"*Just food and joy*": An exploration of diverse community food practices in Liverpool, UK

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by

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March 2023

Word Count: 81631

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Abbreviations

AFN- Alternative Food Network

AGM- Annual General Meeting

ANT- Actor-Network Theory

CBO- Community Business Organisation

CIC- Community Interest Company

COVID-19- Coronavirus Disease 2019

CSA- Community Supported Agriculture

DEFRA- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

FRSP- Family Refugee Support Project

GHG- Greenhouse Gas

ICT- Information and Communications Technology

IPS- Industrial and Provident Society

NRT- Non-representational Theory

PAR- Participatory Action Research

PEB- Political Ecology of the Body

SSE- Social and Solidarity Economy

UK- United Kingdom

UKRI- UK Research and Innovation

Acknowledgements

When starting this PhD, I could not have anticipated that it would be severely impacted by a global pandemic. Getting through the project has required a lot of help, particularly from my fantastic supervisor team of Pete North, Sarah Marie Hall and Andy Davies. Pete in particular has always been there to reassure me when problems seemed insurmountable.

I would also like to thank my family, for their ongoing support and proofreading skills, and Saoirse, for remaining incredibly supportive over the course of the project.

Finally, I would like to thank my participants at Squash, who provided such insightful and honest comments throughout the research process. In particular Clare and Becky, who assisted me from the beginning of this PhD and always remained keen to share their expertise throughout the process.

Abstract

Sharing meals with others encourages vital exchanges of sociality, learning and politics. How and where we consume food, framed by social and cultural practices, has great importance in shaping why we make decisions around what we eat. Indeed, emotional and affective connections with the site of eating form a fundamental part of how we process food as a material and impacts our relations with place. Understanding these socio-spatial circumstances allows us to better envisage how food choices and ideologies intersect with an individual's everyday experiences of food to influence their participation, motivation and enjoyment in food practices.

Whilst food has long been considered an important part of how we learn to live together in the Anthropocene within diverse economies research, practices around the mealtime remain underexamined in the field. At the same time, there exists an emerging body of work that highlights the importance of communal eating events and new forms of social eating in addressing social and environmental issues in society. This body of research considers the importance of materiality and sociality, yet there remain significant gaps in the significance of affectivity and especially embodiment within these studies.

This thesis, a mixed-methods study of a community food space, explores the transformative potential of such spaces, drawing focus on practices of social eating and communal preparation of food. The approach utilises an initially ethnographic methodology, working alongside a social eating group and a community food space in an inner-city neighbourhood of Liverpool, UK called Squash. Against a backdrop of COVID-19, the research then engages with a remote methodology, relying primarily on video and phone interviewing to draw out visceral experiences from participants.

Through a focus on how embodied and social interaction around food contributes to subjectivity shifts in participants, this thesis uncovers the importance of affective and collective properties of social cooking, eating and food sharing and the generative potential of these practices in cultivating different food subjects. In doing this, it argues that the 'how we know' that contributes to our food knowledge has a vital role in building relationships with food and others in alimentary environments. As part of this, it argues that a framing based around *diverse visceral imaginaries* assists in highlighting the role of *learning to be affected* in shifting economic subjectivities, drawing attention to the role of everyday practices related to food in building other possible worlds.

Addressing critiques of 'alternative' food as single entity in relation to a dominant food system, this PhD research connects a visceral geographies standpoint and a diverse economies approach to understand the food system as diverse and diffuse. This approach helps this research to identify new

ethical coordinates, negotiations of difference and diverse practices within the food economy, addressing some of the gaps within literature on social and communal eating. By considering the body as the starting point for economic politics within this, this thesis contributes towards J.K Gibson-Graham's project of developing understandings of the economy as a domain of difference.

1: Introduction

> *What I've learnt is like not to knock anything back anymore. Not to doubt any taste or food or anything. Even what it looks like. Cos when I first went in there, I was like fuck that… Do you understand what I mean?*
>
> *David, Volunteer / Local Resident (Interview, November 2020)*

I have often reflected on my phone call with David when writing this thesis. His shift, from outright culinary sceptic to passionate advocate of healthy food, was as unexpected as it was stark. I have vivid memories of the first few times that he walked into the building and can still recall his palpable sense of unease as he realised what he was being asked to chop was also what he was going to be served for lunch. In my interview with David, he reflected so openly on how his perspectives on food had changed in recent years and the role that the community food space had had within this transformation. There were so many complexities and nuances to understand in how David's approach to food had changed, but to my surprise, at its core, much of what he expressed was also being relayed by my other participants. These expressions ultimately ended up forming the backbone of this thesis, informing a project that sought to become increasingly integrated into the mealtimes of my participants. I didn't always expect my research to take this path, however.

My research field was a site that I thought I knew well before entering, albeit previously from a perspective different to that of a researcher. I had, after all, worked with the group for a number of years prior to researching them. Before entering the field, I had assumed that my participants would want to discuss with me their approaches to community gardening; how they grew and foraged food for communal meals, and how they had developed skills over years of practice. This was not the case. Instead, it was the mealtime itself that became the focus of almost the entirety of our discussions. How food made my participants feel, how they had developed friendships through meal sharing and how they had learnt more about the food they were eating all came to the fore during our conversations.

Returning to the drawing board after these initial sessions, I realised that as well as being significant to my participants, these were themes that were fundamentally important to me too. The times when I had experienced the most physical and emotional enjoyment with the group had all been

around the table. I realised that I took as much pleasure as my participants did in learning new food skills, experimenting with different ingredients and flavours and chatting over a bowl of soup or a cup of tea.

This raised questions for me around why these moments were significant for me and my participants, the influence of the space we were in in shaping these perceptions, and whether, as well as changing mine and my participants diets, these moments were also changing our wider perspectives, both on the food system, and on wider society. These themes of the importance of joy for my participants and myself when considering transformative practices related to food became the focus of this thesis.

In this introduction chapter of this thesis, I will first provide some context to the research and introduce some of the key terminology that the reader may be unfamiliar with. Following this, I will define the research and focus on the theoretical framing of the project. Next, I will provide the reader with more background information about myself, and why this is significant to how this project has been constructed. After this, I will introduce my research questions, and outline where I believe the original contributions of this project lie. Finally, I will provide the reader with a brief chapter outline, introducing the key themes in each chapter of this thesis.

1.1 Diverse Foodscapes: Context and Terminology

The act of eating is a complex subject matter to approach. It is considered simultaneously "deeply personal" (Wilbur and Gibbs, 2020:115) and "irreducibly social" (Jackson *et al*., 2020:752), or at once, "intensely individual and social" (Probyn, 2000:3). It is "quite literally, the stuff of the everyday" (Hall *et al*., 2020:84) whilst correspondingly existing as a "privileged occasion for […] encounter" (Giacoman, 2016:465). The experience of eating is contingent upon a multitude of economic, political, and cultural contexts and material and social forces, that combine with our sensory grasp of the world to form a food experience (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008).

It is also widely acknowledged however, that we need a different approach to how food is produced, distributed and consumed (Cameron and Wright, 2014). The food system contributes up to 29% of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) (Vermeulen *et al*., 2012), and the UK, where this research is situated, remains reliant on global food production, maintaining a production to supply ratio (also known as a self-sufficiency ratio) of 60%, thus relying on £46.2bn of food imports a year (DEFRA, 2018), one of the highest figures in Europe.

Furthermore, food bank use in the UK has risen dramatically as a result of a decade-plus of austerity governance pursued by Conservative-led governments since 2010. Indeed, in delivering 2.1 million packages of 3-day emergency food in a year between April 2021 and March 2022, the Trussell Trust[1] witnessed a 35-fold increase in demand since the same period in 2010/11 (Trussell Trust, 2022). Further to this, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many of the underlying issues with food access, leading to increased food insecurity and strain on services (Gardner *et al*., 2021; Jones *et al*., 2022). During this time, rather than national programmes, it was local initiatives that were "crucial in ensuring the resilience of communities, providing food access when centralised distribution fell short, and organising and delivering agile emergency food support" (Jones *et al*., 2022:210; see also Dombroski *et al*., 2020).

Within academia and in wider social commentary, food has often been presented in black and white terms, for example; as 'good' or 'bad', as 'global' or 'local', or as 'natural' or 'industrial' (DeLind, 2010; Alkon, 2013). This has led to perspectives that are held solely in relation to a dominant economic system (Cameron and Wright, 2014), therefore restricting "economic imaginings to a limited binary framework" (Fickey 2011:239) and has been critiqued both in fields of visceral geographies (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013), in diverse economies thought (Cameron and Gordon, 2010; Cameron and Wright, 2014), as well as in wider critical food scholarship (Guthman, 2008a; DeLind, 2010; Alkon, 2013). Rather than a presentation of conventionality and alterity, some scholars have instead sought to develop a framework that seeks to "emphasise the generative capacities of the ruptures and tensions associated with conventional food systems by foregrounding to differing degrees concepts of pedagogy, practice, and subject formation" (Sarmiento 2017:486).

In this thesis, I align myself with this framing of the food system, understanding the food economy through the lens of *diverse foodscapes.* Both Carolan (2017) and Goodman (2016), amongst others, have used the term foodscape in lieu of reference to a food system, because of the latter's association with reducing food to an analysis of commodity chains and structural matters of production, processing, distribution and consumption. Instead, Carolan (2017) evokes the term foodscapes to recognise the complexity of food and eating, and its associations with power, feelings, relations, culture and histories. In light of this, and with a view to wider discussion in this thesis concerning how diverse economic (food) practices do not always neatly fit into established categorisations, I follow this terminology. In keeping with the considerations above, I prefer to use the term *diverse* to *alternative* within my analysis when describing the food system, and because of

[1] The Trussell Trust is a charity that supports a network of over 1200 food banks in the UK.

this, also pluralise *foodscape,* understanding food through a performative lens, concerned with 'making multiple worlds' (Law and Urry, 2004) that observes different realities.

This thesis is also concerned with what I refer to herein as *community food spaces.* Building on theoretical context from diverse economies and critical food scholarship, I use this term to describe spaces where possible food futures are enacted. Hasanov *et al*. describe community food initiatives as organisations focused on creating "social spaces which manifest notions of social engagement and social bonding, working together, food citizenship and civic engagement practices" (2019:3171). In this thesis, I take forward this definition, but retain a focus on the spaces of economic possibility that these initiatives *make.* Gibson-Graham and Cameron (2007) query how we can theorise community enterprises in ways that strengthen their more-than-capitalist credentials, arguing that community enterprises don't only service communities, but also actively work to build new varieties of economies. By incorporating this viewpoint into current perspectives, I seek to widen current definitions of community/alternative food initiatives, to engage with how these spaces can be conducive towards *making* economies that are fundamentally different (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Healy, 2009; Cameron and Wright, 2014; Roelvink *et al*., 2015, Carolan, 2016). This perspective also recognises how community initiatives engage with issues beyond their immediate geographical and social contexts, connecting ideas and practices across different scales (Massey, 2007; Schmid et al., 2021).

1.2 My Research

This study examines diverse foodscapes in the specific context of encounters that take place during commensal events within community food spaces. The various sites of commensality, defined herein as spaces where food is eaten (or prepared) together, act as the 'stage' for where the research is set. This is framed within the context of a neighbourhood characterised by neoliberal policymaking and severely impacted by the effects of austerity and COVID-19. It therefore engages with perspectives that view food as both a "site and […] means for building worlds beyond capitalism" (Wilson, 2013:734). This research situates itself within considerations of eating as a transformative practice within a wider diverse economy, exploring hope and difference within food economies.

I engage with this in the context of the visceral realm, foregrounding understandings of food that are based around the agency of physical matter between and within bodies, and understandings of the self that are contextualised, interactive and relational (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). My interest in visceral geographies here is grounded in what embodied experiences can tell us about

emotive and affective relations with place (Longhurst *et al*., 2009), specifically, in the context of this research, community food spaces. This thesis therefore contributes to theoretical debates that look towards visceral perspectives to better understand the politics of food through an acknowledgement of the body's role as a starting point in economic politics (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013, Roelvink 2020a).

This research also looks to build upon theorisations of diverse economies (Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006), and more specifically, contemporary debates in literature on diverse food economies on how we can create and support diverse food initiatives (Cameron and Wright, 2014). My engagement here is concerned with Gibson-Graham's project of developing understandings of the economy as a domain of difference. This project rejects approaches to *the* economy as a unitary neoliberal entity, a perspective that gives too much credibility to a hegemonic neoliberal discourse and limits possible action. In doing this, this project is tied to an understanding of research as performative practice (Roelvink, 2020b), where the utilisation of techniques of *thick description* and *weak theory* (Gibson-Graham, 2014) underpin a stance that is focused on 'tasting' rather than 'judging' (Gibson-Graham, 2006, Cameron and Wright, 2014).

My interest in working with both diverse economies thinking and visceral geographies in this thesis is also concerned with how affect can be seen as a means to bring about shifts in economic subjectivity (Roelvink, 2020a). Eric Sarmiento (2017) has highlighted the synergies within food and embodiment, diverse food economies, and more-than-human food geographies, arguing all of these approaches have much to offer in focusing attention on cultivating more ethical food systems. In this, he develops the concept of an *ethical food subject*, emphasising how subjectivity shifts in actors towards embodied understandings of food practices can lead to approaches of uncovering economic possibility within the food system.

Of particular significance for this research is developing Sarmiento's approach to understand how community foodscapes can influence subjectivity shifts in participants. This has particular implications when considering the perceived importance of widespread shifts to healthier and more sustainable diets in the future. Here, I look to engage with theory in both visceral geography and diverse economies thinking to highlight the role of *learning to be affected* in shifting economic subjectivities (Guthman, 2008c; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010; Roelvink, 2015, 2020a; Carolan, 2016). This involves employing knowledges from different fields to cross-fertilise as a generative theoretical technique (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

The research focuses on one organisation in South Liverpool, UK called 'Squash'. Squash are a non-profit community organisation, with a specific focus on food. They seek to use creative and

participatory approaches to food and eating as a tool to enact social change in the local neighbourhood. This has culminated in the development of a 100-year vision for their surrounding area that is focused on building "sustainable community resilience, creativity and more loving ways of being, together"[2].

The organisation manages a number of spaces within their neighbourhood in South Liverpool including a community café and shop, a meeting/engagement/training space, a community garden and a seed library. As well as managing these spaces, Squash also run training programmes, festivals, workshops, and communal cooking and eating events. These events are organised for a variety of reasons: 1) as ways to address issues of isolation and loneliness in the local area, 2) to provide opportunities for participants to learn skills that can help them to find meaningful work, 3) to help participants improve their cooking abilities, 4) as ways to introduce different foodstuffs to participants and 5) to bring people together to learn about the food system, as well as the wider environmental and political landscape. This research focuses on all of these themes, recognising them all as constitutive of diverse foodscapes, but is drawn most heavily towards those linked to Squash's communal cooking and eating events.

1.3 My Background and Interest in Food

It is important to note at this stage that I did not undertake (or seek to undertake) this research as an impartial observer. As will be elaborated upon later in the thesis, my position here is not one that is overly "discerning, detached and critical" (Gibson-Graham, 2008:618), and is instead concerned with a performative ontological stance. This means researching with a recognition that the research that forms this thesis plays a contributing role in bringing different worlds into being. Indeed, the main reason for choosing this topic is the personal interest and experience that I will document here.

Squash are an organisation that I had been closely involved with in the years prior to undertaking a PhD. I worked for the organisation for a year in 2017/18, helping them to establish their new community-designed building, housing a café, shop, multi-use space and office. This role often involved working closely with volunteers and local residents, providing me with valuable insight into their lives and experiences that helped form the basis for this project.

It was during the weekly communal cooking and eating sessions in the community garden that I began to make a stronger connection with members of the local community who visited, volunteered, or worked at the organisation. The stories they told me and the experiences that they

[2] https://squashliverpool.co.uk/about Retrieved: 15th September 2022

shared made me fascinated to learn more from the people and their knowledges, desires and motivations around food. It also made me aware that the various parties involved with Squash would be willing for me to be involved within their lives for an extended period.

Experiencing these sessions and engaging in these conversations also made me more aware of how this form of meal sharing could be a transformative process. Understanding how my participant's eating habits, social interactions, and even their understandings of the world had shifted made me want to understand better why these shifts had occurred. It was experiencing this that provided the inspiration for the research proposal that formed this project.

Beyond an engagement with Squash, food is something that has long shaped my life outside of work and study. I have spent significant time managing an allotment plot in Liverpool, drawing my focus towards organic and regenerative methods of cultivation. I have even spent time whilst writing up this thesis growing much of my own food off-grid on the west coast of Ireland. My experiences of growing food highlighted to me the importance of embodied encounters in better understanding it. How things felt, smelt, looked, and tasted, I realised, all contributed to my knowledge around every aspect of my experiences with food, from seed to fork and beyond. As I will document in Chapter 4 of this thesis, all of this has certain implications with regards to reflexivity and positionality in the research.

1.4 Research Questions and Contributions

Drawn from the focus of this introduction, the research questions of this thesis are as follows:

1) How do community food spaces affect participant's experiences of food?
2) How can shared, communal practices in the preparation and consumption of food impact how it is experienced and enjoyed?
3) Do these practices change how we understand community food initiatives and social eating spaces as transformative elements in building more hopeful foodscapes?

RQ1 and RQ2 form the basis for the two main empirical chapters within this thesis, whilst RQ3 draws upon the development of the underlying theme of transformation throughout this research. Building on the theoretical focus and research questions set out above, this thesis makes several connected contributions to knowledge, the most significant of which I will briefly introduce here:

1) *Visceral encounters in community food spaces.* The first contribution of this research looks to situate the visceral within contemporary understandings of commensality. Whilst current

literature on commensality has begun to engage with materiality (see Marovelli, 2019), there are significant gaps in the role that viscerality and embodiment have within how we understand community commensal practices. This study aims to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring the importance of viscerality in understanding community food spaces, but also the significance of community food environments in signalling visceral shifts in participants.

2) *Viscerality, affect and diverse food economies.* The second contribution of the project builds on the previous contribution to highlight the significance of affective shifts in cultivating more ethical food systems. This focus seeks to develop upon Sarmiento's (2017) conception of *ethical food subjects* to consider how community food spaces offer opportunities for recognising how actors within foodscapes both affect and are affected by others (Carolan, 2017) as well as how affective experiences enable individuals to act politically (Roelvink and Zolkos, 2015; Roelvink, 2015). In doing this, I seek to bridge the theoretical frameworks of visceral geography and diverse economies, two approaches that have previously been tentatively linked, but have much more to offer in complementing one another in a more encompassing analysis.
3) *Material, affective and visceral research in a remote context.* The timing of the fieldwork for this research fell during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that the project had to engage with previously unplanned and somewhat experimental methodologies. Research during this time was unpredictable and required innovative solutions in order to capture events in the field. As such, this research offers contributions around the documenting of experiences during this time, and how to negotiate a complex, evolving, and emotional field. This contribution pays particular attention to materiality, affectivity and viscerality in this context, examining the possibilities and limitations of remote research when considering these themes. I address this theme in detail in my discussion of my methodology in Chapter 4, but it exists in the backdrop to the entirety of my discussion of findings.

1.5 Chapter Outline

The rest of the thesis is composed of seven further chapters. In Chapters 2 and 3, I will engage with current perspectives in literature on both food and diverse economies. Chapter 2 will introduce literature on diverse economies thinking and diverse food economies. The first section of this chapter engages with the diverse economies framework established by J.K Gibson-Graham. Here, I build upon theorisations that situate the economy as a domain of difference, exploring how

researchers engage with approaches that apply a performative and generative ontology and use techniques of weak theory and thick description. Following this, I look to examine how diverse economies thinkers approach the idea of community within their work. Here, I look at how J.K Gibson-Graham has shaped her own iteration of community, as well as examining how this has been furthered through the work of Ethan Miller. Subsequently, I explore how diverse economies thinkers have engaged with the subject of food within their work. In this section, I first look to highlight the different ways in which diverse economies thinkers have researched and theorised food. Next, I look towards conceptions of alterity within food, developing a perspective that recognises the diversity of foodscapes and challenges the assumption of alternative food practice as peripheral.

In Chapter 3, I introduce literature related to food, specifically focusing on the impact that the visceral and material turn in geography has had within the study of foodscapes. Here, I engage heavily with the work of Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy to outline how the visceral realm is employed within contemporary food studies. Following this, I explore the epistemological foundations of visceral geographies, bringing into focus the potential for engagement with diverse economies thinking within this field. Later in this chapter, I critically engage with literature on food practices. Here I draw focus towards practices important to this research, namely communal cooking and eating practices. It is at this juncture where I also highlight many of the key literature gaps within this field that this research hopes to fill.

In Chapter 4, the 'Methodology', I examine the research design for this project and methodological approaches used in the collection of data. In this chapter, I explain my choice of methodological pluralism for the research, discuss the research site and bring into focus my own positionality in relation to the field. Because of the nature of this research, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, I also provide additional material in this chapter regarding conducting research during this period, providing justifications for necessary methodological changes, as well as discussing enforced limitations on the project that emerged as a result of the pandemic.

Chapter 5 functions as a bridge chapter between the literature review, methodology, and data analysis. Firstly, I will map the economic, political and cultural context for which the research is situated. This section will also seek to emphasise the importance of place and relationality within community economies. Following on from this, I look to examine Squash as part of a diverse food economy, reading the organisation and its practices as constitutive of economic possibility.

Chapters 6 and 7 concern the empirical findings from the research in greater detail. Chapter 6 is centred around the theme of visceral transformation, examining what draws certain people to organisations like Squash, but also what 'chills' them or turns them off (Guthman, 2008b; Hayes-

Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). In this chapter, I explore how moving beyond *knowing* and into *feeling* (Carolan, 2011, 2016) provides a means of generating new economic possibilities and subjectivities (Gibson-Graham, 2008) through *diverse visceral imaginaries*. It is here that I establish a basis for how visceral engagements can help us to frame political projects of social transformation.

Following this, Chapter 7 looks to interrogate the practice of communal cooking and eating. Here, the aim is to highlight the importance of the affective and collective properties of social cooking, eating and food sharing and their generative potential for building community food economies. This chapter looks to develop upon the ideas around performances of care, spaces of encounter and the expression of political and cultural choices within academic literature to offer a perspective that emphasises how eating, and in particular social eating in community settings, is an important political act defined through an assemblage of practice. From this, I develop a perspective on how commensal encounters can be considered transformative moments in the cultivation of *ethical food subjects.*

Finally, in Chapter 8, I offer concluding thoughts on the research. Here, I look to position the research within contemporary debates in diverse economies, visceral geographies and critical food studies, and revisit the research questions established in this introduction, as well as offering reflections on the methodology of the research and avenues for future research in the field.

2: Diverse Food Economies: A Review of the Literature

> *"How can our work open up possibilities?*
> *What kind of world do we want to participate in building?*
> *What might be the effect of theorising things this way rather than that?"*
> *(Gibson-Graham, 2008:615)*

After introducing the project in the previous chapter, I will now begin to examine the relevant literature to this research in greater detail. My first focus here is to explore themes of diversity and transformation in how the economy, and specifically the food economy, is understood within contemporary academic literature and place this body of work within the context of this research project.

I will engage in the first section of this chapter with one of the primary theoretical frameworks of this research: diverse economies thinking. Examining the work of J.K Gibson-Graham, this section will begin with an analysis of how diverse economies thinkers seek to develop understandings based around a *performative ontology of economy*, where language can contribute towards making visible (and enacting) more-than-capitalist worlds of possibility. I then highlight how diverse economies scholars use tools of *weak theory* and *thick description* to develop understandings that focus on diverse rather than dominant understandings of economy. Following this, I examine what diverse economies scholars mean when they discuss a *community economy*, focusing on Gibson-Graham's development of J.L Nancy's account of community as a process of becoming, as well Ethan Miller's development of the theory.

After engaging more widely with diverse economies thinking, I will begin to hone my focus on how the framework can be used more specifically in the context of this thesis, with food. Here, I explore ways that diverse economies thinkers have engaged with food in different ways, examining emergent themes within the field. Following this, through an engagement with relevant literature, I explore how diverse economies thinking can enable critical food scholars to reconceptualise alterity within the field. This provides a base from which the following chapter builds upon, examining more specifically where this thesis contributes towards this reconceptualisation of the food economy.

2.1 Understanding Diverse Economies

Situating the economy as a *domain of difference* is central to the diverse economies framework proposed by J.K Gibson-Graham. Gibson-Graham, the pen name for collaborative work between Katherine Gibson and the late Julie Graham, endeavours to theorise economic practices without assuming the dominance of capital. This leads to an approach that asserts difference within economic practices, critiquing the oft-asserted marginality of 'alternative' practices whilst bringing them into the wider consideration of a *diverse economy.* This, more holistic understanding of economy, looks to include the human and the non-human in economic understanding (see Figure 1) and seeks to position environmental, social and economic sustainability at the centre of its approach. It therefore reframes how researchers should approach the economic subject, engaging with practices that draw into question how we should live well, together. This section will introduce some of the key concepts of a diverse economies approach.

Figure 1- The Diverse Economies Iceberg[3]

2.1.1 Performativity and Making Economies of Difference

As part of a diverse economies approach, Gibson-Graham (2008) highlight the need to engage with a performative ontology, rather than a realist or reflective approach, thus acknowledging the political interest that is inherent in knowledge production in the field (Roelvink *et al.*, 2015). Gibson-

[3] Diverse Economies Iceberg by Community Economies Collective is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

Graham's engagement with performativity stems from the work of gender, race and sexuality theorists (see Butler, 1990; hooks, 1992; Sedgwick, 2003 for key examples), developing a perspective that argues that whilst language is filled with endless interpretations and possibilities, discourse can be limited to restrictive binaries that perform and re-perform dominance (Roelvink *et al*. 2015). Gibson-Graham's premise is based upon the notion that that if these performances of dominance exist, then the same is true for capitalism's dominance in economic language. Therefore, diverse economies thinking is engaged with an investigation into how the performativity of language can be developed into making visible (and enacting) more-than-capitalist worlds of possibility. Through an approach that critiques and deconstructs the prevalence of capitalocentric thought structured around restrictive binaries, a diverse economic method seeks to liberate the 'non-capitalist' spaces whilst simultaneously disrupting the discursive dominance of capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 2006). This involves approaching language as a counter-hegemonic tool to reorient economic meaning along lines that depart from capitalocentrism.

Law and Urry (2004) describe research approaches that are performative as having effects, making difference and enacting realities, whilst bringing into being what is discovered. Understanding economics through its performativity therefore rests on the notion that the study of economy is not merely descriptive, rather, those involved in researching it are participating in producing it (Mitchell, 2008; Roelvink *et al*., 2015). An important part of this performative ontology is the recognition that economy is not only performative immaterially, through words and concepts, but also materially, through bodies and bodily practices, and through objects and technologies (Roelvink *et al*., 2015). Therefore, an ethical framework based upon these forms of non-representational[4] encounters should acknowledge myriad possibilities present (Popke, 2009; Deleuze, 1992). This is something I take forward within this thesis, highlighting the role that both material and immaterial encounters with food plays within creating worlds of difference.

The performativity of the diverse economies method is also concerned with "making multiple worlds" (Law and Urry, 2004:397), departing from an underlying assumption of a universal 'truth' based upon a single reality. Instead, it seeks to ask questions that assume a multiplicity of truths, drawing from an understanding that looks towards experimentation in the economy as something that is predicated on locating *a* solution to a specific set of problems, rather than *the* solution to a more general issue (Callon, 2007). It is here that diverse economies scholars seek to "visualize

[4] Non-representational theory is engaged with occasionally throughout this thesis, in relation to both diverse economies thought and conceptualisations of food. It will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

economies as interconnected flows made up of different "moments," or spheres of activity" (Miller, 2010:4).

This is also the point at which diverse economies approaches can be distinguishable from some other work conducted on alternative economies. Diverse economies thinkers observe that structuralist work on economic alternatives is conducted predominantly in relation to a dominant capitalist framing, whilst diverse economies framings endeavour to foster space for a performative ontological politics that is engaged in *making* economies that are fundamentally different (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Healy, 2009; Cameron and Wright, 2014; Roelvink *et al*., 2015). This perspective recognises the economy as something that cannot be identified through "pre-given entities, [that are] already bounded, identifiable, and knowable" (Butler, 2010:147).

Gibson-Graham's *politics of the subject* engages with how a politics of becoming can be achieved in subjects that are over determined by dominant discourses. This involves denaturalising capitalist forms of subjection in order to provide a "breathing space for fugitive energies of caring, social concern, and collectivity to be directed towards new performances of economy" (Gibson-Graham, 2006:51). This disassembling of hegemonic forces is central to how Gibson-Graham sees the breaking of dominant performances and the becoming of different economic subjects, through the recognition "that new languages and shifts in subjectivity are crucial to the change process" (Cameron and Gibson, 2020:517). Because of this shift, economic horizons are broadened through the enveloping of ethics, care and social relations into conceptions of economy (Veen and Dagevos, 2019).

Once the role that performativity has in shaping our understanding of economy has been acknowledged, it is the responsibility of the researcher to critically reflect on what it means to be performative in their own role. Gibson-Graham (2008) contends that whilst performativity has the potential to strengthen different economies and elaborate heterogeneity in the economy, it is not until we become different academic subjects that we are able to perform this difference. She argues that academics are currently trained to be "discerning, detached and critical" (Gibson-Graham, 2008:618), meaning that academic production can be mired in sceptical and negative thought through paranoid ways of thinking (Brown *et al*. 2011).

Gibson-Graham instead draws from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work on paranoid reading here to develop an ontological framework that moves beyond paranoia in research. Sedgwick (2003) argues that paranoid thought is something that is intrinsically linked to critical theory due to the prevalence

of systems of oppression that make anything but a paranoid stance seem naïve. Instead, the process of becoming different academic subjects through a performative diverse economies approach involves an engagement with theory that explores realms of possibility, rather than using academic knowledge to confirm what is already known (i.e. discourses of domination and oppression) (Gibson-Graham, 2008). This opens up an exploration into how weak theory can be used to locate spaces of possibility. This is not to say critique is discounted from Gibson-Graham's account, rather critique takes a wholly generative form and becomes a means of productive practice (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Stock *et al*., 2015).

2.1.2 Rethinking the Economy with Thick Description and Weak Theory

'Weak' theory is presented in Gibson-Graham's diverse economies framework as an approach that is diametrically opposed to strong theory. Strong theory looks for "sameness and patterns that will confirm that which is already known" as well as seeking alignment through totalising theories and developing knowledge through 'exposure'; where exposing something becomes the theoretical endpoint (Roelvink, 2016:33). Strong theory adopts structural perspectives concerned with locating the sole reality in relation to theory. It involves methods of critique where existing structures are seen to be dominant, totalising and unchallengeable and alternatives are not explored and experimented with. Weak theory, on the other hand, provides activists, community groups and social movements with an understanding of neoliberalism (and other overbearing framings) that is beneficial towards a framework for social change (Roelvink, 2016). It adopts an understanding that theory based solely on methods of critique lacks the means to transform existing structures of power and create alternative social arrangements (Hardt, 2011). Further to this, weak theory departs from understandings that place capitalocentric theories of economic reorganisation as central to economic change (Gibson-Graham, 2014), paving a way for an approach that recognises and understands the importance of diversity in economy.

Weak theory therefore denotes an ethical stance that looks towards ethical compassion for others and the planetary systems (Roelvink, 2016) and seeks out an affective position that is inherently reparative in its nature (Sedgwick, 2003). For Gibson-Graham (2006), developing a weak stance into a weak theory involves three 'thinking techniques' that are set out in the introduction to *A Postcapitalist Politics*. The first of these involves an ontological reframing in order to move from a more traditional world, based around structures of domination, towards an emergent world based around possibility. This means addressing a belief based around an "economy-wide imperative of

capital accumulation" (Gibson-Graham, 1996:16) and assumptions of an "asocial body in lawful motion" (Gibson-Graham, 2006:xxx), and moving towards spaces of negotiation and recognition of difference. The second technique involves using approaches of rereading, engaging with an overdeterminist reading[5] to disperse "the object of attention, dislocating it from essentialist structures of determination" (Gibson-Graham, 2006:xxxi). Most notably, this engages with stances of curiosity, rather than recognition, in order to offer something new for other political and economic spaces through practices of *reading for difference rather than dominance*. The final technique engages with practices of creativity, where through drawing from queer and feminist poststructuralism, an environment is fostered to encounter and create the unexpected, whilst employing knowledges from different areas to cross-fertilise as a generative theoretical technique. Methodologically, this requires an approach that recognises and locates the means to document the ways in which economy in language can be "liberally distributed rather than sequestered in certain activities and denied to others" (Gibson-Graham, 2006:60).

Gibson-Graham's use of thick description (both with and against Geertz, 1973) alongside weak theory argues for a way of interpreting economy that places personal, community and planetary wellbeing at the centre of a reconceptualised economy (Gibson-Graham, 2014). Thick description represents a "method that directs interpretive attention not only to material practices but to the nuances, affects, multiple codes of meaning, silences, jokes, parodies, and so on, that accompany them" (Gibson-Graham 2014:148). For critical and reflexive researchers, this means importance is placed on finding ways to "make small facts speak to large concerns" (Gibson-Graham 2014:147), to create a performative ontology of economy that is based around hopefulness through stories and experiences that reclassify roles, identities and relationships (Massey, 2013). This has a direct impact on the approach to data collection used by diverse and community economies researchers. A methodological approach that relies on thick description calls on a focus towards everyday encounters (Carolan, 2016), whilst it "observes, interprets, and yields to emerging knowledge" (Gibson-Graham 2014:149) and takes a stance that "refus[es] to extend explanation too widely or deeply, refus[es] to know too much" (Gibson-Graham, 2008:619). A rethought economy using practices of weak theory and thick description therefore is one that is also "open to intervention, local action, and possibility rather than inevitability" (Morrow *et al*., 2019:57), providing

[5] This concept is developed from Althusser's (1972) theory of overdetermination, which Gibson-Graham understands as "signalling the irreducible specificity of every determination; the essential complexity – as opposed to the root simplicity – of every form of existence; the openness or completeness of every identity; the ultimate unfixity of every meaning and the correlate possibility of conceiving an accentric […] social totality that is not structured by the primacy of any social element or location" (Gibson-Graham 1996:27)

opportunities for research that looks towards making visible and developing a plurality of alternative practices that go beyond totalising narratives.

2.1.3 Situating Community

Community is a term that is hotly contested, and increasingly politicised, but plays an important part in our understanding of the practical and discursive functioning of contemporary food systems and culture (Dixon, 2011). It is considered a concept that it is outdated (Blokland, 2017), as well as featuring a regressive understanding of place (Rose, 1997). Numerous academics have highlighted how community is a term embedded within neoliberal discourse, allowing for the removal of governmental economic responsibility from society (Gibson-Graham, 2006; De Angelis, 2003; Watkins, 2017). Community is considered a central tenet of neoliberal local economic and political regeneration, without critical appraisal of its meaning (Amin, 2005), leading to difficulties in articulating communal activities and practices against this idealised notion (Traill, 2021). This leads to an understanding of the concept as "enticing and evocative, if increasingly plastic" (Traill, 2021:2).

Because of this, within diverse economies thought and beyond, academics have begun to look for different iterations of community as a concept and a practice (Hill Collins, 2010). Gibson-Graham draws heavily J.L Nancy's (1991) consideration of community as a process of becoming when iterating her own conception. Nancy's critique of community lies in a perceived misconception of community as a prescriptive programme of togetherness. Instead, he argues that community "is given to us with being and as being, well in advance of our projects desires and undertakings" (Nancy, 1991:35). This becomes a process of a ""being-in-common," a sharing of the very limits of our commonality" (Miller, 2013:521) whereby community cannot be considered "*a work* or *a project*, made or realised through the implementation of a vision or collective aspiration" (Miller, 2013:521, original emphasis). Instead, it should be recognised as a process of "*becoming* of new and as-yet unthought ways of being" (Gibson-Graham, 2006a:85, original emphasis). This leads to an understanding that instead views community as a type of 'ontological anarchy', an unworking of the concept that denounces positivity, closure and a specific concrete essence (Miller, 2013).

i) Communities of Practice

Literature on communities of practice also has significance within this discussion. Communities of practice is a concept developed in the foundational work of Lave and Wenger (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) that recognises and observes the "role of situated practice in the process of

learning and knowledge generation" (Amin and Roberts, 2008:353). Wenger (1998) articulates how learning can be observed through practices, building on work that developed the concept of *legitimate peripheral participation* to characterise learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). For Wenger, collective learning results in practice that reflects the "pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations" (Wenger, 1998;45). Through this, learning and social membership are recognised to be co-dependent *(*Hui *et al*. 2016) and *knowing* is connected to the transformation of identity (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The term has been critiqued for its imprecision (Amin and Roberts, 2008), but remains an important framework for researching how learning is associated with food practices (Blay-Palmer *et al*., 2013; Bradbury and Middlemiss, 2015; Levkoe, 2017) because of how it considers the processes involved in sharing and gaining skills and knowledge.

ii) The Practice of a Community Economy

> *""Community economy" does not refer to a community-based or local economy (although it can be that too); rather, it refers to economic concepts and practices that foreground community and environmental wellbeing. In this sense, "community" is an adjective for a type of economic practice rather than any pre-given entity or place, and, insofar as it is a practice, there is always the possibility that a community economy might emerge"* (Synder and St. Martin, 2015:46)

The practice of a community economy is a fluid process of continual resignification, which discards any notion that there is a perfect community economy that lies outside of negotiation, struggle, uncertainty, ambivalence, and disappointment, dismissing the concept of a blueprint that tells us what to do and how to 'be communal' (Gibson-Graham, 2006b:xv). Community here is considered to be an active idea, collectively shaping practices (Traill, 2021) where, through using Gibson-Graham's unworking of community as a concept, we can better understand how citizens can be engaged as ethical economic decision makers around social, ecological and economic concern (Hill, 2011). This position means that as researchers we can "remain attentive to the power of community as an idea to frame and promote social action, without slipping into positioning it as a social object or a useful analytical construct" (Traill, 2021:3). In doing this, there is a recognition here of community that observes how community economies can only be as accessible and inclusive as those who govern and practice them (Morrow and Martin, 2019).

This also links to how Gibson-Graham describes a local ethics of a space, where she considers how "any number of thinkers enjoin us to recognise particularity and contingency, honour difference and

otherness, and cultivate local capacity" (2003:51). This cultivation of local capacity recognises the *constitutive power* of small and localised practices and processes in building community economies (Gibson-Graham, 2002). These notions of place form an important part of how community is conceived. Geographers have looked towards conceptions of place beyond place (Massey, 2007), where local formations are inexorably connected to global changes. This outlook looks beyond bounded conceptions of place, and towards more complex understandings of the role of scale within place (Amin and Roberts, 2008), and addresses concerns with the implicit linking of community to locality (Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016).

When considering community economies, this means that "being-in-common can neither fully embrace nor fully ignore the material interdependencies that "economy" gestures toward"(Miller 2013:522). Moreover, diverse economies scholars recognise the different means of 'being-with' that are present within the practices and sites of a diverse economy (Gibson-Graham, 2006). In doing this, Gibson-Graham's conception of community within the consideration of a diverse economy resists closure linked to positive articulations of economy (Miller, 2013). Miller develops this through the conceptualisation of three distinct but interrelated moments of community economy: CE1, CE2 and CE3. He describes these as:

> *"CE1 is the "ontological moment" of community economy, an essentially negative and unfixable space characterized by a sharing of the very impossibility of fully capturing or mastering the nature of our being-together. CE2 is the "moment of ethical exposure," the affirmation of a demand to render visible and contestable the dynamics and consequences (and thus responsibilities) of our interrelationships. CE3 is, finally, the "moment of politics" in which the inevitable positivity of our collective ethical negotiations is made explicit and becomes a site of connection, exclusion, struggle, and active transformation"* (Miller 2013:519-520)

In theorising the practices of community economy in this way, Miller opens up a line of questioning into how the theorising of community economy can be adopted as a political project whilst creating and maintaining space for *ethical exposure* and *possibility*. Miller uses CE1 as the starting point for community economy, highlighting the ontological meeting point of *economy* and *community*. Here, he argues that the unworked, anti-essentialist ontology of community drawn from the aforementioned work of J.L Nancy meets a conception of economy that "dislocate[s] any economic landscape that attempts to fix itself as the only possible reality" (Miller, 2013:521). The result is a perspective that seeks to resist any moment of closure in favour of proliferating spaces of possibility. Building on this, CE2 represents the moment "our interdependence is exposed for negotiation or

contestation" (Miller, 2013:523). For Miller, this means a movement towards affirmativity, or positivity, whereby the role of negotiated ethical praxis is brought into question. Finally, CE3 finalises the enactment of positivity, where the moment of ethical decision is decided through "networks of relations, struggles, and possibilities from which a given process of articulation emerges" (Miller, 2013:525). As Miller notes, this is a moment that cannot be predetermined, but rather emerges from an ongoing struggle for hegemony (see Laclau and Mouffe, 2001; Gibson-Graham, 2006a).

Gibson-Graham's iteration of commonality also extends to how we negotiate the non, or more-than-human world. This is particularly important when considered food. Following Gibson-Graham, Beacham maintains that an "ethics of care approach for the Anthropocene requires a recognition of the shared commonality of being" (Beacham, 2018:544) whilst Hill calls for a 'collective responsibility' for the care of human and non-human others through "research matters of concern" (Hill, 2015:555). Both of these positions recognise an "ethic of attuning ourselves more closely to the powers, capacities and dynamism of the more than human" (Gibson-Graham, 2011:3) as a central feature of commonality. Here, community economies are sites of economic decision-making, of negotiation and experimentation, and foundations for research that fosters and amplifies their potential to be more durable and exchangeable (Morr*ow et al*., 2019).

Initiatives within a community economy "not only address issues beyond their immediate geographical and social context but are also entangled with groups and actors, near and far" (Schmid *et al*., 2021:156). This moves beyond conceptions of place based on logics and relationships of competition (Massey, 2013), and towards understandings based on the recognition of particularity and contingency, of honouring difference and otherness, and of cultivating local capacity (Gibson-Graham, 2003). With regards to the food economy, these perspectives allow us to witness how through "convivial practices, new socialities are being created which help to break down binaries around production and consumption and highlight heterogeneity" (Kennedy, 2020:313). In observing this, the important *affective qualities* of community food spaces are highlighted (Marovelli, 2019).

2.2 Diverse and Community Food Economies

Diverse economies scholars have approached food in a number of ways. Literature on the different ways that the production, distribution and consumption of food can be constitutive of non-capitalocentric conceptions of economy has formed an important part of how we conceptualise, advocate for, and bring into being, different economic food futures for a climate changing world (Cameron and Gordon, 2010). Diverse economies approaches therefore identify the transformative

nature of foodscapes through an assessment on the strategies of accumulation and distribution of surplus value, as well as the accountability of individuals and organisations (Dixon, 2011), as a way to generatively explore the "strengths, limitations and conundrums of different approaches" (Cameron and Wright, 2014:1). This enables research to highlight how a "diverse and resilient food economy can incorporate an ethical dimension which acknowledges and builds interconnections between people within a local area—and further afield—and between people and the environment" (Cameron and Gordon 2010:1).

Moreover, scholars have also moved to frame diverse food economies within Gibson-Graham's community economy framework (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Gibson-Graham *et al*., 2013). In this context, community food economies are recognised as premised on relations where "the interdependence between humans, and humans and the non-human world is foregrounded and concerns for co-existence are ethically negotiated" and where "arrangements allow for collective and planetary interests to be put before private profitability and unbridled growth" (Cameron and Wright 2014:119).

Enterprises	**Transactions**	**Labour**	**Property**
Capitalist Supermarkets Local retailers Restaurants	*Market* Food from supermarkets Food from restaurants Food from local retailers	*Wage* Workers in supermarkets, local retail, restaurants and agriculture	*Private* Commercial space Domestic food growing Agricultural land
Alternative Capitalist Small family-run food businesses Council owned businesses Food-cooperatives	*Alternative Market* Food sourced directly from farmers Fair trade	*Alternative Labour* Self-employed food workers 'In-kind' payments Work in food co-operatives	*Alternative Private* Allotments Community gardens Council-owned land

Non-capitalist	*Non-market*	*Unpaid*	*Open access*
Self-employed farmers Community gardens Community kitchens Food co-operatives Food rescue schemes Food banks	Seed swaps Food grown in allotments, gardens or community spaces Gifts Donations Donations of waste from businesses Free meals	Volunteers Reproductive labour in the domestic kitchen Domestic food growing	Gleaning Foraging 'Dumpster diving'

Table 1- A non-exhaustive list of the composition of a diverse urban food economy (adapted from Cameron and Gordon 2010, Gibson-Graham et al. 2013, Cameron and Wright 2014)

Table 1 identifies some of the different components of a diverse urban food economy, highlighting the "multiplicity of ways that food is produced, distributed and consumed" (Cameron and Wright, 2014:4). Whilst proposals such as those put forward by Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) offer insight into how the agrifood system can be categorised beyond neoliberalism through the introduction of a comparative analytical framework of *neoliberal, reformist, progressive* and *radical* food regimes, they still offer perspectives that observe food in relation to a dominant system. Diverse economies perspectives, in contrast, acknowledge that whilst capitalist food production has cheapened food, and relies on slim, fluctuating profit margins that means exchange value expires faster than use value (Morrow, 2020), there is also the space for a plurality of thought around how the foodscape can be understood through practices of *reading for difference*. This process assists in identifying locations of economic power, and how it can be redistributed more equitably to create fairer food systems (Naylor, 2020).

Reading for difference rather than dominance also speaks to the post-disciplinary study of more-than-food. This framing, that explores the messy 'in-between spaces' within food networks' (Goodman, 2016), helps us to unpack how different elements of the food economy can be seen to include an array of biological and ecological components and political, economic and cultural materials drawn from a wide range of actors (Sarmiento, 2017). Whilst visualisations such as Table 1 have obvious usefulness in helping to unpack diverse economies, they also have shortcomings for these reasons and can fall "prey to the scientific urge to build simplifying, diagrammatic models of

social life" (Schatzki 2002:xii). As I will illustrate throughout this thesis, diverse food practices do not always fit neatly into categorisations such as those illustrated in Table 1, with blurring and overlap common throughout the various practices. Specifically, I will highlight how these categorisations neglect the intimacy of many of the affective, embodied and relational forces at play within diverse economies.

Additionally, tables and illustrations such as Table 1 highlight the incapacity of language to always accurately describe the diverse economies project. Instead, analyses formed around affect, viscerality, feelings and emotions may form part of the solution to issues of representation within the framework (Sharp, 2018b). In this research this is something that is foregrounded; in building a transformative food economy, I follow Sharp (2018b) and Roelvink (2020a) in arguing that an engagement with affective and visceral politics helps to establish more extensive imaginings of the possible within the diverse economies project.

2.2.1 Emerging Themes in Diverse Food Economies Research

Following my examination of diverse and community food economies, I will now review some of the emergent themes from literature in the field. Here, I highlight the wide-ranging scope of the theory within critical food scholarship. The intention here is to provide a brief overview before examining the overlap of diverse economies thinking and critical food scholarship in the field of embodiment and affect in more detail in the following chapter.

Diverse economies researchers have explored a range of themes in regard to how food is produced. Cameron and Wright (2014) warn against a capitalocentric view of food production, arguing that it neglects the 1.3 billion small-holder and subsistence farmers globally. Scholars have also noted the role of 'backyard', urban or community-based food production in contributing to diverse food economies (Hill, 2011; Smith and Jehlička, 2013; Cameron and Wright, 2014; Larder *et al.,* 2014; Sovová, 2020), arguing that dismissal of small scale activity encourages hidden economic activity to be ignored. Furthermore, diverse economies thinkers have highlighted the importance of recognising how food production is both socially and culturally embedded, and how this is widely ignored within 'mainstream' economic thought (Wright, 2010; Larder et al., 2014; Jehlička et al., 2015).

Others have highlighted the diversity of labour within food production, drawing attention to how unpaid labour involves ethical decision-making in urban agriculture (Drake, 2019), how Community

Supported Agriculture (CSA) is comprised of a diverse range of labour forms (White, 2013), and how unpaid labour in self-provisioning is indicative of a 'quiet sustainability', a practice that is unwittingly resulting in beneficial social and environmental outcomes (Smith and Jehlička, 2013). Whilst these accounts all offer differing perspectives on the role of ethical decision making within the food system, they all recognise the non-capitalist and alternative capitalist roles undertaken by labouring bodies in the food economy.

Diverse economies perspectives also look towards locating food commons across a variety of property forms (Kennedy, 2020), from private and state-owned land, to open access resources (Gibson-Graham *et al*. 2013) as well as how we understand the management of these commons to create new spatial imaginaries that evoke a range of potential economic subjectivities (St. Martin, 2012) . This perspective seeks to reject normative narratives of 'food as commodity' in favour of counter-hegemonic and transformative narratives of 'food as commons' (Vivero-Pol, 2017), focusing on themes of environmental sustainability, social justice, democracy, solidarity and food sovereignty (Gordon, 2018; Vivero-Pol *et al*., 2019). Therefore, the approach engages with a viewpoint that "examines how the specific ordering and spatiality of particular projects can effectively challenge centres of power in food supply" (Holloway *et al*., 2007:15) and recognises the multivariant nature of the food system (Dixon, 2011). These debates around moving the food system towards common-food futures have been accelerated in light of the production and supply chain crises brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic (Healy *et al*., 2020), a crisis that exacerbated many of the underlying issues in the food economy.

Diverse economies scholars have also focused on the different ways that individuals and communities procure food. This is highlighted through respective studies on direct food provision through collective procurement (Grasseni, 2020), practices of gleaning and foraging (Barron, 2015; Morrow, 2020), sharing through community fridges (Morrow, 2018), saving food waste (Diprose and Lee, 2021), food buying clubs (Little *et al*., 2010), consumer-initiated food cooperatives (Oba and Ozsoy, 2020) and CSA (White, 2013, 2020; Cameron, 2015). These perspectives seek to highlight how supermarkets and their supply chains offer only one reality of how food is procured around the world when instead there are a multitude of different and viable approaches taken by individuals and groups that should demand greater focus.

Academics have also recognised the spaces of food sharing and food consumption as burgeoning sites for diverse economic activity. More detailed attention will be paid towards the practice of food

consumption in the following chapter, but a focus on the importance of diverse economies in relation to the practice is important here. Food-sharing initiatives have been recognised as *spaces of possibility* (Davies *et al*., 2017b; Marovelli, 2019) where communities are engaged through practices of cooking, sharing and eating. This involves a perspective that interprets the economic and social practices related to food sharing as *more-than capitalist* (Davies *et al*. 2017b).

Food sharing also extends to more than the sharing of food, expanding into the exchange of skills, knowledges, stuff and spaces (Davies *et al*., 2017b; Marovelli, 2019), highlighting the complexity and diversity within and between different economic spaces. These acts are based around the prominence of *more-than economic motives,* situated within the transformation of socio-spatial relations (Veen and Dagevos, 2019). Jehlička and Daněk (2017) extend these spaces to include informal food sharing practices, arguing that practices beyond the conventional market have the propensity to build social cohesion, strengthen environmental sustainability and encourage food re-localisation. This has the effect of *resocialising* economic relations through practices of food sharing (Ulug and Trell, 2020; Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016; Rosol, 2020). This aligns with Oona Morrow's arguments (2011, quoted by Sarmiento, 2017), who contends that these encounters are not an end in themselves, but a means to establish different ways of living, to politicise the everyday, and to desire different economic practices to capitalism.

A common theme throughout this body of research is how different iterations of community food economies allow for participants to "share meaning and find ways of being together" (Gibson-Graham, 2006:82). This approach attempts to investigate the conditions for how possibilities are thought possible to begin with through investigating the "generative capabilities of alternative food assemblages that extend to issues of social change, value creation, and a politics of the convivial" (Carolan, 2016:142). Through engaging in alternative food, participants are seen to cultivate themselves as different economic subjects, "enacting a different negotiation of the ethical dilemmas posed by food systems today" (Harris, 2009:61) as well as creating a space for dialogue about the meaning of economic practice in food economies (Trauger and Passidomo, 2012).

This development has allowed diverse economies thinkers to begin to utilise commonalities between diverse economies theory and other frameworks. In the context of food, this has ranged from analysing shared space between diverse economies and food sovereignty (Gordon, 2018), to embodiment and more-than-human food geographies (Sarmiento, 2017) to the production of nature (Morrow, 2021). This has furthered diverse economies thinking by integrating different and new

schools of thought into the framework, which, as I noted in the introduction to this thesis, is a contribution I hope to make with this research.

Whilst diverse economies perspectives on foodscapes, from production to provisioning, can be considered extensive, an area where the field engages sparingly currently is the mealtime. Diverse economies thinkers have considered the mealtime in the context of providing a platform for wider social change (Wilson, 2013), how diverse food spaces contribute towards the cultivation of different *ethical food subjects* (Ulug and Trell, 2020) and how meal sharing crosses borders between capitalist and non-capitalist economic practice (Veen and Dagevos, 2019). These perspectives seek to move beyond a perspective that sees food as embedded in commodity culture (Goodman, 2008), and instead looks at the potential for multiple economic identities (Gibson-Graham, 2006) of the food subject. These contributions, however, largely ignore the agentic capacity of food within these processes. This is the point where this research makes a contribution to diverse economies thought, specifically by investigating how materials, connections and flows within shared meals in diverse economic spaces contribute towards subjectivity shifts in participants.

2.2.2 Reconceptualising Alterity: Towards Diverse Foodscapes

Scholars have sought to draw attention to 'alternative' economies, institutions and practices, most notably in collections by Leyshon *et al*. (2003) and Fuller *et al*. (2010). This work examines how "being alternative by believing in the possibility of an economic and political other" (Jonas 2010:4) allows us to recognise how alternatives exist everywhere. Theorising economic alternatives therefore seeks to examine "the efforts of individual and collective actors to imagine and, more importantly, to perform, economic activities in a way that marks them out differently from the dictates and conventions of the mainstream economy" (Leyshon *et al.* 2003:4-5).

Diverse economies approaches often seek to challenge framings of economies based around alterity. Cameron and Wright (2014) propose that, due to 'capitalocentric' forms of analysis (Gibson-Graham, 1996), alternatives are viewed solely in relation to claims about capital's dominance, meaning that what is construed as criticism can become more akin to 'gritty realism' (Carolan, 2016:149) that "restricts economic imaginings to a limited binary framework" (Fickey 2011:239) where the "perceived spatial extent and viability of alternatives are shaped by how one understands the dominance of the mainstream economy" (Healy, 2009:338). Because of this comparison to an assumed mainstream, alternatives are dismissed as "precapitalist holdovers or doomed utopian experiments" (North 2007:xxii) instead of viable visions for diverse futures.

This argument isn't universally accepted, with others indicating that "alterity is itself diverse, context-dependent and, above all, geographically specific" (Jonas, 2010:5). This perspective instead calls for a more critical interrogation of the concept of alternatives. Gritzas and Kavoulakos make an important intervention at this point, noting that whilst alternatives should be observed as oppositional, they should also be recognised as dynamic processes that are "materially effective and interconnected beyond the local scale" (2016:924). It is at this point that the theorisation of alterity meets with considerations of wider diverse economies.

Critical food scholars have predominantly used the term *alternative* when describing food practices that are situated outside of a perceived corporatised, industrial mainstream food system. Jarosz (2008) develops four characteristics to describe Alternative Food Networks (AFN's):

> *(1) Shorter distances between producers and consumers;*
>
> *(2) Small farm size and scale and organic or holistic farming methods, which are contrasted with large scale, industrial agribusiness;*
>
> *(3) The existence of food purchasing venues such as food cooperatives, farmers markets, and CSA and local food-to-school linkages;*
>
> *(4) A commitment to the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable food production, distribution and consumption.*

Whilst this offers useful insight into how AFNs are defined; it also highlights how they are held in relation to a dominant system. Dominant understandings of alternative food have been criticised for their oversimplicity and focus on identity rather than an openness to plurality (Sharp *et al*. 2015), thus reflecting a limited politics of the possible (Guthman, 2008a). Consequently, there is an argument that many of the central tenets of the alternative food movement (fair trade, environmentally friendly certificates, local supply chains, for example) actually contribute towards capitalist development, farmer exploitation and the exclusion of low-income consumers (Guthman, 2008c; Paddock, 2016; Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017). This is also compounded by the fostering of an 'infertile consumer politics', where individualistic practices are deepened and neoliberal configurations are reproduced (Moragues-Faus, 2017). Correspondingly, there have been calls for research into alternative food networks to engage with alternative economic practices and models (Schrager, 2018; Rosol, 2020) and acknowledge the heterogeneous mix of networks present within the sector (Follett, 2009).

There has been a significant amount of research investigating the tendency of alternative food to be exclusionary by nature (Guthman, 2008b; Alkon, 2013; Zitcer, 2015; Moragues-Faus, 2017). This critique sees alternative food as something that often serves to "conceal and reproduce inequality" (Cadieux and Slocum 2015:15) and can be seen to "hark back to a white, bourgeois and idyllic rural imaginary that ignores social injustice" (Watts *et al.* 2018:24). Developing upon this, scholars have highlighted how alternative food can be very differently understood by individual participants, and how they identify, or more importantly don't identify, with certain characteristics of the practice in the context of their everyday lives (Guthman, 2008a; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010; Holloway *et al*., 2010).

The lack of participation of ethnic minorities within the alternative food movement (Slocum, 2007; Alkon and McCullen, 2011) highlights a fundamental issue facing any radical potential within a sector that is structured around racialised meta-narratives of place (Howerton and Trauger, 2017). For Alkon and McCullen (2011), this means that despite burgeoning popularity, alternative food cannot be seen to contribute towards a *just sustainability* when it struggles to challenge and transform ecological, material and social relations. Rachel Slocum proposes that, currently, whilst "the ideals of healthy food, people and land are not intrinsically white, the objectives, tendencies, strategies, the emphases and absences and the things over-looked in community food make them so" (2007:526). Slocum argues that whilst many of the acts, processes and structures involved in community and alternative food are currently centred on whiteness, as well as wealth, alternative food practice has the *possibility* for changing relations and that this possibility for more ethical relations lies in the potential of spatial bodies within place to promote integration. Drawing on Massey's (1994) 'global sense of place', this perspective argues that anti-racist practice, through confronting privilege and recognising other histories (Slocum, 2006) is fundamental to building community food systems that work for everyone. More work is needed, however, to clarify what it means to create socially just food systems (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015) in order to support communities and resist hegemonic forces within the industry.

Additionally , there have been arguments that alternative food as a descriptor inherently neglects the economic diversity and the political potential of the food system (Cameron and Wright, 2014; Wilson, 2013). This perspective recognises that alterity, in the context of food, is positioned as "peripheral, relatively powerless, and socially insignificant, merely the efforts of a self-conscious few at the local scale" (Hill, 2015:563). This means that the diversity of the ways in which food is currently produced, distributed, and consumed is often overlooked in favour of a wider monolithic, capitalist food system, and counterpoised with an often abstract 'alternative' food sector. This can lead to an interpretation of economy that views alterity through problematic binaries such as

'global' or 'local' food (DeLind, 2010), or food production as either 'natural' or 'industrial' (Alkon, 2013). These binaries mean that focus is lost on specificities and nuances, instead foodscapes are recognised through conventional–alternative dualism (Allen, 2004; Holloway *et al*., 2007).

Consequently, capitalocentric thinking can conceptualise the food economy as a singular entity: a neoliberal food system. This form of analysis ignores the vastly different ways that food is engaged with, particularly in the Global South, from backyard and subsistence agriculture, to food economies based on exchange, to communal food sharing events. With reference to food, attempting to universalise alternatives can lead to the tendency to entrench established privileges whilst neglecting to challenge the structural inequalities that are present within the food system (Guthman, 2008a; Sharp, 2018a). Instead, an approach that reads for difference situates alterity as a site to be explored in different and experimental ways. Here, interpretations based around diversity can provide a richer understanding of spatialities that goes beyond simplistic framings (Cameron and Wright, 2014) and recognise the economy as a "zone of cohabitation and contestation amongst multiple economic forms" (Gibson-Graham, 2006:xx).

Whilst Cameron and Wright (2014) observe that aspects of the food system are becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few powerful corporations, they argue that taking a capitalocentric approach leads to an understanding that is structured around only one economic reality that assumes a mainstream culture of capitalism. Instead, they suggest an approach that recognises food economies as diverse rather than alternative. This approach acknowledges the diverse means of production, distribution and consumption of food that are present globally through an understanding based on a relational constitution of the world (Massey, 2004). By building on Gibson-Graham's diverse economies framework, Cameron and Wright recognise the heterogeneity of food through the "diverse forms of labour, markets, enterprises, property and finance" (2014:4) that are present within the food economy. This can be extended into urban community food spaces to recognise the role that food can play in connecting groups and the position that food initiatives can take outside of, and beyond, capitalocentric practice. This also speaks to discourses and praxes of radical food geographies, where theoretical and action-based interventions resist oppressive food regimes and structures, whilst also seeking to create viable and equitable food futures (Hammelman *et al*. 2020).

Indeed, rather than situating food within binaries relating to capital, some diverse economies perspectives have argued that we should move away from "a kind of structuralist paranoia" (Gibson-Graham, 2006a:68), and instead embrace questions about how food can be considered to have different degrees of alterity (Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016) economically, but also socially and

culturally. Positioning food in this way rejects predetermination and "teaches us to be open to, and playful with, difference" (Carolan, 2016:144). This allows us to view the food economy not as a natural force, but as a range of social relations in need of coordination (Massey, 2013). Through a recognition that the dominant framing of neoliberalism as a 'hegemonic story' (Larner, 2003) is something that can have a 'paralyzing effect' on movements and their proliferation (Roelvink, 2016), diverse economies approaches can offer a means of uncovering alternative food futures. Using this approach enables research to uncover the hidden diversity of enterprises, markets and labour practices within the wider 'foodscape' (Cameron and Gordon, 2010).

Locating a position that has the flexibility to encompass intersections of food activism/justice, alternative food networks and ethical consumption means moving beyond problematic binaries. The question at the heart of this is whether we wish to view food as directly related to (or subsumed by) capitalism, or whether food acts as a "site and a means to build worlds beyond capitalism" (Wilson, 2013:734). This is an important distinction to make at this stage of the thesis. In positioning food as a site of transformation within the economy, my argument centres on how food can be analysed as both a tool and the means to build better worlds.

2.3 Concluding Remarks

In summary, this chapter has examined literature on diverse economies in the context of this research. In doing this, I have demonstrated how the diverse economies project can foster other worlds, specifically with regards to food. In the first section of this chapter, I introduced Gibson-Graham's diverse economies framework. Here, I focused on how developing a performative ontology allows researchers to understand the economy through reading for difference. I also paid attention in this section to how a weak theory and thick description approach opens up perspectives of economies that are conducive to "possibility rather than inevitability" (Morrow *et al*., 2019:57). These perspectives, I contend, enable researchers to contribute towards *making* economies that are fundamentally different.

Building on this, I looked for links between diverse economies theory and food geographies, highlighting examples of intersection between the two fields. Here, I focused initially on how diverse economies thinking helps us to move past unhelpful binaries when considering food, particularly those related to neoliberalism. Building on this, I also engaged with examples of research that seeks to move past these binaries in a variety of fields, covering food production, provisioning,

distribution, sharing and consumption. In this section, I also identified gaps in the literature around the mealtime, and where I intend this thesis to contribute towards diverse economies knowledge.

The final section in the chapter consolidates perspectives on observing food through a diverse economies lens. This involves moving away from capitalocentric conceptions of 'alternative' food and towards understandings that break away from perspectives of the food economy that engage with a dominant reading of the economy, instead looking towards diverse and community imaginings that seek to identify the transformative nature of foodscapes.

The following chapter engages with the perspectives developed through this chapter, to explore how 'more-than-food' engagements with the subject contribute towards building transformative food economies. As Michael Carolan argues; "you cannot understand food as a verb if power remains a noun" (2016:150). If this chapter has broadly followed this thinking, the following chapter will elaborate on it further.

3: ‘More-than-food’: Embodiment, Materiality and Encounter

Michael Goodman develops the term ‘more-than-food’ to recognise the “multitudinous, shifting and contingent ontological, epistemological and methodological ways” (Goodman 2016:258) that geographers are beginning to approach food as an area of geographical inquiry. In recognising food as ‘more-than-food’, Goodman in particular asks us to consider the role that the visceral and material turn in geography have within the study of foodscapes. The purpose of this chapter is to examine these themes within contemporary academic literature and investigate how they fit within the context of this thesis.

In this chapter, I will first examine what is meant by *visceral geographies*. This will engage with how the literature on the subject has a particular focus on themes of *affect*, *materiality* and *relationality*, and how these are important within the study of food. In examining this, I will also examine the key theoretical concepts within visceral geographies. This provides a foundation for the data analysis section of this thesis where, through a *developmental* understanding of the visceral, I evidence how the food subject can be situated in relation to processes of *becoming* within diverse economies.

Building upon these themes, the second section of this chapter reviews literature relating to food practices. I pay particular attention here to two practices that are significant in the context of this thesis: cooking and communal eating, with a particular focus on these practices within community settings. In this section, I engage with literature on practice theory and commensal practices. This focus draws upon the themes introduced in the first section related to embodiment and affectivity, and ties it into considerations of wider situated food practices.

3.1 Introducing Visceral Geographies

Visceral geographies involve an engagement with embodied and deeply personal experiences of food and its politics, whilst moving away from theorisations ‘without a body’ (Watson and Cooper, 2019). The study of viscerality is closely linked to feminist theory (see Butler 1993, Grosz 1994, Probyn 2000 for important texts) and answers calls within geography for greater attention towards the role of embodiment within food research (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014).

Longhurst *et al.* provide a basic definition to build upon. They describe viscerality as:

> *"The sensations, moods, and ways of being that emerge from our sensory engagement with the material and discursive environments in which we live"* (Longhurst *et al.* 2009:334)

Visceral geographers are concerned with what embodied experiences can tell us about emotive and affective relations with place (Longhurst *et al*., 2009), highlighting the importance of *where,* as well as *what* we eat (Bell and Valentine, 1997). Building upon this description, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010) add three additional components to its scope. The first of these is concerned with how visceral geography can further our understanding of the agency of physical matter between and within bodies. The second addresses how the field can move beyond 'static' conceptions of the body and move towards interpretations of the self and other that are more contextualised, interactive and relational. Drawing heavily on the work of Butler (1993), this recognises the sensations and judgements of the body in socio-spatial terms that are networked, rhizomatic and situated. The final component seeks to encourage a scepticism of boundaries within research. Rather than looking to dismiss outright all dualisms (such as mind/body and representational/ non-representational), it instead attempts to understand how we can imagine and practice our political lives in, through and beyond these tensions. These three additional components mean that the field moves beyond body-centred work, and towards generative scholarship that observes the body as a radically relational agent whilst being focused on affective strategies for social change.

These relational approaches to the body therefore recognise the role of specific socio-spatial circumstances in shaping bodily sensations and judgements (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010; Latour, 2004; Bourdieu, 1984). Here, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008), following Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Anderson (2006), argue that visceral geographies are not based on individualising or essentialising forms of *being political;* rather they adopt a *radically relational* perspective on the messy and unstructured ways bodies interact in the production of the everyday.

An engagement with the visceral politics of food therefore seeks to better understand how an individual's food choices and ideologies intersect with their everyday experiences of food, and how fundamentally, this is already material and defined through a visceral body (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008; Carolan, 2015). Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy develop an iteration of the visceral realm (also following Connolly 1999, Probyn 2000), particularly in relation to food, as a way to account for both material and social forces and for both structural and random events (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013). From this, they question how theorisations of the visceral can be applied to develop participation, motivation and enjoyment in certain food practices:

> *"Encouraging more diverse participation in alternative food, therefore, would require activists to begin to evaluate and redress the socio-spatial circumstances that tend to trigger negative visceral responses among certain social groups. We might ask, what conditions are needed to promote feelings of belonging among a more diverse group?"* (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2010:1277)

Developing a better understanding of visceral triggers is seen by visceral geographers as crucial to overcoming power and oppression within the food system and beyond (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010; Probyn, 2000; Longhurst *et al*., 2009), a point where visceral geography departs from diverse economies perspectives on food, presenting an imaginary of extensive power structures in the food system limiting the ethical cultivation of the self (Sarmiento, 2017).

Important within this sphere is the work of Elspeth Probyn, who examines how food can be recognised as an appropriate tool to understand power and difference within wider social and political relations (Probyn, 2000), whilst observing that taste can never be universal because it is fundamentally differential and particular (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). Probyn argues that "we need to consider what power tastes like, where it is sucked, [and] what types of bodies it produces" (Probyn 2000:7, also 1997), a position that is also concerned with how power relations privilege some bodies over others (Hayes-Conroy and Martin, 2010). Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy use an analogy of ice cream to explain this:

> *"The sweet taste of ice cream is not decidedly uplifting for all minded bodies; rather, memory, perception, cognitive thinking, historical experience, and other material relations and immaterial forces all intersect with individuals' sensory grasp of the world, complicating one's visceral experience of the ice cream eating event."* (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008:465)

Whilst individuals are actors embedded within social networks (Massey, 1994) that have a distinct effect on the emotional and affective responses to food contributing to the development of social bodies (see Butler 1993), social difference complicates the visceral realm (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). Taste connects rhizomatically with the material content of ideas, beliefs and social conditions where these "representations join and become part of old memories, new intensities, triggers, aches, tempers, commotions, tranquilities" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2010:467).

Probyn observes that "food and eating continually branch into areas that may at first seem unconnected, yet in their rhizomatic logic are deeply intertwined" (2000:8). This interpretation goes

beyond considerations of the visceral that are defined solely by factors such as distance, price or cultural meaning of a foodstuff, and towards a much broader rhizomatic network concerned with wider forces that influence bodily movement and drive (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013). Take, for example, Roe's description of carrot preparation:

> *"For some people, peeling, chopping, and scrubbing contributes to the preparation of an edible carrot; whereas for others it does not: different practices are part of the process of making something edible, creating your own intimacy with the materiality of what you will then eat"* (Roe 2006a:473)

Here, the carrot is materially contingent on an array of influences that are "shifting, contextualized and indeterminate [in] nature – albeit bounded and privileged by relations of power, geography and political economy" (Goodman 2016:260). These concepts can also be observed in the work of Ahmed, who argues that whether something is judged to be "beneficial or harmful involves thought and evaluation, at the same time that it is 'felt' by the body" (Ahmed 2004a:6). For Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, as well as other visceral geographers, it is important to understand why foods feel different to different bodies beyond Cartesian mind-body dualism and an emphasis on individual behaviour.

From this, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2013, 2015) have more recently called for understandings of viscerality to be based around a framework of a *political ecology of the body* (PEB) in order to "organise and operationalise political ecological research on the body" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2015:662). Figure 2 shows the overlapping elements of structural forces, knowledge production and visceral experience within the health and wellbeing of human and more-than-human bodies that comprise the framework. The model is established for researchers to form modes of inquiry that "systematically interrogate the production and reproduction of the material body through sets of directed questions" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2015:662) that pay close attention to overlapping elements and interactions between the model's three wheels. The overlapping elements of the PEB framework emphasise how individual visceral feelings are not detached from wider structures and systems of meaning making, but the body still remains central within theorising (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2015). For example, when considering questions of communal eating in this thesis, I may consider structural questioning around spatial, temporal and economic conditions regarding the meal (although this questioning would also consider poststructuralist and anti-essentialist diverse economies approaches). Using the PEB framework however, I would also reflect on knowledge-based questioning on differing perceptions of the meal across different participants, as well as more visceral questions that look at how embodied

experiences of the meal, trigger feelings of enjoyment or disgust (developed from Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2015).

PEB, in the context of food and eating, therefore provides a tangible structure that allows for a recognition that "bodies and eating offer vantage points for understanding food as the material grounds of survival, the structural enabler and constraints of this, and discursive practices mediating food access at multiple scales" (Spring *et al.* 2019:846). Because of this, the PEB framework helps to address some of the well-worn critiques of alternative food (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013) that are highlighted within the previous chapter of this thesis. In this thesis, I engage with the PEB framework as a useful tool in research design but remain wary of overplaying the importance of structural forces within this design, choosing instead to understand power as linked to an assemblage, as well as focusing on the political nature of knowledge making and the way in which language constructs the world (Cameron and Gibson, 2005).

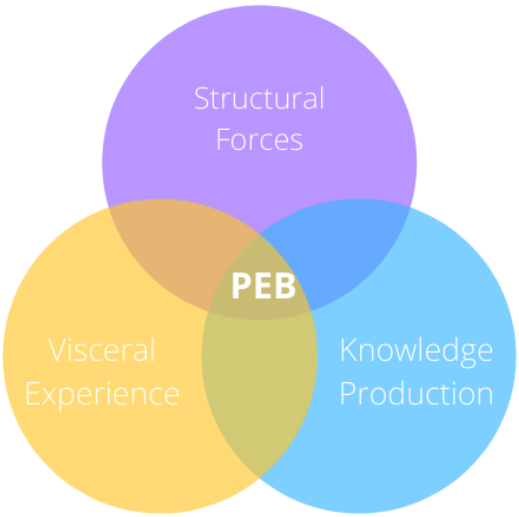

Figure 2- The political ecology of the body model (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2015)

Beyond purely theoretical interventions, visceral geographers have also called for greater attention to the role of the body within research methods. Longhurst *et al* (2008) developed an approach that has sought to develop an understanding of how the body can be used as tool for research, questioning how drawing attention to senses such as smell and taste whilst conducting research can add to understandings of relationships between people and places. Similarly, Hayes-Conroy's (2010) engagement with visceral methods argues that these approaches are less about getting the 'whole picture', and instead should be concerned with *embodied detail*, examining how bodies interact with and in the material world. This perspective seeks to "embrac[e] the ambiguities of bodies 'talking' as well as the unfinished nature of talk about the body" (Hayes-Conroy 2010:736). Building on these

themes, Brady (2011), calls for a 'cooking as inquiry' method that recognises bodies and food as sites of knowledge. Whilst similar to the findings of Longhurst *et al.* (2008), Brady also highlights the role of "researchers as researcher-participants in reflexive, collaborative study that explores the ways in which the embodied self is performed relationally through foodmaking" (Brady 2011:322). These approaches will all be engaged with in Chapter 4, as constituting parts of my methodology.

3.1.1 Material Geographies of Food

Historically, perspectives on the materiality of food have been drawn towards considerations of material or product biographies (Hall *et al*., 2020). This view sees food as a material with a life-span, from production to consumption or disposal, focusing on the economic and social value of objects within supply chains (Hall *et al.* 2020, see also Appadurai 1988, Cook *et al* 2004). Perhaps the most notable example of this is through Cook *et al.*'s (2004) tracing of the journey of the papaya fruit, from production to consumption, exploring the role of unknown global connections between different actors in the supply chain.

This analysis of materiality through the geography of commodities has focused more on the human acts related to food, without a careful consideration of the role that materiality plays in shaping how food is consumed and experienced (Bennett, 2013). Visceral and embodied geographies, however, have approached the role of food materiality through the lens of the *material body*, and how it comes to produce the social world (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). This body-centred approach has implications for how food is understood materially. Within visceral geography, this is understood through the way that "foods link up with ideas, memories, sounds, visions, beliefs, past experiences, moods, worries and so on, all of which combine to become material" (Cook *et al*. 2010:113).

Firstly, it is important to understand the processes related to *visceral identification*. Roe describes this as a process where:

> *"The plants and animals that become our food are tested through our powers of smell, touch, taste and sight and it is only after passing these tests does the food, through digestion, become integrated into our bodies" (2006b:118)*

Roe (2006a) draws attention to how the formation of edibility is understood as relationally embedded within the material environment. Concerned with how meaning formation leads to either eating or not eating a foodstuff, Roe argues that whilst visceral and corporeal knowledges affect the edibility of something, eating is also determined by immaterial forces (see also Latham and

McCormack 2004, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008). Similarly, Waitt and Phillips (2016) note that material and visceral assessments enmesh with negotiations of everyday practices when judging the decay of foodstuffs. This understanding of materiality draws upon relational understandings of knowledge formation that are based on a simultaneous interaction between the material and the social (Law and Urry, 2004). This perspective is part of a wider movement that has developed understandings of the bodily materiality of food to become concerned with the social structures that shape interactions with material objects (Lavis and Abbots 2020, see also Guthman 2015). Bennett builds upon this in the following excerpt:

> *"Edible material is an agent inside and alongside intention-forming, morality-(dis)obeying, language-using, reflexivity-wielding, culture-making human beings. Food is an active inducer-producer of salient, public effects, rather than a passive resource at the disposal of consumers." (2007:134)*

Bennett notes here how edible matter is an agentic material that is capable of comprising a role of an 'active inducer'. This conforms with wider considerations of the material (re)turn within human geography that has developed a recognition of agency that acknowledges its contingency and relationality (Lavis and Abbots, 2020). With regards to the formation of edibility in food, Roe argues that this form of meaning making is both "political and ethical because the action that is played out from this process is relationally embedded in the environment […]; thus, this process of meaning making is not reflexive but evolves through affective and material connectivity" (2006a:478).

Hayes-Conroy and Martin's (2010) interpretation of *biosociality* is concerned with how the body engages in an act of *becoming* that is situated within wider social and material processes to create visceral sensations and judgements. Moving away from conceptions of the biosocial as a disruption of the nature/society binary, Hayes-Conroy and Martin instead seek to understand how the biosocial "highlights multivalent relations producing visceral sensations" (2010:272). Jackson *et al*. (2019) elaborate upon this perceived relational materialism through their ontological study of freshness. They argue that freshness in food is something that is not only material, but is also enacted through a processual *doing* that emphasises social and ethical embeddedness through care and attention which prioritises producer/consumer connectedness (see also Carolan 2017, Sarmiento 2017). Jackson *et al*. adopt a material-semiotic approach to explain how this process is rooted within "materially and discursively heterogeneous relations" (2019:2, see also Law 2009).

Scholars have questioned how changing or vanishing material practices have altered how food is consumed. Roe (2006a, 2006b) contends that embodied practice within food choice has changed in the face of pre-prepared food being dominant within modern diets, removing the need for

heightened sensory engagement with food as a material. Because of this, different skills and knowledges related to the edibility of foodstuffs apply to a modern consumer, particularly in this instance with regards to the role of biotechnology within food production. Similarly, both Carolan (2011) and Watson and Cooper (2019) question a 'lock-in' effect, where consumers have become locked-in to eating processed food, due to visceral processes of identification based around visual appeal, rather than broader multisensory engagement.

Whilst these perspectives have value in the study of contemporary eating habits, they also come with the danger of essentialising what constitutes a 'modern diet' that is distanced from visceral processes of identification. Waitt and Phillips (2016), in their study of domestic refrigeration practices for example, find that bodily capacities can provide more dynamic and open-ended assessments of the vitality of food than use-by-dates. This forms part of an understanding of food and viscerality that considers its 'more-than-food' elements, that are shifting, liminal and multiple (Goodman, 2016).

By attending to the role of the material world within visceral encounters, we can observe how agency is situated not only exclusively within bodies, but is also built from connections between bodies, the material world and discourse (Abbots, 2017). The non-human materiality within foodscapes is not a passive actor, but rather an actant within an agentic assemblage that is self-altering and dissipative (Bennett, 2013). Taste therefore, is something that is developed materially in the brain, body and tongue, but is articulated through assemblages of social histories (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013).

3.1.2 Conceptual Groundings of the Visceral

Having considered what visceral geographies are, and how they are employed in research, it is important at this juncture to highlight the conceptual groundings of the theory. Many of these groundings have significant overlap with diverse economies thinking, and the grounding of this research herein. Visceral geographies build upon key theoretical foundations of affect, Non-Representational Theory (NRT), Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and assemblage thinking in order to situate the body within foodscapes. This section will introduce some of these key concepts to provide more context for the literature introduced within this chapter.

Visceral geographers have engaged with ANT as a means to advance a relational ontology of the body, where affect is understood to be rhizomatic and interpersonal (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013). ANT within food studies is recognised as fundamental to opening up a political

economic approach that engages with the metabolic relations between humans and foodstuffs (Roe, 2006b) in ways that are collective and networked, performed through sociomaterial associations that observe the role of the non-human as actively present and consequential (Goodman, 2001). Within studies of viscerality, this means that there is no recognition of passivity within an actor, instead there is an understanding of shared inter-activity between different actors in the foodscape (Mol, 2008). Within food studies, there have been critiques of ANT, with Guthman (2002) suggesting that it has the capacity to 'flatten' critical assessments of power relations present with food system.

Whilst considered widely compatible and overlying with ANT (Law, 2009; Müller and Schurr, 2016), assemblage thinking has formed another important aspect of the ontological development of visceral geographies. Sarmiento describes assemblage thinking as an approach that "generally deploy[s] a relational ontology, holding that phenomena do not exist as discrete subjects or objects defined by intrinsic, essential qualities, but rather emerge and develop in and through relationships between a wide array of actors and agencies, human and more-than-human" (2020:486).

Assemblage thinking builds principally on the writings of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who argue that assemblages are a product of relationships between domination and difference, through a constitution of territorialising and de-territorialising forces. In relation to visceral geographies, this has many significant overlaps with discussion around ANT, however, as Goodman argues that, whilst eating takes into account the forces of class, gender, sexuality and nation, alimentary assemblages "place different orders of things and ways of being alongside each other, inside and outside inextricably linked" (Goodman in Cook *et al*. 2010:113). This allows assemblage thinking to provide ANT with a greater recognition of the capacities of bodies to affect and be affected (Müller and Schurr, 2016).

As well as engagement with ANT and assemblage thinking, those with an interest in visceral geography have also been drawn to the complex and unidentifiable ways in which bodies affect and are affected by the world, leading to a prominent role for non-representational theory (NRT) within studies of affect and viscerality. Affect and NRT prioritise the non-cognitive ways in which individuals go about their everyday lives, seeking to locate meaning in and between physical bodies (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010), whilst giving a more equal weighting between humans and non-humans (Anderson and Wylie, 2009; Simpson, 2020). NRT has become prominent within studies of corporeality because it "inherently resists becoming known;[…as] it cannot be exhaustively understood through analysing its capture in language" (Saldanha 2012:284). Thrift, in situating NRT within the studies of emotion and affect, argues that "emotions form a rich moral array through

which and with which the world is thought and which can sense different things even though they cannot always be named" (2008:176).

NRT is also concerned with practices (a forthcoming section in this chapter), which Thrift understands as "material bodies of work or styles that have gained enough stability over time, through, for example, the establishment of corporeal routines and specialized devices, to reproduce themselves" (Thrift 2008:8). Through this, in NRT, material bodies are constantly being rewritten and are products not of the properties of actors, but of a network of interconnections brought about through a wide range of resources (Thrift, 2008) that bring attention to the *background* of social life (Simpson, 2020).

Carolan argues that non-representational theorisations are flawed, particularly within his own studies of agri-food, because they "suggest that what is of analytic concern ultimately dies the moment we try to talk (and write) about it" (Carolan 2008:412). Building upon papers by McCormack and Latham (Latham, 2003; McCormack, 2002), Carolan instead calls for knowledge to be considered as *more-than-representational,* where representations are acknowledged as only telling an incomplete part of the story, but where this part is recognised as important and worthy of investigation. This is also considered in the work of Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008), who instead of dismissing the non-representational realm, instead argue that it should be recognised, in relation to viscerality, as something that encompasses, but is broader than the representational.

3.1.3 'Tuning' and 'Chilling': Learning to be Affected

Much attention has been paid within and beyond geography on the topics of emotion, feeling and affect[6] (see Ahmed 2004a, Thrift 2004, Thien 2005, Anderson 2006, Anderson and Harrison 2006, McCormack 2007, Thrift 2008, Anderson 2014 for key texts). Whilst affect is often closely understood with emotion and the senses, affects are not situated in individual bodies, rather are formed through an interaction of different bodies, objects and places (Duff, 2010; Massumi, 2002). Here, affect is "distributed and works as a complex gathering of intensities, words, artefacts, gestures, attachments, bodily sensations, expectations and habits that make up subjectivities and suffuse spaces and objects such that they become affecting" (Keevers and Sykes 2016:1648). Unlike emotion, which is observed as individuating, affect can be recognised as a force or intensity that can ultimately be disruptive and transformative (Carolan, 2016). In relation to the study of food and eating, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy have theorised that affective encounters with food emerge

[6] Anderson (2006) offers a clear delineation of these terms.

from a range of "social relationships, intellectual engagements, and material attachments" (2013:82) that give rise to different bodily motivations across different bodies.

Latour (2004) describes the concept of *learning to be affected* through an analogy of the 'training' of noses in the perfume industry. He illustrates this by noting that with the use of an odour kit, an individual entering the industry can be trained to differentiate between smells, or develop a 'nose'. This analogy is useful when discussing affect and embodiment, Latour argues, because, whilst the odour kit is not a part of the body in a traditional sense, it forms a significant relationship with the body in developing the sensation of smell. Here, the pupil learns to be affected in an ever more complex way, with an ever-increasing number of differences added as the learning progresses. This approach therefore recognises the relational nature of embodiment, and observes how sensations and judgements arise out of a network of material conditions (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010).

In relation to diverse economies thinking, Gibson-Graham and Roelvink describe this process of bodily learning as "not learning in the sense of increasing a store of knowledge but in the sense of becoming other, creating connections and encountering possibilities that render us newly constituted beings in a newly constituted world" (2009:322). For them, learning to be affected places emphasis on how learning forms an important part of co-constitution of a new body-world, as well as how affect is seen as a means for a change in economic subjectivity within transformational practice (Roelvink, 2020a). Gibson-Graham and Roelvink go on to explain:

> *"We are interested in thinking about learning to be affected as an ethical practice, one that involves developing an awareness of, and in the process being transformed by, co-existence. We are also interested in the ways that an ethics of learning to be affected might be operationalised in a wider arena"* (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2009:325-326)

This interpretation of learning to be affected engages with radically relational way of being and becoming that centres on political potential. As Cameron *et al*. speculate: "if gardening provides opportunities for learning to be affected, then perhaps community gardening provides even more" (2011:496). Considering this in the context of this thesis, I seek to examine how community food preparation, cooking and eating can provide further opportunities for learning to be affected. This perspective draws greater focus towards possibility situated in social and relational elements, recognising how every actor within the foodscape both affects and is affected by others (Carolan, 2017) as well as how affective experiences enable individuals to act (Roelvink and Zolkos, 2015; Roelvink, 2015), two important distinctions that I make within this research.

Carolan (2016) argues that feelings, ecologies, and more-than-representational knowledges are fundamental to how we can better understand how sustainable foodscapes can be enacted through practices. This position recognises how "affect offers a way to create a break in one's subjective attachment to capitalocentrism" (Roelvink, 2020:428) through diverse engagements with food. Building on these themes, Sarmiento has developed the concept of *ethical food subjects* to highlight how subjectivity shifts, towards a better embodied understanding of food practices related to production, distribution and consumption can lead to approaches of uncovering economic possibility within the food system. Sarmiento questions how can "asking what people actually do with food, and how food is sensed, felt, and experienced by specific people in particular times and places further debates around the diverse economies of food" (2017:487). This is a critical question that I hope that this thesis will contribute towards answering.

An ethical food subject can be identified as both an individual who has developed embodied understanding of issues related to food (Ulug and Trell 2020), but also "someone who is subject to the ways in which their food practices impinge on the livelihoods, well-being, and life prospects of these myriad others" (Sarmiento, 2017:488). Developing upon the work Foucault (1986) and Connolly (1999), the development of ethical food subjects is concerned with "what one is, what one does, and what one is capable of doing" (Foucault 1986:68) through a process of becoming. This recognises the "profoundly contingent and provisional outcome[s] of incalculable forces pulling in all directions" (Sarmiento 2015:79) and positions food consumers, not as 'neoliberal subjects' (Harris 2009) or 'citizen-consumers' (Johnston 2008, Busa and Garder 2015), but as a 'work in progress' or part of practices of 'self-cultivation' (Foucault 1990, Sarmiento 2017). The use of actor-network and assemblage thinking here allows work to be conducted into how networks influence specific bodies in ways that create the conditions for economies predicated on possibility (Sarmiento 2017).

Building on Guthman's (2008a) analysis of the exclusionary politics of alternative food, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010a) question how visceral processes affect how bodies can be *charged* or *chilled*[7] towards certain foods, examining how foods come to feel differently in different bodies. Carolan (2011, 2016) alternatively calls for this to be understood through the framing of careful *retuning* of bodies away from industrialised and fast food, and towards 'alternative' food practices and systems. He argues that bodies, much like in Latour's examination of the perfume industry, are *tuned* towards certain tastes, and that these tastes currently lie predominantly with those produced by industrial food. Carolan suggests bodies can therefore be retuned towards more sustainable food

[7] Hayes Conroy and Hayes-Conroy use the terms *charged* and *chilled* to denote positive and negative feelings towards food. They do this whilst acknowledging that this terminology can only be used as a 'stand-in' for what are highly complex and subjective visceral judgements across bodies. Therefore, the authors use the terms to illustrate how understanding visceral resonance offers insight into rationales for food-based acting.

practices, and in parallel to Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, calls for research to examine the bodily changes and conditions necessary for such a change. These perspectives both recognise how wider political and economic dynamics are played out in and through that the eating body (Abbots, 2017), but the former additionally questions how visceral difference is key to understanding social change (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010).

In their respective theses, Beacham (2018) and Sharp (2018b) elaborate on the importance of embodiment and affect when considering diverse economic foodscapes. Building predominantly on the work of Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, Beacham (2018), using the context of UK austerity, calls for greater attention to be paid towards how intimate visceralities can lead to bodies becoming attuned to different political economies of food over time. Similarly, Sharp (2018b) highlights the need for recognition of how wider food assemblages linked to attunement problematise simplified neoliberal rhetoric surrounding foodscapes. Both of these recognise how bodily practices are closely intertwined with economic conditions (see also Guthman, 2011, 2015; Roelvink and Zolkos, 2015; Roelvink, 2020). This thesis recognises these important inventions but also places emphasis on the everyday practices and relationships, as well as the "relationalities of food, space and place" (Goodman, 2016:258), that create the socio-material assemblages for attunement.

3.2 Cooking and Eating Together: Practices and Commensal Encounters

> *"Eating brings together a cacophony of feelings, hopes, pleasures and worries, as it orchestrates experiences that are at once intensely individual and social" (Probyn 2000:3)*

Eating is not the only embodied encounter that we have with food: producing, selecting, preparing, cooking and serving food all involve the body in different ways (Abbots, 2017), and all influence how food is experienced. Taking into account the previous section that recognises consumption practices to be contingent and open to the possibility of transformation (Sarmiento, 2015; Carolan, 2016; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010), I will now discuss this in relation to two specific practices that are of particular importance within this study: shared cooking and communal eating. Building upon the themes of learning to be affected and wider embodied geographies, this section will review literature on social eating (and cooking), whilst paying close attention to how the visceral realm affects these practices. Building upon the work of Carolan (2016), this section recognises the importance of *doings* and *feelings* when theorising diverse foodscapes beyond merely *knowing*, a

perspective that recognises the eating body as an amalgamation of matter, knowledge and social relations (Abbots, 2017). Carolan asks us:

> *"What is it about the sticky visceralities of practice that make worlds of difference? And how can we talk about and theorise doing difference in ways that avoid the radical individualism (and essentialism) implied by conventional understandings of practice, knowledge, and feeling, thus embracing the more-than (human, material, etc.) ''turns'' [in food studies]?"* (Carolan 2016:142)

Building on the theory introduced in the previous section, this passage engages with these questions in relation to social practice in order to establish a foundation for analyses of data later in the thesis.

3.2.1 Introducing Practice Theory

The study of practice has foundations in the philosophy of Heidegger and Wittgenstein, as well as social scientific roots in the work of Foucault, Bourdieu, Giddens and Butler, before being consolidated as a ontological framework of practices by Theodore Schatzki (2001, 2002) (Halkier *et al*., 2011). A practice is broadly defined as "a routinised way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood" (Reckwitz 2002:250) or an "open-ended, spatially-temporally dispersed nexus of doings and sayings" (Schatzki 2012:14). Practices therefore comprise of sociomaterial connections (see Orlikowski 2007) between bodily activities, mental activities, materials and their uses, embodied knowledges and emotions (Reckwitz, 2002) connected through socially shared moments (Welch and Warde, 2015). This focus recognises an increasingly prominent 'nexus' of practices that is "constantly happening and continually changing" (Hui *et al.* 2016:6), highlighting the importance of practice theory for developing theories of social change (Shove, 2010a; Schatzki, 2019). Indeed, instead of engaging with overarching systems, practice theories tend to look horizontally towards everyday reproduction and practice in order to situate change (Schmid and Smith, 2020).

Practice theories have previously been criticised for only having usefulness at a local scale (Shove *et al*., 2012) and evading structural questions (Schmid and Smith, 2020), similar critiques to those levelled at diverse economies scholarship. Practice scholarship has also been critiqued for its evasion of 'critical questions'; failing to engage with critical discussion of capitalism (Schmid and Smith, 2020) and dismissing such engagement as a fixation with "familiar preoccupations" of social theory (Shove 2010b:278). These contentions are broadly disputed by contemporary practice theorists (Hui *et al.* 2016, Schatzki 2016) who call for a greater focus on the nexus of interconnections to display how smaller practices have wider implications.

Shove *et al*. (2012) develop understandings of practices to include *materials, competences* and *meanings* as elements of how practices are made, sustained and grown (see Figure 3). Materials refer to tangible physical entities, technologies and the stuff with which objects are made. Competences encompass the skills, know-how and embodied knowledges related to practices and finally meanings are composed of the symbolic meanings, ideas and aspirations of practice. Changes or emergences in practices occur for Shove *et al*. when connections between these elements are made, sustained or broken. Shove's understanding is particularly useful within my analysis, where *materials, competences* and *meanings* form an important part of my understanding of embodied learning with food.

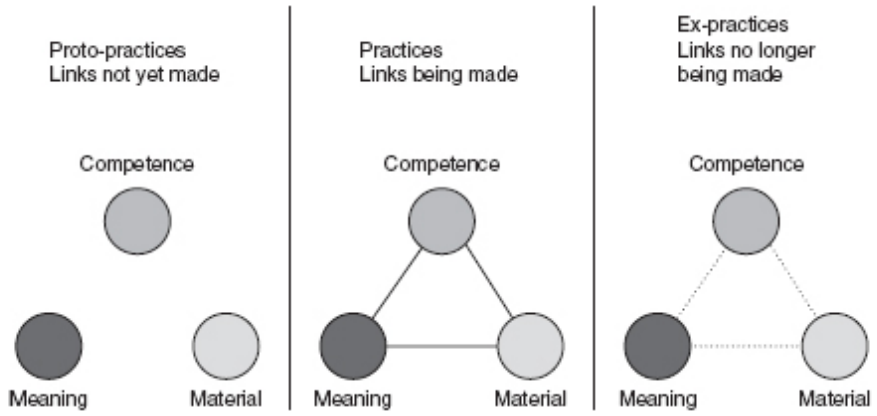

Figure 3- Links between materials, competences and meanings (Shove *et al*., 2012)

Whilst interpretations of theories of practice are widely understood to be heterogenous and ununified (Warde, 2005; Welch and Warde, 2015; Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, 2001), Schatzki (2012) highlights three commonalities across different readings of practice theory. The first of these recognises that practices are a social phenomenon comprised of an organised constellation of activities across different people. The second commonality observes that important features of human life should be understood as forms of human activity. This perspective pre-supposes that social phenomena does not exist solely of people's actions, but of actions coming together with practices. The final commonality identifies that human activity consists of something that cannot be put into words, or, as Carolan argues "to know something, […] we have to do it, literally" (2017:14). All of these common features help to build into a broader understanding that social order and action is established through, and is a feature of, practices (Welch and Warde, 2015; Reckwitz, 2002).

Practice theories have also provided useful links to the theories of affect, embodiment and materiality that are presented in this chapter. On this point, Keevers and Sykes find that "practitioners choreograph bundles of practices, sociomaterialities and specific arrangements to

engender affective relations" (2016:1663) that are situated and enacted in specific social, economic and historical contexts. Indeed, Reckwitz argues that:

> *"Because social practices depend on implicit schemes of knowledge, they are always cultural practices. And because they are anchored in bodies and in artefacts connected with bodies in specific ways, they are also always material practices" (Reckwitz 2016:114)*

Reckwitz expands here to recognise that "affects are properties of the specific affective 'attunement' or mood of the respective practice" (2016:119), where individuals are affected within practices by other people, things and ideas. Consequently, a "social practice is the product of training the body in a certain way: when we learn a practice, we learn to be bodies in a certain way" (Reckwitz 2002:251). In observing this, we can see how praxeological perspectives on social theory therefore facilitate the expansion of possibility within the body (Schmid and Smith, 2020), a point of particular significance within this thesis. These perspectives, along with the aforementioned discussion on *learning to be affected*, are concepts that I take forward within my analysis when considering visceral transformation.

Whilst not explicitly engaged with in the work of Gibson-Graham, and developing in parallel to, rather dialogue with, diverse economies theory, practice theory is observed as a concept that "goes to the heart" of the diverse economies project (Schmid and Smith 2020:259), and provides a tool to examine how diverse economic futures are *made*. Practice theory "sharpens insight into moments which restrain or further postcapitalist alternatives" (Schmid and Smith 2020:266) by engaging with a similar 'weak theory' approach to that of diverse economies research. In Gibson-Graham's iteration of performativity that moves beyond the active utterance (see Sedgwick 2003), the material nature of practices are framed alongside immaterial aspects of language (Roelvink, Martin, *et al*., 2015; Schmid, 2018).

Development towards understandings based on a wider nexus of practices help to move both practice theory and diverse economies research away from critiques based around issues of upscaling (Hui *et al*., 2016; Schmid and Smith, 2020). Dialogues between practice theory and diverse economies are still in their infancy however and need more academic engagement to better understand the role of experiential participation in sites of diverse economic possibility (Schmid and Smith, 2020). This an area that my analysis focuses upon, examining practices related to food in the context of an understanding of place linked to diverse economic possibility.

3.2.2 Food Practices

Whilst the previous section has introduced practice theory, it is also important to engage with how this theory can be used in the context of food. Therefore, in this section, I draw attention to how a focus on studies of foodmaking and eating can reveal the importance of practices within the nexus of foodscapes. Carolan, in his book *No One Eats Alone: Food as a Social Enterprise,* notes that "we cannot understand food without understanding the social practices that go along with eating and producing it, as well as all those activities that lie in between" (2017:7). This section will engage with what Carolan means by these social practices and activities 'in between' by highlighting some of the different ways that food practices have been theorised in academic literature.

Food practices have long been recognised as processes that are bound within social class (Bourdieu, 1984; Guthman, 2003; Mellor *et al*., 2010; Cappellini *et al*., 2016; Huddart-Kennedy *et al*., 2019). Within the social sciences, this has seen taste recognised as an expression of class and culture-based distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984). More recently, however, particularly within geography, food practices have been recognised as more complex processes, involving situated and embodied interactions with both the social and material world. This perspective recognises "practices as embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organised around shared practical understanding" (Schatzki 2001:11). As Simpson argues in relation to wider practices:

> *A range of geographers have turned to other sources of inspiration in developing accounts of the performativity of situated practices. In particular, there has been a concern for both the ways in which practices take place in relation to various social structures that they themselves (re)produce, that practices are situated and embodied, and also that these practices are experiential – that bodies participate in them, subjectivities and sense of self and surroundings emerge from them, and a host of felt experiences circulate around this. (Simpson 2020:51)*

Whilst not directly referring to alimentary practice, these points all help to situate the role of food within the study of practices. Food unveils embodied practices that shed light on identity, bodies, and knowledge that other practices do not (Brady, 2011) and is a way in which people can share stories and build relationships at a visceral level (Longhurst *et al*., 2009). Further to this, everyday eating practices become resources for identity place-making as well as sites for imagining a different politics of food (Duruz, 2010). From these contentions, the role of food as both a physiologically necessary and socially intimate material (Guthman, 2015) can be highlighted through a nexus of practices.

After establishing an understanding that practices are simultaneously both social and material in the previous section of this chapter (see also Orlikowski 2007), we can also see how materiality related to sharing food is recognised to extend beyond base foodstuffs, to include food-related skills, stuff and spaces (Davies *et al*., 2017b; Marovelli, 2019). Preparing, cooking and consuming food is therefore something that simultaneously involves embodied skills, visceral repertoires and material engagements (Hall *et al*., 2020), as explored in the following excerpt:

> *"The senses are important, but are not all. Gathering wild foods, for example, involves seeing, smelling, touching and tasting; but it also requires walking, pulling, cutting, sorting, washing, chopping and more" (Wilbur and Gibbs 2020:17)*

This quote highlights the role of practices within the preparation of foodstuffs. Roe argues that the practice of eating food "connects together the distant site of production, the domestic [sic] site of eating and the site of the stomach" (2006b:112), highlighting the situated and embodied nature of (food) practices (Simpson, 2020). Although this represents a somewhat idealised perspective of the experience of eating, the quote is useful in that it adds basis to the argument that food acquires much of its meaning from the place that it is assembled and eaten (Law, 2001), but also through the nature of the practices that surround its production and consumption. These perspectives can begin to highlight how embodied food practices can be seen to redress socio-spatial circumstances that trigger negative visceral responses (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010).

Foodmaking and eating also form an important site for pedagogical practices. Spring *et al.* (2019) use the previously examined *political ecology of the body* framework to highlight the role of viscerality within pedagogical practices related to the redistribution of surplus food. They find that activists and charity redistributors engage with a range of visceral repertoires for developing different and transgressive kinds of food–body knowing. This perspective on practice recognises how embodied learning can disrupt established preconceptions of "the ways things are" (Phillips and Willatt, 2020:212) and as well as how "food is an ontologically multiple medium for learning about the politics and ethics of food systems" (Spring *et al.* 2019:845). For Spring *et al*., food is not only a point of connection, but is something that *does* the connecting through practice.

3.2.3 Commensality

An important site where food practices and embodiment meet in this thesis is around the table. It is therefore important within this literature review to briefly consider academic literature, particularly that which has emerged recently, on commensality and commensal practices. There have long been

calls within geography for greater considerations of the site of eating (Bell and Valentine, 1997; Law, 2001), and greater attention to the importance of commensality for sharing cultural experiences and building social capital (Firth *et al*., 2011; Marovelli, 2019). This section is particularly concerned with how commensality is engaged with in the context of its spatiality and materiality, building on notable work in recent years that expands on commensality's pre-existing sociological base (see le Grand 2015, Giacoman 2016, Marovelli 2019, Smith and Harvey 2021 for examples of important recent contributions).

Commensality is broadly defined as the practice of eating with others, which in turn can help demarcate and shape individual's social lives as well as reinforcing common identities within communities (Sobal and Nelson, 2003). Etymologically, the term derives its meaning from eating at the same table as others, but is widely extended, with contemporary eating arrangements, to mean the act of eating in others company and sharing a meal. Commensality is generally recognised as one of the most important interactions of human sociality (Kerner and Chou, 2015; Fischler, 2011). However, despite its wide usage, particularly within the fields of sociology and anthropology, and more recently geography, there is not a precise unified understanding of its meaning (Jönsson *et al.* 2021) and whether the term is best used to describe meal sharing, social interaction around a table, the site of eating, or the affective moments linked to this. Within the context of this research, I consider many of the properties of commensality to extend beyond the table, and into the kitchen, where purposeful encounters around the sharing of food in community spaces continue to exist.

The act of eating with others is something that helps to develop more purposeful relationships between individuals as well as satisfying the bodily requirement of food consumption (Sobal and Nelson, 2003; Julier, 2013). Eating alone, in contrast, is recognised to evoke feelings of loneliness and self-consciousness in individuals (Pliner and Bell, 2009). Others have noted the difficulties lone eaters have with some of the practicalities surrounding buying and eating alone (Jamieson and Simpson, 2013) as well as how elderly people who eat alone are recognised to have a higher prevalence of inadequate diets than those who eat with others (Pliner and Bell, 2009). Whilst the reality of individual lived experiences of eating are not this simple, as the narrative throughout this chapter has highlighted, these findings highlight the importance of commensality as a focus of study.

Building upon this, Dunbar (2017) finds that individuals who engage in social or communal eating are often happier, have greater life satisfaction, trust others more, are more engaged within their local community and have a greater network of friends to rely on. Marovelli (2019) highlights some the emerging forms of social eating in urban contexts. She contends that community food sharing spaces

can be representative of "complex and hybrid type[s] of commensality, in which elements of public and private, exceptional and everyday commensality converge" (2019:199). Marovelli (2019) argues that through the act of cooking and eating together, encounters can be made to feel safer, through a shared experience of what she describes as *we-ness in difference*. Following Marovelli, in this thesis I contend that community food spaces go "beyond the food offered, by engaging with the material and affective elements of cooking and eating together" (2019:191), which act as indicators for the development of relations in the mealtime. This perspective builds upon how eating can be understood as not only a nourishing of physical body, but also the social body (Masson *et al*., 2018; Dunbar, 2017). As this thesis will argue, commensality therefore provides a perfect backdrop to engage with practices' *communality*, where practices of participation, cooperation and politics highlight moments of togetherness, conviviality and belonging (Schmid 2018, see also Nancy 1991, Steinfort *et al.* 2017).

Recently, literature has started to focus a little on the political dimensions of commensality, particularly when staged within community settings (Marovelli, 2019; le Grand, 2015; Smith and Harvey, 2021). These perspectives seek to understand communal food sharing settings as spaces of encounter premised on possibilities where food sharing focuses on 'more-than' distribution (Marovelli, 2019), or exists as a site of 'temporary activism' (le Grand, 2015). This allows us to recognise the potent and pervasive forces of commensality (Higgs, 2015; Smith and Harvey, 2021) in shaping wider diverse foodscapes.

Much of the academic focus on commensality and social eating has focused upon kinship and celebratory feasting rather than the role that social eating, in a community setting, can have in the context of the everyday (Marovelli 2019, Abarca 2021 being notable exceptions here). These gaps in literature highlight the need for greater attention to be paid towards new and emerging forms of meal sharing (see Masson *et al.* 2018, Fourat *et al.* 2021b) that includes communal public eating spaces in diverse economic spaces.

Whilst there has been some significant recent contributions around the importance of materiality and sociality in studies of commensality (Marovelli, 2019; Jonsson *et al*., 2021; Smith and Harvey, 2021), there are significant gaps in the role that affectivity and especially embodiment play within community commensal practices, notwithstanding some recent contributions (Abarca, 2021; Sharp, 2018b). There is thus a need to examine in greater depth how diverse bodily experience can shape visceral engagement with community food initiatives, particularly in the context of social eating.

3.3 Concluding Remarks

The literature review in this chapter has explored the geographies of food in a number of important ways in relation to this research. In Section 1 of this chapter, I presented viscerality as a growing focus within the field of geography and wider social sciences. From the discussion here I have highlighted the importance of social difference in visceral understandings, drawing particular attention to the importance of *radically relational* approaches to the visceral. This included an introduction to the PEB framework for researching the visceral realm, a concept that is taken forward within the analysis sections in this thesis. Building on visceral conceptions of food geographies, I then illustrated the importance of materiality within the field. Here, I sought to connect the material world with visceral experiences, highlighting perspectives that consider edible matter as an agentic material.

Following this, I then highlighted the epistemological foundations of visceral theory. This section focused on how ANT, assemblage thinking, NRT and theories of affect contribute towards contemporary understandings of the visceral. At this juncture, I also began to explore some of the links between visceral geographies and diverse economies thinking, focusing particularly on the role that affect has in the two schools of thought. Here, I also introduced Sarmiento's (2017) conception of *ethical food subjects,* highlighting a notable link between the two theories for which I seek to develop upon in this research.

The second section of the chapter documented two practices within food geography that have particular significance within this research: cooking and eating with others. In order to explore these practices, I first introduced the pertinence of practice theory within this body of research. Within this section I argue that practices should be recognised as complex processes, involving situated and embodied interactions with both the social and material world.

I then highlighted how academic literature has engaged with food practices, and in keeping with previous discussion, paid particular focus on how diverse food practices involve embodied skills, visceral repertoires and material engagements (Hall *et al*., 2020). I also began to explore how these practices have the potential to disrupt established preconceptions of 'the ways things are' (Phillips and Willatt, 2020), indicating a role for the transformative understandings of the theory that will follow in this research.

Finally, I sought to introduce the field of commensality, particularly focusing on recent developments in the field that have seen it emerge as an important element in the study of food practices. With

the study of community commensality, particularly within geography, considered a relatively recent development, this final section also highlighted some of the gaps in existing accounts of commensality, namely the role that viscerality, affectivity and embodiment play within community commensal practices, as well as the linkages between community spaces and the everyday. In foregrounding these debates, I have begun to establish how this thesis contributes to existing accounts through the development of a perspective on commensality that draws upon the themes laid out in this chapter.

4: Methodology

This chapter examines the research design for this study and the methodological approaches used in the collection of data. Beyond a description of the methods used in the project, I will also discuss the epistemological foundations of these methods, understanding methodology as an "examination and exposition of the philosophical positions that underpin methods" (Humphries and Smith, 2014:479).

After contextualising the research approach, I will briefly introduce the organisation and the participants involved within the study (this will be explored in much greater detail in Chapter 5). Following this, I will document how the research and specifically how the strategies for data collection changed over time, both due to a developing project and overriding factors related to remote working and data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, I will discuss the justifications for the range of qualitative methods used, the choice of methodological pluralism, and the variations and additional methods that were required to collect data during testing circumstances. Throughout this discussion, I will pay close attention to the ethical implications of the decisions made, as well as reflexively situating my own positionality within the context of the research.

From this, I follow Cameron and Wright (2014) in upholding the importance for critical food researchers to both understand their own role in actively contributing to diverse food practice in various ways whilst forming considered and generative accounts of the strengths, limitations and problems facing different approaches to food. This approach engages with a research process that seeks to "foster emergent possibilities" through working on matters of shared concern (Cameron *et al*., 2014:119). I do this whilst remaining conscious of the "tensions of trust, friendship, loyalty, guilt and discomfort [that] are evident as complicating ingredients in the mix" (Wynne-Jones *et al*., 2015:219) of participatory experience of conducting research.

Although diverging somewhat from the initial plan, the methods used in this project were formulated and adapted to specifically engage with the research questions set out at the start of this thesis. To revisit these, they are:

RQ1: How do community food spaces affect participant's experiences of food?

RQ2: How can shared, communal practices in the preparation and consumption of food impact how it is experienced and enjoyed?

RQ3: Do these practices change how we understand community food initiatives and social eating spaces as transformative elements in building more hopeful foodscapes?

In somewhat of a parallel to the recent shift towards more-than-human and non-representational methods in qualitative human geography, scholars within food geography have called for greater methodological attention to considerations of 'more-than-food' moments within foodscapes. Indeed, Michael Goodman calls for a recognition of the food system as composed of more-than-food where the research subject is acknowledged as something that "is multiple, it is liminal, it is shifting, it is fully situated in temporal, social, material and spatial relationalities – and needs to be approached [and] researched this way" (Goodman, 2016:259). Moving away from theorisations of food 'without a body' (Brooks *et al*., 2013), this approach is adopted within the methodology of this research, with a study that leads to an examination of "taste in a performative fashion, where the properties of the food and the 'ordering' of human-nonhuman relations are simultaneously produced" (Miele, 2017:204). This approach to viscerality looks towards the performativity of research methods (Law and Urry, 2004), whilst remaining attentive to how researcher and participant bodies can be considered 'instruments of research' (Longhurst *et al*., 2008) and dovetails with diverse economies approaches that seek to explore the development of other possible bodily subjectivities (Gibson-Graham, 2006). The research questions set out above consider these methodological shifts in the field in their formulation.

Because taste is recognised as both "deeply personal" (Wilbur and Gibbs, 2020:115) and "irreducibly social" (Jackson *et al*., 2020:752), a research methodology requires careful consideration of the complex and diverse nature of food and eating. This chapter will document the approaches taken in this project to address this.

4.1 Selecting and Accessing the Research Site

To elaborate on my introduction to the project in the first chapter of this thesis, and without going into the detail that will be covered in the following chapter, Squash are an organisation that I had a strong connection to prior to the commencement of my PhD studies. I spent a year working for them in a variety of roles during the opening of their new site in 2018. I also volunteered occasionally with the organisation during the first year of my study whilst I was exploring possible research sites. How these formative experiences with the organisation informs my positionality will be discussed at various points later in this chapter and thesis.

Whilst it was during this initial period with Squash that piqued my interest in a potential research project about community food spaces, it was during my volunteering time that I realised that Squash would be a suitable organisation to be the sole focus of the study. The scale of ambition within their various projects, from growing to sharing food, meant that I felt that there was ample material to develop into a detailed and rich project. I also became more interested in the importance of *where* instead of *what* we eat in the construction of bodies (Bell and Valentine, 1997; Longhurst *et al*., 2008).

Following this period, Squash invited me to join them in June 2019 as they brought 20 people to the BBC Food and Farming Awards following their nomination for (and eventual winning of) the 'Best Shop or Café' award. It was here that made me realise that what was going on at Squash was a comparatively unique occurrence, as well as highlighting to me the enthusiasm of everybody involved in the project. My experience with and choice of Squash as a research site has implications related to methodology and positionality that will be discussed later.

Rather than aiming to provide statistically significant data, the selection of Squash as a research site instead aims for purposive sampling, using 'strategic choices' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019) to determine the best location for research. Whilst other sites across Liverpool and further afield were examined, working with a single organisation across multiple, albeit proximate sites, was chosen for three main reasons. Firstly, the aforementioned scale of operations at the organisation and the number of people involved at various levels meant that there were enough individuals occupying various roles at Squash to provide a significant base for a detailed research project. Secondly, because of the different sites and practices engaged in at Squash, I felt that there would be ample opportunities to address each research question with sufficient detail. Finally, the choice of site also reflects on how COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered the constitution of the 'field' for researchers (Howlett, 2022). At this time, I no longer felt that it would be possible to work with another organisation in the same way that I did with Squash, with mechanisms of communication and trust established between both parties. Because of this, I felt that I could not conduct an ethical, and empirically rich account of another group during this time.

4.1.1 Identifying Participants

After selecting a broad research site, it became important for me to source a range of participants that would help me to address my research questions.

During the initial stages of fieldwork for this research, I had considered the potential for the fieldwork to evolve into a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, taking inspiration from the assimilation of poststructuralist approaches into the methodology (Cameron and Gibson, 2005). During the early stages of my fieldwork, in January and February 2020, I was in regular communication with the co-directors, the volunteer co-ordinator, and a number of participants in the sessions to discuss how this could be developed, and the themes that might want to be explored in such a project. Here my plans were centred around usefulness to the organisation and participants.

A key element of my plan for this was an ongoing engagement with the weekly Friday growing and cooking group at Squash. The group has existed since 2012, when it was formed by Squash members and local residents as they became aware of an old pub car park that was available for use by the community. Prior to the commencement of this research, I had worked briefly alongside the group, acting as a coordinator in the preparation and consumption of the weekly communal meal. One of the key reasons for choosing the group was because it was comprised of individuals who are what Hayes-Conroy (2017) describes as 'primed' for visceral methodologies, making it easier to co-create knowledge that is attuned to the complexities of visceral feelings.

By having a pre-established rapport with the group, who I found later could be otherwise lukewarm to newcomers, an opportunity arose to study individuals who use Squash's services over a long period of time, as well as watch and learn from the ways that they engage with food. My fieldwork with this group began at the start of 2020, but was abruptly curtailed at the start of March due to the impending COVID-19 lockdown.

However, as I will discuss in greater detail later in the chapter, all plans regarding fieldwork were abruptly curtailed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March 2020. Whilst detailed fieldwork was able to resume in September 2020, albeit from behind a screen, after meeting with Squash's co-directors, we decided that a PAR project would be unfeasible with a university requirement for remote research, citing a lack of access to technology and logistical issues in organising such a project when the organisation was under significant strain from the pandemic.

Instead, we refocused on how the data collected in interviews and pre-pandemic observations could still be of use to the organisation. Before conducting interviews, I discussed the schedules that would be used with Clare. Whilst the final decision on the content was mine, I attended to multiple suggestions around how the interviews could extract more useful information for the organisation from participants. Much of this focus was centred around drawing an engagement from participants around future directions for the organisation, something that I was more than willing to integrate.

It proved impossible to fully re-engage with the group again during the fieldwork process. Although some of the group were interviewed remotely, for many it was too difficult to organise, due to a variety of issues. Many didn't have access to computers, mobile phones or an internet connection. For others, whilst it was challenging to explain my role as a researcher when in physical proximity, it was impossible to do remotely by phone. As a result, it was often hard to justify ethically attempting to collect data this way.

As COVID-19 placed limitations on the ability to access participants, I became reliant on Clare, the Squash co-director, and later, Elise, the office manager, who acted as gatekeepers for the interview phase of the project that occurred during the pandemic. I would approach Clare with names of people I might like to interview remotely, and she would first discuss with me the usefulness of each interview, before exploring how we could make the interview work whilst attempting to negotiate any technological and logistical limitations. As previously mentioned, some participants did not have access to a computer or mobile phone for downloading ethics documents and engaging in video calls. Others were extremely busy with work or care; trying to mitigate the effect of the pandemic on their organisations or look after loved ones. Later, as Clare became too busy to assist, Elise, the office manager, was able to talk to potential participants as they came in to shop or work about the project and ask them if they were willing to participate. This ultimately meant that potential participants were far more likely to respond to my future messages inquiring about interviewing.

Because of these numerous issues, a number of participants who I interviewed during the pandemic were not those who I spent time observing and participating alongside prior to the pandemic. My focus for interviewing became drawn more towards (but not exclusively) members of staff, volunteers and customers instead of the service users and local residents who comprised the majority of my pre-pandemic research participants. Whilst this constituted a change from the initial research plan, it did ultimately enable me to gather a more rounded coverage of the organisation.

It therefore makes logical sense for me to describe the methods for data collection in two separate sections. Firstly, I will discuss the pre-pandemic data collection before then moving on to the intra-pandemic phase of data collection. Throughout this, I will outline how these two phases diverged, and how they ultimately relate to each other in the constitution of a singular project, underpinned by an approach of methodological pluralism.

Following the conclusion of fieldwork, I have fed back, and am in the process of feeding back, findings in a number of ways. I have met with the organisation's co-directors on a number of occasions, feeding back different findings from the research. I have also presented my findings to the

Squash board. Finally, I am in the process of writing up two accessible findings documents, one to share with the organisation, another to share with participants.

4.2 Pre-pandemic Strategies of Data Collection (January-March 2020)

From mid-January to mid-March 2020, the point at which in-person research was suspended, I spent time conducting an ethnography that explored day-to-day practices at Squash. This section covers this period of data collection, examining this ethnography, with a particular focus on observational, visceral, and participatory methods.

4.2.1 Ethnography

Data collection in ethnographic research is usually composed of interviews, participant observation, field notes, document and artefact analysis, and research diaries (Wall, 2008; Pink, 2009; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019), and goes beyond studying *what* people are doing, striving instead to understand *why* they do it, often through researcher participation (Miller and Deutsch, 2009). Indeed, Schatzki argues that there is "no alternative to hanging out with, joining in with, talking to and watching, and getting together the people concerned. […] One will never understand the significance of what has been uncovered and its implications for change and design absent ethnography" (Schatzki, 2012:25). This approach to ethnography recognises that "ethnography is a reflexive and experiential process though which understanding, knowing and (academic) knowledge are produced" (Pink, 2009:7) and provides the basis for my own ethnographic research using a participatory approach that seeks active engagement with the material lives of participants.

i) Ethnographic Sites

My ethnography engaged with a multi-sited case study approach. In early 2020, from mid-January through to mid-March, I engaged in weekly sessions with a regular group of participants, 'hanging out' (Jupp, 2008; Schatzki, 2012; Williams, 2016), whilst observing and participating in the preparation and consumption of a communal meal in a process that follows Brady's approach of considering "foodmaking the means of garnering understanding about food, identity, and the body" (2011:323). Building on Sarah Pink's engagement with sensory ethnographic practice, my own approach sought to arrive "at an understanding of other people's memories and meanings through [my] own embodied experiences and/or attending to other people's practices, subjectivities and explanations" (Pink, 2009:64).

In participating in the cooking and consumption of a meal with the group, I had to consider my own body in the context of the setting, as well as its implications for my methodology (Longhurst *et al*., 2008; Hayes-Conroy, 2010; Marovelli, 2019; Strong, 2022). This meant a recognition of my position of relative privilege within the group. How I understood ingredients, cooking methods, and even commensal habits all needed to be reflected on critically during the research process, as well as acknowledged as a fundamental component of the research (Longhurst *et al*., 2008; Marovelli, 2019). This meant moving beyond 'shopping list' positionality (Folkes, 2022), and developing an understanding that is based on how the everyday, banal and prosaic experiences of research can begin to establish emotive relationships between the researcher and the researched in how space is negotiated (Longhurst *et al*., 2008; Pink, 2009).

Whilst I tried to spend my time on the perimeters of the group, observing and talking, with some limited participation in food preparation, there were occasions when I was drawn into a more active role. The most notable of these occasions was for a Pancake Day celebration, where various staff illnesses and holidays meant that none of the usual session leaders/cooks were available to attend the session. As someone who had previous experience in organising sessions like these, I was asked at the last minute whether I would fill in and run the session in order for it to go ahead. Taking on this kind of role was not in my research plan, but I reluctantly agreed, putting the episode down to a travail of research. This temporary repositioning of my role proved very insightful however, as the following excerpt indicates:

> *"I decided to make vegan pancakes, mainly because the recipe is familiar to me, and eggs and milk would need to have been bought from the shop. This is met with a degree of scepticism from some of the group, but they reluctantly agree to give them a try.*
>
> *As I cook the seemingly endless pile of pancakes (2kg of batter), John helps me in the kitchen. He continually talks about how the consistency of the batter isn't quite right... 'because there's no eggs or milk...' he says. As is often the case, he humorously enjoys reiterating his disdain for vegetarian and vegan food. "After these sessions I often go home and make myself a ham sandwich to fill me up" he says. He enjoys the light-hearted banter involved with this - he knows that I know that he generally enjoys the food served here.*
>
> *We all cram into the polytunnel to eat the mountain of food. "Let's try these fancy pancakes then" comes a call from the back, whilst others continue to voice scepticism and general distrust. Whilst most of the group seem to enjoy the food, it is clear that some would rather I'd stuck with a more traditional approach."*

Research diary, February 2020

This diary entry underlines how the relationship between mine and my participants bodily experiences of food differed in the project, as well as drawing upon the ongoing negotiation of this throughout the process. Wilbur and Gibbs (2020) highlight how methods that focus on how the researcher is implicated within embodied practices between humans and non-humans in the research can provide insight into the politics of food. This will be covered in more detail in the data analysis section of this thesis.

In addition to the communal eating group, from mid-February to mid-March 2020, I also spent one to two days a week volunteering in the shop and café at Squash, working with the regular staff and volunteers on tasks such as serving customers, washing dishes, preparing food, setting up for community events and taking deliveries of stock (see the following section for more detail on my practice of research volunteering). The intention behind engaging with this site was to gain a greater insight into the experiences of working and volunteering at Squash, to witness the relationships between workers, volunteers, and members of the public in the space, and observe eating experiences outside of the regular volunteer group.

Lastly, in the weeks leading up to the first COVID-19 lockdown, I participated in a UKRI-funded action research project with researchers from Manchester Metropolitan University that, stemming from Squash's 100 Year Street plans (see following chapter for more detail), attempted to produce a community-designed map of Windsor Street that was focused on the community plans for the next 100 years. The output from these sessions did not directly feed into this research project, but I was able to learn a great deal about the members of the community and their thoughts on the local area as well as the part that Squash plays within it now and moving forward. This in turn, proved useful during the interviews later in the project, where I encouraged participants to discuss their own thoughts for the future of Squash and Windsor Street.

ii) Sensory Ethnography

Throughout this three-month period of data collection, my ethnographic observations were largely concerned with the material and visceral engagements with food, often resembling something that was akin to meal-centred focus groups (see Smith and Harvey, 2021), where verbal communications often occurred at the same time as non-verbal communications (Longhurst et al., 2009; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2015). This sensory ethnographic approach meant observing and participating in how participants engaged with food as a material and how they used their sight,

hearing, smell, touch and taste in different ways (Pink, 2009) whilst engaging with food. This approach "recognises bodies and food as sites of knowledge" (Brady, 2011:322), whilst making space to "give [participants] voice in the idiom of food" (Miller and Deutsch, 2009:159). In doing this, a platform can be established for the consideration of affect and emotion as ways to understand subjectivity shifts (Cameron and Gibson, 2005; Roelvink, 2020).

My findings were kept in a field diary, which became a "depository of stories of the everyday that captures events and moments that can be reflected on" (Williams, 2016:515). The diary was seen as an important part of my ethnographic work, based on a notion that ""doing" and "writing" should not be seen as separate and distinct activities, but, rather, as dialectically related, interdependent, and mutually constitutive activities" (Emerson *et al*., 2011:20). During my fieldwork I would make regular notes of points of interest, particularly attending to the different sensory encounters present. I would try to find opportunities when in the field to 'disappear' for a few minutes, going to a quiet space, such as the bathroom or pantry to quickly jot down notes that would then be written into more detailed notes when I got home or back to the office.

iii) Research Volunteering

As part of my integration into the organisation during ethnographic fieldwork, I took on a role of a volunteer in order to participate more deeply within the practices of the organisation. Given the importance of volunteer labour within the fabric of organisations in the social economy (Amin, 2009) as well as considerations of 'productive participation' (Jupp, 2008), research volunteering is emerging as "an iterative and grounded process whereby the researcher gains an in-depth and embodied awareness of the focus of the study" (Williams, 2016:519).

During my time engaging in active participant observation as a volunteer at Squash, I became much more aware of my positionality in the field. Despite being someone who had previously worked at the organisation, occasionally in a leadership capacity, I perhaps naïvely thought that I would be able to operate in the background of activities, probing participants when necessary, but fundamentally following the instructions of others when working. The following excerpt from my research diary indicates otherwise:

> *I begin by taking the weekly Suma delivery off the back of the lorry with a regular volunteer and doing a check of the stock. At one stage, Jo comes in to advise us on what to do. During this conversation, David keeps referring to me as his senior in the work we're doing and*

asking for advice. I explain to him that I am here to learn from him and that I neither want to, or am capable of, instructing him. One conversation goes:

David: 'Where do you think we should put this box?'

Olly: 'I don't know, what would you do usually?'

David: 'I'm not sure, you tell me'

Olly: 'Well, what would you do if I wasn't here?'

David: 'Don't start this again…'

I thought that I had been away from Squash long enough as worker so that I wouldn't be identified in this way by volunteers, but it is clear that this is perhaps not the case. The dynamic throughout the morning continues in this with way, David constantly looking to me for instruction despite his vastly superior experience in the work he was undertaking.

(Fieldnotes, March 2020)

This was not an isolated event during the initial fieldwork and was something that had to be managed through frequent reminders to participants of my role as a researcher. It also forced me to critically reflect on how I was being perceived by the members of the group whilst in the field. After this incident I made sure that I introduced myself and my role before every volunteer shift and made it clear that my role was to learn from the group, rather than lead. Occasionally, I found that making the action of field diary 'jotting' visible to participants helped to remind them that my role was different to what they perhaps expected (see Emerson *et al*., 2011 for an example of this).

Volunteering whilst researching has certain limitations, namely through restrictions on who can be observed and where observation can take place being defined by the tasks undertaken as a volunteer. However, the position allows the researcher to be "intimately and uniquely aware of the day-to-day interactions and processes that constitute the organisation" (Williams, 2016:515). During my experience, I was able to broadly specify the roles that I wanted to undertake to the management at Squash, indicating a preference for positions where I would be working alongside a number of people, as well as roles that allowed a degree of socialisation with other workers and volunteers (for example, working behind a busy till does not afford many opportunities for idle chat or note making).

The two roles that I predominantly undertook before the pandemic, were working on stocktaking vegetables and ambient goods[8] and packing up vegetable boxes before the shop opened on a Wednesday, and assisting on basic tasks in the kitchen, washing pots and chopping vegetables on other days. These roles allowed me to engage with a wide range of staff and volunteers at the organisation and were tasks that provided the opportunity for casual observation and socialisation.

This section has covered research volunteering within a wider ethnographic practice. The following section of this chapter moves on to the methods used during the COVID-19 pandemic to complete my fieldwork.

4.3 Food Encounters and Remote Research (March 2020- January 2021)

The second part of the data collection for this project took place in the midst of the first and second waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK. Due to government and university restrictions on social contact during this period, the project underwent significant forced adjustments in its approach. The pandemic fundamentally altered how social science research could be conducted (Howlett, 2022), with drastic societal changes during this period also leading to questions of how researchers could 'return' to the field (see Sharma, 2018), as well as the associated changes in participant expectations, ethics and production of knowledge during this time.

With regards to this, Castree *et al*. ask us "what [methods] might we need to invent in order to address absences in our cognitive and normative tool box?" (2020:412) as human geographers in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst Howlett questions how shifting methodological approaches "might (re)shape our understandings of 'fieldwork'" (Howlett, 2022:389). These important questions help to shape the development of the COVID-19-influenced methods in this thesis. This involves carefully considering what constitutes the 'field' in these new spaces, and what changes to a conventional methodology might have to be made in order to gather suitable data.

Whilst also taking into account the inherently more disembodied nature of remote research (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014) during this time, in this section I provide an overview of the methodological adjustments made to the project and how they remain engaged with the research questions posed. In addition to this, I examine these adjustments in the context of the questions posed above by Castree *et al*. and Howlett.

[8] Defined as goods that can be stored at room temperature (i.e. canned and dried food).

4.3.1 Remote Research as a Volunteer

During the early months of the pandemic, it was clear I would be unable to use any of my planned methods, either in-person or via remote adaptations. The organisation during this time was simply too busy supporting the local community and trying to stay viable to help me with research. It was also evident that I needed to find some way of remaining engaged with Squash if I wanted to continue researching with them when it was possible to do so. Considering this, I utilised a variety of approaches to remote research volunteering. After discussion with the Squash management team, I adopted a number of roles that helped me stay engaged with the organisation.

Firstly, I carried out the task of ordering weekly online vegetable stocks with suppliers after the member of staff whose responsibility it was previously left on maternity leave. This, whilst not taking up much of my time, allowed me to stay involved with the organisation and help where it was possible for me to do so.

I also attended webinars on behalf of Squash with organisations who funded them, such as Power to Change and the Plunkett Foundation, that focused largely on how community businesses, particularly those in the food sector, could adapt to the ongoing COVID-19 situation. I would then feedback my findings to the co-directors of Squash. This helped me to maintain an engagement with the organisation, whilst also getting a better understanding of the emergent challenges in the sector.

Two unique circumstances related to the pandemic led to the decision to adopt these roles. Firstly, it was clear to me that without offering a contribution to the organisation, it was going to be extremely difficult to remain engaged with the field during this time, as the organisation was undergoing significant strain as a result of the pandemic and would not have the capacity to engage with me as a researcher. Secondly, and relatedly, the strain that the organisation, and the local community were experiencing during this unique period made me want to help in any way possible, and this role allowed me to contribute in a small way. The approach during this time could still certainly be considered an ethnography, perhaps more in the vein of the 'patchwork' approach (Günel *et al*., 2020) that is gaining more traction in modern academia. It also incorporated elements of digital ethnography, where contact with participants was often mediated, rather than direct (Pink *et al*., 2016).

With a project whose focus was predicated on people's experience of community food spaces, I found remote volunteer research less empirically useful than I maybe anticipated. It was, however, vital in maintaining a connection with the field when it was near impossible to do so otherwise. It

also provided an instance where “researcher volunteering can create a space for reflection on situated everyday practices of care and justice in order to discern the significance of specific practices” (Williams, 2016:515-6).

4.3.2 Observing Remotely

As someone who was undertaking volunteer work with Squash, I was invited to attend weekly Zoom staff meetings that would discuss short- and medium-term plans for the organisation. Being part of this allowed me to follow the major changes in the organisation over the initial period of the pandemic and learn how the food practices shifted and changed throughout this time. This is, understandably, a method without much literature focus, with emerging research beginning to engage with observational approaches during remote interviewing as well as the shifting researcher/participant dynamic during interviews (Engward *et al*., 2022; Howlett, 2022) forming part of an approach that involves “sensing and communicating in other ways” (Pink *et al*., 2016:3).

During the meetings that I was invited to participate in, I adopted a different approach to my other observations, where I was often a more active participant within events. During meetings on Zoom, I was far more removed as a researcher, rarely contributing to conversation unless specifically asked for an opinion. This meant that I could dedicate my time to documenting the meetings *in situ,* as the participants could not see me actively making notes throughout the meetings and did not alter their behaviour accordingly as they may have done in person. Because of this, I would often come out of meetings with significantly more complete fieldnotes than during physical observation sessions. Again, the usefulness of the data collected during this time lay in how it informed me around ongoing changes to the organisation. This also meant that I could develop more detailed questioning around the impact of COVID-19 for the interviewing phase of the research.

4.3.3 Remote Interviewing: Using Video and Phone Calls

After a period spent in flux between March and September 2020, Squash eventually settled into a phase of ‘new normal’ in their operations, affording me the space to begin to conduct interviews with those engaged with the organisation. This section explains the process of conducting these interviews and sets out the key methodological differences from a typical interview-led methodological approach, as well as how I addressed the more ‘muted’ role that food plays in a remote interview context, as opposed to observations of everyday interactions (Wilbur and Gibbs, 2020)..

Interviews are recognised as a methodological technique that help us to create detailed pictures of people's lives (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014). Researchers using interviewing as a method do not aim for the data to be directly representative, but instead look towards how we can better understand people's experiences and make sense of their lives (Valentine, 2005). Whilst most commonly referred to as social events (Seale, 1998), interviews also contain material and sensorial components (Pink, 2009). These material and sensorial moments differ greatly during remote interviewing, something that will be elicited upon in this, and the following, sections of this chapter.

In total, I conducted 20 interviews with 21 participants over a period of three months. These were transcribed and then thematically coded using NVivo. Interviews here generally followed a loosely set schedule, which was determined by the participant's relationship to Squash, with separate, albeit overlapping, schedules for staff and volunteers, customers, and local residents. For participants that I knew well, I often asked more specific and personal questions that went beyond the set schedule, with the aim of acquiring more unique information and insight from the interview, as well as encouraging them to relate to personal experiences.

Therefore, the remotely conducted interviews for the project sat between semi-structured and more narrative-based interviewing. Semi-structured interviews typically are formally scheduled, and occur in a time and place that is different from usual social interaction between the researcher and the participant (Davies, 2008), in this case, over Zoom or through a phone call. This enables the interview to take the form of fluid conversation, where a schedule is set, but is not necessarily followed, allowing the interviewer to direct the conversation In a way that can elicit more useful data from the informant (Bryman, 2012). An important aspect of semi-structured interviewing is the need to be flexible, with questioning not being delivered from a rigid script (Bryman, 2012; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019).

Parts of the interviews also encouraged a more narrative focused response from the participant. The use of 'interviews as conversations', or more narrative-based interviews, allows for the collection of data that illustrates an individual's personal perspective of an event, an experience, or a point of view (Madison, 2005). This technique evokes a story-based method, allowing participants to describe to the researcher particular events, or moments that were considered important to them. These interviews have a distinct overlap with participant observations, allowing the researcher to explore the role that place has in everyday experiences (Kusenbach, 2003). The investigation of narratives as part of the interview analysis means that the research can be more representative of 'human voice' and the associated narratives that are linked to individual experience (Cortazzi, 2014). A narrative interviewing technique in the context of this project had the

intention of generating data to develop a variety of perspectives that are linked to everyday and personal experiences of food within a community of practice.

Further to this, using interviews to provide narrative accounts provided an opportunity for me to tie participant experience with the placing of events in time and place, as well as providing an interpretation that is linked to causality, teleology or rationalisation (Cortazzi, 2014). This is well suited to the ethnographically informed methods of this project, and helps to build a wider understanding of people's interpretations of their surroundings. Ethnographic interviews have been differentiated from standard interviewing techniques through the ongoing relationships that the researcher has with the interviewee, the development of a strong rapport to encourage genuine exchange of viewpoints, and enough time and openness within the interview for the interviewee to explore the meanings that they attach in their worlds (Heyl, 2001). Whilst the interviews in this project do not fit neatly into Heyl's description, due largely to the interruption in ethnographic engagement, many of the interviews, particularly with participants that I previously knew well, assumed this form.

After conducting two pilot interviews with a member of staff and a volunteer who had both recently left the organisation, I found that striking a balance mixed between semi-structured interviewing and narrative-focused, more unstructured questions allowed participants to talk about personal experience and their own unique insights in enough detail, whilst also allowing enough comparable material across transcripts during the data analysis phase of the research.

Interviews were conducted over a mobile phone, through either a video or audio call. Whilst remote interviewing was previously consigned to Skype or telephone, there are now multiple mediums with which to conduct video and audio interviewing, making it easier to access participants in different settings (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014; Oliffe *et al*., 2021; Howlett, 2022). For this research, I found that Zoom and WhatsApp provided the most suitable mediums for interviewing, as they were relatively easy for participants to navigate, had few 'drop-offs', and participants could easily choose between video and audio calling to suit their preference (Lobe *et al*., 2020).

The choice of these channels has some implications for the research, however. In where we situate interviews, we are reminded that "the dialogic construction of identities, power and knowledge exists in a dialectic relationship with the 'place' [of the interview]" (Sin, 2003:311) as well as how interviews are "inevitably both emplaced and productive of place" (Pink, 2009:81). Despite being remotely conducted, the interviews, particularly those over video, were effectively situated in the respective homes of both the participant and interviewer, an intimate and gendered space underpinned by complex, private relationships (Miller, 2001; Blunt, 2005) where research is often

precluded from stepping in to, but also a space where participants often feel most comfortable and are more likely to reveal personal information (Hall, 2014; Oliffe *et al*., 2021).

Interviews over virtual mediums such as Zoom or Skype have been widely critiqued for their disembodied nature, difficulties reading body language and non-verbal cues, technology issues; including dropped calls and inaudible sound, and loss of intimacy during the interview (Hanna, 2012; Deakin and Wakefield, 2014; Seitz, 2016; Oliffe *et al*., 2021; Howlett, 2022). Interviewing during the COVID-19 pandemic however, meant that these difficulties and barriers had to be accepted as part of the process. Issues related to technology (of which there were many, on both ends of the connection) could not be addressed in any meaningful way, but there were ways that the other issues noted above could be mitigated.

Through the pilot and initial interviews, I made some slight adjustments to the initial schedules[9]. This was related to the fact that often participants could sometimes become overwhelmed by some of the questions that were focused on experience. In this instance, attempting to conduct 'interviews as conversations' (Madison, 2005) with some participants required the use of setting questions in advance. A question that got participants to recall a memorable meal and a more material-focused question around a significant object relating to Squash (see following section), were sent to participants prior to the interview, allowing them to formulate a response as well as locating their significant object. I found that giving participants at least a day to recall a meal meant that they would often come to the interview with numerous events that they were able to recollect in detail, from the food that was eaten and who they ate with, to how the meal made them feel and their sensory experience of the event.

I moved both of these questions to the start of the interview from the end and found that this helped relax participants into the interview, offering them questions that they knew were coming and found easier to answer biographically. This recollective form of answer also helped to break down the artificial nature of the (remote) interview (Witzel, 2000). In responding to two biographical questions at the start of the interview, participants also moved away from answering questions with what they believed I wanted to hear, instead, they recounted moments that they felt were important. It also helped to establish interviewer/interviewee rapport by not opening the interview with questioning that was too probing, or too focused on moral or ethical stances.

[9] For full final schedules, see appendix

i) Engaging with Materials at a Distance

> *"I mean, it's hard to describe why you like a certain food, isn't it? It's just a very tasty dish"*
>
> *Nina, Freelancer (Interview, January 2021)*

Getting participants to recall events, talk about past meals or discuss making food initially proved challenging through a screen as people struggled with impromptu explanations of detailed and visceral accounts (Jackson *et al*., 2020). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I had planned to carry out a series of 'go-along' interviews with a number of participants (Kusenbach, 2003; Carpiano, 2009) to overcome this, particularly with participants who were more used to carrying out material tasks when at Squash, such as cooking, gardening or moving produce. This, I felt, would have allowed the participants to talk about the work they carried out in a more illustrative manner, and for some, discuss things in a more relaxed and open setting away from a formalised interview space.

Despite this type of method becoming impossible during the COVID-19 pandemic, I wanted to retain an element of materiality in my interviews. After all, as a material, food "brings people together, […] as well as being a point of shared memories, experiences and practices" (Hall *et al*., 2020:84). Materials, and specifically materials related to food, can tell us a great deal about who made them, who consumes them and the culture in which they have their place (Miller and Deutsch, 2009). Further to this, objects act as 'receptacles' for memories and stories, illuminating hidden and invisible interpretations of intertwining human and non-human biography through embodied and sensory accounts (Holmes, 2020). This understanding considers objects as agents with the capacity to *do* something (Latour, 2007), and therefore act as *more than* passive backdrops to narratives (Humphries and Smith, 2014).

Humphries and Smith (2014) highlight three approaches that are important for researchers engaging with objects to consider. These are: *object materiality, object practice* and *object biography.* The first of these approaches is object materiality, defined as "the engagement between bodies, tools, materials and substances that occur through physical things" (Humphries and Smith, 2014:483) beyond the concrete thing itself. The second approach refers to an object's practice, exploring the practices that enmesh objects and people and generate narratives through use (Humphries and Smith, 2014). Regarding food, this means looking at food beyond an object to be thought about, instead as a knowledge-generating practice (Brady, 2011). Of particular interest to researchers in this instance is often how objects are used in ways that are not as originally intended as well as how objects exist as part of wider network or assemblage (Holmes, 2020). The final approach engages

with an object's biography, where an object can be used as a 'container' for access to a subject's life events, memories and relationships (Kopytoff, 1986; Holmes, 2020) whilst examining how objects and people have "multiple and mutual biographies" that become entangled over time (Humphries and Smith, 2014:489).

After conducting my pilot interviews, I became aware that I would need to be more creative in my approach in order to facilitate conversations that would describe experiences with corporeal detail. I therefore decided to try to incorporate object interviewing into a section of my interview schedule. For this, I asked participants who had agreed to a video call to bring something to the interview with them that reminded them of Squash, an event at Squash or something they had eaten at Squash.

Following Humphries and Smith (2014) and Holmes (2020), I sought to overcome a dichotomy of object and subject and engage with the objects on an equal footing to the subjects during questioning, whilst noting the messiness and fluidity of ever-changing materiality. Rather than being a directly object-focused method, I also used the object in the interview as a *method of inquiry* in order to assist participants in recalling past experiences. Being able to hold, feel and see an object related to Squash at a time when they could not physically engage with the space at the organisation helped to bring its association with past events to life, and helped to illuminate previously hidden stories and experiences related to food materials.

Objects shown and discussed in interviews included: a Turban squash, an empty glass juice bottle, a baker's journal, a poster advertising a food workshop, a sketchbook, an apple and a brown paper bag. Some of these had a profound connection to Squash, whilst others were clearly gathered hurriedly immediately prior to the interview. The level of consideration shown towards the object didn't particularly matter, as even the most mundane and random objects could be discussed with relevance to the research, and it was often these everyday objects that helped participants to think about materiality and food in a more careful and considered way.

Contrary to Holmes' (2020) findings about general participant uneasiness sharing and discussing objects, I found that discussing an object at the start of our conversation helped to relax participants into a wider semi-structured interview. Participants generally seemed to enjoy explaining the material properties of the object, explaining why they chose it as an object of significance, and sharing its cultural history. The discussion tended to act as a segue between me introducing the research and more structured questioning, and provided a platform to the interview where participants felt they didn't have to think too hard about the questions being asked.

Object interviewing only worked when participants agreed to use Zoom or another video calling interface for interviews. Of the 20 interviews I conducted, 12 were done through video calling, and 8 were done through an audio only call. Although I encouraged participants to use video interviewing if they could, it was not always possible. Some had no access to the appropriate technology or internet connection; others did not know how to use video calling and a number of participants recalled 'Zoom fatigue'[10] and indicated a preference for a phone call.

4.3.4 Documents and Social Media: Using Text to Supplement Methods

Again, with no means of physical interaction with those at Squash, I was more reliant on ICT (Information and Communication Technology) mediated means of communication in order to fill in some of the gaps in my knowledge around the day-to-day and long-term running of the organisation. Therefore, a small amount of my supplementary data during this phase of the fieldwork comprised of analysis of social media posts and documents. Bowen (2009) highlights five uses for documents in qualitative research: 1) to provide data on the context of the research setting, 2) to provide a base for questioning in follow-up interviews, 3) to provide supplementary research data, 4) to track change and development, and 5) as a means of verifying findings. I used Bowen's suggestions as a framework for undertaking my own document and social media analysis.

Analysis of social media provides researchers with a "diverse range of content without the need for intrusive or intensive data collection procedures" (Andreotta *et al*., 2019:1766). Squash used Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and email on a regular basis to communicate with people during the pandemic, often streaming material live through these mediums. This provided a good opportunity to supplement the data that I was collecting using other methods, and get a richer and deeper picture of what was going on in this moment. During this time, I paid particular attention to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts from the organisation, attempting to draw out meaning from their everyday interactions with the public. I chose not to engage with those interacting with Squash's posts, but instead with the images and text in the posts themselves.

As well as studying everyday social media posts, I also sought strategic documents from the organisation in order to gain a deeper understanding of the long-term aims for the group. The documents engaged with included 5- and 10-year plans, standing orders, and CIC (Community

[10] Zoom fatigue, sometimes referred to as virtual fatigue, is a condition related to the increased cognitive demands of video engagement, an issue that was exacerbated during increased remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interest Company) documentation. The purpose of examining these documents was to develop a more detailed understanding of the formalised structures at the organisation, as well as develop a wider understanding of the long-term strategy at Squash.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has introduced the methodological approach used during this research project, a participatory, visceral methodology that is informed by the reparative motives of thick description and weak theory introduced in the previous chapters. I began the chapter by discussing the choice of research site and my approach to identifying participants, addressing both the choice of a singular research site and the challenges of identifying and engaging with participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The sections that followed described the methods chosen for this study. Firstly, I engaged with the pre-pandemic methodology for the project, an ethnographic approach that was informed by both participatory and corporeal schools of thought. Following this, I explained my rationale for choosing to change my methods as a result of restrictions enforced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, I examined the drawbacks and potentials of remote fieldwork for a project like this, critically questioning whether material and visceral methods can function from behind a computer screen. I also focused here on some of the more novel contributions offered by this research in the context of remote methodologies, including offering thoughts on approaching material engagement in a remote setting.

The following chapter will begin the analysis section of this thesis, examining the organisation and area that the study took place in. This will allow me to ‘set the scene’ for the more detailed analysis that follows, whilst providing important context for a place-based study.

5: Situating Squash

Before expanding into the everyday food practices and visceral encounters related to community food spaces, it is both appropriate and important to 'set the stage' for the analysis. In doing this, I seek to highlight the performativity of spaces (Gregson and Rose, 2000; Cornwell, 2012), as well as looking to capture the idea of place as a political project (Gibson-Graham, 2002).

In this chapter, I will situate the research within its wider environment, looking firstly at the city of Liverpool, then at the neighbourhood of Liverpool 8, and then finally at the street where the project took place, Windsor Street. This section will map the economic, political and cultural context for which the research is situated. It will also seek to emphasise the importance of connections and networks, and relations within community economies.

Following this introduction to the neighbourhood around Squash, I will then use *thick descriptive* methods (Gibson-Graham, 2014) to examine Squash, the organisation of focus within this thesis. This section will illustrate how the organisation contributes to diverse food practices in the area, as well as highlighting the importance of place within these practices. Following this, I examine the organisation as a diverse economy, reading the organisation and its practices as constitutive of economic possibility.

5.1 Liverpool, Liverpool 8 and Windsor Street

To better understand why Squash operates in the way that it does, it is important to examine the spaces that it works in. This enables us to see how Squash exists in space that is constantly being produced and reproduced (Gibson-Graham, 2002) in the practising of place through negotiations of intersecting trajectories (Massey, 2005). This section will first examine the city of Liverpool, its recent history and its current socio-economic landscape. I will then explore the area of the city known as Liverpool 8, before looking at the specific street studied within this thesis, Windsor Street.

5.1.1 The City of Liverpool

Throughout its history, Liverpool has been recognised for its global significance. Situated in an important shipping lane in the Irish Sea, its ports played a major role in the Atlantic slave trade, and then became a significant site during the industrial revolution, providing a gateway for many of the

UK's imports and exports. From the second half of the 20th century, Liverpool's global nature has been characterised by its culture; through the Merseybeat invasion of the early 60's, the worldwide explosion of the Beatles, and later, through the city's contribution to the proliferation of punk and post-punk in the 70's and 80's and electronic dance music in the late 80's and 90's. More recently, the award of the European Capital of Culture for the city in 2008, described as 'rocket fuel' for the local economy (Belchem, 2006), led to tourism moving to the centre of the economic strategy for the city. The successes of the city's two football teams; Everton and Liverpool, have also helped to contribute to the universal 'brand' of the city. Liverpool's historical links with other cities across the globe have led to it being described both physically and metaphorically as a 'city on the edge' (Davies, 2008; Frost and North, 2013), with more characteristics supposedly drawn from across the Atlantic than from the rest of Britain.

During the interwar period, the city was almost entirely reliant on its port to support its economy and workforce, with 136,000 out of the city's population of 800,000 employed in port related activities (Boyle *et al*., 2018). Like other cities in the UK previously reliant on the shipping industry, the second half of the twentieth century then saw rapid deindustrialisation as Liverpool was seen to descend from 'world city' to 'pariah city' (Wilks-Heeg, 2003), and a 'city on the edge' for very different reasons. Global economic changes in the 1970's and 1980's saw Liverpool recognised as a city symptomatic of wider economic decline, urban decay, mass unemployment, political militancy, social unrest and crime (Boland, 2008). Whilst Liverpool once existed as the key driver of globalisation, during this period, it became one of its biggest victims (Wilks-Heeg, 2003), suffering from some of the worst effects of industrial decline as an 'outrider' of post-industrial transition (Thompson, 2015). From a peak population of 870,000 at the start of the 20th century, Liverpool's population had halved by the end of it (Thompson, 2020).

Today, Liverpool is a city still characterised by high levels of poverty, as well as huge economic discrepancies between different areas of the city. The city ranks third out of 317 English local authorities on the index of multiple deprivation, and is the third most deprived local authority for health deprivation, fourth for income, fifth for employment and fifth for living environment (Liverpool City Council, 2020). These figures must also be placed in the context of huge local budget cuts implemented by the Conservative and Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition governments since 2010 (a 32% real-term fall in total local government spending (Centre for Cities, 2019)), meaning that local government has less resources to alleviate these problems. Whilst the city has belatedly adopted an 'entrepreneurial stance' (Harvey, 1989), focused heavily around the cultural development of the city (linked heavily to the Capital of Culture bid in 2008 (North, 2010)), it has

also seen concentrations of wealth pocketed around the city centre, leading to patterns of uneven development emerge that have entrenched areas of the city in cycles of poverty.

The city is regarded as politically distinct from its English contemporaries through its reputation as a 'radical city' (Belchem and Biggs, 2011). From the general transport strike of 1911, to the rise of the Militant led council in the 1980's, to the various dockers' disputes throughout the 20th Century, most notably the twenty-eight month dispute from 1995-1998, Liverpool has long held a reputation as a city predicated on political exceptionalism, drawn from a 'self-declared otherness' (Belchem, 2006) that is focused on a working class identity that lies politically and culturally distinct from the rest of England, and is drawn from a global base. This has led to a perception of the city that is "tinged with a certain political flavour, distinctly radical, democratic and anti-authoritarian" (Thompson, 2020:28).

Briefly refocusing on food, Liverpool also has claims to its own dish in the form of 'Scouse'. Scouse is broadly considered to be a dish that is "easily improvised, made up of ingredients-to-hand, and one that, as a result, varies from table to table" (Kierans and Haeney 2010:102). It is traditionally made from a meat, often mutton, as well as an assortment of vegetables, cooked together in a casserole-like dish. Its origins lie in Scandinavia in the dish *Lobscouse*, but the dish has become indigenised and forms an important part of the city's cultural identity (Belchem, 2006; Kierans and Haeney, 2010). As a meal, it is closely linked with both the identity of Liverpudlians as 'Scousers' (see Boland, 2010 for more detail on the term), and, because its composition is linked to individual tastes and practices, the identities of the cook and their household. As one volunteer exclaimed in horror as I was chopping a selection of vegetables for one meal: "you don't put mushrooms in a Scouse!" (Fieldnotes, January 2020). Scouse will be explored in more detail in the context of this research in the following chapter.

5.1.2 Liverpool 8 in History and the Present

The neighbourhood that Squash predominantly operates in is named Toxteth, or more commonly across members of the local community, Liverpool 8 or L8[11]. Locals argue that the name Toxteth only began to be used in wider discourse in 'toxic' journalistic creations of place (Butler, 2020) during, and in the aftermath of, the uprisings[12] In the summer of 1981. This was reflected in my research,

[11] Throughout this thesis, I follow local terminology here, and generally refer to the area as Liverpool 8 or L8 rather than Toxteth. The name Liverpool 8 exists as an important part of how residents contest the perceptions of them from outside the city and the neighbourhood (Benwell et al., 2020).
[12] The term 'uprisings', rather than 'riots', again reflects the local terminology of the events.

with my participants keen to discuss the use of terminology often completely unprompted (Fieldnotes, various dates).

Previously a much larger former royal park situated outside of Liverpool, Toxteth was incorporated into the city 1895 because of a growing working-class population moving into the space as part of the growth in urban areas in the late 19th Century. In the decades that followed, Toxteth became home to Liverpool's first black population, and developed into an important diasporic space for seafarers and immigrants within the city. This placing was not unintentional however, with local government policies instrumental in 'containing' and segregating the black population in Liverpool 8 (Vathi and Burrell, 2020).

Toxteth retains an ethnically diverse population today. Whilst the city of Liverpool has a relatively low level of ethnic diversity (86.3% of the population are white (Liverpool City Council, 2018)), Princes Park ward in Liverpool 8 is one of the most diverse areas of the city, with 51.2% of the ward coming from BME backgrounds (Liverpool City Council, 2018).

The Liverpool 8 area is most notorious for a 1981 uprising, which saw 781 police officers injured, 214 police vehicles damaged, 150 buildings burned down and over 500 arrests (Frost and Phillips, 2011), as well as some of the most brutal police repression in the UK's recent history. Against a backdrop of widespread stigmatisation of the neighbourhood, racial discrimination against the black population and systemically racist policing (Frost and Phillips, 2011; Thompson, 2020), tensions between the police and the Liverpool 8's population erupted, and led to nine days of rioting and six weeks of disturbances in the area.

The aftermath of the uprising led to a number of largely (local and national) state-driven interventions into the neighbourhood which imposed change into the landscape of Liverpool 8. Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) in the Granby area, for example, saw many members of the neighbourhood, particularly from the black community, dislodged from their residence (Boyle *et al*., 2018). Today, Liverpool 8 still has a significant number of derelict properties. Because of decisions such as this, changes in Liverpool 8 are seen to offer an important example of state-led regeneration interventions being unable or unwilling to recognise complex socio-spatial processes and residents' contribution to place-making (Vathi and Burrell, 2020), as well as ongoing mutual mistrust between city authorities and local residents (Thompson, 2020).

Liverpool 8 is still an area of the city that experiences large scale deprivation. Of the 30 electoral wards in Liverpool, Princes Park ward in Liverpool 8 (where Squash is based and where they focus most of their work) ranks second lowest in income, third lowest in barriers to housing and services,

fourth lowest in life expectancy, and sixth lowest in measures of health and disability (Liverpool City Council, 2020, 2021). Princes Park ward ranks in the lowest 10% of wards nationally across the Index of Multiple Deprivation, with a number of LSOA's (Lower Layer Super Output Areas), including some around Windsor Street, ranking in the lowest 1% (Liverpool City Council, 2021).

Liverpool 8 is also home to a range of projects and organisations that seek to develop community-led alternative economic practices for regeneration. Arguably the most well-known of these is the Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust (CLT), who seek to reframe debates around housing and community through a position that considers how the "social and material aspects of dwelling are dialectically entwined" (Thompson, 2015:1038). The CLT runs an ongoing campaign, after decades of disinvestment and demolition-and-rebuild plans (most notably through the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) programme in the 2000s which created a new wave of dereliction through CPO's), to take back empty homes through community ownership (Thompson, 2015).

Granby CLT also run a monthly market, of which Squash is a regular participant in, drawing all aspects of the local neighbourhood together to participate in a celebration "full of flowers, food and hope" (Boyle *et al*., 2018:569). The market offers an opportunity to showcase the "tenacity, the creativity and the 'do it yourself' culture of the residents" (Boyle *et al*., 2018:575) who live in the Granby area, whilst providing an income source for local residents who run stalls.

5.1.3 Walking Down Windsor Street

After examining the wider city and neighbourhood that Squash is based in, I will now turn to the specific street where Squash have focused their work for the best part of two decades. In doing this, the analysis highlights how "relations, affiliations, networks, and ties are constitutive factors in socioeconomic entities" (Turker and Murphy 2019:52).

A few streets away from the Granby area, lies Windsor Street, the road that Squash is situated on and the site of the *100 Year Street.* The street runs roughly north-south for nearly a kilometre. Situated between and parallel to the busier traffic routes of Park Road and Princes Road/Avenue, the road is surrounded by residential properties, but itself has a range of residential, commercial and community assets directly on, or adjacent to, the street. When walking down the street, the first thing that is noticeable is the Anglican cathedral, situated at the end closest to the city centre. Indeed, Britain's largest cathedral (Visit Liverpool, 2022) is visible at nearly every stage of the street and dominates the skyline.

Figure 4 – The Anglican Cathedral in the background of a mural and housing on Windsor Street. Toxteth TV is also visible on the right of the image. (Credit: Author)

Whilst they engage across the entire street, Squash have three sites that they use for various projects. The first, and most hidden of these, is their seed library, tucked away in an unassuming spot at the back of Toxteth library, at the north end of the street. It is used as a space to grow plants specifically to let them go to seed. Only the horticultural manager and a few volunteers tend to use the library, but its outputs are shared annually during community seed swaps and for sowing produce in the Grapes Garden. Seed swaps are run by Squash as events where growers can exchange or receive seeds in a way that purposefully excludes multinational seed companies (Pottinger, 2017, 2018 has covered this practice, as well as its links to diverse economies theory, in detail).

Walking south past the first houses on Windsor Street, you arrive at Toxteth TV, a hub for a range of local community arts groups, with a broad focus on learning. The site is used by a variety of community groups as a multifunctional creative and media training space, with a focus on creative learning programmes for marginalised and hard-to-reach groups.

The Grapes Garden, managed by Squash, is the next site along Windsor Street. Previously an abandoned pub car park owned by Toxteth TV, its management was taken over in 2012 by a group of volunteers coordinated by the organisation. In the decade since, the group has covered the site with raised beds, planted trees, and installed the facilities to allow social eating events to occur during all but the coldest winter months.

The site of the garden is currently owned by the residents that live in the converted pub, but who are amicable to its current use and regularly participate in Squash events. This, however, does add a sense of precarity to the site's long-term management, with no real control over the space should the owner wish to change its function.

Further on lies John Archer Hall, another community space, and the previous site for many of Squash's activities, including the base for their offices. A range of community groups operate out of this space, from drumming groups to ceramic workshops to occasional social eating groups. The space forms one part of the network of organisations across Liverpool 8, including the nearby Kuumba Imani community centre, the Crawford House community partnership and the Mary Seacole House community mental health group.

Figure 5 – Mural at the Kuumba Imaani Millennium Centre on a neighbouring street to Squash (Credit: Author)

Squash's main hub stands out on the street. Designed by architectural cooperative Urbed, and clad entirely in Scottish larch, the building couldn't look more distinctive from its neighbours. Funded primarily through grants from Power to Change and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the building enables the organisation to host the local community where they were previously limited to engagement in external spaces, and creates space for commercial trade, learning and meal sharing. Interviewees described it as the 'heart' of the community (Mel, interview) and a space for everyday community engagement (Becky, interview). Alongside this, visually at least, the building could be seen as unusual in its setting. As a volunteer noted whilst I was helping prepare a meal during fieldwork: "you wouldn't expect to see something like this here" (Fieldnotes, February 2020). Similarly, an interviewee commented: "you wouldn't think it was there, you wouldn't think it was that. Not in this area anyway" (David, interview). The meaning behind these comments is twofold. Firstly, the building's design, made from larch cladding, is visually distinct from the predominantly red brick buildings along Windsor Street. Secondly, the wider function of the space, is not what either participant expected in the local neighbourhood. Whilst the comment is presented as a hopeful one, it also offers a glimpse into how the building could also be perceived as a cultural boundary in the way that community is enacted (see Traill 2021).

Figure 6- The Squash building (Credit: Author)

Figure 7 – The brickwork that dominates the Windsor Street and Liverpool 8 area (Credit: Author)

Figure 8 -Housing on Windsor Street (Credit: Author)

Moving past Squash along the road, there is a collection of streets with compact terraced housing. These streets include Madryn Street, the birthplace of Beatles drummer Ringo Starr. One interviewee discussed with me how on the corner of these streets there were previously services such as a bakery, post office and pub, but these gradually shut down during the 1980's and were either left derelict or converted into housing (David, interview). This is reflective of both the move towards supermarket shopping, and the clearances that took place in the area after the 1981 uprisings.

Figure 9 – Graffiti outside an abandoned plot on Windsor Street

Beyond the end of the street lies Princes Park, a large public park where Squash have held events during the summer months in order to increase capacity and attract people who may not normally interact with the organisation. Large scale feasting events around the summer solstice and foraging walks through the park are regular parts of the Squash calendar that use the space as a stage for public engagement.

As these sections have evidenced through both images and text, the area in which Squash operates forms a diverse landscape of economic, political and cultural histories and present conditions. Firstly, I introduced the city of Liverpool, documenting the changes that the city has experienced throughout its history, culminating in the existence of a city with a distinct political and cultural identity. Following this, I focused on the area of Liverpool 8, highlighting its turbulent past, as well as many of the issues facing the area in the present, before emphasising the role that the social and solidarity economy play here. Finally, I drew focus towards the area of Windsor Street in the immediate vicinity of Squash. In documenting the road, I drew attention to how the spaces that Squash manage coexist with the rest of the street, and the relations that exist across the area.

Building on this highlighted locale in which Squash is situated, the following section will begin to examine the organisation in greater detail.

5.2 Introducing Squash

After an engagement with both the wider and more local areas that Squash operate in, I will now discuss the key structures, principles and practices relating to Squash as an organisation. Cornwell (2012; see also Massey, 2005), in a focus on capitalist and non-capitalist work, describes how spaces and property are understood through stories, practices, behaviours and performances and observes how these factors influence how we understand ownership of space. Thinking through this in the context of Squash's relationship to the wider Windsor Street area we can develop understandings of ways in which the discourse and practice can help to construct a politics of possibility within the neighbourhood.

Founded in 2007, Squash Nutrition[13] was established with the aim of helping people to eat healthier, more nutritious food, particularly in areas where access to this type of food is limited. Their work has often seen them engage in sites that could be considered unusual and they regularly utilise public spaces such as streets or parks as ways to connect with people who would not normally be reached by nutrition programmes.

Squash now engage with a variety of diverse food practices across a number of local sites. The organisation moved into its new base on Windsor Street in Liverpool 8 in May 2018. Previously, they had operated out of an office in a community building on the same street, and before that, out of the flat of one of the co-directors. The new building is comprised of a café and shop space, a community space for meetings and events, office space and outdoor space for growing, learning and eating. Further to this, as noted in the previous section, an abandoned pub car park, two minutes' walk down the road has been converted by Squash into a multifaceted community garden called the Grapes Garden. These sites will be described in greater detail later in the chapter.

Squash originally had an overarching focus on learning about food through related physical practices. Their focus was primarily around the construction and implementation of courses, workshops and public events that engaged with embodied skills and knowledges relating to healthy food consumption. These events worked alongside a variety of individuals, from schoolchildren, to mothers, to unemployed men and took place in different settings and different contexts. Alongside these practices, Squash also retained a focus on community gardening as a space for engagement

[13] The 'Nutrition' was dropped in 2018 as part of an adoption of a wider scope of focus for the organisation.

with food learning. They developed and opened the Grapes Garden on Windsor Street in 2012, as well as developing community garden spaces in two separate areas in the city for local residents to manage themselves.

Their move to a permanent centre in 2018 enabled Squash to extend their activities, as well as focus less on grant funding as their primary source of revenue. The organisation now runs a community shop and café providing affordable food, as well as providing a community meeting space in an area lacking in services. In 2019, Squash received national recognition at the BBC Good Food Awards, achieving the 'Best Shop or Café' award at the ceremony in light of the organisation's innovative, community-led approach to managing a food space.

The space continued to operate with a commercial and non-commercial approach until March 2020 where, as a result of the emerging COVID-19 pandemic, Squash were forced to close down the vast majority of their operations, operating only as a limited 'phone and collect' shopping service, and a centre for a small food aid operation, focusing on food provision to Squash volunteers and refugee families in the local neighbourhood. This disruption to their service lasted periodically until May 2021, when the organisation were able to fully resume their original programme.

Squash have also sought to frame their ongoing practices as part of a wider, long-term strategy for the immediate local area. From their inception, Squash's focus has prioritised working beyond the four walls of their own space and meeting people where they are (Becky, interview). This has regularly included work on Windsor Street that engages with creative practices to attract attention. As Becky described to me:

> *"We've always really understood that there is many ways to connect with people. I think some of the most successful and some of the work that I enjoy most is the work that we've done on the street. So actually, physically being on the street. […] But really the understanding that the way to invite people in is to get their attention, to be a bit surprised, be a bit delighted by something."*
>
> *Becky, Co-director (Interview, November 2020)*

In 2010, the Grapes Garden group were gifted some apple trees to plant in the space. Upon researching how to successfully cultivate the trees, they discovered that their expected lifespan was a hundred years. This led the group to start thinking about what they thought Windsor Street would look like at the end of this lifespan, and from this, what they would want it to look like. These discussions were often placed in the context of climate change, with considerations made to how physical environmental changes would alter how the space could and should be used in the future.

This discussion formed the inception of the 100 Year Street project. The project adopted an informally democratic form, where local residents would be invited to offer their thoughts on what they would like to see more of along the streets. These informal 'consultations' would take place on the street, at the local market and in the community garden space. At these consultations, there was a wide interest in how the street could be better used as food growing space, as well as how the street could open up more social opportunities (Clare, Co-director; Interview, October 2020).

As noted in the previous discussion of Liverpool 8, the aftermath of the 1981 uprisings led to many abandoned and derelict plots. This extends to a number of the sites along Windsor Street. Both the Grapes Garden (formerly an abandoned pub) and the Squash building (a disused garage and pub) are examples of spaces that had been left in disrepair. Much of the preliminary work conducted on the 100 Year Street project explores previous land use, from services and residential sites, to historical waterways and green spaces. In doing this, local contexts and everyday practices have helped to shape the values and direction of the project (Parkinson *et al*., 2017).

The 100 Year Street project attempts to recentre Windsor Street as a 'people-powered place' (Squash, 2022[14]), where principles of interaction and collaboration are seen as fundamental in building practices of place-making (Franklin and Marsden, 2015). This aligns with the development of critical questioning as to the prioritising of needs of *consumers* over *community members* in food literature (see DeLind 2010; Hill 2011 for examples). Through using Windsor Street as a space for this tangible engagement with foodscapes, Squash aim to physically introduce meaningful encounters with material foodscapes and human and non-human others as a means of approaching the Anthropocene in the area. By encouraging material engagement, participants are provided with a sense of tangible connection and permanence in the project (Beacham, 2018) that looks towards developing an "ethic of attuning ourselves more closely to the powers, capacities and dynamism of the more-than-human" (Gibson-Graham, 2011:3).

Connection to place also forms an important part of Squash's wider work. Members must live, work, volunteer, or herald from the Liverpool 8 area to be eligible for membership. Similarly, the vast majority of the staff employed by the organisation have a connection to the area, often going back generations. Squash believe that this allows them to have a greater connection and rootedness in the communities with which they work (Becky, interview; Clare, interview). As Table 2 emphasises, Squash retain a significant focus on place-attached, socially embedded work, facets that are key components of a community economy (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Moreover, focuses on co-creation,

[14] https://squashliverpool.co.uk/about Retrieved: 12th September 2022

local relationships, access and solidarity all point towards an emphasised importance of collective action in the development of Squash's plans.

Strategic Plan Outline 2020-2029 with a 5 year focus to end of 2024	**VISION: Ours is a 100 year vision inspired by nature; we're transforming our Windsor Street neighbourhood into a people-powered place that's known around the world for being a playful, resilient & loving community where everybody thrives** **MISSION: We use food & art in creative ways to encourage participation, nurture confidence & grow skills & connections in our neighbourhood**				
AIMS	1. INCREASE PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL PEOPLE	2. COMMUNICATE OUR STORY & VISION EFFECTIVELY	3. DEVELOP & DELIVER A CREATIVE PROGRAMME	4. ENSURE CAPACITY & INFRASTRUCTURE IS FIT FOR PURPOSE	5. BUILD FINANCIAL RESILIENCE
BENEFICIARIES (what we must achieve for our users)	Increase participation of Black People & People of Colour (BPOC) & young people in all areas of our work	Board, staff & members understand & share our Vision, Mission and Values	Strengthen our practice of co-creation	Increase employment & volunteer opportunities for BPOC and young people living locally	Support the growth of a strong, local, solidarity economy
CAPACITIES (what we need to excel at)	Increase & strengthen access routes in to Squash	Recognised as thought leaders in our sectors	Ensure high quality and relevant practices, processes and products	Develop leadership, autonomy and up-skilling throughout team	Improve business planning and financial processes
LEARNING & GROWTH (where we need to invest to excel)	Build stronger relationships with local organisations	All media platforms used to tell our story to the broadest possible audience	Prioritise research, planning & development Prioritise climate emergency learning	Wellbeing at the heart of all we do	Increase entrepreneurial approaches
RESOURCES (how we ensure we can do what we need to)	tbc		tbc	Expand our team Expand & diversify income streams: inc; sustainable trading, solidarity economy & philanthropy Grow new & existing capital assets including land & property	

Table 2- Squash's strategic plan 2020-2029 [Source: Squash]

5.2.1 Squash as a Diverse Economy

In this section, I will explore Squash as an organisation in more detail, highlighting their contribution to diverse food practices in the local area and their role within the wider social economy. This involves an engagement with the following features of an ontology of political possibility established in *A Postcapitalist Politics:*

- *The role of place as a site of becoming, and as the ground of a global politics of local transformations;*
- *The uneven spatiality and negotiability of power, which is always available to be skirted, marshalled, or redirected through ethical practices of freedom; and*
- *The everyday temporality of change and the vision of transformation as a continual struggle to change subjects, places, and conditions of life under inherited circumstances of difficulty and uncertainty.*

(Gibson-Graham, 2006:xxvii)

In prioritising these features within my assessment, I will provide a place-based analysis of a community food space that provides a platform for my writing in the chapters that follow. I intend for this place-based analysis to help me to unveil different instances of interdependency, co-existence and communality (Gordon, 2018) that occur at Squash.

Table 3 provides a basis with which to build on in this section. This non-capitalocentric reading highlights how transactions, labour and enterprise at Squash are performed in diverse ways, with significant alternative and non-capitalist practices forming important parts of the organisations scope. Despite appearing to many as a conventional café and wholefoods shop (Patrick, Customer; Interview, January 2021), the table highlights the diversity of economic activity undertaken at the organisation. Whilst I have offered some critiques of this style of table in Chapter 2 of this thesis, it offers a useful visual aid from which to develop analysis of the organisation.

Transaction	Labour	Enterprise
Market - Cafe and shop sales	**Wage** - Paid work at Squash: contracted and freelance	**Capitalist**
Alternative Market - Pandemic vegetable box scheme- supporting local and regional agriculture - Soup-it-Forward scheme, drawn from extra donations from paying customers - Supplying of local and ecological suppliers - Courses and workshops run by Squash (pay-as-you-feel)	**Alternative Paid** - Volunteer work in the garden- produce and a meal for labour - Produce discounts for those working/volunteering	**Alternative Capitalist** - Squash shop and café to pay local people and reinvest surplus into community projects - Plant sales to support community garden activities - Incubating or assisting other social enterprises and community businesses
Non-market - Facilitating self-provisioning through growing or foraging - Pandemic care-packages for Squash service users/volunteers and refugee families - Courses and workshops run by Squash (free)	**Unpaid** - Other volunteering at Squash	**Non-Capitalist** - Grapes Garden activities and events - Community events run by Squash

Table 3- Diverse economic practices at Squash (adapted from Gibson-Graham, 2006; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013)

i) Spaces

The first of Squash's engagement spaces is their community building, which acts as a focal point for the organisation's activities. It is split into four main sections: a shop and café space, a community events space, an office, and a small outdoor community growing space.

The café and shop space was opened as a way to provide the organisation with a steady income flow throughout the year. It stocks seasonal, organic, vegetarian food at a price point that compares favourably to other stores and cafes providing a similar service in the city. Squash endeavour only to supply products in this space that have what they consider as having social and environmental value. This means food being ethically sourced, from local producers where possible, organically farmed and seasonal. For them, this can involve engaging with food suppliers who are worker cooperatives (such as Suma and Organic North[15]), stocking products from independent local makers (their kombucha, pies and kimchi all come from makers in the immediate vicinity of the organisation), or through stocking products that directly assist work to build better foodscapes. Examples of this would include fruit and vegetables grown in the Grapes Garden, or products supporting organisations such as the Landworkers' Alliance[16].

The community events space in the building allows collaborations with other community organisations in the local area, fostering interdependence between different actors. It is hired out for use for meetings, workshops, and classes. It is also used as a space for the organisation to run workshops of their own, members and planning meetings, and even occasional community cinema events that showcase local community films and international films themed around diverse and radical food practices. It is also used as an occasional overflow space for larger eating events when extra seating is needed.

[15] Suma and Organic North are large worker food cooperatives based in the north of England, who sell ambient and fresh produce respectively.

[16] The Landworkers Alliance is a UK-based union of farm and land-workers who campaign for better food and land use systems. They are a member of the international peasant farmers collective *Via Campesina.*

Figure 10- Layout of the Squash building, with communal seating and open kitchen space, accessible from two eating spaces (Credit: Author)

Squash generates revenue through café and shop sales, renting out community space (at a reduced rate for charities and social enterprises), through obtaining grant funding from a variety of public, private and third sector bodies and from small donations from the local community to support individual projects. This revenue helps to fund staff wages, site maintenance, food aid and community projects and events.

The other important site that Squash use is the aforementioned Grapes Garden. Founded by Squash alongside a group of local residents in 2012, the community garden acts both as a space for growing food, and space where people can come to learn or socialise. The installation of a polytunnel and Solardome in the garden, both obtained through grant funding, has allowed Squash to use the space throughout the year. The garden is open at least twice a week, with weekly Friday sessions open to the public. With the exception of one horticultural worker/ volunteer coordinator, the space is maintained by a collection of long-term volunteers. Once a month, except during winter, the group organise a communal feast in the garden made using produce grown in the space, cooked for passers-by and interested parties. This allows the group to showcase the space, as well as what they have learnt with regards to growing, harvesting, preparing, and cooking food. The garden is also used during special events; as a space for communal eating, for music performances and for classes, which have previously ranged from fire making to seed drawing.

As mentioned previously, Squash also maintain a seed library on Windsor Street. They have also previously helped to establish other community gardens across Liverpool with local communities and maintained beehives on Windsor Street above the aforementioned John Archer Hall. Finally,

Squash's use of public space, specifically on the street, is also fundamental to their practice, a theme that will be engaged with later in this chapter.

ii) Structure

Whilst Squash's structure is hierarchical on the surface, with two co-directors leading the operation, and managers of the food, horticultural and office sections, much of the organisation's practice is carried out in a cooperative and horizontal manner. Volunteers are regularly included in organisational decision-making and seniority is not necessarily a precursor to decision-making authority. During meetings, decisions are usually made only after unanimous or majority agreement from the staff and volunteers present (Fieldnotes, June 2020). As one volunteer expressed to me:

> *"It doesn't feel … you know a strong sense of hierarchy or you know people having power over you, it seems very shared and inclusive, which is, yeah, a good feeling."*
>
> *Megan, Volunteer (Interview, November 2020)*

Many decisions also go through board and members' meetings. The board, elected predominantly from members of the local community, meet monthly to check progress, and offer expertise in a variety of fields. Key strategic decisions must go through the board before being implemented. Members meet at an AGM to decide on strategic goals for the organisation and as an accountability mechanism. Members' meetings also sporadically occur outside of the yearly cycle, and occasional events are run solely for members. Lifetime membership costs £1, as long the member lives, hails from, or works/volunteers in the Liverpool 8 area.

In addition to formal and informal democratic structures within the organisation, Squash also place significant importance on the how they can engage with the local community in order to represent their interests in the best possible way. This reflects a desire within the organisation for "[Squash] space to be embedded within the community, for people to make decisions around what happens here [at Squash] as much as is possible" (Clare, interview).

Squash use a Community Interest Company (CIC) legal model, first introduced during the New Labour government in 2005. The framework was implemented following a consultation with the third sector in order to provide more 'flexibility and choice' alongside established charity and industrial and provident society (IPS) legal forms (Nicholls, 2010a) and is overseen by the Regulator of Community Interest Companies. Since the inception of the form, the UK has experienced year on year growth in the number of CIC's (Mason, 2020).

CIC's can take the form of a company limited by guarantee or a company limited by shares, with the majority preferring to take the form of a company limited by guarantee (Mason, 2020). Most CIC's function with a trading arm. To become a CIC, a business must establish a stated community interest purpose, that outlines "what it will do, who it will help and how" (Cho, 2017:162).

CIC's also utilise an asset lock, meaning that available assets are retained to benefit a nominated community, and cannot be sold for financial gain. This acts as a means to prevent predatory corporate acquisitions through the retention of profits and assets (Mason, 2020). The asset lock also creates conditions that decommodify land (Thomps*on et al*., 2019), through helping to maintain community ownership of property for future use. The asset lock, as well as 'community interest test' are designed to help protect the 'mission' of an organisation through the creation of governance mechanisms that are designed to combat drift (Cornforth, 2014).

Critics of the CIC model have recognised that whilst the model allows for a wide range of governance and organisational structures, there is no requirement for structures of democratic governance within the organisations (Smith and Teasdale, 2012). It has also been criticised for an absence of formalised monitoring, leading to a perceived lack of accountability in the sector (Nicholls, 2010a), with this lack of scrutiny making it difficult to measure the success of the CIC model (Mason, 2020). Indeed, Chew (2010) finds that the formation of CIC's has little to do with fulfilling government policy agenda, but instead are often formed as a means to advance their own organisational mission in the context of an increasingly competitive funding environment.

Returning to Squash, the organisation explored a variety of options, including functioning as a worker-cooperative, before deciding that the CIC model fitted best. The co-directors of the organisation did this after consulting and visiting a variety of other community food initiatives to explore similar practices, observing the strengths and weaknesses of different ownership models. Following this, members voted on the adoption of the new model.

This was not without criticism from some of those involved, however. This was underlined by one employee:

> *"Maybe I'm just naïve in that I think that the … the juxtaposition of a business and a community-based organisation, I think that's really, really hard to bring those things together"*
>
> *Donna, Employee (Interview, December 2020)*

The requirement to run aspects of the organisation as a business, focused on remaining financially viable, and therefore profitable, doesn't sit well with everyone involved. This represents a relatively

recent change in strategy from the organisation, moving away from a model based almost entirely on the acquisition of grant funding, towards a model that strives to be a "financially viable business that benefits its community" (Becky, interview). The extent to which this constitutes 'mission drift' (Cornforth, 2014), however, can be identified through the alignment of this branch of the organisation within the goals established in Table 3.

iii) Work

Squash usually operate with between 12 and 15 paid employees, working in a range of full-time, part-time and freelance roles. They recruit almost exclusively from the Liverpool 8 area, as well as regularly employing individuals who have been involved with the organisation in different capacities prior to employment, such as those who have participated in the Women's Food Biz course. More recently, they have recruited using the UK Government's 'Kickstart' scheme, an initiative established to find employment for 16-24 year olds in receipt of Universal Credit. The Squash co-director, Clare, explained to me that staff tend to stay a lot longer at Squash than is generally expected in the hospitality sector. She put this down to pay being at the Real Living Wage[17], good working conditions, and care and flexibility with specific employee needs, such as childcare (Clare, interview). In doing this, the organisation strives to create more meaningful and purposeful work that values contributions that individuals are able to make (see Cameron, 2009; Dempsey and Sanders, 2010; Mckinnon *et al*., 2020) and more centred around the development of livelihoods over job creation (Williams *et al*., 2003).

Clare's comments also align with wider research on the social economy that find that workers are generally less concerned about salary, and have a greater focus on social aspirations and *intrinsic* benefits to working in the sector such as the social usefulness of work, autonomy and involvement in decision-making processes and stronger inter-employee relationships (Borzaga and Depedri, 2009). This leads to a generally greater job satisfaction than in the for-profit sector (Benz, 2005) as well as increased organisational loyalty (Borzaga and Depedri, 2009). There is, however, a contrasting body of literature that suggests that because of the predominantly low skilled, low paid jobs on offer within social enterprise, organisations are more reliant on these 'pro-social motivations' for work (de Cooman *et al*., 2011; Mazzei, 2017; Brolis, 2018; Jeworrek and Mertins, 2021), making them vulnerable to potential labour shortages. Others have argued that a market-oriented social economy

[17] The Real Living Wage is a voluntary minimum wage paid by organisations that is designed to meet everyday needs. As of 2022, it is £9.90, compared to the national minimum wage of £9.50 (less for under 25's).

leads to the naturalisation of precarious work through competitive, masculinist, and corporatised practices (McRobbie, 2016; Mclean, 2021).

Like many organisations in the social economy, Squash are reliant on volunteer labour to support their wider operations, helping to form the 'building blocks' of the organisation (Amin, 2009a). Amin (2009a) identifies three types of volunteers who frequent the social economy. The first of these are motivated by a desire to contribute towards a 'good cause', are often retired or not seeking work, and are valued for their skills, commitment and experience within the sector. The second type of volunteer identified is individuals who seek work experience in order to enhance their job prospects. This group often has higher education qualifications and uses volunteering as a means to develop a career within the social economy. The final group of volunteers comes from predominantly socially disadvantaged backgrounds and use volunteering as a means to ultimately secure work in the mainstream economy. This group finds volunteering opportunities predominantly through personal contacts, through placements or through referrals.

At Squash, volunteers come from all three of Amin's categories. The staff in the café and shop spaces are supported by volunteers, who help to take stock, weigh and bag produce, wash dishes and prepare food for paying customers. Volunteering is done in exchange for a meal and travel expenses and more informally, through acquiring skills from others. Like the paid staff, volunteers are predominantly from the local neighbourhood. The frequency that individuals volunteer varies considerably, with some participants assisting on an almost daily basis, and others only able to offer time once a month.

Less formal volunteering takes place regularly in the Grapes Garden to help maintain the space. Work here takes place through drop-ins, rather than structured timetabling, as is the case with other volunteers. Volunteers here work on Wednesdays and Fridays to plant seeds, weed beds or harvest crops. The sessions on Fridays are followed by a communal meal that is prepared by other volunteers. During the warmer months, any excess harvest that does not form part of the communal meal is shared between volunteers to take home (Jackie, interview).

A point of importance for Squash is that where work isn't paid, it is purposeful. Volunteers are made to feel like they are participating in practices that benefit the community and learning forms a fundamental part of the volunteer experience. This means that Squash attract volunteers with a variety of aims, from 'good cause' volunteers, to those who use volunteering to help eventually seek paid work either with the organisation, or elsewhere (see Amin, 2009b).

As David, a local resident and volunteer, explained:

"I get money from my social [welfare]. So that's like paying my way back. Paying back- I'm not getting it for nothing. But you know what I mean, I enjoy it, the atmosphere and all the people and the company. It's not work, you know what I mean? It's not a chore. The time I've been there it's like… It's part of my life at the moment, you know what I mean?"

David, Volunteer / Local Resident (Interview, November 2020)

For David, his motivation for volunteering is drawn from both his enjoyment of the space, and a sense of 'giving back' to the community. David explained to me how whilst volunteering, he would be able to select the workload that he wanted to do. He told me "I just go in, do what I want to do […] then I get out of the way" (David, interview). This is common across volunteers; workload is dependent on the needs of the individual participating.

What would sometimes be referred to as service users are also called volunteers by those at Squash, in light of a recognition of their contribution to the organisation. These are individuals who usually participate in the preparations of communal meals, or help with certain tasks in the garden space. Whilst distinguishing between various 'volunteer' roles at the organisation can perhaps be confusing at times because of this, I have chosen to follow Squash's terminology to reflect their description of those involved with the organisation.

iv) Education

Squash run regular community events, including large events to mark the summer and winter solstices, an annual film festival, seed swaps, and monthly garden events for the public. The larger events are paid for predominantly by grant funding, many of which come from arts bodies. The smaller, more regular events tend to be funded by donations from attendees, or through revenue from the café and shop spaces. At all of these events, Squash want participants to leave having learnt something.

Since their inception, Squash have been concerned with developing pedagogical practices alongside food. They have regularly carried out work in schools and universities, running 'hands-on' sessions that involve cooking simple and healthy meals. They have also run bread making workshops, urban foraging sessions and food growing courses. Again, all of the sessions are free, or pay-as-you-feel, with costs covered through grant funding and donations of money, materials and labour.

Their most significant educational course in recent years has been the 'Women's Food Biz' course[18], set up for unemployed women in the local neighbourhood. Funded by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), the course endeavours to provide a basis for individuals wishing to establish a food enterprise of any size, or to acquire skills for entering the food industry. The course covers practical skills such as growing and cooking, workshops and meetings with local food producers and entrepreneurs, and accredited Food Safety qualifications. Whilst many of the women who participate do go on to establish successful food businesses as a result of the course, informal feedback has also suggested that the benefits of the course also come in the form of networking opportunities, a reduction in social isolation and increased local cooperation (Sally-Anne, Women's Food Biz Co-ordinator; Interview, December 2020).

v) Principles

Squash's focus is guided by environmental and social concern surrounding foodscapes, as well as a desire to bring people together using food as a tool. When I asked Squash co-director, Becky what were the important principles that guided Squash, she emphasised the importance of:

> *"Creating the space [...] in terms of bringing people with you, meeting people where they are. Whether that's physically in terms of the space you're going to meet them, but also where they are in term of their life situation, their view on food"*
>
> *Becky, Co-director (Interview, November 2020)*

Becky's comments highlight how the organisation have adapted their scope of practice to engage with diverse audiences and people who not normally seek out a group like Squash. The organisation places an importance on creating open and accessible spaces at every opportunity. Almost every event is free or pay-as-you-feel, public, accessible spaces are used as much as possible, and food served attains to be culturally appropriate. Through this, Squash seek to create space for practices of embodied learning with food that is inclusive and attentive to need.

Whilst many of the approaches undertaken by the leadership of Squash are indicative of a focus on social entrepreneurship or the casting of 'heroic' social entrepreneurs (Nicholls, 2010b; Nicholls and Cho, 2006), much of this can also be attributed to what Dey and Teasdale (2016) ascribe as *tactical mimicry*. This theory recognises that whilst organisations and individuals regularly identify with many of the institutionally ascribed normative features of social enterprise, their realities reflect

[18] Further analysis of this course appears in section 7.1.2

otherwise. Rather than challenging dominant narratives of the performance of social enterprise, these individuals and organisations reinterpret these narratives to meet their own criteria (North *et al*., 2020). In doing this, individuals and organisations conform to government set criteria for social enterprise in order to exploit the framework (Dey and Teasdale, 2016; Teasdale and Dey, 2019) whilst developing, engaging with and utilising different, self-generated worlds of meaning (Paton, 2003) as ways to disassociate themselves from governmental discourses around social entrepreneurship.

For Squash, this means that whilst, in order to attain funding, they must meet certain criteria that is dictated by funding bodies, their approach regularly challenges narratives of social entrepreneurship. As Becky described to me, through a "consciousness of checking in with your community [and] creating possibilities within that and creating the space within that" (Becky, interview), Squash are able to generate narratives that often challenge normative features of social enterprise, something that will be focused on throughout this data analysis.

Beyond their wider understanding of the social economy, Squash have always been careful to observe that whilst food aid and food banks are something that are necessary in modern Britain, they are not something that is desirable, and not something that should be normalised culturally (Clare, interview). Instead, Squash see their role as one to build more hopeful, positive accounts of possible food futures, enshrined in a Right to Food[19]. This approach changed somewhat as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, where Squash organised emergency food aid for volunteers and refugee families (working alongside Merseyside group Family Refugee Support Project (FRSP)). The urgency of the situation, as well as individuals being missed by more formal food aid meant that Squash felt that they could use their local knowledge to deliver aid in an effective way that was attentive to specific need.

[19] The declaration of a Right to Food would make the government directly responsible for addressing and eradicating hunger across the UK, following a seven-step process set out by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (available at: https://www.fao.org/3/i2250e/i2250e.pdf). The Right to Food is supported by campaign groups, trade unions and various food groups across the UK. In January 2021, Liverpool became the first UK city to declare a Right to Food when the city council called for the right to be incorporated into the National Food Strategy.

Figure 11- Squash's 'Soup-it-forward' scheme, a 'buy-it-forward' mechanism for supporting the local community. The organisation runs similar 'shop-it-forward' and 'veg-box-it-forward' schemes at different price points.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have focused on situating the research in place to provide a base for examining how Squash's place-based focus forms a fundamental part of their scope. Through engaging with the notion that spaces should be considered to be performative (Gregson and Rose, 2000; Cornwell, 2012), I have illustrated how community foodscapes are important contributors to diverse urban economies.

The chapter began with an examination of place, focusing on the city, area and street that the research is focused on. Here I paid particular attention to the diverse landscape of economic, political and cultural histories and present conditions of Liverpool and Liverpool 8. Building on this, I concentrated on the spaces of Windsor Street, focusing specifically on the importance of relations as constitutive within the development of the space (Turker and Murphy, 2019).

Following this, I provided a detailed introduction to the organisation of focus within this research, Squash. Here, a non-capitalocentric reading highlighted how transactions, labour and enterprise at Squash are performed in diverse ways. In this section, I also drew attention to the diverse spaces, structures, work, education and principles to highlight the organisation's role within a diverse economy.

This chapter has primarily sought to provide a platform from which the rest of this thesis will develop upon. In doing this, the rest of the thesis will seek to uncover how participants *feel* when

they engage with food and each other at Squash, and whether this feeling is tied to (non)capitalocentric conceptions of enterprise. Whilst primarily functioning as a 'stage setting' chapter, the engagement here has also begun to help address RQ1 and RQ3. By documenting the formation of a community food space at Squash and highlighting the relational and performative aspects of this space, I have begun to foreground what it is about these spaces that influence participants' experiences of food.

In the chapter that follows, I will develop this into a deeper perspective that explores the visceral encounters that ground Squash as an organisation. Edwards *et al*. describe how "peoples' engagement with food in turn influences the shape and feel of the city, fostering the potential to bring people either together or apart, to connect or repel people from having a connection to place" (2021:1). Taking this into account, the following chapters of this thesis will highlight how encounters with food at Squash form an important part of how political and economic space is imagined.

6: Visceral Transformation: Materiality, Embodiment and Food Choices

The processes through which people choose what to eat or how they engage materially with community food spaces are important for a variety of reasons. The diverse composition of lived experience of those who interact with Squash, the organisation upon which this thesis focuses, means that there are numerous entry points for individuals in the organisation and multiple experiences of taste. Developing upon this notion, in this chapter, I look to explore what draws certain people to organisations like Squash, but also what 'chills' them or turns them off (Guthman, 2008b; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). Food choices also help us to understand moral and symbolic boundaries around food, and to whom these boundaries concern (Johnston *et al*., 2011). This can help us explore, through our choices and engagements with food, how we become 'articulating subjects', where "through our enactment of practices we reforge new meanings, new identities for ourselves" (Probyn 2000:17).

In this chapter, I examine the importance of understanding visceral and corporeal engagements alongside community food practices, exploring how the "metabolic, material, fleshy connections consumers make with foodstuff inform their embodied knowledges" (Roe 2006:107) and, building upon this, what it is "about the sticky visceralities of practice that make worlds of difference" (Carolan 2016:142). Through a consideration of how affective geographies influence people's relationship with food, I begin to establish a basis for how visceral engagements can help us to frame political projects of social transformation (Probyn, 2000; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008).

From this, I explore the implications of embodied experiences, tastes and practices on how we think relationally about assemblages of diverse food economies, moving beyond knowing and into feeling (Carolan, 2016, 2011), as a way of generating new economic possibilities (Gibson-Graham, 2008). This involves a particular focus on feelings of trust and comfort, consolidating how everyday lived experiences of food can help us to construct more just and sustainable food systems (Carolan, 2011).

By developing these themes within this chapter, I build towards a recognition of how materials, flows and connections *beyond,* or more-than-food, are equally important parts of how my participants enjoy, share, reject, or become alienated by food experiences. Following Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008), as well as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Massey (2013), this argument is not based on individualising or essentialising forms of *being political;* rather it adopts a *radically*

relational perspective on the messy and unstructured ways bodies interact in the production of the everyday. Engaging with Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy's (2015) PEB framework introduced in Chapter 3, I explore the connectedness of visceral experience, structural forces and knowledge production in the production and reproduction of the material body.

Healy *et al*. (2020) discuss how diverse economies thinking is concerned with focusing attention on *another imaginary* of the subject. For them, this imaginary is defined through an openness to affect, a capacity to act ethically, and desire to experiment with forms of social, economic and ecological organisation that further enable these capacities. Integrating this with the themes of transformation linked to the 'tendencies and latencies' developed through embodied relations to food (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy in Cook *et al*., 2010) that are displayed in this chapter, I suggest that forming perspectives on *diverse visceral imaginaries* allows a lens through which to research the diverse social and bodily experiences related to different bodily futures.

The chapter begins with an examination of recognition and learning about food. It engages with the diverse visceral processes of participants in the study, exploring how bodies are 'tuned' and 're-tuned' to different foods (Carolan, 2015). Following this, I draw perspectives on how taste is negotiated by individual participants and begin to highlight the diverse approaches undertaken at Squash to different tastes.

The following section builds on these themes, examining the role of experimentation and familiarity in the contexts of affects related to comfort and trust. From this, I offer thoughts for what this means in the context of diverse economies thinking, namely how we understand the visceral in the context of subjectivity shifts.

6.1 "Just taste it before you criticise it": Recognition, Viscerality and Learning

This section seeks to engage with the importance of identification and viscerality in how my participants *learn to be affected* by diverse food experiences. The analysis here highlights the importance of visceral difference in how food is experienced, before beginning to explore the role of viscerality in transforming tastes. The section starts by exploring the visceral processes of identification undertaken by participants at Squash. I then examine the significance of difference when considering alternative and diverse visceral imaginaries.

6.1.1 Recognition

> "*Food that is recognisable as food is really important."*
>
> *Clare, Co-director (Interview, October 2020)*

During our interview, I asked Clare, the Squash co-director, where she thought the importance of the food offer at Squash lies. As per the quote above, Clare made direct reference to the visual recognition of food, aligning the act of eating with that of material experiences of the constitution of food. Roe (2006a) argues that the materiality of food is something that becomes 'processually emergent' (see also Latham and McCormack, 2004) rather than concretely tangible, and therefore, a thing (a foodstuff in this instance) can be made meaningful in terms of its edibility through discursive and non-discursive practices. Clare's reference to importance through being visual and sensorially 'recognisable' here highlights her perspective on how she understands food, as well as the material terms with which she wants people to engage with food at Squash. For her, food that resembles the (primarily) plant that it grew as, denotes an acceptance of edibility.

This is a position that is not always shared by all participants in Squash's projects. Contrastingly, for example, on separate occasions, participants told me a purple carrot, a kohlrabi, or a Romanesco cauliflower grown or sold in Squash were materials they didn't recognise as foodstuffs [Fieldnotes, various dates; Patrick, interview, January 2021]. This highlights the diversity of visceral experience with what is 'recognisable' as food, as well as the significance of learning within this process.

Figures 12 and 13 – Various dried bean seeds and artwork depicting the lifecycle of the Squash plant. The Squash building features regular examples of attempts to connect consumers with life of food before it reaches the shop. [Photo credit: Squash (Fig. 12) and author (Fig. 13)]

From this, Clare further articulated the importance of visual recognition and how certain connections to food processes develop personal attunement towards foodstuffs:

> *"It is people being connected to it [food] and people wanting to be connected to their food."*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *"The fact we've got this garden where you can **see** stuff growing. As soon as we can we're going to get it [growing] out there and up and down the street. The more you can **see**, it's an **emotional connection**, it's your understanding of self as a **being** on the earth. It's so important to be able to see that there is a seed in the spring, then the sun helps it grow."*
>
> *Clare, Co-director (Interview, October 2020, emphasis added)*

In these statements, Clare illustrates the significance of a 'connection' to food. This connection again implies an alignment with the transformation of food from seed to plate, but also with an emotional connection to the materiality of the foodstuff. It represents an experience of *doing* food beyond simply *knowing* it (Carolan, 2016). This, for Clare, involves a material engagement with the human and non-human assemblages that constitute the food system.

As a result, Squash's approach to food consumption considers how participants learn to *feel* food in a multisensory way. When inside the building or in the community garden space, the sights, smells, and tastes of what is being grown or cooked is never far away: a space where food is growing is

always visible, as is an area of food cooking and its associated smells [Fieldnotes, various dates]. The freshness of food, and from this, its perceived 'better' qualities (Jackson *et al*., 2019), is always presented sensorially through the display of fruit and vegetables, and through baked goods (See Figures 14 and 15). This allows the food to pass a multisensory 'test' before becoming integrated into the body, an approach that is arguably lacking in the more sensorially-removed supermarket or fast-food environment (Roe, 2006b; see also Guthman, 2002) of plastic packaging and click and collect. Clare, and the wider Squash team, view this as an important part of their approach to food engagement; an approach that unpacks the intrinsic materiality of food and looks for ways to both acknowledge and develop bodily experiences of food when interacting with the organisation.

Figure 14- Seasonal vegetables are presented in a way that facilitates multisensory engagement. As few foods as possible are pre-packaged and food can be touched and smelt before eating. This enables visitors to learn more about the food they will consume. [Photo credit: Squash]

Figure 15 -Fresh bread is placed in baskets in front of the counter in the shop, rather than behind it as is common in many bakeries. This enables customers and visitors to smell, look at and even touch the bread before eating it. [Photo credit: Squash]

A key aspect of unpacking the materiality of food for Squash is a focus on seasonality. Clare described to me how seasonal produce links with visceral recognition in the following excerpt:

> *"I think seasonality is really really really important because people can actually see… it's another tool for people to see food growing and go 'oh yes there are actually apples growing at this time of year, there are apples and we are doing things with apples'. It's a brilliant educative tool. […] Things taste better in their right season. People really know, that if they get a strawberry in February, which you can get, it's not going to taste as good as if it's come in June. And people know that. […] I think seasonality just makes so much sense. For me, if you're not doing seasonal food, you're buying into the Tesco system of anything is available, at any point, to anybody. It's not true, it's not working. It's much better that we can show the plenty of the garden."*
>
> *Clare, Co-director (Interview, October 2020)*

The existence of a multisensory connection to consumption here again places importance on *feeling* or *doing* food, as well as exploring how embodied practices can link more directly to a challenge of large agribusiness (Wilbur and Gibbs, 2020). By underlining the importance of how the strawberry tastes, or the apple tree looks, Clare challenges the sensorially removed nature of pre-packaged or pre-prepared food. With the viscerally connected role of seasonality in the food at Squash, we can also see how urban spaces can become platforms for visible political statements in the food landscape, making the *doing* of food a form of activism (Pottinger, 2013; Carolan, 2016). Whilst academic commentary has recognised enactments of seasonality as a means to increase desirability through temporal rhythms through the year (Jackson *et al*., 2019), Clare instead argues that seasonal food is something that is offered because it "makes so much sense" (Clare, interview). Rather than pitching seasonality as 'high-status practice' (Huddart-Kennedy *et al*., 2019), this view considers the 'ordinary' practices of ethical consumption, and contests how community food initiatives and contexts "work discursively and relationally to construct this alternative as expensive and exclusive rather than healthy food or family food" (Blake *et al*., 2010:422). Instead, through attempts to create discourses of the ordinary or the everyday around their food through an emphasis on accessibility and simplicity, Squash engage with diverse means of engagement.

Clare also notes that "seasonal food, it's going to be cheaper" (Clare, Co-director; Interview, October 2020), arguing that the simplicity of sourcing seasonally available produce can provide a way of disentangling ethical consumption from high-status practice. This potentially provides an avenue for sustainable practice to be moved away from a "conception of the individual as the locus of change" (Middlemiss, 2011:1170), looking instead towards a refocusing around how communities can address challenges of sustainable consumption.

Figure 16 – Seasonal tomato jam sold in the Squash shop is presented to followers on social media alongside the plant that it grew from. [Photo credit: Squash]

Focus on seasonality as part of an ethical food offer does pose some problems, however. During my time conducting fieldwork as a volunteer during the 'hungry gap[20]', I noted the change in material composition of much of the produce arriving at Squash, from carrots going mushy, to potatoes and onions sprouting. Jackson *et al*. (2019) note that freshness is most often perceived through sight and touch with properties attached to fresh food beyond mundane technical assessments, whilst Waitt and Phillips (2016) argue that the affective forces triggered by sensory engagement can prompt revaluations of edibility. For example, when David, a volunteer and local resident, tells me part of the pleasure he gets from food at Squash is his embodied knowledge that the food is "fresh from the ground" (Field notes, February 2020), he is evaluating the mud on the potatoes and being able to touch each individual vegetable. Here, we can witness the materiality present in his food choices. Whilst seasonal and local food remains an important aim of Squash, the spring period poses problems with how this freshness and even edibility linked to seasonality can be performed. Whilst a desire for more 'authentic' food can be a motivating factor for seasonal or local consumption (Autio *et al*., 2013), when this is met with a period of the year when quality and choice diminishes,

[20] The hungry gap in British agriculture historically represents the time of year (roughly March-May) when produce stores run low and winter crops such as cabbage have bolted, but before the early summer crops are ready to harvest. The ill effects of this period have largely been alleviated by the introduction of mass-imported produce from around the world.

consumers may be driven elsewhere. Whilst the timing of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that more research on this was not possible, it could offer an avenue for further investigation.

6.1.2 Encountering Food and Difference

The method of learning to feel food in different ways through practice is discussed in literature broadly through the lens of Latour's (2004) concept of *learning to be affected* as well as various iterations of becoming *tuned* to different foods (Guthman, 2008b; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010; Carolan, 2011, 2016). At Squash, these principles are also experienced in the space and community therein;

> *I was [initially] like fuck that, I'd rather be dead than eat that. But in the kitchen they were like just taste it before you criticise it. And I tasted it and I couldn't get enough of it. You know some of the foods, and the sauces and dishes and all that, [it's] nice food. And they're always like taste some, have some of that.*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *What I've learnt is like not to knock anything back anymore. Not to doubt any taste or food or anything. Even what it looks like. Cos when I first went in there I was like fuck that… Do you understand what I mean?*
>
> *David, Volunteer / Local Resident (Interview, November 2020)*
>
> *I've never once eaten a thing in Squash and thought 'I'm not into that'. Everything has just been great. But if I was to pick out one thing [that is memorable] it would be the pakora curry, I think. Because I've never had it before.*
>
> *Daniel, Volunteer (Interview, September 2020)*

Whilst Daniel, in the extract above, illustrates his immediate openness to new tastes, David conversely articulates his need to become comfortable through feeling food gradually. This stark visceral difference evidences how individuals experience food differently and why alternative and community food initiatives should pay close attention to this difference. Hayes-Conroy and Martin (2010) discuss how the relations between environments and different bodies create feelings that turn people 'off' or 'on' to a cause. In this instance, we can see that David's initial bodily reaction to Squash's food space is one of hesitancy, reluctance or even disdain, dismissing the material edibility of food (Roe, 2006b) in that specific environmental context. Similar reflections were made at various

points in my field diary, where participants discussed with each other how they "would never have eaten this before" in reference to a potato, celeriac and mouli salad [Fieldnotes, January 2020] as well as oft repeated sarcastic references to "…not more vegetables?" [Fieldnotes, February 2020].

Developing this further, let us return here to the description of experiencing ice cream that Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy use to explain how perception of taste differs, covered earlier in the thesis:

> *"The sweet taste of ice cream is not decidedly uplifting for all minded bodies; rather, memory, perception, cognitive thinking, historical experience, and other material relations and immaterial forces all intersect with individuals' sensory grasp of the world, complicating one's visceral experience of the ice cream eating event."* (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008:465)

This reading of food encounters is useful here. For instance, David's instinctive dismissal of food, contrasted with Daniel's immediate acceptance of new tastes, illustrates the importance of understanding difference in how individuals experience food. Learning how individuals encounter the social and material dimensions of eating helps us to understand how community food initiatives can encourage or deter participation. The unknown characteristics of the pakora curry, like the ice cream in Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy's example, evokes an unpredictable and viscerally distinct experience. Throughout my own research, I saw this through the wide-ranging responses to meals in the Grapes Garden group. Whilst some participants would readily consume whatever foodstuff that was put in front of them, others would only select familiar food (i.e. breads or rice), or even occasionally attempt to avoid the mealtime in its entirety, either through claiming to be too busy with gardening or kitchen tasks, or by leaving the session early to go home [Fieldnotes, various dates].

By interpreting difference in food experience through the visceral realm, we can better understand how community food initiatives that are focused on the provision of 'alternative' food can take a more careful and considered approach towards how people eat. David's experience also speaks to a gradual process of becoming *tuned* (Carolan, 2015, 2011) towards eating the food at Squash, where initial repulsion transforms into acceptance and then pleasure as part of a shifting embodied encounter (Goodman, 2016). His experience shows the transformative potential of understanding how *diverse visceral imaginaries,* that consider how 'tendencies and latencies' develop through embodied relations to food, can rework how we approach the construction of bodily futures (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy in Cook *et al*., 2010).

In other conversations with David, I learned from him that he believes the incorporation of food from Squash into his diet makes him 'feel better' (Fieldnotes, February 2020) when compared to his previous diet. When I asked him why he thought that, he focused largely on perceived freshness with food 'not sitting for days in plastic on a supermarket shelf' (Fieldnotes, February 2020). Similar reflections came from Eve, who highlighted the importance of buying "fresh, organic stuff that the local supermarket… doesn't stock" (Eve, Customer; Interview, January 2020) and Max, a volunteer who exclaimed "that smells so fresh and tasty" when the first herbs of the year were brought into the kitchen [Fieldnotes, February 2020]. We can also see from these comments, as well as David's comments earlier, how flavour (Watson and Cooper, 2019) and an enactment of freshness (Jackson *et al*., 2019) become motivating forces for participation in activities at Squash. David's discussion of a 'good' feeling, related to the consumption of 'good' food, or Max's connection between 'fresh' and 'tasty', shows how individuals elicit specific feelings that are engendered through encounters with food (Hayes-Conroy and Martin, 2010).

David's experience also reflects the importance of the practice of tasting in informing food choices, as a part of the assemblage of affect, emotions and meanings in food (Goodman, 2016) . Through the action of 'taste this', David engages with both a "practical activity and its representations" (Warde 2005:134), as both the sensations and performances of taste become "the gatekeeper to consumption" (Guthman, 2002:299). As David became more familiar and comfortable with the food at Squash, he would get a fruit and vegetable box to take home after volunteering. He would usually take the majority of the box to his sister's house, who would normally cook a Scouse, casserole or other 'hearty' dish with the ingredients and box up a few portions for David to eat through the week. David would tell me that he would not know what to do with the vegetables himself, but would trust his sister to provide something tasty from the produce.

Despite not yet being conceived as edible to David, the material content of his vegetable box is still representative of his socio-economic engagement with food (Hall *et al*., 2020). Whilst eating is considered a mundane practice, we can see through this instance how it can represent the politically performative nature of David's subjectivity around food (Longhurst *et al*., 2009). Here, David's distrust in his own cooking, which literature often ties to gender and class (Guthman, 2003; Johnston and Szabo, 2011), coupled with the newly developed practice of how he approaches transforming produce into food are representative of the role of embodiment within his food choices (Carolan, 2011; Warde, 2016). Whilst he feels incapable of having the skills and experience to materially transform produce into a meal himself, his trust of either his sister's or Squash's cooking evidences a embodied connection to the site of eating through the development of visceral practices.

Contrastingly, Daniel refers to an engagement that doesn't require such visceral 're-tuning' (Carolan, 2015) instead engaging as a body that is tuned towards 'alternative' food tastes. Daniel was a volunteer at Squash, who engaged with the organisation after learning about them as part of an architecture module at university. During his interview, he spoke of how he and his girlfriend carefully made food choices at Squash, focusing on perceptions of bodily and planetary health, engaging as a *consciously reflexive* eater (Guthman, 2003). His exclamation of joy from having never tried a foodstuff denotes a foregrounded connection with the food present at Squash, food that to others may seem unusual, or even alien.

Social difference such as the examples presented in this section, can complicate material encounters with food (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008), with particular attention needed to be paid to how "foods link up with ideas, memories, sounds, visions, beliefs, past experiences, moods, worries and so on, all of which combine to become material" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy in Cook *et al*. 2010:113). Here, as part of a rhizomatic or networked linkage to food choice (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013), taste is informed through myriad interactions within human and non-human spheres and through discursive and non-discursive elements. Whilst it is impossible to pay attention to all of these 'non-representative' moments (Thrift, 2008) within the visceral register, we can begin to unravel how visceral differences form a fundamental part of how food is experienced, and as a result, how it should be approached by those who want to generatively address systemic food issues.

This section has engaged with the identification and enjoyment of food using examples of diverse visceral engagements from participants in this research. It has sought to highlight the importance of visceral difference in how food is experienced, as well as the ongoing processes involved with changing tastes. The following section builds on this, examining the role of familiar and unfamiliar tastes in building vital feelings of trust and comfort within a community food space.

6.2 From 'Scouse' to 'Turmeric Tonic': Negotiating the Familiar and the Unexpected

Whereas the previous section examined sensorial encounters with food, this section builds upon this to explore experiences of how Squash negotiate tastes in order to facilitate more purposive relationships between individuals and healthy, sustainable and ethical food. Here, I specifically examine the impact of (un)familiarity and experimentation in building affects related to comfort and

trust in participants; highlighting the role that these affects have in nurturing diverse visceral imaginaries.

6.2.1 Careful Experimentation

A fundamental aspect of the organisation's scope is their careful approach to experimentation through taste and flavour. Although, on the surface, experimentation is encouraged at any opportunity, I noted with the previously introduced Grapes volunteer group that careful planning around taste-related food choices is a subconsciously integrated part of the communal eating event. Particularly noteworthy is how tastes are accommodated for in different ways. The following excerpts are drawn from observations made during the Friday communal meal in the Grapes Garden, introduced in the previous chapter.

> *Volunteers are given an option for a spicy or a non-spicy version of the Ful Mudammes. This comes from the cook's experience, as some of the group have refused to eat food with even a little bit of spice in before. The cook seems to pre-empt potential issues here.*
> *Fieldnotes, November 2019*

The previous excerpt provides an example of how different tastes are accommodated at Squash. Whilst this can mean more work for those cooking, it provides a welcoming atmosphere for participants through the medium of taste. However, whilst individual preferences are always acknowledged, they are not always enacted:

> *As the food is being served, Dorothy, a volunteer, asks Deborah, the lead chef, whether the dish has any chilli in it. Deborah replies no, but then she turns and winks at the rest of the group. Most of the group seemed to have learnt by now that Dorothy will usually eat what is put in front of her, so long as she perceives it to contain ingredients that she is comfortable with.*
>
> *Fieldnotes, March 2020*

Here, a particularly fussy participant receives different treatment from the cooks. Learned experience in this instance means that Dorothy's taste differs, depending on her perception of the content of the meal. Long-term engagement here provides the cook with the experience necessary to successfully negotiate the situation.

In the first excerpt, the choices made by the session leaders and cooks pre-empt a negative visceral response to food. In the second, preconceived notions of taste and familiarity form an important

part of how the meal is construed by the individual. Through the example of spiciness given in the two excerpts above, we can see how an individual articulates their relation to a foodstuff can foreground feelings and emotional connection to the site of eating (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013). Here, emotional comfort as well as bodily assimilation of food through flavour and taste are important ways in which the meal event is performed, at least in the mind of the subject. In this instance, the individual feels a threat from a spicy taste, and an emotional perception of its harm (Ahmed, 2004).

The threat of negative taste is not always negotiated carefully by the session cook, as the following examples demonstrate:

> *As Max is cooking, I make the group a batch of lemon and ginger tea to use up excess ginger from the shop stock. A couple of people were immediately reluctant to try it, and a few of the group comment on its almost medicinal smell, but everyone tasted it eventually after an initial few take a cup. If some of the group can be convinced to try something, most of the others will intuitively follow.*
>
> *Fieldnotes February 2020*

In the excerpt above, the group follow the example set by their peers, despite being initially trepidatious about tasting something. There is evidence here of a trust in the judgement of others in the group, where perception of positive taste is shared. This tends to mean that the group are accepting of new flavours and even cooking techniques, even when there is widespread reluctance. Of additional relevance here is my attempt to make pancakes alongside the group (see 4.2.1 for discussion). Here, the group were happy to dispute what they consider to be bad practice in the cooking of pancakes, as well as express discontent with certain approaches, again indicating a confidence in their collective judgement of taste.

As I discussed in the methods chapter of this thesis, during the pre-pandemic, participatory phase of my fieldwork, because of my prior experience working with food, I was sometimes asked by the session leader to help lead on certain small cooking tasks, such as those noted above. This formed an unexpected, but nonetheless useful dimension of using my body as an 'instrument of research' (Longhurst *et al*., 2008), as well as providing an insight into how embodied methods can reveal food politics (Wilbur and Gibbs, 2020). It is worth, in this instance, revisiting my own, often more clumsy experiences with introducing my own tastes to the group, with the previous discussion of how the experienced garden cook carefully negotiates diverse tastes. Whilst, as noted earlier in this section,

the regular session cook is able to carefully traverse the sticky issue of spiciness between different members of the group, I approach cooking unconsciously unaware of the diversity of visceral perception and experience across the group, as well as the agency of my own embodied practices (Wilbur and Gibbs, 2020). As such, the reception to my food preparation and planning in these instances was lukewarm. Whilst I didn't necessarily improve my ability to traverse tastes with participants during my research, it was something that I became reflexively aware of as the fieldwork progressed. As such, I was able to identify more opportunities to press participants on their food choice, as well as their emotive and corporeal responses to certain foods, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

> *The cook asks me to try to beat out the lumps in the big pan of thick polenta with a whisk, a thankless task that doesn't truly get resolved and the polenta has to be served lumpy. The thick, heavy mixture looks thoroughly unappealing, and I can sense the people around the pot looking uneasily at the mixture inside. The overriding smell, however, is one of a hearty, warming dish. Prior to eating, I ask a volunteer sitting next to me, who I had noticed looking suspiciously at the pan, about their expectations of the dish. They replied that they didn't think the texture looked nice, but still wanted to try it.*
>
> *Fieldnotes, March 2020*

Here, the excerpt illustrates how, using multisensory judgement with visual and olfactory approaches, participants form an opinion on the edibility of a dish. Despite looking unappealing, the smell of the polenta, as well as the trust in the skills of the cook, mean that participants are willing to try a food. This discussion also lends credence to the importance of everyday practices that establish and consolidate relationships at Squash for informing food choices. In the excerpt below, two participants discussed with me their expectations around the food cooked at Squash, and how this affects their perception of taste.

> *I ask John about ingredients such as mouli and tahini, which are part of the dish today. He replies: "No, [I don't know what they are], but I'll eat pretty much anything they put in front of me here'. Jean adds to this and tells me that because the food is always good here [at the Grapes group sessions]; she doesn't hesitate before tucking into new foods.*
>
> *Fieldnotes, January 2020*

Again, the comments from both excerpts above are suggestive that the food practices at Squash help to nurture different, or 'alternative' tastes in careful and considered way. Both examples here note an implicit trust in the food that they are served at Squash. Despite not recognising the

material properties of every food that is put in front of them, they are prepared to accept it as edible, and likely to be delicious. This aligns with Roe (2006b), who discusses how properties of edibility are difficult to apprehend, because it is something that is performed or enacted, and as such, it is important to observe what people *do* with a foodstuff.

At Squash, the communal meals provided an opportunity to see the willingness of the group to accept edibility from new tastes. Talking to John and Jean, as above, whilst they happily tuck into their potato, celeriac and mouli salad dressed in tahini, provided more of an insight into the transformation of tastes. These interactions highlight the creation of shared and relational spaces at the organisation. Here, participants' embodied knowledges and visceral experiences "solidify or shift material and discursive connections to 'healthy' food" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2015:663). For these participants, this means developing both an implicit cognitive trust in the food served, but also a corporeal acceptance to it as an edible material.

At Squash, this is an ongoing process, developed through strategies of long-term engagement with a core group. As noted in the previous section, Squash present a multisensory setting for eating, where individuals can experience the various phases of a foodstuff's lifespan. This helps to traverse unfamiliar tastes. Flavours are introduced slowly and carefully, particularly with those who are sceptical. Once individuals have been convinced to try a tomato or strawberry growing in the garden, the pathway to eating plants such as mouli, or sharks-fin melon (both grown in the garden), becomes much easier.

6.2.2 The Unexpected: Turmeric Tonic

After establishing how unusual flavours are introduced to participants at Squash, let us now consider a specific flavour. In our interview, Mel discussed 'turmeric tonic', a drink that was widely considered unusual but tasty to those who tried it. The following quote highlights some of the unusual flavours contained in the drink:

> *"And obviously you [initially] think, oh that's really weird having like pepper and orange together and apple together and [then you taste it and] it works and it's really nice, yeah."*
>
> *Mel, Freelancer (Interview, January 2021)*

Mel is discussing 'turmeric tonic', a drink consisting of fresh turmeric, ginger root, lemon juice, apple juice and ground pepper that Squash make and then sell in their shop and regularly give away tasters of to those around the building or participating in their events. Some describe the taste as 'gentle

and earthy' (Lis, Customer; Interview, December 2020), others 'punchy' (Mel, Freelancer; Interview, January 2021), whilst for others it is 'unusual to try' (Patrick, Customer; Interview, January 2021). Whilst its material properties are generally considered to be unfamiliar, it is evidently one of the most popular items at Squash, with the discussion around the drink during interviews largely emerging unprompted. How, as a fluid material, the drink goes from a perception of 'weird' to 'really nice' however is an important question when considering how tastes can be traversed. This attends to Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy's (2010) notion of the *biosocial,* combining the ever-shifting biological and social elements of how we eat food as a way of understanding visceral differences.

Figure 17- The turmeric tonic and some of its constituent ingredients [Photo credit: Squash]

This can also be observed through again highlighting the importance of visceral experience. In the following quote, Eve linked the aromas that she associated with the turmeric drink with visceral memories growing up:

> *"There's something about the smell that has … you know it's olfactory connection to Squash really I think, yeah, it's … it's the pantry smell, it reminds me of home when I was a child and you know one of the things is the turmeric"*
> *Eve, Customer (Interview, January 2021)*

Through Eve's comments, we can observe how both lived experiences and non-representational

knowledge forms an important part of her engagement with the drink. Whilst for others, they have had to learn to feel familiar with the drink, Eve noted an immediate association with sensory memories of childhood. We can see here the role of social representation in differing visceral experience, where "representations join and become part of old memories, new intensities, triggers, aches, tempers, commotions, tranquilities" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008:467). In Eve's case, this means that the social representations associated with turmeric tonic drink leads to a very different visceral encounter to say, the Grapes volunteers highlighted in the previous section, who would be significantly less familiar with the flavour profiles and cultural associations of the drink's taste. Watson and Cooper (2019) highlight how 'smell memories' are more emotional and evocative than memories drawn from other senses. This has important implications for how we consider taste as something as learned and malleable, with wider considerations of how different senses have different emotive roles in the development of visceral experiences.

Learned engagement with unfamiliar tastes also becomes part of the everyday for some participants. In my interview with her, Megan discussed with me how she learnt how to make the turmeric tonic at Squash, but now mostly makes it at home as a way to save money [Megan, Volunteer; Interview, November 2020]. Again, we can observe here how practices of *doing* food can create embodied knowledges (Sarmiento, 2017). Through learning to both make and enjoy tasting the drink whilst volunteering at Squash, Megan then transfers the acquired cognitive and embodied knowledge into her everyday life at home, allowing visceral experiences acquired at Squash to traverse space into the home and the everyday.

6.2.3 Building Comfort

Expanding on participants' experiences with the turmeric tonic, I will now explore how the wider entanglement of experimentation and comfort at Squash is revealed. How different people engage with food at Squash evidences a space that is open to a diverse range of food choices. As Clare explained to me:

> *"It doesn't really matter who eats what here… And you know we don't push it down people's throats."*
>
> *Clare, Co-director (Interview, October 2020)*

This is a guiding principle of how Squash have found success in engaging with different groups within the local community. Whilst food, and its material impact on the body is important, of equal

importance is the creation of a space that facilitates comfort, through a variety of different approaches. Clare uses an example of why food choices form only a small part of Squash's work:

> *"I absolutely love it when Barbara comes in [to Squash] with her Diet Coke […] it's just great. She feels really comfortable here and that is absolutely brilliant. Success. I'm still never going to sell that food [sic] here, but that's alright."*
>
> *Clare, Co-director (Interview, October 2020)*

Clare is talking here about a local resident who has been involved with Squash's activities for a number of years. The meaning and purpose of Squash to her is not necessarily one of food discovery, or even the provision of food, but as a space to come and engage with other members of the community, over a coffee, or a diet Coke. Clare highlights the desire for people to 'feel comfortable' in the space of Squash. This involves not falling into the common trap of alternative food practice of dismissing the enjoyment of fast food, or in this case Diet Coke, as *inferior*, or consumed through an *incapable* body (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). Instead, by promoting comfortability in a setting, Squash are trying to address feelings of rejection within alternative food through enacting ecologies of care (Carolan, 2015) without positioning participants as "objects of education" (Guthman, 2007:78).

This provides an interesting contrast to the findings of Hayes-Conroy (2010:740), who argues that alternative food practices (in her example, Slow Food in the US) can create situations where bodily articulations are deemed to be 'true statements' of taste, while other tastes are dismissed as wrong. Instead, whilst remaining steadfast in her own view of Diet Coke, Clare deliberately takes an approach that does not dismiss tastes that could be deemed oppositional, or external to, the work that Squash do. Guthman (2003) reflects on the issues with binary framings of fast food and slow/organic food, criticising the oversimplification of a complex assemblage of power within food networks. It is at this juncture that Squash offer an avenue for further exploration; specifically through how they engage with how diverse foodscapes can be formed in ways that deconstruct dualistic tendencies of *knowing* good food, and build into *feeling* diverse pathways (Carolan, 2016).

Similar reflections were made in my fieldwork during social eating events with the Grapes volunteer group at Squash. Whilst the food served by Squash at the events was almost always vegetable-focused, and considered 'healthy', those involved regularly brought along food and drink from the home, either for themselves, or more regularly, to share with the group. Upon arrival at the Friday sessions, I was always greeted with the offer of a cup of tea, as well as a selection of biscuits or cakes bought from the supermarket by one volunteer. Other times, volunteers would bring in chocolate or

cakes to share informally with me and others before and after the main meal. Meanwhile, some volunteers brought along fizzy drinks, that they would take a sip from occasionally during sessions. These mundane, 'quiet acts' (Smith and Jehlička, 2013; Pottinger, 2017) of resistance against a backdrop of health-focused food practices, show us the importance of not attempting to universalise a 'right' way of eating, or as DuPuis and Goodman frame it, a "politics of perfection" (2005:362) whilst attempting to sustain links with the familiar and familial (Smith and Harvey, 2021) in the construction of eating space.

Building comfort in eating also extends to other spaces in the organisation. In the following quote, Nina explained to me how, through a different type of engagement with comfort in a space, Squash could engage with individuals who weren't tuned towards community food spaces:

> *"So some people wouldn't go and eat in there or shop in there [Squash], it's not in their price range, it's not in their kind of … it goes beyond their cultural norms to eat food … the kind of food that Squash are cooking but they would go there to do something with their children or they would go there … go if there was story-telling or if there was … as we would discover if it's poetry or if there's a drawing or if there's a … craft and design activity, then it gives people another reason to go to a community centre and then whilst they're there, they get hungry, they get given a soup or a coffee or they go and buy and soup or a coffee and then it does enable them to sort of mesh it into the food offer."*
>
> *Nina, Freelancer (Interview, January 2021)*

Nina is a local artist, who has worked in a freelance capacity at Squash for a number of years, often running sessions such as the ones she refers to here. In the quote above, Nina highlights the importance of these events and materials in bridging individuals with different foodscapes. Through a recognition that "food and food movements come to feel differently in different bodies as a result of inner-connected biological and social forces" (Hayes-Conroy, 2010:2956), as well as an acknowledgement that "food can never be universal, because taste will always be differential and particular" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008:468), Squash seek to approach engagement as a platform for individuals to connect with new political and economic subjectivities.

Whilst these slow processes of comfort building during events at Squash were commonplace, it is also important to note that for others an engagement with healthy food was something that to them felt natural. One customer, for example, discussed with me how it "felt normal to walk into wholefood shops" [Lis, Customer; Interview, December 2020]. Another interviewee expressed how they felt that they could "just like take my foot off the pedal and relax and feel nourished" [Tabitha,

Freelancer; Interview, December 2020] when entering the building. This allows us to revisit the concept of bodies being 'tuned' towards certain food practices (Carolan, 2015). Lis' background was one of close links to ethical food consumption- she had been a vegetarian since her twenties and was involved in a wholefoods cooperative as a student in Nottingham in the 1980's. As such, we can note the 'visceral processes of identification' with how Lis interacts in the spaces of alternative food, which Hayes-Conroy and Martin (2010) describe as an identification beyond cognitive labels to implicate the entire body. Through feeling 'normal' in the space, these participants all speak of a *visceral attunement* towards food practices like Squash's whereby comfort is already established. This group, however, hold less significance for me in this research, as they speak less to the transformative practices at Squash than individuals whose eating practices have changed as a result of the organisation.

6.2.4 The Familiar: Scouse

Building on a discussion of how 'imperfect' food practices can create environments of comfort, it is also important to highlight how familiarity played an important part in how Squash cultivated new tastes. An example of Scouse, the local dish introduced in Chapter 5, provides a useful insight into this process.

During a volunteer event to celebrate Wassail [21], I asked John about what he thinks of the event and the food. 'Not this rubbish again' he replied, with a roll of his eyes [Fieldnotes, January 2020]. For some of the group, many of what would be considered *alternative* practices surrounding food are not something that they immediately, or occasionally ever, warm to. Therefore, how tastes are negotiated by community food initiatives like Squash becomes vital to the scale of their reach. The following excerpt elaborates upon this:

> *I ask John what food was going to be served today [at a separate community event he was attending in the area]. John responds: 'Scouse... and a meat one at that! And there's always pudding!'. He refers to it as **'proper food'** - when I question him on what he means by this, he explains that it is food that he (and others in the group) have **always** eaten. I talk to John about his opinions on the unfamiliar dishes that use what might be considered non-traditional ingredients that are served here, before asking for his thoughts on the*

[21] Wassailing is a traditional English practice where communities would visit orchards at the height of winter to perform recitals and songs, blessing the trees ahead of spring in order to receive a good harvest. In January 2020, Squash ran a pared back version of this, with a short trip to the community garden followed by an apple themed feast consisting of parsnip and apple soup, apple pie and apple cake.

development of the concept of 'Blind Scouse', a vegan alternative to Scouse that is served at Squash and throughout Liverpool. I ask him whether this still constitutes Scouse. He scoffs, and tells me that Scouse is a dish that is fundamentally from home but should ***always*** *be cheap meat and spare veg.*

Fieldnotes, February 2020

Through the dish of Scouse, we can see how John immediately associated a dish with home, and from that, comfortability and belonging. John's focus on absolutes such as 'always' is clear here, referencing a specific way that he perceives his food should be eaten. This lends itself to an understanding of a dish that is defined by individual tastes and identity, as well the collective tastes of the home, offering an example of identity narratives being both individual and collective (Yuval-Davis, 2006). John's description speaks to his own culinary heritage and 'place-belongingness' (Antonsich, 2010) as a 'Scouser'.

Figure 18- An example of the 'Blind Scouse' dish served in the Squash café, The dish is a vegetarian interpretation of the classic Liverpudlian meal. [Photo credit: Squash]

The dish Scouse was perhaps the meal that came up most frequently during everyday conversations during my in-person fieldwork at Squash. Participants told me that "my Nan makes the best Scouse" (Fieldnotes, February 2020) was a common refrain heard whilst growing up, whilst another participant was alarmed to find out that Squash included mushrooms in their Christmas Scouse: "you don't put mushrooms in a Scouse!" (Fieldnotes, January 2020). Kierans and Haeney (2010) describe how Scouse is a dish where meaning and identity is ascribed by those who consume the dish,

something that is reflected here.

During both my fieldwork, and my prior experiences working with them, Squash's own version of 'blind Scouse' (the Scouse dish without its meat element) was cooked on numerous occasions as a way to cheaply produce a communal meal with familiar flavours, using available vegetables, either from the garden, or that were left unsold in the shop. It was often the go-to dish for community cooking events, notably 'Disco Scouse', an initiative to materially teach children about food and cooking, or when providing a meal at a larger event. From the different occasions that Scouse was talked about by participants, we can see how the dish can be reflective of a feeling of belongingness across different geographic scales (Antonsich, 2010) as well as how different aspects of life can be ascribed meaning through eating (Probyn, 2000). Because of this, the dish can be used as a tool for engagement with healthy food by providing a bridge for many participants to the home, to cultural norms and to visceral memories.

6.2.5 Building on the Familiar: Linking Squash and the Home

The reference to Scouse was not the only time that the comfortability of 'home food' was mentioned in interviews. Julie spoke to me about how being encouraged by Clare to make banana jam from surplus bananas evoked visceral memories of growing up on Reunion Island.

> *That was like home for me because the kitchen smelt for like that time, the first time I made it, not anymore, but it smelt like home, like this place where I'm from, which you know everybody heard about but just never been and I'm like, this is like my house!*
> *Julie, Baker (Interview, December 2020)*

In this quote, Julie refers to an instance where she was encouraged to use excess bananas in the pantry, that were beginning to turn brown, into a jam. She is discussing here the visceral memories linked to the home that came from cooking the jam. Similarly, Fozia described cooking pilau rice at Squash through the aromas of the kitchen:

> *The smell when pilau rice is cooking, you know its pilau rice that is getting cooked. Because it's that burnt onion smell that goes around the house. […] It just brings childhood memories I think- that's how your mum cooked it sort of thing.*
>
> *Fozia, Chef (Interview, September 2020)*

Again, Fozia discussed the significance of how a smell in the Squash kitchen was linked to the home

and childhood. Both of these quotes offer precise examples of how the viscerality of food is "about its connections—inside, outside, gender, sexuality, *et al*—but also how food contains the emotional, the inexpressible, and the biological" (Goodman, 2008:12). Julie and Fozia's discussion of smell here raises the importance of how aromas link to, visceral perceptions of food as well as feelings of pleasure (Watson and Cooper, 2019). However, they both also link to visceral memories of the experiences of the home. Here the embodied nature of place-based memory connects directly to sensory experiences, but also to the concept of a 'moveable feast' (Duruz, 2010), where place-belongingness and the home can be rewritten across new environments.

These examples of how food can create a sense of home evidence how everyday food practices, based around sensory experience, can create performative politics of identity (Law, 2001). They also offer stories of how objects become "sticky, or saturated with affect" (Ahmed, 2004:11) in the kitchen. The 'burnt onion smell' for Fozia and the cooking of vanilla with bananas for Julie represents a distinctive emotional connection to the place of eating. Both Fozia and Julie, despite discussing an action situated in a commercial kitchen, link it to an experience of the home. Home, in this instance represents a "symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment" (Antonsich, 2010:646 developed from hooks, 2009:213) that is represented in a foodstuff. By facilitating a material connection to the home at Squash, the associated positive affects help to create a space that evokes comfort.

Whilst many experiences at Squash are closely linked to the home, usually through bringing 'home' into the commercial or community kitchen, the inverse of this transition (i.e. bringing unusual food to the home) does not always materialise in a positive manner, as the excerpt below demonstrates:

> *I speak to Jean whilst the food is being cooked. She tells me about how last spring she brought home some leftover nettle and wild garlic soup from the Grapes Garden sessions at Squash because she enjoyed it so much. Her husband was surprised that he enjoyed it despite its lack of meat. She goes on to describe how she then brought some back for her neighbours but didn't tell them what was in it. They really enjoyed it and asked what it was made of. When Jean said what it was, where it was from (the graveyard at St. James Gardens), and how it was acquired (foraged), her neighbours found it disgusting. It is interesting how what is now considered normal food to the group and myself, is still something that can provoke feelings of disgust and fear in others.*
>
> *Fieldnotes, November 2019*

Jean's story of introducing new flavours to her neighbours shows us a contrasting account of food's

comfortability. Her own articulated bodily experience of the soup differs significantly from that of her neighbours. Carolan (2011), building upon Latour's theory of 'learning to be affected' (2004), argues that our understanding of food and the food system is predicated on something we *do,* rather than something that is acquired objectively. In the instance of the soup made from foraged ingredients, we can see different reactive scales of how people are affected by the dish. In the first instance, the soup evokes feelings of comfortability and enjoyment, in the second, feelings of surprise, and in the third, emotions linked to disgust, or repulsion. This admittedly simplified account of the lived experience of food consumption shows us how social difference engages with the visceral realm to "materially complicate everyday personal–political experiences" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008:468). We can therefore recognise how each individual described in Jean's story act as 'articulating subjects' (Probyn, 2000), creating new identities and meanings from the expected and unexpected elements of the dish. If we acknowledge that the vitalism of food is socially constructed (Abbots, 2017), we can see how the different reactions here highlight the importance for alternative food initiatives in how they approach a careful 're-tuning' (Carolan, 2016, 2011) of taste, as well as the dangers of a misguided approach to engagement.

Whilst Jean's experience of returning unusual food to the home evidences how surprise can evoke negate emotional responses to food consumption, Brian discussed the role of the unexpected in his weekly shop at Squash:

> *So, something unusual turns up in the basket every week […] And so I suppose for me that kind of is what came into my head when you said what do I think of when I go to Squash- [it] is things I wouldn't normally [buy or eat] … I certainly wouldn't buy that because I have no idea what it is! It's not even from planet Earth!*
>
> *Brian, Customer (Interview, December 2020)*

Here, Brian is referring to a particularly unusual looking Turban squash from his weekly veg box that he had brought along as an object to talk about during our interview. For him, the surprising and unexpected elements of his veg box are part of what draws him to Squash. Uncovering an unfamiliar or unidentifiable foodstuff for him is not something that he perceives to be a barrier. Instead, a lack of recognition of a foodstuff provokes curiosity in Brian, and a desire to try new tastes. In other instances, participants were less inspired to experiment with new tastes at home:

"Almost every time I come here, I try something new", John tells me, "but I'll still go home and have a ham sandwich when I get back"

Fieldnotes, November 2019

For this volunteer, while Squash represents a space of willing experimentation, the home for him is a space of familiar tastes and experiences. The 'ham sandwich' exists as an object that facilitates an embodied feeling of home through taste (Longhurst *et al*., 2009). Whilst his experience with Squash is one of general openness to new tastes, this is reflected only in a limited way in his eating habits. Throughout my in-person fieldwork, I had frequent conversations with John about how he interacted with food. I was particularly interested in speaking with John because of how, despite being a long-term volunteer with Squash, he frequently spoke of a general distrust or distaste towards the food that he was served there, coupled with a desire to talk about his home eating habits that were centred around what would be considered traditional working class English food. Whilst it seemed like much of this was communicated in a tongue-in-cheek way, his comments are noteworthy in that he was communicating that he did not feel comfortable being associated with the food served at Squash. Guthman (2002, 2003) highlights how certain groups of individuals, particularly linked to class, engage more commonly with experimental, more aesthetically-focussed approaches to food. This is something to consider when observing differing levels of engagement with community food practices - who are the individuals that take the practices and tastes home with them, and who are those whose experimentation is confined to the public space?

6.2.6 Surprise and Trust: Nurturing Subjects

Building on the previous discussion on familiarity and experimentation, it is important now to turn to the emotive and affective relations that these themes establish. Jarosz (2008) notes how alternative food networks are premised on themes of trust and personal interaction. This section will examine this in the context of Squash, focusing on the role that these themes, within community food spaces, have within 'the politics of the subject' (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

Tabitha described how surprise has been an important aspect of leading cookery workshops at Squash:

"People have been surprised [by the food they have eaten at Squash]. And there are often surprises, people surprised by enjoying a soup with garlic in it or lentils in it, or enjoying a soup without meat."

Tabitha, Freelancer (Interview, December 2020)

In contrast to some of the previous experiences with comfortability, familiarity and food, Tabitha notes the importance of surprise in Squash's work. We can see from Tabitha's explanation how affects like surprise, in this instance, can be attached to other affects like joy (Sedgwick, 2003, Thrift, 2008). By building on how food can surprise, we can see how this illuminates what becomes possible through an adventurous *doing* of food practices (Carolan, 2016), engaging with a "reparative motive that welcomes surprise" (Gibson-Graham, 2008:619). Workshops, meals, conversations and transactions at Squash all form a part of this reimagining process. This reframing of what becomes possible with regards to eating highlights the "disruptive potential" (Sharp, 2018:271) of food assemblages in imagining different and diverse food futures.

Part of what makes affects such as surprise become part of a positive rather than negative experience is how relations of trust can be embedded within food choice. Tabitha discusses an implicit trust in what she buys from Squash.

"The hummus, I'd rather buy [at Squash than in a supermarket] … I sort of feel like I trust it."

Tabitha, Freelancer (Interview, December 2020)

Tabitha's comment offers an example of how trust facilitates relationships at Squash. For Tabitha, this trust is established through a greater understanding of the material composition of the hummus that stems from greater transparency; knowing what ingredients were used to make the product, where they came from, and who made it. This is contrasted with a more obscured production process in mass-produced food, where the consumer knows little about any stage of the process. Diprose (2020) focuses on the importance of observing the relationship facilitated by transactions within diverse economies. He argues that we should view transactions as a 'communicative action' rather than the 'transfer of goods, services or funds' (Diprose, 2020:195), a procedure fundamental to Gibson-Graham's diverse economies approach of uncovering "new ethical practices of thinking economy and becoming different kinds of economic beings" (Gibson-Graham, 2006:xxviii). In the case of the hummus, it is clear that the transaction of purchasing the product is not the only force at

play, and different knowledges, experiences and relationships form a key part in the composition of the transactive communication.

The importance of emotions such as trust, and comfortability play an important role in learning how to uncover different ways to think about economy and uncover different economic-geographical imaginaries (Watts *et al*., 2018). Gibson-Graham (2014) note that social relations, such as those based around trust, form an important part of their wider reframing of economic practices.
In the first comment, Tabitha focuses on a feeling of trust brought about through the purchasing of hummus, indicating a positive emotive relationship towards the transaction, relaying an inherent link between morality and economic markets (Jackson *et al*., 2009). Her trust is what facilitates her perceived understanding of Squash's products as of higher quality or having greater ethics. From this point, Squash are able to address aspects of the "multiple, contested, competing and contradictory" (Warde, 2016:156) advice issued around food in wider society.

Seyfang (2008) finds that whilst organic food consumers have a range of economic, social, environmental and personal reasons for engaging, many also engage through a motivation to avoid supermarkets wherever possible. Whilst for the majority of those interviewed for this project, Squash was the only alternative food initiative that they engaged in with, and some still shopped predominantly at supermarkets, usually for reasons of cost or convenience, many suggested a desire to avoid supermarket shopping where possible. This is reflective of a movement towards becoming more ethical food subjects, whereby rather than acting as 'citizen consumers'' (Johnston, 2008) or 'neoliberal subjects' (Harris, 2009), diverse economies perspectives, as well as viscerally-focused viewpoints, see this practice as "a multiple and emergent phenomenon" where the subject is seen as "always a work in progress" (Sarmiento, 2017:488). Building upon these themes, Megan discussed her own motivations for engaging with the food at Squash as opposed to supermarkets:

> *"What they put into it, it's all healthy, I love the taste […] you know, it's all homemade and … you know, made with love!"*
>
> *Megan, Volunteer (Interview, November 2020)*

Here, Megan provides another example of implicit trust in the material composition of food, and the human connection in its transformation from ingredient to foodstuff. The visceral judgements attached to the site of eating here can illustrate how this can be generative of a wider economic

transformation (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Beacham, 2018) as well as helping us to understand how "possibilities become possible to begin with" (Carolan, 2016:142). Through mechanisms of trust, we can see how food, in both its material and immaterial forms can be accepted as edible and enjoyable. Trust forms an important dimension of the embodied relationship that Squash has with both its customers and its volunteers. Here we can specifically look at how the economic networks formed through trust rely on human relationships and contact (Watts *et al*., 2018).

In choosing to spend money at a community food initiative like Squash, where participants feel it "tastes good and you know it's helping out a little bit as well" (Megan, interview), they are trusting the capacity of the organisation in practices of community building or strengthening local economies. Here, how the food tastes acts as a prerequisite for Megan's ethical consumption, with "organoleptic properties of being 'good' or 'better' tasting" (Goodman *et al*., 2014:223) informing her decisions around consumption. The coupling of this with community building and supporting local economies offers an insight into motivations for ethical consumption at Squash. It is here where participants are given the "opportunity to materially connect new political ideas and social representations with taste" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008:468).

From the comments from participants, we can observe the complex nature of how people connect to food in very different ways. Affects attached to surprise and unexpectedness are experienced differently through different bodies. Conversely, whilst affects linked to familiarity and comfortability are associated with an overwhelmingly positive relationship to the site of eating, this is not something that is always requisite for community food practices.

6.3 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have considered the 'lived experience' of ethical food practices (Johnston *et al*., 2011:313), and how these experiences describe how diverse economies are constructed, how they *feel,* and what those who participate in them are *doing*. This has allowed me to problematise the responsibilisation of the individual citizen-consumer (Guthman, 2008a; Guthman, 2008c; Sarmiento, 2017; Watts *et al*., 2018) and instead frame questions of ethics around community concerns (Hill, 2011), engaging with questioning around "how do consumer subjects become subjects of sustainable community economies?" (Dombroski and Gibson-Graham, 2021:19).

From the discussion in this chapter, I have displayed how taste, influenced by social and cultural practices, shapes food choices. The diverse experiences highlighted evidence the importance of not

essentialising lived experiences within food when addressing issues such as participation in community food spaces. Through embracing the visceral register of food (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010), I have explored how "vulgarities of materiality—of emotion, impulse and other corporeal activities" (Carolan, 2011:6) are fundamental to how we better understand food politics and food economies. From this I have developed the term *diverse visceral imaginaries* to expand on perspectives of different bodily futures using an open-ended and anti-essentialist approach to the 'decentred subject', drawn from diverse economies thinking (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Healy *et al*., 2020).

Roelvink (2020) argues that it is vital that researchers concerned with economic transformation explore the play of affect in the diverse economy. Building on this notion, I have highlighted throughout this chapter the significance of the visceral realm as equally as important within this understanding. My analysis here is reflective of a wider movement in diverse economies scholarship towards focus on the "material dimensions of reality" (Schmid and Smith, 2020:259) and argues that the connectedness of visceral experience and knowledge production in the production and reproduction of the material body play a vital role in cultivation of different economic subjects. This focus on what Crang (2010) describes as 'texture', has significance in how we understand and promote different ways of inhabiting the economy and taking action with others (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

Seyfang (2008) argues that supermarkets, while offering convenience and low price lack the response to desires for community building, personal interactions, and strengthening local economies and livelihoods. This is a perspective that has been consolidated in the findings of this chapter. Affects based around trust, comfort and familiarity play a fundamental part in how Squash begin to cultivate *ethical food subjects* (Sarmiento, 2017) through bodily shifts linked to careful and diverse encounters with food. By engaging with these topics, I have looked to make a case against a "delimited politics of the possible" (Guthman, 2008a:437) in the food system, and have looked towards strategies for how reading for difference can uncover hidden possibilities within the transformative potential in embodied experiences of diverse food provision. In line with Oona Morrow's arguments, quoted by Sarmiento (2017), these encounters are not an end in themselves, but a means to establish different ways of living, to politicise the everyday, and to desire different economic practices to capitalism. In doing this, I have contributed to debates that seek to highlight the importance of affect and subjectivity within diverse economies scholarship, by underlining the importance of embodied food experiences within these shifts.

At Squash, the senses and emotions attached to the act of eating that are explored in this chapter are important for understanding how individuals encounter food. Equally important to community food practices such as Squash's however, is the embodied knowledge gained from shared experiences related to the practical activities of cooking and communal eating that will be explored in the following chapter, further expanding upon the "spaces, places and relationalities of foodscapes" (Goodman, 2016:258). Elspeth Probyn tells us that eating "orchestrates experiences that are at once intensely individual and social" (2000:3). Whilst this chapter has largely explored individual experiences, the following chapter will look towards the importance of shared experience, investigating how social encounters with food are also integral to how we understand community food practices.

7: The Role of Social Cooking and Eating in a Community Food Space

In this chapter, I explore practices around commensality and social cooking at Squash. Building on the previous chapter that examined individual lived experiences of taste in the development of ethical food subjects, this chapter looks to explore practices of 'eating together' (Kerner and Chou, 2015; Davies *et al*., 2017a) to highlight the connections between social interaction and the consumption of foodstuffs.

Taking forward concepts from the previous chapter around the development of ethical food subjects through visceral engagement, the aim here is to highlight the importance of the affective and collective properties of social cooking, eating and food sharing and their generative potential for building community food economies. To quote Michael Carolan: "we cannot understand food without understanding the social practices that go along with eating and producing it, as well as all those activities that lie in between" (2017:7). Here I look at both the socio-spatial practices related to social cooking and eating, as well as the activities 'in-between', from quiet food pedagogies to moments of economic diversity in the exchange of food. The events and experiences documented often blur the distinction between everyday food and occasional feasting, creating a 'complex hybrid' of the exceptional and the everyday (Marovelli, 2019).

From this point, I look to interrogate how community eating practices, within the context of specific community food practices, can shape and extend social relations in diverse ways (Giacoman, 2016). As well as observing the eating event itself, I also look to expand on the role of food preparation as substantive towards commensal arrangements and part of a continuum that extends beyond the base practice of cooking (see Holmes, 2019). In doing this, I also explore the importance of the kitchen as a gendered and relational space within these arrangements.

As noted in the literature review, with a few notable exceptions (see le Grand, 2015; Marovelli, 2019; Smith and Harvey, 2021), studies into commensality and social eating have rarely explored the diverse political and economic potential of the act, and have instead focused predominantly on the social and cultural functions of eating. This chapter looks to develop upon the ideas around performances of care, spaces of encounter and the expression of political and cultural choices within these studies to offer a perspective that emphasises how eating, and in particular social eating in community settings, is an important political act defined through an assemblage of practice. This

contributes to diverse economies scholarship, highlighting the importance of embodied food practice within the development of community food economies.

Following Davies *et al*. (2017) and Marovelli (2019), my discussion around food sharing in this chapter encompasses the more-than-material in its examination of the exchange of food and includes the skills, stuff and spaces related to food practices, as well as focusing on how these relate to performances of care (Smith and Harvey, 2021; Phillips and Willatt, 2020). In this section, I also highlight some of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on social cooking and eating practices in a community food space, namely, the absence of proximity in the mealtime during this period.

Finally, across the sections in this chapter, I consolidate a viewpoint that ties social cooking and eating into a diverse economies perspective. Through doing this, I look towards how an ethic of care helps to "cultivate a palpable sense of *we*" through non-market and non-monetary exchanges (Werner, 2015:72, original emphasis). This involves an investigation into the performative elements of the practice, and how they build into assemblages of being and living together (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Economists of any variety have under-explored the economic implications of commensality (Van Esterik, 2019), and a diverse economies approach enables an exploration of some of the quieter and mundane economic practices in a community kitchen and during social eating events that can help to shape a wider community economy. This chapter therefore explores how diverse socialities are developed through convivial practices, moving beyond binaries in the food economy towards understandings based around diversity.

The chapter begins with an examination of material approaches to food practices. In this section, I explore the material practices at Squash that are particularly related to communal activity. Following this, I analyse how difference and disruption is negotiated in a community food space at Squash. My focus here is tied towards highlighting how shared and convivial food practices are drawn from difference and diversity, and how this can influence social relations, which in turn shape how food is experienced. Building on this, I then examine how shared practice influences learning with food. Developing on the findings in the previous chapter, I here investigate the role of *doing* food in subjectivity shifts in my participants.

The following section engages firstly with commensal encounters at Squash, where I explore how the socio-spatial dimensions of commensality and social cooking helps pull towards certain foodscapes through shaping *how we feel* towards food. I focus here on how community food spaces can become settings for the everyday staging of shared meals. Then, in the final subsection of the chapter, I examine the theme of commensality in the context of the emergent COVID-19 pandemic

during fieldwork. In this section, I explore the effect of the pandemic on some of my participants in order to highlight the importance of shared encounters with food.

7.1 Making and Sharing: Material Approaches to Food Practices

As previously noted in this thesis, an important part of Squash's approach to food is engaging people through practices of *doing food*. Shove *et al*. contend that "moments of doing, when the elements of a practice come together, are moments when elements are potentially reconfigured (or reconfigure each other) in ways that subtly, but sometimes significantly change all subsequent formulations" (2012:22). In this section, I uncover how food practices of doing, as well as their associated materials, competences and meanings (Shove *et al*., 2012) can be considered transformative. This involves a recognition of performativity as both material and immaterial, whereby I consider how diverse food practices are part of a "performative ontological politics that is interested in making economies work differently" (Roelvink *et al*., 2015:8).

Every Friday, in the Squash garden, the Grapes group would gather to share a meal, as well as to garden and collectively maintain the space. The food used would be comprised of vegetables, fruits and herbs grown in the garden, surplus stock from the Squash shop and café, and occasionally some extra ingredients from the local supermarket. The group is made up of local residents, as well as individuals who have been referred to Squash through a variety of mechanisms, including through NHS social prescribing programmes. Most of the group are older women, although there are a few younger adults and men that participate. Jackie explains below some of the tasks and more-than-food motivations for participants:

> *"In the polytunnel there'd be, you know, six or eight people, some peeling veg, some chopping veg. Even if they only sit there, and in an hour session they only peel and chop an onion while they're* ***chatting****. […] A lot of it would be about […] coming and* ***meeting friends*** *and* ***creating friendships****."*
>
> *Jackie, Horticultural Manager[22] (Interview, November 2020, emphasis added)*

As Jackie alludes to above, whilst the sessions are usually attended by about 25 people, 6-8 individuals help with the material preparation of food as part of the meal. Others contribute by helping to prepare the eating space, make drinks for the group and tidy up after the meal. Jackie

[22] Although Jackie's official role in the organisation is as a horticultural manager, her remit extends to managing and co-ordinating the volunteers/service users in the Grapes Garden, as well as organising the cooking sessions on Fridays.

emphasises in the quote above how social interaction during food preparation and during mealtimes is fundamental to how the sessions operate. She discusses specifically here how social interaction during food preparation creates friendships. The food preparation and cooking area remains central to these activities throughout the event, creating a relational space that encourages interaction and intimacy (Marovelli, 2019; Giard, 1998). The group has existed since 2013, meaning the friendships have been developed, and a relational 'sense of belonging' exists amongst its members (Askins, 2015).

Despite the success of using food as a tool for social interaction, Jackie discusses below how the intention behind the Grapes sessions was initially domestic nutrition-related, rather than focused on sociality:

> *"We realised that people were taking the bags home and they weren't necessarily cooking with it, so we then decided to lets try and cook things on site, to help develop. First of all we were sort of giving recipes and ideas and we thought actually lets just start cooking with it."*
>
> *Jackie, Horticultural Manager (Interview, November 2020)*

The cookery aspect of the Grapes sessions was introduced as a way to carefully integrate both nourishment and learning into the group. This is part of a general movement at the organisation away from the basic provision of food and towards a more holistic approach to nutrition, involving learning, viscerality and more intimate care. Jackie felt that the group would be better served being *shown* food preparation techniques in order to develop competence to better use the food materials provided (Shove *et al*., 2012). As discussed in the previous chapter, this in turn would be more likely to viscerally *tune* (Carolan, 2016) them towards using developed skills in a domestic environment.

As the group became more confident in their abilities, they expressed interest in showing the work they had been doing to the local community. Jackie explained to me below the process of creating monthly, volunteer-led events in the Grapes Garden:

> *"So we decided to do monthly cafés. So we did a first Friday of the month café in the summer months. And going as long as we could. And that developed into all the volunteers coming together to cook a soup and a salad and probably herb teas or cold drinks made from things in the garden. And we started inviting people in from the local community and it got really popular. We'd even invite people to come and play music, we'd do plant sales, you know, whatever anyone decided would be an interesting idea to do, we'd try and accommodate that. At times there'd be like 70 people or more in the garden, they became very very popular."*

Jackie, Horticultural Manager (Interview, November 2020)

Larger monthly events, that welcomed the local community, were run once a month during summer months in addition to the smaller-scale events that included only the volunteer group. These sessions would be led by the Grapes group, and they would decide what they would like to cook for the community the week before, based on available produce from the garden. Once the food was cooked, the group would serve guests, before taking it in turns to eat when things were quieter.

During these monthly events, as opposed to the weekly meals, there was a palpable sense of the group *showing* the community what they were *doing.* The cooking area would often be positioned in the middle of the garden to show guests the processes involved, members of the group would take time to show people the work done in the food growing area and newly built garden structures would be used during the event. This practice of showing guests the work done added different meanings to the materials and skills within the group. From this, my participants provide evidence into how shared practices coalesced around food offer a valuable insight into how different subjectivities are formed across both members of the group and the engaging public, that are based around principles of sharing and non-capitalist exchange of materials.

An example of how materials intertwined with meaning is through the garden's brick pizza oven, built by the oldest member of the group, who is in his eighties. The oven was described as the group's "labour of love" (Jackie, Interview) and during the monthly sessions was used for cooking pizzas, flatbreads and other barbequed foods, which would then be given away or distributed on a pay-as-you-feel basis. During the first few monthly events after its construction, particular emphasis was placed on *showing* the oven to guests as well as highlighting the specific foodstuffs that were cooked, or could be cooked, in the oven. This had the significance of giving the group a sense of pride in their accomplishments, as well as a feeling of collective ownership of a shared space. Linking this back to the concept of cultivating different economic subjects, this activity has the effect of sustaining positive affect, whereby participants often engaged in "unwitting involvement in the practice of collectivity" (Gibson-Graham, 2006:155).

Figure 19- The Grapes Garden pizza oven. [Photo credit: Squash]

At these monthly events, the emphasis was more focused on caring for guests (Julier, 2013), rather than other regular volunteers. These caring experiences act as a "purposeful sharing of activities" (Fincher and Iverson, 2015:24), whereby individuals proactively share a space with others in a convivial manner. In the context of the Grapes Garden, this can take the form of showing and telling guests about the pizza oven and its uses, making drinks from garden produce such as sage or mint, or selling plants they have grown to cover the costs of events and garden maintenance. Tabitha highlighted some of the principles that underpinned these events:

> *"I think because it was very relaxed and very … there was never any sense of a hierarchy there, everybody was just mucking in."*
>
> *Tabitha, Freelancer (Interview, December 2020)*

Tabitha expands upon how meals are often performed at Squash. Not only does the preparation of the meal require everyone 'mucking in', but she also indicates that the staging of the meal preparation remains inclusive towards everyone's needs and abilities. The perceived absence of hierarchy in the food preparation is an important part of how the meal is constituted by its participants, contributing to how the site of food preparation "reflects and is remade by social and spatial relations" (Johnson, 2006:124).

In our interview, Jackie elaborated on the group's democratic structure, explaining how "people would suggest what they wanted to cook or have a go at cooking […] we'd always ask them [what they wanted]" (Jackie, Interview). As documented in the previous chapter, the composition of the meal during the sessions is primarily dictated by the seasons, and correspondingly the produce available, but once the options have been made available, the group decide what they would like to make the following week. The only parameter set is that food must be entirely vegetarian, and there must be a vegan option as part of the meal. These boundaries are set so that nobody is excluded from the meal because of their cultural, religious, or dietary preferences or requirements. This means that rather than having a meal imposed on them, the group can develop a menu that is suited to their diverse tastes and cultural backgrounds and to a certain extent, their skills, promoting an ethos of inclusivity. This is something that Tabitha noted in our interview:

> "I don't know, [the meals were] just very **inclusive** of everybody who was there and that just created a sense of … **calm** and **peace** I suppose really, and **warmth** and you know … something that's quite … unusual in … I don't know, you know when you leave that garden (laughs) the reality hits sometimes a bit, and I think it just felt very peaceful and very … **welcoming** really. And I think it was always … although it was peaceful and calm, there was always this sense of **conversation** and **laughter** and … I don't know, [it was] just very convivial really."
>
> Tabitha, Freelancer (Interview, December 2020, emphasis added)

Beyond her discussion on hierarchy, Tabitha also describes how taking part in the food preparation made her *feel,* as well as the *atmosphere* present at the sessions. The affective moments of the meal preparation can then be recognised as "properties of the specific affective 'attunement' or mood of the respective practice" (Reckwitz, 2016:119). In this instance, that reflects, for Tabitha, a sense of belonging to the collective practices of food preparation and shared eating.

Moreover, Tabitha's comments emphasise the importance of "an ethos of care based in comfort" (Julier, 2013:27). The 'warmth' and the 'welcoming' atmospheres contribute to how participants feel when they are collectively producing a meal, helping to define that specific moment for them (Bille *et al*., 2015). This demonstrates how bodies are neither static or explicitly individualised (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010; Probyn, 2000), as well as highlighting the implicitly political nature of emotion (Ahmed, 2004). These affective atmospheres form an important part of how care is performed within the practices and staging of meal preparation.

Tabitha also draws upon the conviviality of the space whilst the meal is being prepared. This is an important part of the social cooking at Squash, where, at least in the initial stages of the meal being assembled, the pace of cooking is slow, creating more space for interaction, learning and sharing. Marovelli (see also Wise and Velayutham, 2014), sees conviviality as both an atmosphere and an affect, where "social dimensions enmesh with material, sensory and spatial ones" (2019:193). In the quote above, Tabitha describes her own affective relationship with the sessions in a variety of different ways that all convey a sense of relational belonging towards the collective meal.

The convivial moments in the food preparation spaces at Squash reflects a space were work mixes with affective moments of pleasure and conviviality. Louise Johnson notes that the kitchen is a place "where work mingles with desire, pleasure, creativity, […] safety and other people" (2006:123). In the examples provided above, there are clear similarities between Tabitha and other's comments and the discussion from Johnson. Here, the convivial moments during communal food preparation offer alternative negotiations of difference to those in domestic or commercial kitchens. Building on this, Lis discussed convivial moments during food preparation at Squash in our interview:

> *"It's slow … you know it's like I think that was what was really nice about it is it was … people actually got … there was a whole sort of conversation just about making them, do you know what I mean?"*
> *Lis, Customer (Interview, December 2020)*

In the quote above, Lis chose to discuss a community event where Squash made pizzas for members of the public in the garden's pizza oven where participants were asked to make a small donation to cover costs if they could afford it. People would queue up, before taking it in turns to construct their own pizzas from a selection of toppings, supervised by a cook. After this was completed, the cook would bake the pizzas in the Grapes Garden pizza oven. This provides a clear example of one of the many attempts at Squash to shorten the distance, physically and socially, between those who cook the meal and those who consume it (Marovelli, 2019). Lis highlights the importance of talking about the food with other strangers whilst queueing. Here, material practices of making the pizzas are punctuated by conversations between strangers, embedding shared identity and interaction within the practice (Orlikowski, 2002).

Sally-Anne also discussed how the material practices around the preparation of the meal contributed towards the atmospheres in the space.

"So some of those [meals], but they're kind of very related to the atmosphere there and everybody… you know… it's not so much the actual food as the people being involved and the preparation of the food and the ideas and the … you know using the … the ingredients grown in the garden really."

Sally-Anne, Women's Food Biz Coordinator (Interview, December 2020)

Here Sally-Anne engages with the more-than-food elements of the Grapes garden meals where both the human and non-human assemblages present within the construction of the meal help to shape how the meal is experienced. This highlights the capacity of human and non-human bodies to be affected and to affect (Müller and Schurr, 2016; Pitt, 2015), with the materials from the garden contributing in a way beyond simple nourishment. Here, the immediacy of the food source in the garden contributes to the way the meal is experienced by the participants, highlighting how the atmosphere at the Grapes garden is staged in between an experience and an environment (Bille *et al*., 2015). The quote is also of particular note because of Sally-Anne's reference to *ideas,* reflecting a link between ethos and practice within the cooking group. This points to a subjectivity and collectivity shift amongst participants, whereby activities are represented by the "pluralization of voices and alternative ways of life" (Zanoni *et al*., 2017:581).

This focus on atmosphere and shared encounters allows us to return to Jackie's interview, where she focused on collective experiences when answering a question about her favourite aspects of working with Squash:

"Well obviously, the food! But it is that thing, it's sort of a reward at the end, it's something at the end, isn't it? I think that's also what kept people coming is… food always does keep people coming. But it's a shared reward that everybody's been involved in and the eating, it's a proper shared experience."

Jackie, Horticultural Manager (Interview, November 2020)

As Jackie alludes to in the comment above, participants in the Grapes group are informally expected to contribute to the meal in some way, whether through preparing vegetables, cooking the meal and deciding on seasoning, making teas for the group, showing visitors around the site, or harvesting crops for a salad for example (Fieldnotes, December 2019- February 2020). This is strictly informal, and individuals are rarely asked to carry out tasks. Instead, most of the group have established roles and responsibilities around the meal, meaning that structure, routine and rhythm are prominent in the way that the group operate.

Figure 20 – 'A shared experience' – the Grapes Garden group gather around a communal table for a shared meal during winter. [Photo credit: Squash]

It is significant that in the quote above that Jackie describes the meal as a 'shared reward' and a 'shared experience'. In this instance, the collective endeavour that creates the meal forms a significant part of the wider experience. Through the convivial practices undertaken by members of the group, new socialities are created whereby practices are transformative, rather than participants being 'passive beneficiaries' of the meal (Smith and Harvey, 2021), leading to a cultivation of more ethical and cooperative subjects (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

Beyond the mealtime itself, David explained how this shared practice was enacted in a group of people with different skills, experiences and dexterities:

> *"A couple of times they've offered me to cook, and I said 'I can't cook, I'll just do the dishes', you know what I mean? You can't do much wrong with dishes."*
>
> *David, Volunteer / Local Resident (Interview, November 2020)*

Difference is also highlighted through an acknowledgement of different skills. Here, David illustrates how he prefers to contribute to shared meals, trusting his skills in cleaning up, but not in cooking. For the wider group, this means that people can work with what they are comfortable doing. One volunteer also told me how she would like to work more with plants as "I didn't sort of sit in the

polytunnel and engage much with lots of people. I'm not […] always very good at that" (Lis, Customer/Volunteer; Interview, December 2020). Within the wider meal preparation space, including the garden, there were many 'quieter' spaces where participants could work whilst the meal was being prepared or after it, and still have a sense of collective participation in its construction.

David's comments above also reflect the gendered and heteronormative nature of the meal, where men in the group tend to conduct "provisional, discretionary and secondary tasks" rather than taking the lead on activities (Jackson, 2009:38). This was something that was notable at times throughout fieldwork, where the men in the group would rarely contribute to cooking, often citing lack of confidence (Fieldnotes, February 2020), and instead undertake tasks away from the kitchen, or contribute instead to tasks such as washing up, laying out cutlery or cleaning up the table (Fieldnotes, various dates).

There was still, however, an expectation that everyone would participate more directly in the meal at the end, at a singular large table (this is covered in more detail later in the chapter). The meal acts here as a focal point for the entire event, a culmination of connections between different elements of practice (Shove *et al*., 2012; Hui *et al*., 2016) that enables the group to come together, share ideas and materials and plan for future sessions and events. Here, the event "opens up the possibility to consolidate and (re)create a communal "we"" (Steinfort *et al*., 2017:1459), where the group uncover meaning related to the meal through interactions with each other.

The excerpt below provides an example of why sharing materials is also a fundamental part of uncovering meaning in the meal:

> *After the meal, Dorothy announces that she has brought some cake for the group, which she has baked in a cooking class earlier in the week and Deborah says she has baked a sweet spelt loaf to share. Both are well received, and everything is finished quickly. The group again are happy to try anyone's contribution, whatever the perceived expertise of the person cooking it.*
>
> *Fieldnotes, January 2020*

The fieldnote entry above shows how practices of sharing are embedded within the everyday ethics and relationalities of the group (Ince and Hall, 2017). In this instance, two volunteers of very different culinary backgrounds, bring in a dessert to share with the rest of the group. The group are happy to taste and compliment whichever dish is put in front of them. This has the effect of performing competence (Shove *et al*., 2012) within food practices, but also in emplacing and

entrenching an ethos of sharing materials (and non-materials) within the group. Sharing food becomes an act that displays care for each other through a collective, material and symbolic practice (Gherardi, 2016). This is not consistent across all types of food sharing, however, as the excerpt below notes:

> *People are often happy to bring their contributions ready-made from home, but much less confident about the pressure of cooking on the spot for the group.*
>
> *Fieldnotes, February 2020*

As the fieldnote entry above highlights, the group's food practices take on a different meaning depending on the spatial context of the practice. The complexity of the act of sharing food material is shown by differing social enactments dependent on preparation space. This distinction highlights how sharing can be situated, and rooted in a confidence in the validity of the food material being shared.

In this section, I have shown how different practices relating to the preparation of food and eating space contribute towards a wider understanding of the preparation of the meal as situated, relational and embodied. The performativity of the shared meal, where a focus is pushed towards these situated convivial relations, means that its participants become re-subjectified as different economic subjects (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Gibson-Graham and Cameron, 2007), where non-capitalist principles of sharing and cooperation are staged as part of an everyday encounter.

7.1.1 Disruption and the Negotiation of Difference in Communal Food Spaces

It is also important not too be overly romantic when considering community food economies (Sarmiento, 2017) whilst still documenting in a way that is generative towards new ways of being. Considering this, this section engages with moments of disruption and difference within my observations at Squash, focusing on how these moments were negotiated by my participants.

Part of the ethos of the Grapes group in particular at Squash is to allow space for self-organisation to plan meals and prepare events. Whilst there is a paid coordinator who is charged with managing the sessions, she tries not to intervene without someone directly asking for help with something (Fieldnotes, various dates). The majority of the group have all volunteered for roughly the same time, meaning social dynamics manifest largely without intervention from paid employees when making decisions around the meal. This can cause fractures and tensions within the group, which will

be explored within this section. I use these moments of fracture to highlight how shared and convivial food practices are drawn from difference and diversity, and how this can shape social relations, which in turn shape how food is experienced.

A first example comes from when a participant told me that they felt that some of the group were not undertaking the appropriate amount of responsibility, and instead leaving the 'rubbish jobs' such as dishwashing to newer or quieter members of the group (Fieldnotes, February 2020). Because there is no 'fair' exchange of invested time within the group from participants (Veen and Dagevos, 2019) and labour is based on honesty and trust rather than obligation, workload imbalances do occasionally occur.

On another occasion, members of the group struggled to agree on whether to continue cooking in the garden polytunnel, or whether to move indoors as the weather got colder (Fieldnotes, December 2019). Moving indoors meant that there were fewer tasks for participants to undertake as there was no work to be done with plants and parts of the meal (i.e. hot drinks, breads) were already made. During this time, the dishes that were prepared got gradually more complicated to increase workload for volunteers (Fieldnotes, January 2020). Conversely, the garden was deemed to be a less accessible place during winter, due to cold, wet and muddy conditions, and the principles of the group were established around equality of access to whoever wished to participate. Ultimately, with a few quiet objections, the group decided that moving indoors for winter was appropriate. During this period, instead of gardening, members of the group who were not cooking found other tasks to do such as crafting, drawing and seed packing (Fieldnotes, various dates).

Both of these instances show how routine practices in the group can become disrupted by different influences and power dynamics. On the first occasion, practices associated with jobs related to the meal created issues with hierarchical social relations. Offering to help as a guest to a meal is considered a normative practice in commensal arrangements (Julier, 2013), and this example demonstrates newer group members unfairly adopting this role of a guest, or outsider. In the second instance, the potential disruption to the rhythms of socio-material practice during the Grapes sessions caused by moving location caused fractures within the group. On this occasion, it was difficult for the group to imagine an alternative dynamic to the sessions, where individuals would have to adopt different roles, and undertake different practices.

Further to this, the excerpt below provides an example of how the group engaged with authority, or a lack of it, in different ways:

Max is about to go home just after people have settled in, but Jackie decides to try and persuade him to take a lead on the cooking. He accepts this somewhat reluctantly (he is one of the shyer members of the group) but starts organising people in the group. It is clear that others are much more willing to impose themselves on his leadership in a way that wouldn't normally occur with Deborah leading.

Fieldnotes, February 2020

Concurrently, the field diary excerpt above emphasises the role of concrete leadership within the group. Although leadership, beyond a paid co-ordinator is informal, it is clear from spending time with the group that it is important to commensal arrangements who is leading and what their approach to leadership is. The asymmetrical power relations across the group extend to who should and shouldn't be 'in charge' of the cooking and standing over the pot, deciding on seasoning and instructing others. This has the effect of consolidating positions within the group, to the extent where newly established leaders rarely emerge.

Tangentially, expectations of the mealtime can also vary across participants, as highlighted in the excerpt below:

As the vegetables are being chopped by the four participants in the polytunnel, Deborah keeps having to interfere as they are not being chopped finely enough. Despite continuing to ask, the chopped veg keeps arriving to her in thick, chunky slices. This eventually is met with some light-hearted despair from Deborah as it continues to happen. With her background in cookery, she can often expect high standards of her food, but realises that this not possible all the time with the group.

Fieldnotes, March 2020

Here, Deborah shows how differing standards for food preparation can cause minor ruptures within the social relations of the group. Whilst working collectively in food preparation can lead to more complex and interesting meals being prepared (Marovelli, 2019), there can be issues with managing this. Deborah is the volunteer lead cook for the group and used to run a vegan cookery school before she retired. Although the exchange here is fundamentally light-hearted, it does highlight the negotiation of differing expectations of the meal and different skillsets and socialisations within the group. These expectations and skillsets are drawn from different embodied experiences of food. Through this, the importance of negotiating *visceral difference* (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010) is illustrated, with this negotiation helping to build shared understandings between each other.

These disruptions highlight a number of important points about social cooking and eating that help to develop a more rounded understanding of the phenomena. Firstly, asymmetrical power relations within and across the group have an impact on how practices are shaped. Within the group, individuals assume different roles and responsibilities, and these practices aren't necessarily defined by what everybody *wants* to do. Here, conflicts within communities of practice are important within identity development across the group (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Secondly, a complex assemblage of skills and habits, drawn from diverse bodies, requires careful approaches to negotiating visceral differences. Food, and by extension, the preparation of food, is experienced differently in not only a social, but also a biological way (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010), as evidenced in the previous chapter. Disruptions within the biosocial relations in the spaces of the kitchen and at the table have an important role in how difference is negotiated between bodies, with these material spaces providing stages for developing understandings based around ethics of care as well as difference related to visceral and cultural experience.

This is significant in the context of understanding community food economies as it allows us to recognise the role that difference has within formations of 'being in-common'. As Gibson-Graham (2006) argue, it is these ethical and political spaces of decision where negotiations of interdependence lie. Through examining the negotiation of visceral difference, I have noted the role that food practices play in the "becoming of new and as-yet unthought ways of being" (Gibson-Graham, 2006:85). This reworking also highlights the importance of careful practice of negotiation by leaders within the group, something that will be developed further in the following section.

7.1.2 Learning through Doing: Care, Embodiment and Communities of Food Practice

Significant elements of the activities at Squash involve practices of learning through *doing.* Carolan contends that "how we know shapes what we feel for things, which ultimately produces a pull toward certain foodscapes" (Carolan, 2017:30). In this section, I explore the meaning behind the 'how we know' and look at how embodied learning practices at Squash influence wider foodscapes and what this reveals about the transformative characteristics of community food spaces. Building upon this, I focus upon how these embodied learning practices help to shape wider *communities of practice* at Squash. I begin by looking at some of the informal practices undertaken by my participants, before examining some of the formalised structures of learning in the organisation.

i) Informal Practices

Much of the way in which participants learn at Squash comes through informal practices. In the field diary excerpt below, I focus on how the Grapes Garden cook negotiates the practice of food preparation with participants:

> *Deborah also encourages individuals to taste the food during the cooking process. 'What do you think, does it need more salt?' she surmises. Deborah could decide this for herself, but encourages the group to be actively involved within the cooking process.*
> *Fieldnotes, February 2020*

This mundane moment in the preparation of a meal highlights how practices of tasting become a fundamental part of how the participants learn about food. Deborah carefully negotiates the cooking of the meal to make it more inclusive and connected to those that will be consuming it. Through this, participants *learn to be affected* (Latour, 2004) by food and how specific flavours are constructed in a dish, whilst at the same time affecting and being affected by different bodies (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). It is through this visceral and relational approach to learning *with* food that helps to foster an environment that makes participants feel like they belong in the community food space.

During my time spent with the Grapes group, I also witnessed examples of the role that learning through doing has for the groups' participants. On one instance, the cook was beginning to make a parsley roux, using only plant-based ingredients, when two or three members of the group took a particular interest in what she was doing. Instead of telling them what the sauce was, she chose to start the process again. Once the roux was made, she encouraged the group gathered around the group to taste it, asking what they thought of both the process and the taste (Fieldnotes, February 2020).

Figure 21 – Participants in the Grapes Garden group are taught to make 'seed balls', a healthy snack made from seeds and dates. [Photo credit: Squash]

On another occasion, a different cook was leading the session, and worked with the group to make a salad dressing using a variety of ingredients, encouraging individuals to experiment with different combinations of oil, spices, lemon juice and vinegars to see what people liked the taste of most (Fieldnotes, January 2020). After a dressing was decided upon, a member of the group asked whether it would be possible to run a more structured workshop on salads and dressing at some point in the future. The session leader agreed that this would be useful and interesting, but suggested waiting until the summer, when leaves and other salad components would be more abundant in the garden. The practices display how a community of practitioners share socially dispersed knowledge through interactions between novices and more established group members (Alkemeyer and Buschmann, 2016).

These examples also evidence how the sharing of visceral bodily experiences helps to embed shared learning practices within the meal. Both instances show how the cook encourages the development of embodied knowledges around food, with disruptive processes of learning directly linked to showing, doing and tasting. Both examples also show the importance of careful and embodied

approaches to learning within food practices, adding to debates around the significance of learning to be affected within community economies.

Developing these themes, the following field diary excerpt provides an example of careful approaches to learning amongst participants:

> *Everyone seems to enjoy the food. Many questions are asked to Deborah regarding the cooking process. Participants are particularly interested in the interesting and unusual range of ingredients such as Marmite and Worcestershire sauce in the onion soup. It is a good opportunity to teach about ingredient and flavour substitution and Deborah explains clearly how flavour profiles work, getting participants to taste the soup before and after certain ingredients are added.*
> *Fieldnotes, December 2019*

Again, learning in this passage is linked directly to inquiry from the participants. Here, participants are inclined to inquire about different flavours within the dish. Their interest in how the taste of a dish is assembled from unusual ingredients is again dependent on an innate trust in the edibility of the food (Roe, 2006b), as well as trust in the cook based in the receiving of care. All of these approaches to learning *with* food help to redress socio-spatial circumstances that trigger negative visceral responses in the participants (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). Through *learning* about food through a *visceral doing,* participants develop different ecologies of taste, choice and care through a "broader assemblage of feelings, patterns of social relationships, and memories" (Carolan, 2015:323).

John provided an example of this assemblage in his description to me of a dish that he learnt at Squash, and now makes at home:

> *Whilst we eat, me and John discuss his recipe for vegetable soup that he makes at home. He tells me that he makes it with potatoes, parsnips and a bag of frozen vegetables. He described his aim for it to be "thick, like porridge". He tells me that he learnt the recipe from when he was part of a separate community gardening team that Squash helped to set up some years ago and found it something that was cheap and easy and didn't take too much time to prepare.*
>
> *Fieldnotes, December 2019*

When John first made the soup, the gardeners would take it in turns to oversee the pot and would be able to leave it bubbling for hours as they continued with the garden tasks (Fieldnotes, December 2019). Building upon a visceral doing, the quote above highlights the importance of practice-based embodied learning for informing domestic practices. In this instance, John directly links the food that we are currently making together with how it informs his cooking at home. For John, the learning taking place at Squash has an impact on his health and his eating habits, but also as Bedore (2018) argues, it influences how the 'home' is made and remade through the changing cultural meanings of food. This interpretation explores how the material practice of food learning can be considered transformative, changing the daily routines of the participant.

Developing upon the notion of transgression across the time-spaces of community foodscapes, Megan explains below how the Squash cooks giving her initial responsibility in the kitchen contributed towards feeling like she was capable of cooking scones:

> *"Well, it was my first thing to make in the kitchen, so it felt like you know I was invited in you know … trusted to do something. Obviously, I was guided through the process but … yeah, it was just nice to know how it was done, how they do it, and then it's something very edible(!) afterwards …… and yeah, it was quite … a nice feeling, you know and to think that people would buy them and enjoy them, so yeah."*
>
> *Megan, Volunteer (Interview, November 2020)*

Megan tells me here about how feeling 'trusted' to carry out a task as a volunteer in the Squash kitchen, in this instance making scones, contributed to confidence in her own cooking. She discusses how being trusted to make the food, and for it to be considered tasty, was important for how she trusts her ability. After making the scones in the Squash kitchen, Megan then told me how she prepared them for her neighbours at home (Megan, interview). For Megan, this embodied learning involving felt emotions "disrupts [her] settled preconceptions of 'the ways things are'" (Phillips and Willatt, 2020:212) in her uncovering of a new skill. This has both a social and material function, where confidence is established at the same time as skilful competences being developed through the creation of scones.

ii) Formal Structures

In Chapter 5, I briefly focused on some of the ways that Squash use education as part of their operation. Here, I build upon this to explore how these structures help participants to learn with

food. As noted previously, the formal structures at Squash include cooking courses for members of the local neighbourhood, cook-alongs with students from local schools and universities and standalone workshops focusing on a specific skill or foodstuff.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the most notable food education initiative recently has taken the form of a yearly course for unemployed women in the local area of Liverpool 8, developing skills to find employment in the food industry, set up their own food business, or simply meet other women with shared interests from the local area. Sally-Anne discussed some of the principles that shape the course with me:

> *"I think it does allow women to get … to become engaged with education really, especially you know in Toxteth, in that area […] but I just think it offers them the opportunity to you know … I suppose initially when they come in and chat, they don't realise the skills they have, so just like from that initial chat, I call it a chat rather than an interview because it's informal, hopefully they think, oh gosh actually I have got some skills here that are very overlooked and as the course goes on, I think they realise that more and more"*
>
> *Sally-Anne, Women's Food Biz Coordinator (Interview, December 2020)*

Figure 22 – A cooking class as part of the Women's Food Biz course. [Photo credit: Squash]

Sally-Anne is a freelance worker for Squash, with a professional background in nutrition, who has been leading the 'Women's Food Biz' course for three years. The course works with women from Liverpool 8 on their specific interests related to food and the wider industry. Whilst some previous attendees have gone on to establish their own food businesses, the course works specifically with needs of the group. Other attendees have used the course to develop ideas for local market stalls whilst others have used the course to establish social networks with other women in the local community. As Fozia, a previous Food Biz participant, and current restaurant owner, noted to me, "imagine what the potential is out there?" (Fozia, interview). The course is designed to help realise this overlooked potential but also to foster cohesive social bonds across groups of women in the local vicinity. Linked to this, in an interview with Sally-Anne, she focused implicitly on the ethic of care embedded within the course, explaining:

> *"Although food is the tool, it's very much about people gaining confidence in themselves in you know many, many ways really"*
>
> *Sally-Anne, Women's Food Biz Coordinator (Interview, December 2020)*

Here, care is realised through an attentiveness to the needs of others (Tronto, 1993), as well as an emphasis on the importance of social bonds and cooperation (Kulick, 2019), both across the group and between Squash and the group. In her comments, Sally-Anne highlights the importance of convivial moments of care within the course as a way for participants to gain confidence. By approaching initial and ongoing engagements with the course attendees with informality and attentiveness to need, care is practiced through a "shared sense of vulnerability- facilitated through the body and its capacity for sympathetic response in interacting with others" (Phillips and Willatt, 2020:213). She further explained:

> *"And because of that, it makes the … the [inverted commas] 'interview' much more relaxed for women coming in, you know obviously we'll … there's coffee, there's tea, there's refreshments, it's much more about engaging in a very* ***gentle*** *way initially. So the women don't have to come in and have prepared and … you know, there is paperwork to do, of course there is, but that's … of course that's something we've got to do, but we try to sort of make that a bit gentle as well."*
>
> *Sally-Anne, Women's Food Biz Coordinator (Interview, December 2020, emphasis added)*

Sally-Anne noted how the initial engagements with the course participants were integral to embedding trust and confidence in the course. By creating an environment that prioritised gentle engagement and support, the course is juxtaposed with the wider food and hospitality industry, which is renowned for its oft-masculine and individualised environments (Leer, 2019). This approach seeks to "*create* and *proliferate* care-full practice" (Dombroski *et al*., 2018:22, original emphasis), whereby those involved can unsettle and disrupt dominant discourses across the sector. Sally-Anne added:

> *"We found that was a great thing to offer women an opportunity to try out their skills in quite a supportive environment."*
>
> *Sally-Anne, Women's Food Biz Coordinator (Interview, December 2020)*

Here, the role of embodied, proximate practice in care relations (Phillips and Willatt, 2020) is highlighted by the material practices of the course . Rather than explicitly teaching the participants new skills, the emphasis here is draw out the embodied knowledges of the group and enable them to use them in different contexts. This also enables participants to share their embodied knowledges,

albeit in a less formalised learning environment. As one participant commented, "you've got to support each other some way along the line" (Fozia, Chef; Interview, September 2020). With regards to developing *meaning* in practices (see Shove *et al*., 2012), this has the effect of increasing the value of the social connections fostered during the course.

In this section I have highlighted how sharing at Squash includes but also goes beyond the material world. The sharing of skills and experiences form an integral part of participants everyday engagement with the organisation. In addition to this, practices of careful embodied learning are present in every example discussed. These practices of learning are less about an objective focused on individuals necessarily participating as 'competent players' (Alkemeyer and Buschmann, 2016) (although this is often the case), and more about social and cultural affects of learning and encounter. Whilst these landscapes of care-full learning are not fully removed from language around economic and social conformism (see Smith, 2019 for another account of this), they do offer tangible spaces for the cultivation of more ethical economic subjects.

7.2 "It was just food and joy": Experiencing Everyday and Exceptional Commensality in a Community Food Space

> *"But it's that [special] thing of when people have been together, cooking something together. So it's definitely the food being great, but also the space and the place."*
>
> *Becky, Co-director (Interview, November 2020)*

Social eating initiatives offer spaces that provide an intersection of domestic, charitable and 'eating out' commensality (Smith and Harvey, 2021), and research has previously explored the distinction between, as well as the blurring of, the exceptional and the everyday in commensal spaces (Giacoman, 2016; Marovelli, 2019). Whilst everyday, or normative commensality is a subject usually confined to the home (Giacoman, 2016), here I look towards the potential of community settings as a space for the staging of everyday commensality. This section therefore looks to develop upon work highlighting the importance of mundane commensal arrangements (Kerner and Chou, 2015; Giacoman, 2016) as well as contemporary research on feasting (le Grand, 2015; Sharp, 2018a), to explore the political and economic possibilities behind the act of eating together at the same table. I argue that the socio-spatial dimensions of commensality and social cooking helps pull towards certain foodscapes through shaping how we feel for food (Carolan, 2015, 2017). This approach looks towards how relationality can affect space (Massey, 2005), and from this, how the meal setting can

generate social action (Marovelli, 2019) that informs how diverse food economies can performatively construct worlds through ethics of care and conviviality.

At Squash, the cooking and sharing of meals embodies a variety of social and material forms. These range from meals prepared by paid cooks, to those where everybody who eats has a role to play in the material transformation from ingredients to food. Food is cooked daily for paying customers, staff and volunteers, weekly for the Grapes group, and occasionally for large-scale community feasts. Additionally, there are quieter, more mundane interactions in the kitchen whilst preparing meals for staff and volunteers or experimenting and developing dishes.

The socio-spatial dimensions of how food is prepared in this context are an important part of how the visceral eating experience is understood (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). As discussed in the previous chapter, in the commercial kitchen at Squash, food preparation is visible from the eating space, with the smells and sounds of the kitchen in close proximity to the site of eating. Here, Julie comments on the sociality present at one of Squash's occasional community feasts:

> *"At the end of the night, you know, you felt like everybody was just like having a really good time and all boundaries were down and everybody was just so happy! And there was no alcohol, or you know, none of those things that you usually use to kind of break down the, you know, social barriers or whatever, it was just food and joy"*
>
> Julie, Baker (Interview, December 2020)

In this interview extract, Julie highlights the symbolic importance of shared meals at Squash. She ascribes importance to the role that the meal plays in breaking down social boundaries to create moments of 'collective joy' (Segal, 2018; Turner, 2013). Following from this, Jackie also credits the significance of 'togetherness' in the Grapes mealtimes, arguing that they allow "people to engage and be social with each other and [highlight] the whole togetherness of food" (Jackie, interview). Jackie's point highlights the potential of food to create conditions of collective identity, where participants share a belief that ingesting food with one another yields both unity and identity across the group (Giacoman, 2016). This relates to the analysis from the previous chapter, and towards the previously mentioned *radically relational* understanding of food (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008), where unstructured and often chaotic relations between bodies help us to understand how individuals experience food.

Here, as well as the ingesting *of* food, it is the ingesting *with* that shapes how food is experienced. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010) refer to 'tangible and intangible ingestions', where foodstuffs are consumed along with the ideas, signs and rhetoric that constitute them. With the

sharing of meals through commensal practices, such as those at Squash, affects drawn from discussion and learning form an important component of the wider consumptive experience. This relational experience of food helps to demonstrate how shared meals in environments like Squash can lead to encounters that can help to address boundaries in the negotiation of difference, and encourage a collective 'we-ness' in difference (Marovelli, 2019; Wise, 2012). This also links to how Eve focused on how communal meals bring people together:

> *"And I think it's a really positive pull together, I always think, you know, who can refuse somebody else's cooking! And it's a good way of getting into … you know getting people together to enjoy their experiences."*
>
> *Eve, interview*

In this quote, Eve highlighted the role that the mealtime, and the material element of food has in creating atmospheres of collective experience. For her, the communal element of the meal provided the basis for the sharing of experiences. This sociality in meal is fundamental to how meals are experienced at Squash, helping to build connections between participants that resemble a 'transformative politics of encounter', that have the potential to shift how participants feel about others (Askins, 2015).

Whilst sharing food as an act helps to create cohesive moments within groups (Giacoman, 2016), Squash also attempt to foster this environment through the creation of a variety of spaces that encourage collective practices. Here, Patrick discusses the communal seating within the Squash community café:

> *"There is communal seating and that you will inevitably if it's busy, end up sitting next to people, and I do think that is part of the … you know that makes the ambience different from just your standard café, where you probably would go and sit deliberately as far away from other people as possible!"*
>
> *Patrick, Customer (Interview, January 2021)*

Patrick contrasts his own response to eating with strangers at Squash to that in different eating environments. He highlights how, at Squash, eating with strangers is something he feels comfortable doing, but would be less comfortable in 'standard cafés' doing the same thing. The layout of the Squash café is designed deliberately to encourage commensal encounters with strangers. Large, communal tables fill the space, with groups of people actively encouraged to share tables with others (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic) or talk across tables. The material composition of the sitting space to eat allows for more inclusivity in the room, where everybody shares the same

concrete space (Giacoman, 2016), attempting to remove hierarchies and isolated eating. Here, the sharing of meals with strangers helps to foster community relations (Veen, 2019) where different rhythms and routines, carried by conviviality, alter the terms of engagement in the meal for its participants (Wise and Noble, 2016).

Figure 23- Commensal eating at a Christmas Day event at Squash. [Photo credit: Squash]

Other participants also expressed similar sentiments about sociality during meals at Squash, as evidenced in the following excerpts from two interviews, one with a member of staff, and the other a customer:

> *"It was a real sort of social hub for people, so you'd come in and you'd talk to people, you know, even people that you don't know, you just … you know it was … it creates this lovely environment where anyone could talk to anyone, and [there was] a real sense of sort of connection there"*
>
> *Mel, Freelancer (Interview, January 2021)*

"When we go [to Squash], sometimes we will see someone and then also, sometimes spark off ideas […] and we could introduce each other to people that I know or people that she knows. So it does definitely widen the networking."

Jane, Customer and Local Resident, (Interview, February 2021)

Here, Mel and Jane echo the words of Patrick when they talk about how a 'sense of connection' and a 'spark of ideas' are fostered by social engagements between different pockets of people. These messy social relationalities speak to how eating events can be considered moments constituted of more-than-food (Goodman, 2016), and in this instance, open up space to more ethical and purposeful encounters (Popke, 2009; Fincher and Iverson, 2015) with food and with each other. The importance of being able to 'talk to anyone' highlights the prioritisation of careful relations of safety and comfort between those who participate, either as a member of staff, volunteer, service user or customer.

"People smile and take their time and have a chat with the people they're sat next to, because they just came and they sat wherever the space, there was no like … you get to pick where you sit, unless you arrived super early. So it meant that some people sat next to each other and just didn't know each other"

Julie, Baker (Interview, December 2020)

In the above example, Julie is discussing a community-cooking workshop run alongside celebrity chef and Squash patron, Andi Oliver. For this event, and the majority of community feasting events Squash have run, encounters such as those that Julie described are encouraged as a foundational component of the mealtime. The unexpected conversations had between people who would not normally sit together help individuals learn from one another, as well as changing the fundamental experience of eating. For example, when discussing the same event, Tabitha told me how the person she was sat next to (a stranger at the time) talked to her about how social eating events at Squash had changed how they approached food at home (Tabitha, Interview; December 2020). The performativity of the meal time, where the interaction between strangers creates unanticipated moments, temporarily transcends routines and rhythms of everyday life for participants (le Grand, 2015; Wise and Noble, 2016). It is in this moment that food assemblages can create moments that are relationally diverse and unexpected, enabling conditions for new political possibilities (Sharp, 2018a), which, in turn, can transform the practice, offering a "chance that new and different acts of affecting will emerge from within social practices and explode their normality" (Reckwitz, 2016:121).

Figure 24 – Volunteers work in the polytunnel (Photo credit: Squash)

This is similar to other spaces at Squash. In the Grapes Garden, the polytunnel where people eat is filled with a single, long table that everyone sits or stands around, this can often feel like lots of people are 'cramming' into a small space (Fieldnotes, February 2020). Situating the group in close proximity to each other encourages people to chat in both small and large groups, where "pockets of people chat amongst themselves and across the space, often discussing the food being served" (Fieldnotes, January 2020). It also leads to conversation expanding across the table, with participants regularly talking to one another across opposite ends of the space (Fieldnotes, February 2020). This has the effect of encouraging individuals to contribute to collective dialogue and disperse ideas between one another.

Of course, there are some who opt not to, or cannot, engage with this, at times, intense sociality. Less confident members of the group, or those who struggle with communication for a variety of reasons, are less likely to feel as included within the social and decision-making structures of the group. This could be seen to entrench inequalities, social groups and hierarchies (Smith and Harvey, 2021; Bell and Valentine, 1997). Gladys highlighted in the quote below how Squash are successful in overcoming this:

> *"But these women were so special in terms of welcoming you and helping you and basically making sure that you were comfortable wherever you were sitting"*
>
> *Gladys, Customer (Interview, March 2021)*

Gladys' comments highlight how comfortability in space can be approached carefully by institutions. Here, she focuses on the attentiveness of those working or volunteering at Squash to address specific needs. The emphasis on comfort highlights how "meals provide much more than meeting material needs" (Phillips and Willatt, 2020:207). This more-than-food (Goodman, 2016) approach in this instance recognises the ethic of care in the staff and volunteers' attentiveness to the wider socio-spatial elements of the mealtime. Amanda raised pertinent questions regarding these more-than-food relations when discussing a larger community event:

> *"Was it about food or was it about the community coming together? Or is it about the music? Is it about perishable goods that we've used and not thrown away? There's a lot of levels."*
>
> *Amanda, Customer and Local Resident (Interview, March 2021)*

Whilst discussing more-than-food approaches, it is useful to recognise the multiplicity present within shared meals. Amanda discusses how she has conceptualised a specific communal meal at Squash with her son termed 'Disco Soup' where participants would collectively contribute to the production of a soup. While the soup was cooking a DJ would play music for the attendees. Here the meal can be understood as "assemblages of emergent relations among multiple subjects and objects" (Sharp, 2018a:266), with meaning derived from this multiplicity and uncertainty. For different participants, different meaning is derived from the event and its constituent practices.

Figure 25 – Outdoor commensality in the summer months (Photo credit: Squash)

In the non-commercial spaces at Squash, food is always prepared in a central space, where people are interacting: a table in the middle of a room, in a polytunnel where participants are engaged in activities, or by a fire, positioned central to proceedings. Here, the spatial and material elements of the mealtime encourage atmospheres of familiarity, comfort and collaboration across social relations (Marovelli, 2019). This *affordance* of conviviality highlights the importance of the organisation of social space, and how it can order opportunities for connection and belonging through possibilities of encounter (Wise and Noble, 2016, original author's emphasis). This was also focused on by Jackie, who elaborated on how these practices are significant to participants:

> *"The whole thing was coming here, spending two hours in the open air with nature, gardening and cooking together and then sitting. I think it's the sitting down and eating together, that a lot of people, you know, are living on their own in flats and it's very rare that they eat with someone else. They eat on their own. That's why their eating habits are… they do get ready meals, they do go out to eat or whatever."*
>
> *Jackie, Horticultural Manager (Interview, November 2020)*

Jackie is describing here the significance of the cooking sessions at Squash. Most of the Grapes group live alone [Fieldnotes, January 2020], so the communal meals at the Grapes have particular importance. Jackie's comment illustrates the importance of sociality within the mealtime, with the collective rhythms of the mealtime (Giacoman *et al*., 2021) contributing towards a shared relational experience of the meal. These diverse socialities allow the group to *experience* food differently, which can in turn inform *feeling* and *thinking* differently about what they eat (Carolan, 2017). Here, these micro-political acts tap into positive affective registers to allow for shifts in identification (Cameron and Gibson, 2005) with how the mealtime is experienced. At this juncture, we can also return to an engagement with Smith and Jehlička's concept of *quiet sustainability.* For the Grapes group, attendance at these events is not dictated by a desire to enact a specific form of change in the food economy, but yet this change is something that is being practiced, even if it is not being identified as such.

Figure 26- Volunteers sharing a meal in the polytunnel in the winter months (Photo credit: Squash)

In addition to this, the spatial ethic of care enacted within the mealtime setting at Squash is highlighted in Jackie's comments. Here, social and bodily proximity and material layout contribute to the significance of the experience of the meal (Phillips and Willatt, 2020). For the Grapes group that Jackie discusses above, this means contrasting the material and social setting of the busy garden with isolated experiences of meals at home. Marovelli explains how social eating spaces engage in care by "delivering a space of safety for social differences and for the expression of vulnerabilities, personal experiences and affects" (2019:200). For the participants in the Grapes group, these expressions are embodied through the communal meal in the garden and the polytunnel, before and during the meal.

This section has focused on how visceral and relational understandings of the mealtime have shaped how my participants experience meals. It has highlighted the importance of recognising shared meals as *more-than-material,* with relational and embodied practices of care proving equally as important to the wider experience. Building upon this, the findings highlight how social eating can help us to envisage diverse futures, with a focus on conviviality, embodiment and care. Social eating departs from capitalocentric understandings of the meal, based in individualism and prominence of the market. Instead, it offers important examples of "everyday activities in quotidian spaces which are part of a broader continuum of movements for change" (Askins, 2015:475).

7.2.1 "It didn't feel quite as buzzy": COVID-19, Proximity and the Mealtime

The COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges to the community business sector, with businesses initially reduced to 'firefighting' or addressing immediate need (Stumbitz *et al*., 2021). It also saw many community businesses expanding their services, using knowledge and existing relationships to address local need (Higton *et al.* 2021) and develop positive changes that led to organisations being stronger and more resilient (Stumbitz *et al*., 2021). However, many community businesses struggled to respond to community needs during the pandemic (Gardner *et al*., 2021).

With a significant proportion of my time in the field being conducted in 2020 and 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study is well placed to contribute to discussions about how the pandemic affected mealtime practices within a proximate community setting. This section uses data gathered during remote interviews with participants during the pandemic to explore reflections on commensality, proximity and care in the context of a socially distanced world. Drawing from emerging themes across my interviews, the focus centres predominantly around absence, with many participants choosing to discuss what was missed during this period.

During this time, the role of exceptional commensality was left confined to memory, as for many, eating was confined entirely to the home, and normative, domestic commensality became the principal way that meals were consumed (Fourat *et al*., 2021b) with reduced 'commensal circles' formed almost solely by domestic 'commensal units' (Sobal, 2000). Lockdowns, social distancing, COVID-related isolation, closing of restaurants and eateries, leisure and social centres, as well many people working at home all contributed to a significant reduction in mealtime encounters outside of the home.

Alternative practices during this period included the proliferation of 'digital commensality', or the sharing of cooking and eating experiences through video calling (Bascuñan *et al*., 2022). In academic literature, focus on sociality has seen eating with others considered normative (Pliner and Bell, 2009), but for many during the pandemic, eating became something that was done alone, in a consistently domestic environment. Therefore, an absence of encounter, when positioned against the centrality of sociality during Squash's pre-pandemic work becomes an important part of how commensality, or indeed its absence, is considered during this exceptional time.

Before the pandemic, Squash existed as a community café, a learning/social space, and an organic food shop. During March 2020, the organisation quickly moved towards a remote shop, where customers from the local area would order over the phone or by email, and collect their food outside the building. Customers were also asked to donate money as part of their purchase, with proceeds raised going towards providing social food boxes for some of the more vulnerable Squash volunteers, as well as refugee families in the local vicinity. The change in a matter of days from vibrant community space, where "you couldn't fit a cigarette paper between people" (David, Volunteer/ Local Resident; Interview, November 2020) to socially distanced practice without any of the convivial moments previously present was stark. In my interviews, which were all conducted during the pandemic, participants often reflected on the absence of commensality as a way of highlighting its importance to Squash and the wider social eating sector.

Clare commented upon how the pandemic forced Squash re-evaluate their approaches to food.

> *"[We try to provide] the opportunity to share food as much as possible in a celebratory way. And that is why we're really missing not being able to eat with people at the moment because that is what we love doing."*
>
> *Clare, Co-director (Interview, November 2020)*

Celebratory feasting, or special or exceptional commensal occasions, are events where people who do not normally eat or drink together come together (Kerner and Chou, 2015). During the pandemic, this exceptional commensality was completely removed from Squash's programme. Because of this, COVID-19 forced a change in the dynamics of care proximity at Squash, as well as other organisations that highlight the importance of social eating. The National Food Service[23] movement, for example, moved away from advocacy for a model that prioritised social eating, to one around emergency food provision and the development of mutual aid networks. For Squash, this meant a

[23] See https://www.nationalfoodservice.uk/ for more information

move away from proximate care, where the closeness of the meal setting acted as the focal point for social and embodied relations, towards less proximate, more materially focused care relations.

Jackie expressed how participants in the Grapes Garden struggled with losing the social elements of the meal during lockdown:

> *"A lot of people really miss […] cooking together. Which is one of the things that I can't imagine when we're going to be able to do that again. Cooking in a polytunnel in close contact, sharing cooking utensils, cooking it all in a pot and then being in that confined space and being that close to each other to chat…. and you know someone pass the onion and…"*
>
> *Jackie, Horticultural Manager (Interview, November 2020)*

During the pandemic, Jackie would regularly phone the Grapes group participants to check in with them and would drop off food parcels from Squash to some of the group. She told me that during the early stages of the pandemic, many of the group found the absence of the weekly commensal experience with one another difficult to adjust to (Jackie, interview). Previous studies have found that commensality plays an important role in increasing sociality in older adults (Dunbar, 2017; Marklinder and Nydahl, 2021), and the absence of this compounded the already isolating effects of lockdown.

Squash were able to open briefly solely as a café during September 2020, before local lockdowns[24] closed that aspect of the organisation again. Close proximity, people sharing tables and conversation across the room were not possible even whilst open as tables had to be socially distanced, table service was mandatory and conversation across tables was prohibited. Not only did this had a financial impact on the organisation, with drastically reduced footfall, there was also a social impact. As Mel explained to me, and as the inspiration for the subtitle of this section, the space didn't feel "quite as buzzy" (Mel, Freelancer; Interview, January 2021), whilst Jane highlighted how "we see quite a lot of familiar faces that we could [only] say hi to from afar" (Jane, Customer and Local Resident; Interview, February 2021). Whilst customers previously used the space for the perceived quality of food, it was also the aforementioned exceptional social elements of space that encouraged participation.

Mel and Fozia, in their respective interviews, both chose to highlight how this impacted practices in the space:

[24] Liverpool entered a local lockdown in October 2020 because of high COVID-19 infection rates. A second national lockdown followed immediately after, meaning that indoor dining wasn't permissible until May 2021.

"When you come to Squash, the association is you know it includes community, people talking, engagement and you know and sitting down over a cup of tea and having a chat, that sort of thing. And then when you come and obviously it's not here, you feel like it's … Squash has sort of lost its … lost its soul a little bit, just ever so tiny bit, like you know?"

Mel, Freelancer (Interview, January 2021)

"Obviously, I'll have a cuppa or I'll have something to eat, but it is about the [missing] social aspect of it, it's really important for people"

Fozia, Chef (Interview, September 2020)

Mel and Fozia's points highlight the importance of commensality to community food organisations like Squash. For Mel, the importance extends far beyond the consumption of food and into matters of sociality and social cohesion. Coming in to work during the pandemic meant an absence of the things that she discusses above: *community, people talking, engagement.* Mel and Fozia's association of spending time at Squash with multiple levels of sociality, highlights the importance *beyond* food when spending time there, where the distinctive biosocial experience of food at Squash changed the nature of food consumption. This highlights the importance of proximity when considering the development of community foodscapes, emphasising how relational encounters with others occupy an important role in the staging of meals.

Further to this point, Elise expressed the importance of commensality and social eating to Squash's work, in contrast to more isolated experiences of food banks (see Denning, 2021 for some examples). She noted:

"And also like … being able to … for some of the people that … you know whether they're volunteers or not, being able to have a hot plate of food that they might not be able to afford otherwise you know, that's something that I feel really passionate about is having people back in the building and doing that I think is really, really important."

Elise, Office Manager (Interview, November 2020)

Like Jackie's comments earlier in this chapter, Elise highlighted how coming to eat together at Squash can sometimes be the only time some of those involved get to eat with others. Whilst a meal can be dropped at someone's front door, it doesn't recreate the affective and collective atmospheres of a shared meal, cooked as part of a group endeavour. In the absence of shared meals, practices of care at Squash became less proximate, and 'caring at a distance' (Williams, 2017; Popke, 2006) was more prominent. The ''Soup-it-forward' and 'Box-it-forward' initiatives, asking

customers to add the cost of a soup or a veg box to their weekly shop, were hugely popular, with 80% of customers adding a donation to their shop at its peak (Fieldnotes, June 2020). Whilst the close physical proximity of care was removed apart from small interactions on people's doorsteps, quiet actions of care between near and distant others (Williams, 2017) became foregrounded in the actions of staff, volunteers and customers at the organisation. Here, practices of care were neither territorially restricted, nor based on distant strangers (Silk, 2004), but instead saw enactments with socially distanced others that were still proximate to the local community. Here care can be understood as a place-based ethical responsibility that is "practised through relationships, direct, indirect and mediated, [which] assists in growing a relational understanding of how justice is performed"(Williams, 2017:834; see also Till, 2012).

The removal of societal close spatial proximity highlights how, in 'normalcy', organisations like Squash function as a facilitator of local interactions and relations (Veen, 2019). This also functions as a useful tool for highlighting how the organisation exists in a complex, diverse food economy, where the exchange of food is recognised as a single component of the wider economic scope of the organisation, focused on human and more-than-human ethics of care.

Building on this, Williams develops a theory of *care-full justice,* where "ideas of proximity and distance [operate] in tension to realise the collective responsibility we have to near and distant others" (Williams, 2017:834). Developing this with the context of COVID-19 in urban environments allows us to recognise these diverse spatialities of care. Through integrating this with an understanding that "care is tied to attending to physicality, bodily comportment, and proximity as well as cognitive consideration of morality" (Hamington, 2015:591), the pandemic has shown how dynamics of care related to food can be forced to change.

By focusing on participant experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in this section, I have demonstrated the importance of the transformational spaces of encounter that were highlighted in the previous sections. Through a focus on absence, the section has highlighted how these relational spaces are fundamental to how community food economies are practiced. Gibson-Graham and Roelvink (2009) note that learning to be affected is an ethical practice that is developed and transformed in relation to co-existence. Eating together forms an important part of this co-existence, as highlighted by my participants both in the presence, and absence of, commensal opportunities.

7.3 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how commensal and convivial activity at Squash has an important role in forming more hopeful and ethical subjects, through a framing of preparation and consumption of meals as situated, relational and embodied. Building on discussion in the previous chapter that highlighted increased attention in diverse economies scholarship on the "material dimensions of reality" (Schmid and Smith, 2020:259), I have underlined the different ways in which the material world intertwined with social encounters throughout this research. By indicating that as well as ingesting *of* food, it is the ingesting *with* that shapes how food is experienced, I have emphasised the need for greater focus on the relational and social spaces of the mealtime.

This chapter builds on existing understandings of commensality by underlining the role of transformation in the mealtime, particularly emphasising the significance of community food spaces as sites for the staging of transformative practices through everyday commensality. Whilst recent studies have emphasised the importance of social eating in the context of wellbeing and care (Marovelli, 2019; Smith and Harvey, 2021), this chapter has developed these themes to examine how community food spaces can be hubs for the cultivation of new economic subjects. This chapter has therefore recognised these inventions but has also focused on the everyday practices and relationships, as well as the "relationalities of food, space and place" (Goodman, 2016:258), that create socio-material assemblages around the meal. By identifying diverse ways in which caring economies can be fostered (Dombroski *et al*., 2018; Williams and Tait, 2022), the chapter has foregrounded the role of food in building these economies. In doing this, I have argued that community food spaces can represent important and diverse infrastructures of care (Williams and Tait, 2022).

My focus on learning in the chapter again attends to the notion of shifting subjectivities. As noted in Chapter 3 of this thesis, Latour's (2004) concept of learning to be affected has been heavily used within diverse economies scholarship (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009; Cameron *et al*., 2011; Roelvink, 2015, 2020) as a means with which to articulate the ways in which economic transformation is linked to shifting affectivities. This chapter has engaged with these framings to argue that shared meals in community food spaces offer tangible opportunities for affective shifts, where participants are transformed by diverse encounters with human and non-human others.

The chapter has therefore framed food practices at Squash as constitutive of a 're-socialised economic relations' (Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016; Ulug and Trell, 2020). Here, my focus has drawn attention to emphasising the importance of interdependence of subjects and economic practices (Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016) and therefore contributed to debates around being in-common,

particularly when considering how practices at Squash contribute to “becoming of new and as-yet unthought ways of being” (Gibson-Graham, 2006:85). The discussion in this and the previous chapter has provided an insight into how we can better understand how visceral engagements with food can transform economic subjects through the enacting of diverse economies through practices that are both habitual and consciously intentional (Gibson-Graham, 2003).

This chapter has concluded the data analysis of this thesis. The following chapter will draw together the findings from these chapters, and attend to the research questions established in the introduction.

8: Conclusion: Developing Ethical Food Subjects through Transformative Approaches to Taste

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In prefixing the title of this thesis with a quote from a participant describing an event as "just food and joy", I have evoked a deliberate ambiguity in its meaning that has hopefully been gradually uncovered throughout this work. Food, in one sense, is a simple material, consumed to *just* sustain us as humans. However, as I have illustrated, it is also much more than this. To borrow again from Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2013); food, when understood in emotional and affective terms, concerns a rhizome of forces that influence how we process it as a material. Therefore, to better understand the *food*, we must also learn more about the *joy*. Through developing understandings of food and eating in this way, research can illuminate pathways to social and economic *justice* through unexpected and diverse means.

In the recently published *Handbook of Diverse Economies*, Gerda Roelvink writes that a diverse economies methodology requires researchers to adopt a stance that is "flexible, that is open to surprise, and is attentive to others" (2020:461). Engaging with this project has been full of surprise and undertaking it has required significant flexibility and attentiveness. From unexpected findings, to rethought methodological approaches, to the profound impact of a global pandemic, I have found that adopting these stances from diverse economies approaches has proved vital in building a reflexive project that has adapted to an ever-changing food landscape.

This study has been an examination of food, eating and learning, placed in the context of an engagement with techniques of thick description and weak theory (Gibson-Graham, 2014) underpinning a stance that is focused on 'tasting' rather than 'judging' (Gibson-Graham, 2006, Cameron and Wright, 2014). This thesis looked at the role of community food spaces in visceral transformation and the cultivation of food subjects. It also examined the role of communal cooking and eating within this transformation, developing relational and embodied perspectives on diverse foodscapes.

To investigate this, I developed a mixed methods approach that was heavily adapted due to the changing research landscape caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. I first engaged with an ethnographic study, working alongside a community of practice. Here, I took on a role of a volunteer in order to participate more deeply within the practices of the organisation and engaged with a methodology drawn from sensory ethnographic practice. After this stage of the research was abruptly curtailed due to the pandemic, I pivoted towards a remote methodology, focused predominantly on remote interview-led methods.

In the introduction to this thesis, I began to highlight where the gaps in literature around my field existed. In response to these, I developed a series of research questions. These included investigating how community food spaces affect experiences (RQ1), how, in the context of RQ1, shared experiences of cooking and eating impact how food is experienced and enjoyed (RQ2), and whether these practices influence how we understand community food spaces as transformative elements in building more hopeful foodscapes (RQ3).

Whilst the data collected and analysed in this thesis has produced some surprising and, at times, complex perspectives, this conclusion will seek to briefly summarise the findings of this research, recalling the literature gaps highlighted earlier in the thesis, offering perspectives on the key original findings and indicating where future research could develop these findings. Therefore, in this final chapter, I will first summarise the key findings of this thesis, consolidated into two themes: *Diverse Visceral Imaginaries* and *Commensality as a Transformative Tool.* Following this, I will offer my thoughts on what I thought the methodological contribution of this research was, as well as indicate where I believed the project to methodologically limited. This section will be followed by my perspectives on where future avenues for research in the field may lie. Finally, I will offer brief concluding remarks on the thesis.

8.1 Key Findings and Contributions

8.1.1 Place and Community Food Economies

This thesis has also highlighted the importance of place within the community economies project. Miller (2010), in his focus on SSE, highlights how solutions look different in different places and contexts. My focus on Squash, an organisation that exists in a neighbourhood characterised by neoliberal policymaking and severely impacted by the effects of austerity and COVID-19, is significant in that it provides insight into a *different* place and context. **My focus on the relational**

and performative aspects of Squash challenges critiques that argue transformative foodscapes exist principally in spaces that are exclusionary (Guthman, 2008; Alkon, 2013; Zitcer, 2015; Moragues-Faus, 2017) and instead offers an example of where change occurs in a place that differs from other academic accounts. Through engaging with the idea that spaces should be considered to be performative (Gregson and Rose, 2000; Cornwell, 2012), I have illustrated how community food spaces like Squash are important contributors to diverse urban economies.

In Chapter 5, my analysis focuses on Squash as an organisation, using *thick descriptive* methods (Gibson-Graham, 2014) to examine how the organisation contributes to diverse food practices in its neighbourhood, as well as highlighting the importance of place within these practices. My "place-based, nitty gritty" approach to research here is linked to how diverse economies researchers understand social change, through actions in "'disarticulated "places"' that are connected through a shared language and understanding of economy that shapes what is possible" (Roelvink, 2020b:459). Therefore, to address a criticism that is frequently levelled at diverse economies research that working at a local level only fosters fragmentation (Gibson-Graham, 2006), this study has challenged perspectives of the local as defensive or regressive (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005) by offering an example of where shifts occur in a 'disarticulated place' (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Roelvink, 2020), acknowledging that change emerges in unique and non-sequential ways (Grabel, 2018; Roelvink, 2020).

Goodman *et al*. (2014) call for a recognition of the reflexive and diverse, yet always *situated* (Haraway, 1988) productions of knowledge related to foodscapes. In doing this, they argue that we can create more complex and inclusive discussions around just foodscapes that move beyond a monolithic framing of 'community values'. Building on this, and drawing on a geographical tradition that constitutes place as relational (Massey, 1994, 2005; Castree, 2004), in this thesis I have sought to understand community food spaces in the context of a diverse foodscape. By documenting the formation of a community food space at Squash and highlighting the relational and performative elements of this space, I have begun to foreground what it is about these spaces that influence participants' experiences of food.

Here, we can also return to the work of Ethan Miller that was introduced in Chapter 2. Whilst all three of Miller's iterations of community economy have featured in the background of this project, it is his focus on CE2 that demands attention here. As I have previously noted, CE2 represents the moment "our interdependence is exposed for negotiation or contestation" (Miller, 2013:523). For Miller, this means a movement towards affirmativity, or positivity, where the role of negotiated ethical praxis is brought into question. **My research has drawn on this moment, arguing that**

embodied food encounters at Squash represent moments of ethical exposure for participants, within a neighbourhood where these opportunities would not normally be provided. By focusing on commensal encounters and visceral engagements with food, I have highlighted important moments in the development of community food economies.

8.1.2 Diverse Visceral Imaginaries

In their contribution to a 'Geographies of Food' discussion in *Progress in Human Geography,* Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy discuss how *alternative visceral imaginaries* can be realised as individuals and groups gain capacities to feel (and eat) food in different and transgressive ways to imagine and taste different bodily futures (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy in Cook *et al*., 2010).This perspective seeks to "begin to feel out different ways of being and becoming" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013:84) that are a part of bodily transformation. Acknowledging Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy's perspective that this process is often chaotic and unstructured, and drawing from Gibson-Graham's (2008) performative ontology of difference and possibility rather than dominance and predictability**, I have sought to develop this understanding into a consideration of *diverse visceral imaginaries.* In developing this using an approach drawn from diverse economies thinking, I have argued that, through an engagement with open-ended and anti-essentialist approaches to the 'decentred subject' (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Healy *et al*., 2020), we can develop perspectives of different bodily futures that emerge from the connectedness of visceral experience and knowledge production in the production and reproduction of the material body.**

In integrating Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy's visceral imaginary with how diverse economies thinking develops diverse imaginaries of the subject, I have sought to contribute to discussions around diverse economies approaches that seek to explore the development of other possible bodily subjectivities (Gibson-Graham, 2006). **In doing this, I have drawn attention to the role of everyday practices such as eating in building other possible worlds**, **whilst acknowledging that change occurs in diffuse and diverse ways (Roelvink, 2020b).** How my participants experienced and discussed food was defined by a myriad of factors, some of which are discussed at great length in this thesis, whilst others did not emerge at all in the research process. What is important to note from this, however, is that all of these influences have significance in how bodily change is understood. In light of this, in undertaking a diverse economies approach to research, I have not been looking to identify what type of economy Squash is (see Gordon, 2018). Instead, I have been asking what kind of economic relationships foster sustainable, ethical and enjoyable ways of

flourishing (see Gibson-Graham et al., 2016), in order to identify new ethical coordinates, negotiations of difference and diverse practices.

My understanding of these diffuse and diverse pathways of change involved considering how alterity is framed within food geography. Again, I have leant heavily on diverse economies thinking here, particularly engaging with contributions from Cameron and Wright (2014) to problematise contemporary framings on boundaries and alterity. As noted in Chapters 1,2 and 3 of this thesis; diverse economies thinkers, visceral geographers and critical food scholars have approached alterity in different ways. Rather than engage with the food system as a series of binaries, I have adopted an approach throughout this thesis that utilises Gibson-Graham's method of *reading for difference,* examining the messy 'in-between spaces' within foodscapes (Goodman, 2016). By using this, I have engaged with an approach to food that rejects predetermination and "teaches us to be open to, and playful with, difference" (Carolan, 2016:144). This has significance in how we understand and promote different ways of inhabiting the economy and taking action with others (Gibson-Graham, 2006), something this thesis has engaged with throughout its analysis.

When introducing his conception of *ethical food subjects,* Eric Sarmiento (2017) asks us what forces are at work in the process of cultivating food subjects. In this thesis, this is a question that I have attempted to (partly) address through my considerations of diverse visceral imaginaries**. In Chapter 6, I examined how affects based around trust, comfort and familiarity play a fundamental part in the cultivation of ethical food subjects through bodily shifts that are linked to careful and diverse encounters with food. Following this, in Chapter 7, I highlighted the importance of the affective and collective properties of social cooking, eating and food sharing and their generative potential for cultivating different food subjects.** These focuses have uncovered *quiet* (Smith and Jehlička, 2013) areas of the food economy where actually existing change occurs. **This study has highlighted how the cultivation of ethical food subjects can often be through this 'quiet' act, drawn from, at times, inadvertent and unwitting participation in diverse foodscapes.**

8.1.3 Commensality as a Transformative Tool

Contemporary literature on commensality has highlighted the importance of social eating in the context of wellbeing and care (Marovelli, 2019; Smith and Harvey, 2021), as well as the potent and pervasive political forces of commensality (Higgs, 2015; Smith and Harvey, 2021). Whilst there have been some important contributions in what is an emergent field, in Chapter 3, as part of my literature review, I highlighted the need for researchers to examine in greater depth how diverse

bodily experience can shape visceral engagement with community food spaces, particularly in the context of social eating. I also underlined the need for greater attention to be paid towards new and emerging forms of meal sharing (see Masson *et al.* 2018, Fourat *et al.* 2021b) that includes communal public eating spaces.

Building on my discussion of viscerality in Chapter 6, in Chapter 7 **I highlighted how, to better understand the ingesting *of* food, greater attention should be paid to the ingesting *with,* in the shaping of how food is experienced. In doing this, I emphasised the need for greater focus on the relational and social spaces of the mealtime, recognising shared meals as *more-than-material.*** In response to calls for more engagement with the "spaces, places and relationalities of foodscapes" (Goodman, 2016:258), **my research has highlighted the importance of a greater focus on these relational and social spaces of the mealtime.**

This is not to say that the ingesting *of* should be ignored within studies of commensality. In both Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, I focused on the material practices and encounters with food, and how they build cohesive bonds that engage people through practices of *doing food*. The material practices of learning focused on in this thesis are less about a focus on individuals participating as 'competent players' (Alkemeyer and Buschmann, 2016), and instead are more about social and cultural affects of learning and encounter with food. **I have therefore been concerned with how commensal encounters influence learning and the negotiation of difference in my participants, finding that the 'how we know' that contributes to our food knowledge has a vital role in building relationships with food and others in food environments.**

My analysis has therefore involved a recognition of performativity as both material and immaterial, where I have considered how diverse food practices were are of a "performative ontological politics that is interested in making economies work differently" (Roelvink *et al*., 2015:8). Here, building on elements of Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy's PEB framework, I have been specifically concerned with the connectedness of visceral experience and knowledge production in the production and reproduction of the material body, **finding that commensal encounters are composed of complex socio-spatial food-body relationships, whilst acknowledging the body's role as a starting point in economic politics** (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013, Roelvink 2020a)**.**

My study has provided further evidence on the idea that community food spaces that focus on social eating offer an intersection of domestic, charitable and 'eating out' commensality (Smith and Harvey, 2021). For my participants, engagement within the communal commensal settings focused on in this project represented both a part of their routinised eating habits and occasions for exceptional feasting events. **My research has also highlighted how these commensal encounters**

also relate to performances of care, consolidating perspectives that argue community food spaces can represent important and diverse infrastructures of care (Williams and Tait, 2022).

Finally, through a focus on commensality and absence in Chapter 7, I highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on participants in social eating initiatives. **Through drawing attention to this absence, I have emphasised the importance of social engagement within community food spaces, highlighting how without this, participants struggled to find meaning within community food activities. This analysis underlined the importance of proximity when considering the development of community foodscapes, focusing on how relational encounters with others occupy an important role in the wider eating experience.**

This key finding also offers a contribution to recent discussion on *if* and *how* community initiatives can be transformative (Schmid et al., 2021, original emphasis), **by arguing that commensal encounters can play an important role in establishing and maintaining inclusive and sustainable livelihoods. Throughout this thesis, I have also focused on how embodied, social interaction around food contributes to subjectivity shifts in participants, becoming an important political act defined through an assemblage of practice**. **With regards to commensality, I have focused on how everyday practices and relationships create socio-material assemblages around the meal. In doing this, I have examined how diverse socialities are developed through convivial practices, moving beyond binaries in the food economy towards understandings based around diverse practices.**

8.2 Methodological Contributions and Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic formed an unwelcome backdrop to the construction of this research project. This backdrop did, however, enable the development of an unorthodox and somewhat experimental approach to methodology. In this section, I will briefly engage with the methods used in this research from a more reflective perspective than I have offered previously, offering thoughts on their wider contributions and limitations.

In the introduction to this thesis, I queried whether remote methods could be utilised to pay suitable attention to themes of materiality, affectivity and viscerality. To answer this question somewhat ambiguously: yes and no. Whilst I was never able to recreate the atmosphere of 'being there' amongst my participants, I did engage with approaches that allowed both me and my participants to understand embodied encounters with food in ways that would not have been possible using traditional ethnographic methods. The pandemic provided numerous opportunities to engage with novel and experimental methods to gather data. Of particular note here was my engagement with a

number of techniques to draw out visceral experiences from participants. From remote object-interviewing, to asking participants in advance to recall meals, I often found remote environments to be conducive to well considered thought around visceral experience and perspectives.

However, these experiences are not the same as being sat around a table with a group of people, witnessing how they eat and enjoy food and talking to them about their experiences and motivations in the moment. As the reader may have observed, there were sections of my data analysis (e.g., sections 6.2.1, 6.2.4 and 7.1.1) that were drawn heavily from my pre-pandemic data collection, where my remote methodology did not provide the requisite tools to offer significant value to these passages. Obviously, this is not an issue that could have been resolved at the time through simply re-entering the physical field, however it is something that is worth considering when evaluating the methodological contribution of this research.

As well as my pandemic-affected methods, there are of course, significant limitations to adopting case-study approaches to research. Being fixed to one site meant that I have had to be careful not to generalise my findings in this project, offering only tentative suggestions as part of a wider conclusion around how we research foodscapes from socio-spatial and affective perspectives. Beyond this, my familiarity and affinity towards my research site meant that an overt bias was introduced into the research. Whilst this again has implications for generalising my findings, this was considered as part of an overarching approach that sought to avoid "discerning, detached and critical" (Gibson-Graham, 2008:618) methods.

All research is faced with limitations; however, it is my belief that despite the limitations in the approaches taken whilst conducting this research, this thesis has significant value in the framing of emergent foodscapes, and sufficiently highlights and develops under-researched areas in this field.

8.3 Future Research

This research has answered some questions, but also prompted many more. Here, I will outline where unanswered, or partially answered questions provide opportunities for future research.

With social eating initiatives an increasingly emergent phenomenon in the UK (Smith and Harvey, 2021), more research needs to be carried out to better understand *how far* and *in what ways* they can affect change (Schmid et al., 2021, original emphasis). This research has begun to examine this, but it remains a field that is incomplete, albeit with an increasing number of recent contributions (see Marovelli, 2019; Ulug and Trell, 2020; Smith and Harvey, 2021). This work, as well as the

contributions made in this thesis, offer a platform for future research to engage with the topic, and specifically consolidate research in how commensal encounters work to build better futures.

Goodman (2008) argues that a significant area in which needs more research in food geography is uncovering and understanding the accentuated inequalities in who eats what, where and why. Whilst this research has begun to address some of the complexities within this statement, in future research I would like to develop this further, investigating more thoroughly the nuances in the visceral development of ethical food subjects, and the barriers to this faced by individuals. I believe that my framing of visceral geographies and diverse economies approaches in this thesis has provided a useful platform with which to better evaluate and redress some of the socio-spatial circumstances (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010) that dictate *access to* and *enjoyment of* food, and further research here would help to uncover and provide solutions to accentuated inequalities within foodscapes.

Building on the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic impacted this research, one of the more obvious directions for future research in this field is through a greater engagement with in-person methods, and the use of PAR. This project would likely have looked very different had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic, and a revisiting of my initial line of methodological inquiry would have provided this thesis with a range of different findings. In this thesis, I have not shied away from highlighting some of the limitations of the pandemic-enforced methods on this project and in future research, it would be useful to engage with an investigation of transformative commensality and diverse visceral imaginaries that utilises approaches drawn from ethnography and PAR.

Conversely, the research has also opened up a line of inquiry to how we can better use remote methods when engaging with research that is visceral, embodied and affective. With an acknowledgement that research in the modern, neoliberal university does not necessarily coalesce with approaches to research that demand integration of the extent that historical ethnographic methods have taken, remote research opens up possible new avenues for investigation. In the context of this project, this meant exploring techniques for how participants can communicate visceral feelings and embodied experiences from behind a screen. Whilst these changes were enforced on the project due to COVID-19 restrictions on research, an avenue for future research should be in investigating in greater depth both the potential for, and the best practices of, this type of methodological inquiry.

8.4 Concluding Remarks

I would like to conclude this thesis by focusing on a quote from Michael Goodman, where he writes:

"You are what you eat, but also how, when, where and why you eat" (2008:12)

This quote succinctly summarises where I think the fundamental importance of this study lies. Through engaging with a situated study of a community food space, the how, when, where, and why of eating have been illuminated in diverse and unexpected ways. As highlighted through my engagement with broader literature in this thesis, there isn't a singular way to research food, but contemporary approaches to the subject should be conscious of the multiple and often non-representative influences in play when considering foodscapes.

Roelvink writes that to generate a shift from a strong focus on capitalism towards weak approaches requires a "rupture in one's disposition" (2020:430). In this thesis, I have argued that these ruptures can be caused by a variety of triggers related to food. The food practices that are explored within this research, from commensal encounters, to embodied learning, to multi-sensory engagement with food, all contribute towards disrupting "settled preconceptions of 'the ways things are'" (Phillips and Willatt, 2020:212). From this, I have argued that practices of self-cultivation regarding food are not always linear and obvious, and often includes various 'hidden' or 'quiet' activities in liminal spaces within diverse foodscapes.

Through this, I have argued that places like Squash that can change how food is experienced and understood are of paramount importance if we are to address many of the issues facing the food system. The challenge ahead then, for researchers and activists in community food spaces, is to find ways in which we can foster and grow them.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Schedules

Thanks for agreeing to take part in the interview. The purpose of this research is to explore how organisations like Squash can help to shape their local communities using food as a tool for change. The purpose of this interview is looking at the everyday engagement that people involved with Squash have with community food, and their experiences and values regarding food in the area. You have been asked to take part because of your close involvement with Squash in the past. If at any point you feel something is important, even if not related to the question, don't hesitate to talk about it and don't feel like you are going off-topic with anything, anything you have to say may be relevant and important. Are there any questions about the research or the interview before we start?

Staff and Volunteers

1. Can you tell me about the object that you've brought along?

2. What is your favourite dish or thing you've or eaten at Squash? Or a time you remember eating something good here?
    a. *Why is it particularly memorable?*

3. Tell me about how you first got involved with Squash?
    a. *What made you want to get involved?*
    b. *(Volunteers) Why here and not anywhere else?*

4. What is your role within the organisation?
    a. *Has this changed over time?*
    b. *How?*
    c. *Do you think you've developed new skills whilst working/volunteering here?*
        a. *What are they?*
    d. *How is working at Squash different from other things you've done previously?*
    e. *(Kitchen staff) Can you tell me about coming up with ideas for food in the kitchen?*

f. *(Kitchen staff) Can you talk me through how you make … [i.e. bread, houmous, turmeric tonic, cottage cheese]*
g. *(Kitchen staff) How do you use waste products and stuff from the garden?*
h. *(Kitchen staff) Squash try to use a lot of products that are in season and lots of seasonal produce comes in from the garden. How do you think this changes how you approach cooking?*

5. Can you tell me about what it's been like working during COVID….
    a. *How has it been different from before?*
    b. *How do you think Squash has made a difference to the local area during this time?*

6. Are you involved with any other organisations that have an involvement with food currently?
    a. *Why do you go there?*

7. Do you shop or eat at Squash normally outside of your working hours?
    a. *What do you tend to buy?*
    b. *Is there anything that you would tend to buy here but not elsewhere?*
    c. *Is there anything you would buy in the supermarket but not from here?*

8. What is your favourite dish you've made or eaten at Squash? Or a time you remember eating or making something good here?
    a. *Why? Ingredients, cooking process, people, event.*

9. What would you like Squash to do more of in the future?
    a. *Can you tell me about your favourite events at Squash?*
    b. *As a worker and as a participant?*

More person specific questions from fieldnotes/ researcher knowledge

<u>Local Residents</u>

1. Can you tell me about the object that you've brought along?

2. What is your favourite dish or thing you've or eaten at Squash? Or a time you remember eating something good here?
    a. *Why is it particularly memorable?*

3. How long have you lived around here?
    a. *What was it like back then?*
    b. *What are the big changes?*
    c. *Where did you go for food in the past?*
    d. *What was food like here in the past?*

4. What are the issues in the area?
    a. *How are they different at the moment from before?*
    b. *Do you think the area is missing anything?*

5. Where do you normally go to buy your food?
    a. *What role do you think supermarkets have in this area?*

6. Tell me about how you first got involved with Squash?
    a. *What is it you like doing most with them?*
    b. *What have you missed during lockdown?*

7. Has Squash changed this road and this area at all?
    a. *How has it changed?*

8. Have you been involved in Squash's community events before?
    a. *If yes… which ones?*
    b. *If no… why not? Uninterested, inconvenient times, not aware of them?*
    c. *Can you tell me about ……[event name]*
    d. *Did you learn anything there?*
    e. *Is there a type of event you'd like to see more of in the future?*

9. *What do you want to see Squash do in the future?*

    Explain 100 year street if not aware…

Prompt with ideas from 100 year street workshops if necessary

[Community bakery, more community growing space, guest accommodation for workshops, planting on the streets]

10. What is your favourite thing that you've eaten at Squash?
    a. *Why?*
    b. *Can you tell me about a time you've eaten that?*
    c. *Are there any recipes/skills you learnt at Squash that you use at home?*
    d. *Can you tell me about them?*

<u>Customers</u>

1. Can you tell me about the object that you've brought along?

2. What is your favourite dish or thing you've or eaten at Squash? Or a time you remember eating something good here?
    a. *Why is it particularly memorable?*

3. Tell me about how you first got involved/heard about with Squash?
    a. *What is it you like doing most there?*
    b. *What is your favourite thing to eat there and why?*
    c. *What have you missed during lockdown?*

4. What makes you want to shop here instead of elsewhere?
    a. *What do you tend to buy?*
    b. *How much of your weekly shopping is bought here?*
        i. *And at the supermarket?*
    c. *What is important to you when you're buying food?*
        i. *Origin?*
        ii. *Organic*
        iii. *Anything else?*
    d. *Is there anything that you would tend to buy here but not elsewhere?*
    e. *Is there anything you would buy in the supermarket but not from here?*

5. Why do you think it is so popular as a place to eat/shop?
    a. *How is it different from other places?*

6. Are you involved with any other organisations that have an involvement with food currently?
    a. Why did you get involved?

7. Have you been involved in Squash's community events before?
    a. *If yes… which ones?*
    b. *If no… why not? Uninterested, inconvenient times, not aware of them?*
    c. *Can you tell me about ……[event name]*
    d. *Did you learn anything there?*
    e. *Is there a type of event you'd like to see more of in the future?*

8. What would you like to see Squash become in the coming years?

    Explain 100 year street if not aware…

    Prompt with ideas from 100 year street workshops if necessary

        Community bakery, more community growing space, guest accommodation for workshops, planting on the streets

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask the researcher if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. It is important to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

This research is investigating the role of urban food initiatives in building communities, and the role that the local community has in this process. It is looking at the everyday engagement that members of a community have with food, and their experiences and stories regarding food in the area. The research will help to explore the different ways that food, in an urban context, can shape communities and investigate how these communities can help to build just and sustainable futures through food initiatives.

2. Why have I been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part because you engage regularly with a community organisation which is taking part in this research. The research looks to engage first-hand with how members of the community who engage with food initiatives experience food in the everyday.

3. What will happen if I take part?

If you choose to take part, you will be asked to carry out an interview with the researcher. This will take the form of a semi-structured interview, in which the researcher will ask you questions around your experience with food and with the organisation where the interview is taking place. The interviews will vary in length but will most likely take around 30 to 45 minutes. If you wish to carry out the interview in two sittings, this can be arranged.

If you wish, you can opt for the findings from the interview to be anonymised. This means that you will be given a pseudonym and no information that will make you identifiable will be included. If you

wish to be anonymised during the write-up, you can notify the researcher up to four weeks after the conclusion of the interview.

The interview will be recorded on an audio-recording device. This is for the purposes of transcription at a later stage. If you wish at any point for the recording to be turned off in the interview, please let me know and you do not need to provide any explanation. This recording will be deleted once interviews have been transcribed.

4. Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you wish not to take part, you do not have to. If you decide to take part and change your mind during the interview, you can stop at any time. You are also free to refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to, without explanation.

5. How will my data be used?

The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit".

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. The researcher's supervisor acts as the Data Processor for this study, and any queries relating to the handling of your personal data can be sent to the contact information outlined at the bottom of this sheet.

Further information on how your data will be used can be found in the table below

How will my data be collected?	Interviews will be recorded on a dictaphone. Occasionally, notes may be written down in the interview.
How will my data be stored?	The recording will be stored securely on the University of Liverpool M: Drive. The recording will be transferred to secure storage and the original file deleted as soon as possible, after the interview. The recording will be transcribed to a Microsoft Word document which will be stored securely on the

	University of Liverpool M: Drive. Audio-recordings will be deleted upon transcription. Any interview notes will be stored securely. Consent forms will also be stored securely.
How long will my data be stored for?	All transcribed data, interview notes and consent forms will be stored for up to 10 years, when it will be disposed of securely. This is in accordance with the University's data archiving procedures. Audio-recordings will be stored securely until transcription, when they will be deleted permanently and securely
What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data?	The primary researcher will be the only person will access to data.
Will my data be anonymised?	All data will be anonymised, with no exception. Any information that has the potential to identify you, such as names or addresses, will be removed or edited with a pseudonym.
How will my data be used?	The data will be used as part of a doctoral thesis, which will be submitted to the University of Liverpool. It may also be used in future academic publications, conference presentations or in reports for local organisations.
Who will have access to my data?	Only the primary researcher.
Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	No.
How will my data be destroyed?	Electronic data will be permanently deleted from all computers and institutional servers. Consent forms and hard copies of data will be shredded.

6. Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no immediate and obvious risks in taking part in the interview. However, the interview may involve disclosure of personal or sensitive information. Whilst this is unlikely, please remember that you are able to abstain from answering any questions you do not feel comfortable with, without explanation. You are also free to withdraw from the interview at any point, without explanation. If you wish to withdraw your participation from the research after the interview has taken place, you can do so up at any point up to four weeks after the interview takes place.

If you disclose something during the interview that suggests that yourself or somebody else is at risk of harm, the researcher will need to raise this concern with a designated safeguarding staff member at the organisation where you work, and/or their primary supervisor. This is the only case in which anonymity would be broken.

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There are no direct benefits from taking part in this study, although you will be helping the researcher to gather information to help answer some of their research questions and aims.

8. What will happen to the results of the study?

This research will be submitted to the University of Liverpool as a doctoral thesis. This thesis will be a public document which can be obtained through libraries. The research may lead to publications in academic journals, or be used to form part of reports for local decision-makers or local authority. Results may also be used in presentations at academic conferences. If you would like to access the research thesis, or any other published documents, once they have been submitted, you can do by contacting the researcher at sgomcdow@liv.ac.uk

9. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

If you begin the interview and do not wish to continue, you can stop at any time without giving a reason. If you wish to remove your data from the interview from the research, you can do so by contacting the researcher, up to four weeks after the data of the interview. At this point, interviews will be transcribed and anonymised and you will be unable to withdraw your data.

10. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting either myself, or my supervisor (details below) and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113

11. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

Researcher: Olly McDowell

Department of Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool

Roxby Building, Liverpool, L69 7ZT, United Kingdom

University email address: sgomcdow@liv.ac.uk

07443649807

Supervisor: Prof. Peter North

Department of Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool

Roxby Building, Liverpool, L69 7ZT, United Kingdom

Email address: northp@liv.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form

Research ethics approval number: 5531

Title of the research project: **An exploration of diverse community food practices in Liverpool, UK**

Name of researcher: **Olly McDowell**

The consent form is to check that you are happy with the information you have received about the study, that you are aware of your rights as a participant and to confirm that you wish to take part in the study.

Please tick boxes if they apply

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the provided information sheet for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that taking part in the study involves an interview which is audio-recorded on a device by the researcher and notes may be made during the interview ☐

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part at any point during the interview, without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions. ☐

4. I would like my real name used so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised. I understand that what I have said or written as part of this interview will be used in research outputs. I understand that keeping my real name ☐

in the research may only be possible if it does not compromise the anonymity of other participants. The standard practice here is for names to be anonymised, so only tick this box if you want your real name used.

5. I understand that if the researcher has reason to be concerned about the safety of myself or another person, then anonymity cannot be maintained and the researcher has the responsibility to raise this with a safeguarding lead at the organisation I attend and/or University Supervisor/s. ☐

6. I understand that I can ask for access to the information I provide and I can request the destruction of that information if I wish at any time up to four weeks after the date of the interview. I understand that following this point, I will no longer be able to request access to or withdrawal of the information I provide. ☐

7. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Liverpool. ☐

8. I understand that signed consent forms and any interview notes will be stored securely and that audio recordings and interview transcripts will be stored securely on a device which is password protected. These will only be accessible by Olly McDowell ☐

9. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____	_____	_____
Participant name	Date	Signature

_____ _____ _____

Name of person taking consent Date Signature

Study contact details and further information:

Researcher: Olly McDowell

Department of Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool

Roxby Building, Liverpool, L69 7ZT, United Kingdom

Email address: sgomcdow@liv.ac.uk

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Supervisor: Prof. Peter North

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