then the camera zooms away to another picture frame of a glowing/glaring blue and reddish flame that was used to cook the meats. Then the camera zooms out into panorama view, showing the skyline of Los Angeles at sunset, hugged by an iconic reddish glow that rises over the Pacific Ocean and radiates inland over the Los Angeles basin before sunset.

The next act goes deeper into the borderlands of exotic foods and ‘hidden geographies’ where “authenticity” awaits foodies. The bloggers zoom in to provide a wide panorama view of taco stands and social life of families and eating. And then it takes us in on a zoom in on exotic objects that signal to foodies “authenticity.” A tortilla press machine made from wood appears in the frame, an object valued because it denotes “fresh” or “authentic” or “simple” homemade tortillas, things foodies value.¹⁴⁵ And of course, a family looks at the film crew like with a body

¹⁴³ Heldke, *Exotic Appetites*, Xxii.

¹⁴⁴ Delaney, “Taco Crawl w/ Dylan Ho (Los Angeles, CA.)”

¹⁴⁵ Josee Johnston & Shyron Baumann, *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*, (New York: Routledge), 76.

language that reads what the *hell are you doing here in this part of the city filming our social space?* They arrive at another taco stand. There they proceed to capture, and film, what is “special” at that particular stand. The informant proceeded to tell Daniel that he likes the pickled onions made of Habanero and before he finishes saying they are hot, Daniel coughs up in reaction to eating habanero Chile, which was too much for him to handle. They laugh about. They eat their next item. Daniel places the food item on display, saying “This is Huarache, which is sort of like a pressed out masa sandal, Huarache means sandal.” He then proceeds to explain what every ingredient is that is used to make the Huarache.

When blogging about his culinary encounter, Daniel always translates what he is eating back to the audience: “we got some cotija cheese, cotija cheese is almost like a feta, a Mexican feta. It has a salty thing to it.”¹⁴⁶ They sample various types of stands and food items, “I’m going to give this a shot and then pass it over.” They move on to translate an “exotic” quesadilla and a drink. About the quesadilla, Daniel says, “Inside there is squash blossom....I really like that it almost has like a spinach almost like a leafy kind of green taste....” and with regards to the drink Daniel says “oh, we did not tell you what we were drinking, this is Juraitos, which is sort of like the coca cola of Mexico. It comes in all different flavors. I have tamarind. And it is really great naturally flavored, it has cane sugar in there and so it does not have corn syrup or anything like that.”¹⁴⁷ Last, they drive to another part of Los Angeles, and eat at street scene, which, his native informant claims is the authentic. Dylan, “his” native informant, proclaims, “This is Hyland Park, AKA taco town. These guys are one of my favorite pits stops too. Solid taco they cook right out of their house.”¹⁴⁸ Here the location of “home” as private/ public, private in that it is home and public in that it extends to the public by vending “home cooked” meals, as the personal equates to authenticity and ethnicity.¹⁴⁹ This raises the specter of the Holy

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Johnston et al, *Foodies*, 85.

Grail of Foodies search for “authenticity.” What can be more “authentic” eating food cooked at home by taco vendors? Home like the label of a geographical location signals a location of “authenticity” just as a regional label serves to signify the “authenticity” of ethnic food and travelling to eat some place “else,” on the margins of the nation state.

III Foodie Truck / Conclusion

This thesis so far explained the variegated meanings of the taco truck. I also introduced the food blog, which focuses on the blogging about the street vending environment in the ethnic enclave. In particular, the food blog focuses on the Citizen Taco Truck aspect of food vending, vending done on the margins vendors appropriate and produce space. Now I will focus on a new form of mobile practice, which I call the ‘foodie truck.’ But how do these three strands link up or make sense in relation to each other? What is the purpose of having these seemingly “new” points of reference that do not seem to cohere around one central point? Put differently, was there a point in setting up the chronology, that is, starting with taco truck then going to the food blog which represents the taco vending environment, of one aspect/meaning of the taco truck?

If anything, having to include three separate meanings to my thesis is actually central to my overall thesis. I imply that something (the taco truck) migrated (morphed) to being a new vending form. That is, not literally, but metaphorically, the taco truck as a mode of vending with a particular meaning was usually associated with one class, like immigrants, migrants, and the subaltern. Now, the taco truck serves a new class of people. Now, the foodie truck is not an object simply giving food to workers and working classes, the foodie truck is serving the upper middle classes and it is now selling a gesture as it performs a new mode of urban vending.

I am not trying to claim that I can explain “how” this migration occurred. I simply wish to apply my sociological imagination so as to point out a new sociological phenomena happening in urban space. I wish to point out that a new

type of “taco truck” if you will has emerged in city life. But the food blog you might ask “why is it in this paper?” The food blog is there because it offers an example of where the value of “the street aesthetic” comes into play in valorization of urban practices like food vending in public space. Let me rephrase. The value of “streets” as in “street foods” or “street dining” or “street vending” has to do not just only with the food one eats. Rather, the materiality connected to it is what gives value to the “street food, “street vending” or “street dining” experience economy.

So why does that matter? It matters for one reason. And this connects to the foodie truck. It connects not as “a” connects to “b” but more like “a” connects to some other point of connection, but it connects. The role of staging something as in making it a performative object matters in social life as a commodity and that form of delivery that makes an object appear vital comes in the expression of gaming.

I would like to position my discussion of the foodie truck in the context of how neo liberalism views space. By “space” I mean not something that is an empty, a void, or a container. Space as I use it here is not a *tabula rasa* in the Cartesian sense. Rather, I ascribe to the term ‘space’ in the way that Henri Lefebvre defines social space. That is, space is *social* because space is a) a product (space is produced), b) a means of production, and c) it ensures/maintains property relations.¹⁵⁰ Taking this notion further and moving it into the range of another field of thinking, that is performance, or the idea of something acting/performing or gesturing, to me, is to say and think of space as something inherently social. It is social because it is full of interaction and social relations and acting, just as a stage needs audience and actors to perform, as Ervin Goffman might say, we need interaction between actor and recipient (audience). With relation to this thesis and the foodie truck, it is cities actor receiving and performing. By performing it take the term “perform” to include “to do, to behave, to show.”¹⁵¹ And it is commodities, foodie trucks, performing as actors not in the space of the face-to-face but on the global

¹⁵⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicolson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell, 1999), 85.

¹⁵¹ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 22.

stage of media in the interurban grid of global urban communication that transmits not just signs and images but values and global desires.

The ideological work behind what drives cities to brand their urban geographies has much to do with the ideology of neoliberalism and how neoliberalism views space.¹⁵² Yes, neo liberalism is not one monolithic thing; neo liberalism is variegated in its form at the local level.¹⁵³ Neo liberalism encourages cities to brand parts of their city, to brand neighborhoods to fit a valorized social scene. This is why we see cities naming parts of the city with labels like “artist quarters,” even when there are no artist living around but rather high rise condos and a smattering of artist who perform in the local bars and music venues. Names that brand places in the city, names like “old town,” “historic district,” “little Italy,” and “eat street,” valorize locality in urban space. What this does is turns locality into an urban amenity, which distinguishes the city, making it appear more attractive. As Peck and Tickell point out, “As David Harvey so persuasively argued of urban entrepreneurialism, the serial reproduction of cultural spectacles, enterprise zones, waterfront developments, and privatized forms of local governance is not simply an aggregate outcome of spontaneous local pressures, but reflects the powerful disciplinary effects of interurban competition.”¹⁵⁴

Staging Vitality

Walter Benjamin was on to something when he writes about the commodity being human like with energy and the ability to perform, as if it were object with a life form. The commodity, as Benjamin asserts, “not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in face of all other commodities, it stands on its head, and out of its wooden brain it evolves notions more whimsically than if it had suddenly begun to dance.”¹⁵⁵ The foodie truck appears to back up Walter Benjamin’s assertion. The

¹⁵² Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, “Neoliberalizing Space” *Antipode*, 2002,

¹⁵³ Tickell and P

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 393.

¹⁵⁵ Karl Marx as cited in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge: Harvard University

national media unfolded a discourse valorizing the foodie truck as a commodity because it has vitality. Time Magazine was one of the first to publish an expose that valorizes the foodie truck as vital (vibrant) and dynamic trace.

Time describes the foodie truck (Kogi Truck) as a vendor that sells something other than food, something that is “new” to the urban landscape. Attitude and style of action seem to be what makes the foodie truck appear hip and full of vitality. Time writes with a tone that is important to note, and Time posits food trucks as if they are animating and staging city life adding a trace of dynamism. As Time states of the Kogi Taco Truck:

Choi, who does his proselytizing from a fleet of culinary clunkers, became the leader of this movement not just by creating a whole new cuisine--a mashup of Korean and Mexican food that has given rise to short-rib tacos and kimchi quesadillas--but by dishing out punk attitude. Peer inside one of his Kogi taco trucks (the name is Korean for meat), and you'll see him yelling in Spanglish, baseball hat askew, arms tatted up, hands flying like a rapper's. This is performance art, and people often wait in hour-long lines for the privilege of snarfing it down with a spork.¹⁵⁶

The article goes on to state how mobile street vending can be more than just about food but about making city life constitutive of other forms of vibrant sociality:

But Choi takes it all very seriously. He wants to bring farm-raised, artisanal food to the masses. In addition to the new restaurant in L.A., he's looking to expand to another city with his trucks. One of his dreams involves a traveling foodapalooza where Eminem performs onstage while farmers sell their veggies at booths nearby.

Press,1999), 197.

¹⁵⁶ Joel Stein, “Gourmet On the Go: Good Food Goes Trucking” *Time Magazine*, March 29, 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1973281,00.html>

He thinks there's a chance it might all come together--maybe when he finally talks to Emeril, whose people just called him to set up a meeting. "I'll meet one of the big boys and see if he'll ride with me on this mission to broaden the food landscape," Choi says. "It's 2010. Let's start feeding people. Let's get out there."

Time casts the nation as being under attack by a movement of urban food trucks in cities, which is bringing food to the masses. The article uses phrase "Culinary Mashup," which takes on a hue of dynamism.¹⁵⁷ Time casts Kogi as cooking, his Kimchi quesadillas vital acts of production, saying "Roy Choi turns street food into high art."¹⁵⁸ Time also casts the foodie truck movement in the nation as one of vital importance and vital impulse as a movement not just about food but about style carried out by not just street vendors by chiefs: "Chefs around the nation are using trucks to bring high-end food to the masses at drive-through prices."¹⁵⁹ Menus of the of the foodie truck too, get cast as a vital act as the foodie truck is vital because it serves "mashup" cuisine, as Time states, Kogi's menu is a mashup of Korean and Mexican food."¹⁶⁰

Time further presents the Kogi Truck as a performative vital act when it covers the various foodie trucks located not just Los Angeles but in other cities in the United States. The expose reads as a straight performative speech act; enacting and doing and showing how the foodie truck is not just a taco truck selling street food, but an urban amenity selling something more: selling spectacular urban vitality along with a street food as a new "cuisine" classification. The article then not only covers Kogi but it covers other foodie trucks in the nation. A list of five trucks and their descriptions capture this performative gesture of vitality. The captions read:

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

Silver Bullet --Based in Seattle, Skillet street food's unique personality starts with a shiny Airstream trailer, which offers a continually evolving menu of chef Josh Henderson's carefully crafted meals, like coriander-braised duck or a grass-fed beef burger with arugula and cambozola cheese.

Bistro Bites -- Skillet is helping change the face of street dining by refusing to pre-cook food to save time and by playing up its organic, locally sourced ingredients. This mouth-watering maple-braised pork belly sells for \$8.

Fancy Fare -- Chef Laurent Katgely, who hails from the French Alps, and his wife Erin, launched San Francisco's Spencer on the Go (named after their son), which offers an affordable take on fine French dining.

Taste of Vienna -- Oleg Voss and Jared Greenhouse have reimagined street food in their own way with a colorful truck a catchy name, Schnitzel & Things, which MobileCravings.com, a nationwide directory of food trucks, recently crowned the #1 street food in New York City.

Perfect Pie -- Who says pizza can't be fancy? Streetza, Milwaukee's cleverly named mobile pizza joint founded by Scott Baitinger and Steve Mai was named one of the top food trucks in the country by *GQ Magazine*.

Staging vitality comes in another form. Time Magazines' move to make the foodie truck vital exhibits two things that comprise its nature. The nature of the foodie truck takes on performative gestures of 'gaming acts' a components that make the foodie truck as a commodity appear vital and vibrant.

Gaming Acts

The foodie truck is a stylized act of expression that connotes gestures of gaming. On two levels, the notion of gaming manifests itself as part of the nature of foodie truck. At the level of graphical arts, and at the level of communicative style, gaming seems to be the operating logic of the expressive tone of the foodie truck. While the taco truck has an artistic nature to its outer surface, the foodie truck has a more hyper graphical gaming nature that is embedded and presented in how the foodie truck looks. The taco truck is not a form of art communication that harkens on notions of gaming at either the level of surface (graphical text or in the gesture of those texts that have a self presentation that exudes gaming).

I mean gaming in the larger sense of the term as “game” denotes spirited, amusement, entertainment, and match. If one were to look at the various images of many of the foodie trucks that are out there one will notice a variety of distinctive graphics and messages that denote the hue of gaming. Many of the trucks that sell fusion food or gourmet food have quirky graphics that not only draw attention but give off a funny, mostly light hearted gaming expression. For instance, this is scene in a few of the iconic truck, a truck that made its way onto the Great Food Truck race: Nonmom truck and Gril Em All (figures 14 -16). The nom nom truck for instance has a graphical image of what appears to be a little face eating away at something, and that face, and the graphics used to produce the image, look almost like video games, like pac man from back in the day, gobbling something down as it game motif. The Grill em All Truck while it does not look like a video game, it carries with it a the graphical text of the milieu of heavy metal rock, and the graphics resemble the font and expression of the famous band Metallica, a famous heavy metal band, an iconic band from the late 80s. the graphics exude gaming because of text and the presentation of self as seen in the movie the *Great Food Truck Race*, where grill em all takes on an edgy gesture of an attitude that is about going after something, “grill em all” as if they are taking food and adding a heavy metal vibe to how to approach their cuisine, a sort of hard core, gritty and intense attitude towards

cooking hamburgers. This is like gaming because most video games when they have a variety of characters or cast of characters in the set of the panorama of the game – endow each character with a set of attributes, a nature, a style, a mode of expression, as the game has a set of players if you will that all have particular attributes that set each player apart from each other. Foodie trucks take on this same logic. Each foodie truck has a stylized action, a repertoire of presentation of self, and a mode of expression, that is game like. Perhaps this is best scene in the foodie truck Manila Machine.

Manila Machine has its own anthem, a stylized gesture of comedy and funkiness that displays how it as foodie truck is distinct compared to all the other players if you will in the foodie truck game, if you can extend the notion of “game” to the field of cooking “street food” from mobile food trucks. Manila machine may cast itself as distinct in that not many trucks sell Filipino food, it may explain that it sells “exotic” foods since it sells a dish made cheek, but what distinguishes its self as a unique player in the game of urban street vending comes in the music and syntax of its food truck song. The song goes kicks off with a soul funk that sounds like an Afro soul sound of either Gil Scott-Heron or Curtis Mayfield’s song Super fly or Pusher man. The song goes:

“walking down Los Angeles’ streets, I am getting kind of hungry gotta find something to eat, so many choices in the local food truck scene but I gotta check my twitter for the manila machine, manila manila manila machine, shiny rays of orange, it’s a sight that must be seen, manila manila manila machine, make that truck your destination for Philippino cuisine, the manila machine ----du au dua dua dua dua uda uda, di da di da di da; they got longanista sliders, and siki over rice, and Filipino breakfast, you know she looks so nice, they got [sic]for me and [sic] for you, don’t forget the chicken adobo....manila machine, it’s a sight the must be seen...”¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ <http://themanilamachine.com/archives/hoy-download-the-manila-machine-theme-song>.

Gaming occurs in the communicative speak of the foodie truck as well. Trucks tweet their presence to the city at large. For instance, Coolhaus, tweets to Santa Monica, CA, “T2 is stuck on the side of the road on the way to SM...it's been REALLY volatile lately. Stay tuned westsiders!”¹⁶² In one day’s tweets, the Coolhaus truck sends out tweets that denote game like gestures: One tweets says, 'Sup Century City? We're servin w/ [@nomnomtruck](#) tmrw 1130-230 @ 10345 W Olympic Blvd. Get your sammie fix! Pword is BEBE 4 \$1 off 2 sammies!” Another says, “Sorry dude T2 got sick-hope to be there nxt time! RT [@bighungrydude](#): [@COOLHAUS](#) We are at Taft, where are you? I need my bacon ice cream fix!”¹⁶³ While this is light game like gesturing, it has a trace of game behavior since it exudes playfulness and affective gesturing of desire.

Paring Acts

Another dimension of gaming comes in the form of paring. That is, in making something go with something, it seems to add flair a sort of new “vibrancy” and edge an new valorized product. For instance, while many of the foodie trucks mix or ‘fuze” food calling their food “fusion,” the idea of paring as something more than just mixing or mashing up food, is a game like hue. For instance pairing is not just about pairing style or taste, though it can be, as in the Great Food Truck Race, food trucks parried their foods according to the audience. For instance the French truck paired its food with people who visited culturally distinctive places, like parks or museums, while the Vietnamese ba mi sandwich truck went after the culinary inquisitive people, the foodie types who shop at places like natural food stores and boutique shops, coffee

¹⁶² <http://twitter.com/#!/COOLHAUS>, July 25, 2011.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

shops, and so on, while the Grill em All truck which sold hamburgers went after the less cultural distinctive social scene: the bar and college scene.

Pairing animates city life because it pairs culture and milieus. It makes the city spectacular and provides boundaries and contexts for a fashionable aesthetic, which excludes at the same time it includes.¹⁶⁴ For instance, the Manila Machine recently parks out in front of the hip landmark theatre in Los Angeles, the El Rey Theatre, a hip status event in the Garment District called Unique Los Angeles, a venue to showcase local garment designs, the Santa Clarita Food Fest, and the Los Angeles Gold Standard, a food and wine event.¹⁶⁵ The clientele at these events are the clientele of those who eat at the taco trucks. The Manila Machine appears to pair urban hip culture with its food. It appears at the Los Angeles Garment District events, a place that produces clothing for the world. And more than that it appears at a specific event, a clothing event devoted to local Los Angeles designers and local products.¹⁶⁶ The matrices of pairing include the web of art/graphic design, communications, and food. That is, food in the case of food vending in mobile fashion has to do more with a complex that is interconnected and supportive of not only culture, taste/milieus, but social scene, the context and locations and events in which the foodie truck makes its appearance. Another example from the Manila Machine supports the notion that pairing pairs social scenes. For instance, the food truck may be unfolding “to the masses” or “*bringing it to the masses*” (emphasis added).¹⁶⁷ That “it” they are bringing to the masses is not solely “street food” or ‘gourmet/fashion food for the masses.’ Rather, as the rhetoric goes that foodie trucks expose vibrant life and social scenes. This staging and producing urban dynamic aura makes city life appear vibrant and dynamic. The move to “pair” something with something else is a laboring act of affective (and aesthetic) communication as well as production: it sparks vibrant textures as well as discourses

¹⁶⁴ George Simmel “Fashion” in *George Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 297, 299.

¹⁶⁵ <http://themanilamachine.com/>

¹⁶⁶ <http://themanilamachine.com/>

¹⁶⁷ See “Meet the Manila Machine” <http://themanilamachine.com/>

of desire. For instance saying “wine pairs” with “tacos” one catches the attention of the public foodie audience and creates buzz among consumers and brands the city as having a new urban food fashion, which readers from afar read and know about, talk and add buzz of their own the discourse of eating in the global city. As wine “pairs” marginal things that have yet to be tamed but the colonial gesture of pairing, the “new” food that goes from margins (via being paired) in discourse and in practice moves that marginal object of difference from the edge of the American mainstream (refines it by valuing it) and places it into a new field of vision and taste from another class of consumers. Global city dynamic aesthetics, such as image and matter (ie. like wine and ‘fusion’ food) have recently been paired with taco (see the way they were treated by the *New York Times Wine and Dining* page in 2010).¹⁶⁸ As the Manila Machine moved Filipino food more into the mainstream, it becomes a target that needs to be figured out and tamed/domesticated as something that can be “paired” with wine and an object that enters into the topography of what “goes” with wine. Wine aficionados, possibly are customers who may have never eaten Filipino food let alone eaten it paired with their wine. But a wine store with a foodie truck parked outside pairs and creates a new urban buzz. Just recently, in Los Angeles, the Manila Machine attended a Filipino food and wine event at Domaine LA wine store on a gentrifying stretch on Melrose Ave. The idea of pairing something novel with a staple of foodie and upper middle class culture (wine) is something that adds buzz to the foodie truck and the image of the city and neighborhood. Manila Machine announced in their website:

Continuing our one-of-a-kind efforts in bringing the authentic flavors of the Philippines to the masses, The Manila Machine is happy to announce a one-of-a kind Filipino food and wine pairing event with Domaine LA.

On Sunday January 23 from 2-5pm, The Manila Machine will be serving a special Filipino tasting menu to be paired with a selection of French and

¹⁶⁸John T. Edge. “The Tortilla Takes Road Trip to Korea”
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/28/dining/28united.html>

Italian wines chosen by Domaine LA's staffers Whitney Adams (also of "On The Lamb Food & Wine") and Jesse Brawner. The Manila Machine tasting menu will include Sisig, Beef Tapa, Lumpia, Crispy Adobo Flakes, and Ube Cupcakes.

Having a wide spectrum of flavors influenced by Malaysia, China, Spain, Mexico, and even the United States, it should be of no surprise that Filipino food can be enjoyed with wine. And with our contemporary take on traditional street and home-style Filipino dishes, The Manila Machine menu can provide endless matches with a variety of wine styles (but don't forget, our offerings are still damn good with a cold bottle of San Mig—Filipino food is versatile like that).¹⁶⁹

All in all, I argued that today's foodie truck is much different than its predecessor taco truck. Today's foodie truck is embedded in a web of intercity communication in a way that makes the city attractive to capital and tourist flows. The foodie truck as stage performs for the city and markets the city as a global locality, and a locality of spectacular vibrancy.

The taco truck has morphed so much that it is now a foodie truck that markets a way of eating in the city, and thus markets the city itself. The foodie truck is more than a commodity, it is an actor that performs and adds value to the city image. They make the city desirable. And other cities want these trucks to make their urban scene seem 'cool' or on par with a global city status like L.A.

¹⁶⁹ <http://themanilamachine.com/>

Bibliography

- Almaguer, Tomás. *Racial Fault Lines: the Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994)
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987).
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Arts in Circulation: The Thing Itself, Profusion" *Public Culture* 18, no. 1, 2006.
- bell hooks, *Art On My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: Norton, 1995).
- bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, (Boston: South End Press, 1990).
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, edited by Hanna Ardent (New York: Harcourt, 1968).
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999)
- Chaves, Leo. *Covering Immigration: Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation*, (Berkeley: University of California, 2001).
- Cody, Jeffrey. "The City as Dinning Room: Dinning in Hong Kong" *Architectural Design* Vol. 75 Issue 3, 2005
- Chow, Rey. *The Rey Chow Reader*, edited by Paul Bowman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010),
- Comaroff, Jean and John. *Ethnicity Inc* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
- Crawford, Margaret, John Chase, Kaliski John, *Everyday Urbanism*, (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999).
- "Corrido de Joaquin Murrieta," in *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, ed by Illan Stavans, Edna Acosta-Belén, Harold Augenbraum, and María Herrera-Sobek, Rolando Hinojosa, and Gustavo Pérez Firmat, (New York: Norton, 2011).
- Cruz, John. *Culture on the Margins: Black Spirituals and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1984).
- Dávila, Arlene. *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City* (Berkeley: University of California, 2004).
- Eisenman, Peter. *Unfolding Frankfort*, (Berlin: Aedes, 1991).
- Fernando, Nisha. "Taste, Smell, and Sound: On the Streets of Chinatown and Little Italy," *Architectural Design* Vol. 75 Issue 3, 2005.

- Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
- Gonzales, Rudolfo "Corky." "Yo Soy Joaquin," in *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, ed by Illan Stavans, Edna Acosta-Belén, Harold Augenbraum, and María Herrera-Sobek, Rolando Hinojosa, and Gustavo Pérez Firmat, (New York: Norton, 2011)
- Gonzales-Day, Ken .*Lynchings in the West: 1850-1935* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 175. Quoted in Daniel Griesbach, "Rough Justice: For Farmworkers: The Specter of Joaquin Murrieta in Raymond Barrio's The Plum Picker," *Western American Literature*, 44, no.1, 1999
- Gray Herman and Macarena Gomez-Barris, *Towards a Sociology of the Trace*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011)
- Grazian, David. *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Chicago*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003)
- Griesbach, Daniel. "Rough Justice: For Farmworkers: The Specter of Joaquin Murrieta in Raymond Barrio's The Plum Picker," *Western American Literature*, 44, no.1, 1999.
- Hailey, Charlie. *Camps: A Guide to 21st – Century Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).
- Harvey, Francis. "Knowledge and Geography's Technology Politics, Ontologies, Representations in the Changing Ways We know" in ed. Kay Anderson, Mona Domosh, etal 2003. *Handbook of Cultural Geography*. New York: Sage.
- Harris, Dianne. "Seeing the Invisible: Reexamining Race and Vernacular Architecture," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture: Special Anniversary Issue* 13, no. 2 (2006/2007).
- Harris, Diane. "Race, Space, and the Destabilization of Practice," *Landscape Journal* 26, no.1 (2007).
- Heldke, Lisa. *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer*, (New York: Routledge, 2003).
- Josee Johnston & Shyron Baumann, *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*, (New York: Routledge).
- Leal, Luis . "El Corrido De Joaquín Murrieta: Origen y Difusión" *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 1. No.1, 1996.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicolson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell, 1999).
- Locke, John. "Of Property" Ch 5 in *Two Treaties of Government* ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: University Press, 1988).
- Long, Lucy. *Culinary Tourism*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004).
- McWilliams, Carey. "Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California," (Boston: Little & Brown, 1939).
- McWilliams, Carey. *North from Mexico: Spanish – Speaking People of the United States*, (New York: Greenwood, 1968).

- McKee Irwin, Robert. *Bandits, Captives, Heroines, and Saints: Cultural Icons of Mexico's Northwest Borderlands* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
- Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
- Mubi Brighenti, Andrea. *Visibility in Social Theory and Social Research* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2010).
- Ochoa, Enrique & Gilda L. *Latino Los Angeles: Transformations, Communities, and Activism* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press).
- Ortega, F. Carlos. Review. *Joaquin Murrieta: A Quest of Justice* by Humberto Garza, (San Jose: Chusma House, 2001).
- Peck Jamie and Tickell Adam, "Neoliberalizing Space," *Antipode*, 2002
- Pilcher, Jeff, "Who Chased out the "Chile Queens"? Gender, Race, and Urban Reform in San Antonio, Texas: 1880-1943." *Food and Foodways*, 16: 173-200, 2008.
- Rabinow, Paul. *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 155.
- Rettberg, Jill. *Blogging* (Malden, M.A.: Polity, 2008).
- Rodowick, D.N. *Reading the Figural, or Philosophy after New Media*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2001), 53.
- Rojas, James. "The Enacted Environment of East Los Angeles," *Places: Forum of Design for the Public Realm*, 8, no.3. (1993).
- Rosaldo, Renato. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, (Boston: Beacon, 1989).
- Ruiz, Vicki. "Citizen Restaurant: American Imaginaries, American Communities," *American Quarterly*, Quarterly, 2008.
- Sheppard, Eric. "The Spaces and Times of Globalization: Place, Scale, Networks, and Positionality" *Economic Geography*, Vol. 8, issue 3, 323arterly, 2008.
- Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
- Taussig, Michael. *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).
- Valle Victor M, and Rodolfo D. Torres, *Latino Metropolis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
- Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: and Outline of Interpretative Sociology, Vol.1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

Wilson, Elizabeth. *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*, (Berkeley:UC Press, 1992).