

DISSERTATION

THEORIZING COMMENSALITY DISCOURSES: FOOD TRUCK COMMUNICATION  
AND INFLUENCE IN LOCAL CULTURE

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## ABSTRACT

### THEORIZING COMMENSALITY DISCOURSES: FOOD TRUCK COMMUNICATION AND INFLUENCE IN LOCAL CULTURE

Food trucks offer spaces of commensality where people negotiate cultural identity and senses of place through practices, tastes, and performances communicated through enactments of food sharing. In this dissertation, I theorize commensality as a rhetorical texture of subcultural ideology, a rhetorical texture of resistance to cultural gentrification, and as a digital process of online community building. I use rhetorical criticism and ethnographic methods of participant observation to analyze physical spaces of food truck commensality in Fort Collins, Colorado: The FOCO Food Truck Rally and North College Avenue. Additionally, I conduct a media discourse analysis of the Fort Collins food truck Instagram community. Overall, I argue that commensality operates as a subcultural ideology resistant and reifying of gourmet elitism, a rhetoric of difference resistant to cultural gentrification, and a process digital commensality building community through social mediated branding, networking, and audiencing.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the food truck industry has grown significantly, reporting 24,602 active food trucks and bringing in \$1.2 billion in revenue in the United States (Le, 2021). One reason is because food trucks create unique spaces of commensality, or interactions in settings where people can share food and connect as a local community (Fishler, 2011). A communicative understanding of commensality suggests discourses of food and food sharing change and maintain spaces and places (Fishler, 2011). We are sharing more than just food material in commensality spaces. We are communicating shared identities, positionalities, politics, ideologies, and culture through and between food. From micro, everyday interactions like exchanges at a coffee shop to more macro political and cultural influences like government policy regulation or the popularization food trends in the media, understanding commensality as the communication of food sharing is crucial for understanding the discursive power of food trucks. While popular in urban centers like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, food trucks are now flourishing in smaller towns, suburban areas, and municipalities (Le, 2021). Especially after the post-2008 “food truck” revolution, unique communities, cultures, and subcultures have emerged within and around the spaces of commensality food trucks offer. Even amid COVID-19, food trucks provided alternative and safer open-air spaces of commensality that fostered community and culture in a time of anxiety and uncertainty (Ray, 2020; Riddle, 2020).

Food trucks in Fort Collins, Colorado are no exception. A city of about 165,000 people cradled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, Fort Collins is home to a growing community of food trucks that emphasize values of “locality” and “community” through food. Locals come together to consume artisanal and gourmet cuisine and “foodie” tastes dominate many of the local breweries and community events like the FOCO Food Truck Rally. People also visit the



hub of food trucks on North College, drawing from more traditional Latinx and immigrant styles of food trucks often referred to as *loncheras* (Muñoz, 2019). Beyond physical spaces, FOCO food trucks have also garnered a presence utilizing the affordances of social media technology. Many have fostered their own digital communities through platforms like Instagram practicing commensality in digital spaces to craft personal brand identities, local networks, and online audiences. Whether in-person or online, FOCO food trucks are key in constituting ideas of culture, place, and community through discourses of commensality.

In this dissertation, I argue Fort Collins food trucks' discourses of commensality operate (1) as rhetorical textures of subcultural ideology, (2) as rhetorical textures of difference resistant to cultural gentrification, and (3) as a process digital commensality constructive of social mediated communities. Combining rhetorical, ethnographic, and media studies approaches, I suggest Fort Collins food trucks communicatively influence local identities, power structures, and relations that transform, and maintain both physical and social mediated spaces of commensality. While food truck scholarship is inherently interdisciplinary providing discussions around social justice, technological innovations, mechanisms of urban and economic development, immigration and labor, and expressions of cultural identity (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017). Less research discusses the impact of food trucks from a communication studies perspective and role in commensality.

In this chapter, I lay out my theoretical framework of commensality discourse, rhetorical textures, and digital commensality and a literature review of key issues related to food truck communities that present my key research questions. Then, in Chapter 2, I outline the procedures and how I will apply my mixed qualitative method of space and place rhetorical criticism, ethnography of communication, and media discourse analysis through the lens of food truck

culture and commensality. In Chapters 3 and 4, I analyze how commensality discourse emerges as rhetorical textures of subcultural ideology at the FOCO Food Truck Rally and as rhetorical textures of difference on North College Avenue. Then in Chapter 5, I analyze how FOCO food trucks engage in digital commensality as a process social media community building. Finally, I conclude and reflect on my findings and arguments in Chapter 6, showcasing how I expand understandings and theories of commensality and food truck discourses from a communication studies perspective.

### **Commensality Discourse**

First, commensality discourse serves as my primary theoretical framework and provides a gateway toward a deeper understanding of how food functions communicatively to influence meanings and understandings of locality and community in food truck spaces and culture.

Commensality generally refers to social phenomena that manifest when social and cultural groups eat together (Kerner, Chou, & Warmind, 2015). Its literal translation from the Latin word *mensa* means “eating at the same table” (Fishler, 2011, p. 529), and “establishes communion and connection in all cultures” (Counihan, 1999, p. 96). Fischler (2011) describes the process of commensality as habitual, wherein social groups depend on each other. Moreover, shared eating practices are foundational to social structures within a community.

Commensality provides people a space to communicate and manage difference through food; but, not always in completely positive or negative ways (Bailey, 2017). Commensality shapes various rules/norms of inclusion and exclusion, and “can manifest equality or hierarchy” in social systems (Fishler, 2011, p. 533). Expressions of commensality do not ignore conflict and differentiation, but instead reveal it and attempt to create senses of belonging negotiated between different individuals and groups around food (Bailey, 2017). Commensality sometimes privileges

interests of dominant institutions and groups, such as fine dining contexts, corporations, and gourmet Western culinary practices (Medina, 2021). At the same time, commensality disrupts elitist hierarchies like food trucking and street food vending that democratize taste and foodie experiences to streets and open spaces (Caldwell, 2021; Capellini, Parsons, & Harman, 2016). Transmitted through shared values and practices of food, commensality has the potential to communicate communal values, develop group bonds, navigate and shape communal spaces, and socialize individuals to cooperate and/or resist particular cultural rules and norms within a community.

In addition to community building, commensality emphasizes the local (Fishler, 2011). Local identities indicate a specific avowal to a geographical location where unique, yet shared cultures reside (Lovell, 1998). One's locality refers to a collective identity and/or representation of a specific cultural location constructed through multiple intersecting voices (Bhabha, 1994). Local understandings are fluid, moving, permeable, and complex (Bhabha, 1994). Locality often "appears subsumed within the notion of belonging itself, which serves to provide collective identity and a sense of cohesion and cultural commensality" (Lovell, 1998, p. 4). Commensality is expressive of shared local values that influence the formation of collective identities and senses of belonging through cultural practices food sharing and exchange in certain locations (Fischler, 2011; Lovell, 1998). Meanings of locality and community communicated through food and have the potential to represent different discursive formations of commensality in local spaces.

Green, Cramer, and Walters (2011) argue "it is our processes of sharing or discussing food that we can view it as a form of discourse" (p. xii). While research has studied commensality as sociological behaviors (Fishler, 2011; Kerner, Chou, & Warmind, 2015

Medina, 2021; Jönsson, Michaud, & Neuman, 2021), I approach commensality from a communication perspective analyzing the phenomenon's rhetorical and mediated discourses. Discourse generally refers to specific bodies of knowledge created by different forms of verbal and nonverbal communication (Foucault, 1969). Commensality communicates locally shared food knowledges and social practices that form powerful subjectivities and relations influential to local and communal meanings within a culture (Foucault, 1969; Fishler, 2011). Commensality, therefore, is also discursive phenomenon of food-sharing representative of local and communal cultural identities, values, and beliefs.

Discourses of commensality can be understood in a variety of ways through the communicative aspect of food. Food is “good to think” meaning sharing and consuming food draws from our emotions, memories, senses, and embodied experiences that help us come to know, understand, and articulate the culture and politics of particular cultures, histories, and places (Carolan, 2011, p. 92). Food is an imperative in the lived experiences of people. Food influences who we are and how we perform and showcasing that “we are what we eat” (Carolan, 2011; Khrebtan-Hörhager, 2016). This is because everyday practices with and around food reflect our cultural identities, positionalities, relations, and worldviews (de Certeau, 1984; Cramer, Greene, & Walters, 2011).

For example, one's (dis)taste for particular foods and foodways can indicate particular identifications with one's self and others. This includes one's belonging in a specific food community like FOCO food trucks, one's personal choice to eat locally produced food, or one's limitations in accessing quality food all reflect markers of cultural identity and positionality (Cramer, Greene, & Walters, 2011). This also includes representing tensions in and between cultures that extend beyond the immediacy of a shared meal. One example is Khrebtan-

Hörhager's (2016) analysis of Italian-German relations and gastronomy. She explains "microclashes within German-Italian gastronomic practices and representative culinary discourses are representative of macroclashes of the respective cultures" in broader historical contexts of immigration and international relations (p. 2). As a form of culture, food is often a discourse of identity and experience communicated through language, symbols, performances, and materials holding both micro and macro implications and metaphors of culture.

Food is also a linguistic expression of culture. Food is a language offering various terms and codes like "slow," "fast," "local," "homemade," "regional," "global," "ethnic," and "authentic," which communicates different identities, relationships, taste preferences, ideologies, and practices within a food community (Levi-Strauss, 1983; Boerboom, 2015). The language of food in particular reflects "who we are" encoding cultural familiarity and distinction within space itself. Many ethnic and political enclaves form around food through languages inviting and maintaining cultural difference (Tran, 2019; Hermosillo, 2011). Thereby food is vernacular, culturally-bound, and expressive of distinct and localized meanings (Young, Eckstein, & Conley, 2015) and creates a grammar for "political and cultural claims making" (Thompson, 2012, p. 59).

For example, popularized terms like "eat local" convey not only the literal consumption locally-produced foodstuffs, but also a political resistance to industrialized and mass-produced food as well as fast food systems (Thompson, 2012, p. 59). Food contains thereby its own lexicon for communicating and representing culture, politics, and power (Boerboom, 2015). Food has the potential to invite audiences in particular spaces in identifying or appealing to specific identities and preferences of taste through language. For example, terms like "fresh," "locally sourced," "globally imported," and "authentic" all appeal to specific taste cultures (Thompson, 2012). Moreover, codeswitching between different languages and descriptions of

food both appeal to difference as well as advocate for the co-existence of difference such as restaurants and food spaces that integrate and encourage the use of multiple different languages in a shared food space (Tran, 2019). As a practice of commensality, food language connects people in guiding them toward shared interactions that influence and are communicative of collective meanings, shared identities, and common experiences of a particular politics and culture.

Food sharing is also symbolic of commensality, demonstrating personal identities and group (dis)affiliations via cultural performances and rituals that materialize in space (Greene, Cramer, & Walters, 2011). This includes nonverbal food-based objects and performances that represent or stand in for individual and shared cultural identities, values, beliefs, and ways of being (Greene, Cramer, & Walters, 2011). For example, Tran's (2019) interpretation of Pho in Vietnamese restaurants in Canada suggests the dish creates a "symbolic evocation associating Vietnamese cuisine and national identity" (p. 1). Analyzing shop signs, window signs, notices, menus, websites, and their positioning in the material world, Pho maintains a "dominant visibility" in the restaurant's linguistic landscape and elicits nostalgic feelings of home and place for Vietnamese migrants (p. 1). As such, food communicates symbolically through visual images and material that structure commensality in space. Moreover, discourses of sharing are also embodied and enacted. Carolan (2011) explains food provides space for "lived experiences" of "embodied doing," fostering "tacit knowledge," gained through on-the-ground, sensorial experiences with food (p. 21). Touching, smelling, tasting, listening, and seeing food materials provide embodied knowledge best understood through lived experience (Carolan, 2011). People's embodied interactions with food are communicative of cultural patterns, beliefs, values,

and relations influential to social constructions of locality and community that express commensality.

Therefore, discourses of food sharing communicate manifest linguistically, symbolically, materially, and in embodied ways that have discursive power in constituting cultural understandings of locality and through commensality. Collectively considering the manifestation of commensality language, symbols, material, and embodiments in space, I also contend food trucks represent different rhetorical textures of commensality.

### **Space and Place: Rhetorical Textures of Commensality**

Understanding food truck commensality discourse as textures requires a baseline understanding of space and place rhetoric. Shome (2003) suggests space is “a central component” of communication and functions as “a means and medium—of power that is socially constituted through material relations” (p. 40). When social practices of language, symbols, material, and relations are embraced, rejected, or re-interpreted, they structure “spatial thinking,” or one’s idea about a space (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011, p. 260). Space is a “social product” (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 81) built on the interrelations of different people who interact each other and the materials around them, engaging in a process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction (Massey, 1994). Spaces are not static constructions, but pluralistic, fluid, and ever-changing processes embedded in dynamic structures of power (Massey, 1994).

What makes spaces and places rhetorical is that they have the discursive power to influence culture. People who occupy different spaces draw from collections of language, symbols, and material as resources to make arguments and influence meaning (Dickinson, 2015). People’s repetitive and often unconscious “everyday practices” with space represent rhetorical “strategies” and “tactics” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 51). Strategies represent actions of institutions

and structures of power that govern space (de Certeau, 1984). Tactics are actions of consumers and individuals that resist and navigate power (de Certeau, 1984). For example, humans walk through a city in accordance with the rhetoric of city planning, following directions (strategies) created by natural landscapes, bureaucrats, politicians, and engineers as they materialize in space (de Certeau, 1984). However, audiences equally constitute the rhetoric of the city by engaging in tactics like cutting across empty parking lots, passing through back allies, and creating alternative “paths” accessing rhetorical resources (de Certeau, 1984). Through strategies and tactics, everyday life is engaged in an active process of “making do” that appropriates materials in space in advantageous ways (p. xiv). The manipulation, arrangement, and reconstruction of space is a resistive rhetorical tactic within itself because it represents, raises awareness, and makes arguments about and for a given location (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011).

Food truck discourses of commensality are thereby significant as space and place rhetorics. Food and place rhetorically “suffuse co-cultures, pop-culture, countercultures, global economics, and environmental policies,” and observes the persuasiveness of food in forming identifications and attitudes in multiple levels of culture and society (Frye & Bruner, 2012, p. 1). The rhetorical power of food is significantly tied to particular interactions with food symbols and materials embedded in specific places (Young & Eckstein, 2020). For example, chef Dan Barber’s pop-up “wastED” used food as rhetorical topoi to advocate for more humane and sustainable food culture (Eckstein & Young, 2018). Barber describes the pop-up’s menu items with terms like “trash” and “waste,” but transforms what has been deemed food waste into delicious and edible dishes (Eckstein & Young, 2018, p. 275). Enacting food materials and space, Barber rhetorically changes customers’ “appetite,” or perception about what should be considered food waste (p. 275). As such, the ways food materials and symbols are embodied,



performed, and interacted with in space and place reflect foods' power and influence in communicating commensality.

Considering these space and place perspectives, I specifically analyze commensality as rhetorical *textures* of food truck spaces. Rhetorical textures are frameworks of ideas, meanings, and representations that emerge in space from enactments and performances of bodies, symbols, and materials of a particular location (Dickinson, 2019). Textures occur in a particular time and space and are rhetorical because they have the power to constitute and reconstitute meanings of place (Dickinson, 2019). Specifically, I analyze and theorize commensality as rhetorical textures of subcultural ideology at the FOCO food truck rally and as rhetorical textures of difference communicated among Latinx food truck communities located along North College Avenue.

### **Digital Commensality & Mediated Process of Community Building**

Beyond physical spaces, I also analyze commensality and its impact in digital spaces, specifically the social mediated environment of Instagram that allows Fort Collins food trucks to represent themselves and create a community presence. Digital commensality refers to various interactions and settings where people use digital technology mediate food-based experiences (Spence et al., 2019). Digital commensality can refer to interpersonal interactions mediated through digital technology, like eating with friends and loved ones over Skype or Zoom (Spence et al., 2019). This also involves performative online interactions created for the purpose of entertainment, like mediated cooking demonstrations and the Korean phenomenon “Muckbang,” where people eat by themselves to a livestream audience (Spence et al., 2019, p. 41). Digital commensality is significant in maintaining long distance relationships, managing loneliness due to extenuating circumstances like COVID-19, and making global connections (Kishino, 2022). Additionally, while research has explored digital platforms like YouTube, Skype, and Facetime,

I expand an understanding of digital commensality as a key component of building communities on social media.

Digital commensality is involved in a process of mediation, “a complex, stretched-out social process” that functions as a (re)presentation of reality (Couldry, 2002). Mediation “brings to life” what it is representing in amplifying representations of cultural identities and ways of being reflected through digital food discourses to larger and/or more distant audiences (Parks, 2018, p. 16). I conceptualize digital commensality as both *mediated food sharing* and the *sharing of food media*. Mediated food sharing involves live, synchronous social interactions taking place through media technology like FaceTime or Skype. The sharing of food media on the other hand involves exchanges of food-related media artifacts. This includes sharing pictures of food, the social media accounts of favorite restaurants, and food reviews. In this dissertation, I suggest digital commensality is enacted as a *process* of mediated community building among FOCO food trucks via mediated food sharing and the sharing of food media on Instagram. Instagram is key for the food truck industry offering a visual-forward platform allowing people to share images, videos, stories, and other experiences of food sharing. In this way, Instagram offers a platform to engage a process digital commensality mediating practices of food sharing that brand online identities, create networks, and engage specific audiences.

## **Identity**

In terms of creating an online identity, food trucks engage in a process of digital commensality sharing food-related content and experiences to “brand” their personal identity in the Instagram community. Drawing from Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of taste, branding an online identity involves certain expressions of social and cultural capital related to food that organizes, connects, and creates boundaries between different groups. In food-media, “taste serves as a

common point of identification, the foundation of common set of everyday rituals organized around familiar ingredients, people, and behaviors” and is a “byproduct of contemporary media culture” (Kelly, 2017, p. 1-5). Taste can create hierarchies or “distinctions” in local culture based on who consumes and understands certain culinary practices and knowledge of food (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 1). Yet, food media also democratizes taste, making it available to mass audiences (Kelly, 2017). Taste has the power to shape a specific “vision” of social life through representations produced and consumed via food media (Kelly, 2017, p. 2).

In doing so, the mediation of tastes through commensality shapes FOCO food truck’s online *rhetorical personae*, frameworks, homologies, and particular archetypes of food personalities (Greene, 2011). While theorized as relatively stable, I consider the multiplicity of commensality and space and I employ a dialectical and approach to the branding of rhetorical personae as patterned, yet productive of contradictory tastes, meanings, and identifications (Nakayama & Martin, 2011; Bourdieu, 1984). Specifically, these taste dialectics include authenticity-innovation and local-global, that concretize and contrast building dialectical rhetorical personas through the process of digital commensality and community building on Instagram.

## **Networks**

Digital commensality also involves a process of networking that structures mediated relationships and connections online. According to Castells’ (2011) “network society theory,” networks are represented through “the space of flows,” or online exchanges of communication with stakeholders in cultures and economies of certain locations and communities. This includes public interactions liking images, re-posting other food truck’s content, sharing hashtags, tagging, mentioning, and/or commenting on each other’s posts. Latour (2011) explains networks

make “what was invisible, become visible, what had seemed self-contained is now widely redistributed” (p. 797). Through social media networks, FOCO food trucks exchange media representations and online communication representative of commensality through food-based media sharing with competing food trucks, local producers and small businesses, municipal bodies, and popular breweries. As I will show in my analysis, these networks are representative as a characteristic component of digital commensality’s process of community building among the FOCO food truck Instagram community.

### **Audiences**

Social media audiences are also implicated in this process of digital commensality. The FOCO food truck community on Instagram partakes in “audience labor” wherein both food truck’s audience of followers engage in a process of “audiencing” (Fisher, 2015, p. 1108). Audience labor theory suggests that social media does not simply offer a free space for people to interact, but its audiences perform work for the larger political economies or interests of a group (Smythe, 1981). Audience labor theory often considers how social media companies themselves utilize audience labor and profit from capitalizing on media social media data (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013). However, my analysis shifts this approach looking at how the labor of audiences develop and maintain the digital community of food trucks on Instagram rather than media companies themselves. Therefore, I employ Fisher’s (2015) approach to audience labor focusing more on the “lifeworld experiences” and discourses of users that contribute to the process of FOCO food truck’s digital commensality (p. 1109). In this sense, audiences also “do” labor for the food truck community’s representation such as sharing, commenting, and creating relationships with the food truck community through sharing food

media content (Fisher, 2015). For the food truck community, this includes specifically their online audiences of consumers and potential consumers as well as local “foodie” critics.

Overall, my study of FOCO food trucks draws from theories of commensality, food discourse, rhetorical textures, and theories of taste, networks, and audiences baked into the mediated process of digital commensality. As both physical and digital spaces, food trucks shape and influence culture-based practices of commensality that emerge as subcultures, forms of difference as resistance, and as a social mediated community. Before engaging this theoretical framework, I provide a review of relevant literature highlighting key issues that serves as a rationale guiding my analysis of Fort Collins food trucks and its commensality discourses.

### **From *Loncheras* to Gourmet Tastes: Food Truck History and Discourses**

A large body of scholarship connects food truck’s discursive relationships in navigating space and place as well as its uses of social media (Ageyman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017; Muñoz, 2019; Wessel, Zeimkiewicz, & Sauda, 2016). These lines of research provide a deeper understanding of key issues, identities, and experiences food trucks communicate and share. These insights inform how I theorize and extend notions of commensality as rhetorical textures and a process of digital commensality building the social mediated community of FOCO food trucks. First, looking to a summarized history of food truck’s influence in the U.S. and more located in Fort Collins outlines a trajectory of the key issues I investigate in this dissertation.

As mobile vendors, food trucks are intimately connected with their relationships, culture, politics, and practices of space and place. Food trucks have historically served as ripe opportunities for newly arrived immigrants and the working-class to make a living (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017). Many of the praised innovations of “gourmet” food trucks we see in

popular culture today, started with the practices, lifestyles, and knowledge of working-class immigrants using push carts to distribute food stuffs to local communities (Valliantos, 2017).

In the 1880s and 90s, “New-England style lunch wagons,” for example, were common practices among early European immigrants on the East coast (Valliantos, 2017, p. 69).

Likewise, in the west, Latinx immigrant vendors mobilized in downtown Los Angeles selling tamales to working-class laborers and locals (Arellano, 2012). Shortly after the invention of automobiles in 1886, food vendors moved into cars and trucks increasing their mobility to serve and deliver food occupying empty parking lots and street corners (Valliantos, 2017; Arellano, 2012). Food trucks shared practices of mobility and feeding immigrant and working-class communities are grounded in practices of commensality.

Based in working-class and immigrant commensality practices, food trucks are material resources people use to “make do” and assimilate, navigate, and craft spaces and places of their own in local communities. Compared to brick-and-mortar restaurants, food trucks have low start-up costs and “produce a business model more accessible to people of diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic status” (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017, p. 3). Raul O. Martinez, owner of *King Taco*, is cited as one of the first widely successful *lonchera* operators and innovators (Sanchez, 1984). Martinez repurposed an old ice cream truck into a taco truck in 1974 and parked outside of a bar in East Los Angeles, selling \$70 worth of tacos his first night, then consistently \$150 worth of tacos each evening (Sanchez, 1984). *King Taco* maintained its popularity over the years and became its own restaurant chain grossing millions of dollars each year (Sanchez, 1984). Thus, food trucks and owners use commensality was used as a practice of cross-cultural adaption, sharing their food skills, experiences, and innovations.

Salient across this scholarship is the “place-making” abilities of food trucks, especially among immigrant communities (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017). Food trucks and street vendors largely have contributed to the formation of “ethnic enclaves,” or concentrated spaces and communities with a collective identity and characteristic economies in contrast to dominant culture (Abrahamson, 1996, p. 781). Hermosillo (2010) explains *loncheras* are commonly placed near low to moderate income neighborhoods and occupational spaces like construction sites and factories that function in an alternative economy localizing economic activity and profits within Latinx immigrant communities tied to neighborhoods and living spaces (Muñoz, 2019). The connections between Andersonville, Buckingham, and Alta Vista, Hispanic neighborhoods in Fort Collins, for example, are intimately with the hub of Latinx businesses and food trucks on North College Avenue (Flores, 2022). As such, food truck commensality discourse is embedded within a process of place-making through food (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017), creating “senses of belonging” and ethnic enclaving (Lovell, 1998, p. 1).

### **The Food Truck “Revolution”: Innovation or Cultural Gentrification?**

The popularity of food trucks spiked significantly after the 2008 recession due to their affordability, low labor costs, and mobile infrastructure. From 2009 to 2014, food truck industry revenue increased 12.4 % each year (Myrick, 2014). Colloquially referenced as a “food truck revolution,” people from a wider range of sociocultural and economic standpoints recognized food trucks offered an opportunity and brought cultural transformations to the industry (Agyeman et al. 2017). However, smaller-scale cities and towns like Fort Collins, local were wary of food trucks and fearful of them creating unfair business competition among brick-and-mortar restaurants, traffic congestion, and noise resulting in heavy regulation.

While food trucks function through placemaking discourses in local communities, government regulations historically and contemporarily constrain food truck operations. Early practices of food trucks relied on less mobility and could easily park in public spaces and set up shop (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017). However, many cities began to place regulations that required more mobility and demanded more labor and expense among food trucks. This included local and state policies that developed proximity bans, time limits for vending, health code inspections, and specific and individual permits to access different public spaces (Dunn, 2017). The main problem with many policies that govern food truck operations are that they vary and are practiced differently in local contexts. This lack of standardization in regulating space makes the rules for operating food trucks obscure and difficult to navigate. This obscurity influences the ways food trucks employ commensality tactics.

Another problem is that food truck regulations do not always consult or include the experiences of food truckers themselves. The voices of food trucks are traditionally ignored in policy development and people who write governing policy are often not food truckers themselves (Dunn, 2017). Yet, officials place permit limits, proximity restrictions, and time caps in certain community spaces in response to dominant public opinions of residents living in the area who hold more power in community decisions (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017; Basinski, et al., 2017).

Owners of brick-and-mortar restaurants feared food trucks would bring unfair competition that would hurt the success of their businesses. Many were in favor of more strict regulatory measures of food truck operators. Additionally, affluent gated neighborhoods and community organizations raise concerns over noise, traffic congestion, and disturbances (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017). As such, some local voices have had more power and



influence in shaping policy that impacts the livelihoods of food truck operators, which is reflective of hierarchies resisted and perpetuated through commensality discourses (Fishler, 2011).

Before 2012, there were only a few food trucks operating in Fort Collins. There was a general fear from brick-and-mortar business that food trucks would bring unfair competition (Duggan, 2015). Additionally, most municipal regulations limited food truck operations to negotiations and deals made with owners of private property, most often other small businesses (Duggan, 2015). Food trucks could not park on public streets, locate in residential neighborhoods, or receive clearance to operate in busy traffic areas like Old Town Square (Duggan, 2015). Policy placed curfews on operation hours. Additionally, rules and regulations for receiving different permits for different locations were unclear and confusing and could become expensive (Duggan, 2015).

However, as food trucks made a bigger presence operating at local breweries and catering private events, community attitudes became more accepting. Additionally, food trucks in the Fort Collins community collectively organized and spoke on behalf of the industry and make regulations clearer. As an initial grassroots movement, Fort Collins regulations around public space and local attitudes relaxed quickly after 2012, and the area has developed a thriving food truck scene. More than 70 active food trucks operate in the area ([visitfortcollins.com](http://visitfortcollins.com)). FOCO food trucks operate in every day spaces like parking lots, breweries, and street corners, using their communication strategically to create community relationships and maintain a successful business. There are several local events like the “FOCO Food Truck Rally,” “Taste of Fort Collins,” and “FOCO Mx” that have created spaces for food truck operations to thrive ([visitfortcollins.com](http://visitfortcollins.com)). Like many other cities across the U.S., food trucks have become important

stimulators of the local economy as well as meaningful cultural staples. Food trucks have connected with the community culturally, introducing different cuisines and bringing people to connect around food.

Amid changing and relaxing regulations, not just in Fort Collins, but across the country, food truck operations became more organized and recognized sparking significant transformations and a dominant aesthetics, style, and performance of food trucks. Bringing artisanal and fusion tastes and as well as discourses of local and global foodways and politics, the “gourmetization” of food trucks (Cappellini, Parsons, & Harman, 2016), new waves of food truckers who were predominantly young, affluent entrepreneurs and/or culinary-trained chefs entered the arena (Dunn, 2017, p. 48). Moreover, gourmet food trucks shape local dispositions of foodie tastes into city spaces, as a “gastropolitan habitus” (McClintok, Novie, & Gebhardt, 2017, p. 289-290).

“Foodie tastes” often guide the social style of gourmet food trucks that communicate preferences for food that is local, global, new, innovative, and/or authentic (McClintok, Novie, & Gebhardt, 2017). Many of these tastes symbolize an image and ethics of environmental and cultural sustainability as well as hipness and being “in-the-know” of food culture and community (McClintok et al., 2017). This produces self-affirming effects of consumer citizenship and group-identification through one’s responsible and ethical consumption of local food and (Chaudhury & Albinsson, 2015), merging with cosmopolitan positionalities and ideologies promoting cultural diversity and a global mindset. Both global and local “foodie” tastes oftentimes exist in complimentary and/or contradictory tension among FOCO food truck commensality discourses.

Gourmet food trucking has the potential to influence taste hierarchies in space. This is reflected in gourmet food truck’s overall security and favorable position with municipal officials

and local communities. Although working-class immigrant groups were the first to innovate the use of food trucks in local communities, the social style of gourmet trucks have received a privileged position based on their social style being perceived as “innovative,” “hip,” “trendy,” along with their economic viability and draw of tourism (Greene, 2011; Valliantos, 2017; Agyeman et al., 2017). City officials and consumers see gourmet trucks as more profitable to local economies and appealing to the city’s desired public images of a sustainable, modern, cosmopolitan city (McClintok, Novie, & Gebhardt, 2017).

This has produced a variety of issues between gourmet and *lonchera*-style food trucks involving issues of cultural othering, exoticism, Whiteness, and cultural gentrification. Martin’s (2017) study points to the lack of influence and voice immigrant and working-class food trucks have in Chicago’s public vending policy. Comparatively, gourmet food truckers are more successful in shaping policy because officials see their form of food trucking as contributing to ‘creative’ and ‘artistic’ enterprises that attract consumers to the city (Martin, 2017). Meanwhile, immigrant and working-class food trucks refusing to embody this ‘gourmet’ aesthetic are regulated as nuisance and framed as perpetuating food safety hazards, noise, congestion, and pollution (Martin, 2017). This reflects both raced and classed biases among city officials that marginalize and silence immigrant and working-class food truckers as inferior Others.

Local foodie tastes also risk eliciting exotic desires for ethnic dishes built on cosmopolitan imaginations of experiencing different cultures through “authentic” and “multicultural” tastes (McClintok et al., 2017). Gourmet food truck’s appeals to the authentic and multicultural are problematic in fetishizing non-dominant identities and difference, manufacturing one’s cultural identity for the pleasure and excitement of experiencing cultural difference (Huggan, 2002). Exoticism reduces the complexity of cultural identity, placing

difference under the control and consumption of dominant groups (Huggan, 2002). Similarly, authenticity is a myth of purity and originality (Hardt, 1993). When commoditized via exoticism, authenticity is sold as product appealing to dominant desires for the ‘original’ or the ‘real’ (Hardt, 1993). Manifesting via commodification, cultural difference is fetishized and sold to neoliberal audiences as a product of consumptive pleasure (Griffiths, 1994).

Commodified authenticity via exoticism is problematic because dominant groups frequently operate through logics of Whiteness, an unarticulated position of privilege wherein white culture serves as the norm (Nakayama & Krizek, 2005). Considering bell hooks (1992) metaphor of “Eating the Other,” non-dominant racial, ethnic, and cultural identities become the “spice” that livens up the “dull dish” of mainstream white culture (p. 366). Dominant groups receive the privilege of experiencing culture and difference without actually interacting in meaningful ways (Huggan, 2002). The falsehoods of desired authenticity/multiculturalism decontextualize racial and ethnic difference through Whiteness, re-framing and placing non-dominant cultures under control of white foodie tastes (hooks, 1992). When gourmet food truckers claim ‘authenticity’ and ‘multiculturalism’ without approval, appreciation, recognition, input, or mutual benefit with non-dominant groups, they erase non-dominant group perspectives in privileging white foodie desires.

Food trucks are deeply engaged in issues of gentrification between gourmet trucks and trucks operated by Latinx immigrants and the working-class. Gentrification typically refers to the forced physical displacement of local minority groups brought on by urban development policies that make space for more dominant, affluent, and often white groups (Smith, 1996). Many gourmet trucks have moved into or near immigrant or working-class food trucking businesses already located in the community, creating more business competition and fracturing their profits

(Muñoz, 2019). Immigrant and working-class food trucks have traditionally functioned to provide cheap and delicious food on-the-go to local communities, but gentrification has removed them from communities they have served for years. Muñoz (2019) argues gourmet food trucks are engaged in processes of gentrification that produce “neo-liberal redevelopment ideologies in space” that privilege gourmet aesthetics and the demand of foodie tastes (p. 95). Neo-liberal redevelopment ideologies control “spatial thinking” in constructions of local spaces encouraging gentrification (Muñoz, 2019, p. 95). Gentrifying processes not only physically displace, but “exclude meanings and histories of marginalized populations” (p. 95). Muñoz refers to this as “cultural gentrification,” wherein mobile food vending functions through a racialized hierarchy. While cultural gentrification does not always completely displace immigrant and working-class food trucks, it does “create barriers, exclusions, and invisibilities” in local communities and erases important cultural food truck histories of innovation among the Latinx immigrant diaspora (p. 95). Overall, these representational issues reflect how commensality can reinforce hierarchies and tensions in local communities through a negotiation of shared, but different practices of food trucking.

Alongside cultural gentrification, studies of local food truck communities report racial, ethnic, and class biases toward immigrants and people of color within the practices and enforcements of food truck regulation (Dunn, 2017; Basinski et al., 2017). For example, *Patty’s Tacos* was a successful business for almost two years operating in a predominantly wealthy white neighborhood on the Upper East Side of New York (Basinski et al., 2017). *Patty’s Tacos* legally avoided the city’s ‘meter-feeding’ policy, moving between parking spots in the area to avoid going past the mandated time limit. Nevertheless, the Upper East Side’s neighborhood organization Community Board 8 saw *Patty’s Taco’s* as a threat to local brick-and-mortar

business operations and demanded stronger enforcement of food truck vendor violations in the area—even though *Patty's Tacos* was abiding by the policy. Law enforcement placed hefty fines and confiscated their property eventually putting *Patty's Tacos* out of business.

Dunn (2017) suggests the lack and/or obscure nature of regulatory food truck policy among vendors encourage local law enforcement to act on racial biases and dismiss immigrant's right to work in certain spaces. Moreover, food truckers who violated city policy experienced law enforcement in different ways (Dunn, 2017). Immigrant food truck owners overwhelmingly reported experiences of criminalization such as hefty fines, arrests, and confiscation of property (Dunn, 2017). Meanwhile, white truckers and vendors, reported warnings or were simply told to move their trucks (Dunn, 2017). This evidence suggests immigrant food truckers of color experienced harsher law enforcement measures for equal violations compared to white food truckers operating in the same community.

### **Strategies and Tactics of Space/Place**

Based on these issues, food truck vendors have developed several spatial and organizational tactics to navigate these inequities in local spaces (de Certeau, 1984). Muñoz (2019) explains Latinx-owned food trucks in Los Angeles who cannot afford expensive permits “navigate local-state truck vending restrictions by creating a system of economic entrepreneurship that works for them in immigrant-receiving communities in Los Angeles” (98). Much of this is making negotiations with owners of private property to operate in their spaces, like the relationships between *loncheras* and Latinx small business on North College. Latinx food trucks navigate limitations in space through collective understandings via community relationships and ethnic enclaves of commensality that provide an alternative economy for these trucks to maintain success outside food truck dominant culture (Muñoz, 2019). This refusal, or

*tactic*, to ignore policy unrepresentative and unsupportive of their identity represents a resistance to dominant group perspectives or *strategies* of the city, shaping difference to create spaces of their own within the local community (Muñoz, 2019). Based in practices of food in shared spaces, these negotiated relationships are ultimately shaped through commensality discourses.

Other forms of resistance have occurred through larger grassroots campaigns, advocacy organizations, and community groups. Wessel's (2017) study exemplifies Chavez' (2011) notion of counter-public enclaves and coalition building among food trucks and community groups. After complaints of "noise" and "crime" attributed to food truck vending, the City of Charlotte tightened the time frame and times per day food trucks could operate in the city (Wessel, 2017, p. 38). Following evidence of an annual report that all sixteen violations among Charlotte food trucks in 2012 were cited to *loncheras*, these regulations were seen as disproportionately targeting Latinx truckers (Wessel, 2017). Latinx *loncheras* launched the "Carne Asada Is Not a Crime Campaign" petitioning an amendment of the city ordinance (p. 37). While the municipal government dismissed this protest initially, *loncheras* partnered with members of The City of Charlotte Food Trucks Organization and persuaded the city to loosen vendor restrictions as a coalition. This reflects agency developed through *loncheras* as well as cross-cultural coalitions with other local food truckers to advocate for equality among their representative communities (Chavez, 2011). Based in the tactics of the food truck community, these folks have helped create a voice that has relaxed regulation and placed pressure on state and municipal governments to reshape their rules in ways that accommodate the food truck business model.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted food truck communication and their use of space. Food trucks were quicker to adapt to circumstances set by COVID-19 compared to brick-and-mortar restaurants. Their mobile infrastructures provide an easy transition to abide

social distancing guidelines, offering delivery services, moving to open spaces like parking lots and city parks to serve food, and already engaging in small scale operations that require significantly less workers than restaurants. Utilizing this flexibility and mobility, food truck spaces have become key localized efforts to support communities across the nation during the pandemic. For example, local food trucks in New York City boroughs helped feed healthcare workers fighting the spread of the virus while also delivering food to the elderly—a demographic at high risk for contracting the virus (Ray, 2020). In Centre County, Pennsylvania, food truck businesses are thriving with community support from locals who started the Facebook group “Centre County COVID Concessions,” which announces where food trucks and vendors open and operating for business across the county (Riddle, 2020). Here in Fort Collins, the FOCO Food Truck Rally became a safer low contact, socially distanced space of commensality for people in the community to come together around food and support local small businesses.

Food trucks historically rely on the innovations of working-class immigrants’ street culture and strategic uses of spatial material to make spaces for themselves. Food trucks also navigate barriers based in state and local government regulation. Moreover, competition exists between gourmet style trucks and working class/immigrant owned trucks in ways that perpetuate racial, ethnic, and class-based inequities. In my analysis, I intend to explore how these issues manifest, are perpetuated, or resisted through the commensality discourse reflected in the rhetorical textures of the spaces food trucks occupy in Fort Collins.

### **Food Truck Social Media Communities**

Beyond use and navigation of local community spaces, food truck scholarship also reveals how social media contributes to the ways food trucks communicate digital commensality discourses. The stark growth in social networking activity after the 2008 recession contributed to



the popularization of food truck operations (Weil, 2010). Wallsten and Rhyan (2014) found that food trucks who actively communicate online through websites and social media platforms remained in business longer. Social media offers food trucks several commutative advantages for their businesses including practical advantages like real time engagement with customers, live updates, and audience reach (Caldwell, 2011). This also includes aesthetic and representational benefits wherein food trucks use social media to create sensorial experiences, connectedness, interactivity, and entertainment with audiences (Caldwell, 2011).

For example, Los Angeles-based chef, Roy Choi is frequently cited for preparing the ground for food trucks' popular usage of social media. Using Twitter for his business, *Kogi BBQ*, Choi developed a grassroots social media campaign promoting the hybrid "Korean Short Rib Taco." Choi's use of social media created a demand for the "*Kogi* experience" attracting hundreds of customers daily (Gelt, 2009). Choi used Twitter specifically to display *Kogi's* food offerings and communicate live updates to the public where they would be serving. *The Los Angeles Times* described Choi's business as creating "Kogi culture," bringing "people to neighborhoods they might not normally go to and allowing for interactions with strangers they might not otherwise talk to" (Gelt, 2009). Choi's use of Twitter mediated the physical spaces it traveled (Parks, 2017), injecting feelings of spontaneity, excitement, and fostering commensality among local audiences. Values that influence social mediated food truck communication appeals to both practical utility and leisurely experiences with food. In this way, the mediation of food truck discourses over social media influence cultural interactions and relations that occur in physical spaces. Food trucks' digital presence matters to develop successful interaction with a local community and displays elements of commensality.

Wessel, Ziemkiewicz, & Sauda (2016) expand on this phenomenon explaining how food trucks used Twitter to create food truck “events” (p. 1653). Their study suggests social media technology generates “impromptu social settings in unconventional and often underutilized spaces” and social media in particular is critical for producing “new forms of public life” (p. 1653). Through social media, food trucks convey spatial and temporal information prior to the scheduled event and cultivate “an audience for a particular location at a particular time” (Wessel et al., 2016, p. 1653). This allows food truck to clearly communicate in real time where, when, and what they will be serving at a particular time and place. However, when these events are impromptu in nature, they elicit feelings of entertainment, excitement, and spontaneity (Caldwell, 2016). Along with utility, the experiential and performative nature of attending food trucks advertised through social media attracts customers and invites them to local places they may not have traversed before (Caldwell, 2016). As such, “this dynamic allows vendors to create a demand virtually, building a select population that is well versed in contemporary food culture” (Wessel et al. p. 1638).

Beyond influencing the attitudes of customers as a mechanism of “placemaking,” Wessel et al. (2016) also found the ways food trucks ‘place’ themselves through social media is often against the structural flow of city planning and urban infrastructure. As food trucks increase in popularity and have more of a demand among customers, this prompts city officials and planners to accommodate food trucks into local cityscapes (Wessel et al., 2016). Social media provides food trucks tactics of both mobilizing and creating audiences in space through spontaneous scheduling of “events,” and have the potential to discursively transform city and town infrastructures through their social mediated food offerings and sharing reflective of commensality discourses.

Additionally, food trucks also use social media to form their own local digital communities. Food trucks frequently connect and organize through digital networks representative of a local culture. These networks function for a variety of reasons whether that is to organize and challenge policy, to collaborate in creating local food truck events, to create a space to offer business and industry advice, and a variety of other networking opportunities. Beyond the physical space, food truck social media discourses cultivate a sense of community in digital spaces reflective of a collective community culture.

Much of this research has explored how food trucks utilize Facebook and Twitter to influence local communities and cultures and navigate local space. Less research has analyzed social media's influence in structuring and representing online communities in the food truck industry. Additionally, not much has been written on the image-focused influence of Instagram on food truck social media discourses, focusing on information sharing and microblogging discourses of textual-forward platforms. Instagram offers geolocation tagging and search features as well as sharing of stories in real time and direct messaging related to food. I consider in this study how food trucks use of Instagram in ways that represent a process of digital commensality that brands different rhetorical personas, amplifies local networks, and utilizes audience labor through mediated representations of food-sharing experiences.

Based on this review of literature, my analysis will focus on expanding theoretical understandings of food truck discourse and commensality investigating subcultural ideologies shaped at the FOCO Food Truck event space, the everyday forms of difference and resistance to cultural gentrification among *loncheras* along North College, and the digital community of FOCO food trucks shaped on Instagram. As such, my dissertation is guided by the following research questions:

- 1.) How does FOCO food truck commensality operate as a rhetorical texture of subcultural ideology?
- 2.) How does FOCO food truck commensality operate as a rhetorical texture of difference in resistance to local issue of cultural gentrification?
- 3.) How does FOCO food truck commensality operate as a process of digital community building on Instagram?

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have outlined my theoretical framework of commensality to explore the influence of discourses of food trucks on Fort Collins' local culture and community. Moreover, I highlight various issues food trucks experience including uses of space and material, navigations and limitations of government regulation, forms of privilege and discrimination that manifest between immigrant and working class and gourmet food trucks, and food truck's strategic uses of social media. Emerging from this literature, I posit research questions that will help me explore the power and impact of commensality discourses food trucks in shaping local communities around shared food practices. In order to provide answers to these questions, I outline in the next section my method for analyzing the commensality discourses of Fort Collins food trucks.

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## CHAPTER 2:

### RHETORICAL CRITICISM, ETHNOGRAPHY, AND MEDIA DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: A MIXED-METHOD QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Using theoretical frameworks and sub-concepts of commensality discourse and rhetorical textures, I apply a mixed-method qualitative analysis combining rhetorical criticism of space and place (Hess, 2011; Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011; Dickinson, 2019), ethnography of communication (EOC), and a media discourse analysis drawing from D'Acci's (2004) "circuit model" (p. 424). The first part of this method section describes how I conduct and apply an *in-situ* subjective, self-reflexive, and embodied analysis of physical local food truck commensality textures through participant-observation, field notes and thick description, and semi-structured interviews in Chapters 3 and 4 of my upcoming analysis. Then, I describe how I integrate a circuit model approach to analyze in Chapter 5, textual, network, and audience discourses representative and reflective of digital commensality embedded in FOCO food trucks Instagram community (D'Acci, 2004). In this chapter, I rationalize and outline of how I apply components of rhetorical criticism, EOC methods, and media discourse analysis in my analysis of FOCO food truck commensality discourses.

#### **Analyzing Commensality Textures Through Space and Place Rhetorical Criticism & Ethnography of Communication**

First, I integrate space and place rhetorical criticism with EOC to examine commensality textures of the FOCO Food Truck Rally as well as the community of *loncheras* along North College Avenue. Space and place rhetorical criticism and EOC both embrace interpretive approaches and take the position that reality and meaning is socially constructed (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). Meaning varies between different cultural standpoints, interpretations,

experiences, relationships, and spaces and is simultaneously maintained and everchanging (Philipsen, 2008; Lindolf & Taylor, 2011; Dickinson, 2019).

EOC and space/place rhetorical criticism critique positivist and quantitative epistemes as providing answers too universal and general to represent the specificity, dynamism, and fluidity of local culture (Tracey, 2013, p. 53). Ethnography and rhetorical criticism recognize the communication of cultural identities, issues, and politics of local culture vary between different temporalities, contexts, and relations in space. To articulate and theorize a totalizing image of culture, risks perpetuating reductive understandings of culture and communication (Madison, 2005). Therefore, EOC and space and place rhetorical criticism analyzes and theorize from specific communicative interactions of specific cultures in specific times and places.

Moreover, EOC studies cultures' communication and their ways of living through direct participation and/or distanced observation within specific cultural settings (Madison, 2005). The goal of EOC is "to describe communication as constitutive of social and cultural lives it explores," and theorize the communicative phenomena it observes (Carbaugh, 1990, p. 262). Space and place rhetorical criticism, similarly draws attention to people's engagements with the rhetoricity of space—its symbols, materials, performances, movements, and bodies that occupy it and influence discourse. EOC is focused salient patterns of communication reflected between groups of people within certain locations and communities (Philipsen, 2008; Lindolf & Taylor, 2011), and rhetorical space and place criticism shifts its lens to the significance and power of a place's materials, symbols, performances, enactments of people in space (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011; Dickinson, 2019).

Crucial for both EOC and space and place criticism is one's personal involvement and subjective experiences in space. Space and place rhetorical criticism and EOC both encourage

the application and reflection of the researcher's positionality. An ethnographic positionality recognizes of one's self and subjectivity as a primary interpretive tool for ethnographic research (Coffey, 1999). Similarly, space and place rhetorical criticism describes the application of positionality referencing the body as a sensorial "tool" that analyzes the power of culture and communication settings (Dickinson, 2019). However, "positionality is not the same as subjectivity" (Madison, 2005, p. 9). Positionality requires the researcher's attention to shift beyond the self, and "acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects" (Madison, 2005, p. 8). This involves the researcher self-reflecting on their own subjectivities in relationship with the subjectivities of others (p. 9).

EOC refers to the application of this positionality as *in-situ*, or one's personal involvement and observation of cultural activities and people in local communities, settings, and contexts (Tracy, 2013; Cameron, 2001). An *in-situ* positionality is often applied through participant observation, engaging in formal conversations or "small talk" with people in these spaces, and even casual interviews with key stakeholders and members of a particular culture or group (Tracy, 2013). Space and place rhetorical criticism does not dismiss nor discourage analysis of human communication *in-situ*, but it tends to focus more on the researcher's embodied involvement with materials, symbols, and language of space that drive one's personal or other people's performances, practices, and enactments in space (Dickinson, 2019). These everyday behaviors bring attention to the constitutive power and influence of meaning embedded in the materiality of certain locations. Therefore, blending EOC's *in-situ* perspectives with rhetorical criticism's sensorial sensibility, provides a more intersubjective representation, accounting for my own feelings and experiences as well as other people's interactions with each



other and/or the rhetoricity of space. Considering these ethics of positionality, I critically assess the multiplicity of meanings and standpoints of locality as always changing and based in their specific contexts of time and space (Bhabha, 1994; Madison, 2005). My in-situ analysis recognizes cultural shifts of the local and articulates a snapshot of an investigation of an everchanging, yet patterned food culture. I also view local discourses of food trucks as shaped through both privileged and underrepresented voices to showcase the complexities of food trucks' cultural power considered "local" and representative commensality (Madison, 2005).

Additionally, the distinctions between EOC and space/place rhetorical criticism are complementary as a mix-method approach. Madison (2005) calls for applying "critical theory in action" in ethnography which has traditionally relied on descriptions and subjective experiences with culture, without critically reflecting on power structures and relations (p. 9). A critical ethnography should understand local cultures as interrelated groups with shared, divergent, and ultimately dynamic histories that recognize intersections and influence of cultural identity in space (Sanjek, 2014). My integration of space and place criticism thereby contributes to putting more "critical theory in action" via ethnographic methods. As Dickinson (2019) explains:

"Since our experience and action in the world—individual and corporate—is always located in both time and place, is always experienced materially and via the body, is always profoundly singular and deeply social, rhetorical criticism that takes space seriously will always move between the local and the global, the personal and the discursive, the everyday and the overwhelming. No longer able to be satisfied with the hermeneutics of isolated texts, rhetorical criticism in/of space is rooted in matter and mattering, in the hurly-burly of daily life" (p. 12)

Moreover, blending of rhetorical and ethnographic approaches shifts from a standpoint of macro-level “oratory” perspectives of rhetoric, into a focus on vernacular, located discourses not always spoken or widely public (Hess, 2011). EOC perspectives localize the power of rhetoric via space and place, focusing on every day and vernacular as constitutive rhetorical expressions of culture in space and place.

Beyond comparing and contrasting the praxis of positionality, EOC and space and place criticism also collectively offer many points and key terms of analysis. From the perspective of EOC, this could involve observations and engagements of “cultural talk” (Philipsen, 1976, p. 16). Cultural talk is best represented as a “as a continuous flow of information, rather than as a segmented exchange of messages” (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011, p. 32). EOC scholars claim perceptions and behaviors of a culture are enacted in distinct ways through language (Hymes, 1962; Philipsen, 2008). Cultural meanings of food truck commensality are reflected through patterns of continuous and everchanging exchanges of speech acts. Relatedly, Philipsen’s “speech codes theory” emphasizes the place where speech acts occur also serve as an “object” of analysis (Griffin et al., 2008, p. 419). Every distinct culture contains its own distinct speech codes producing different meanings, norms, and codes of conduct within a given location of culture (Griffin et al., 2008). “Places for speaking,” therefore, influence the rules and norms of speech in a particular locale just as much as individuals and groups of people (Philipsen, 1975, p. 13). The location of culture contains multiple interacting speech codes that co-exist, yielding varying levels of discursive power to change, negotiate, and/or maintain codes and culture of speech communities (Griffin et al., 2008).

However, these approaches to EOC often narrowly focus on people’s spoken and written language use and exchanges in different contexts. While nonverbal communication is

considered, it does not center its analysis on the communicative affects and discursive power of materials, symbols, bodies, relations, and movements of space. Supplementing EOC, I employ space and place criticism to flatten the hierarchical focus of discursive practices of language and space. Rhetorical textures take seriously that people's bodies and space are "co-implicated" (Dickinson, 2019, p. 7). Embodied symbols of human identity and agency expressed via cultural performances that resist and reify power (Conquergood, 2013). Cultures perform identities that speak back to power in a given context to understand how people "make meaning" in their lives (p. 7). Performance ethnography and criticism engages with culture at the local level, analyzing meanings felt, articulated, and observed thorough the movement of bodies as well as their enactments with other bodies, symbols, and material (p. 7).

Embodiment also involves one's reflection upon one's own and the observation of other people's senses. Space and place rhetorical criticism demands that "we attend to the body of both ourselves as critics and of the bodies (including our own) that are practicing space" (Dickinson, 2019, p. 7). Pink's (2009) sensory ethnography draws attention to the "multisensoriality" of lived experience (p. 19). Pink explains "people's multisensory relationships to the materials and environments of their everyday lives, and to their feelings about them, offers a remarkably rich and informative source of knowledge" (p. 19). Cultural practices, embodiments, enactments, and performances are engaged through the multiplicity of embodied senses in space, reflecting various "sensory modalities" that are dominant and hierarchical within a culture (p. 19). Sensory modalities bring attention to how interconnections of smell, touch, taste, sound and emotional feelings perform and structure culture, identity, space, and agency (Pink, 2009).

Therefore, rather than a stable object of analysis, an analysis of rhetorical textures articulates a cultural nexus, "woven" points or various combinations of interwoven

performances, enactments, and movements of bodies, symbols, and material in space (Dickinson, 2019, p. 7). Not only does the critic self-reflect the consequences of their own interactions in space, but also how space acts and is acted upon by people moving, living, and performing in these spaces (Dickinson, 2019). These intersecting and interrelated textures ultimately function as discourses influencing, constituting, and (de)constructing cultural meanings and materials in space. While I have reasoned for my specific methods of space and place rhetorical criticism and EOC, I detail below how I integrate and apply these notions to gather data through participant-observation, field notes, and semi-structured interviews.

### **Participant-Observation, Rationale of Research Sites, Thick Descriptions**

I enact and engage my *in-situ* experiences as a food truck customer as my embodied “tool” of participant observation to conduct my space and place ethnographic rhetorical criticism (Tracy, 2013; Hess, 2011; Dickinson, 2019). Participating as an everyday customer, I pay attention to different textures in certain food truck spaces to get a sense of the everyday flow of life within these spaces. I pay close to the patterned, the impactful, and the out-of-the ordinary, movements of bodies and exchanges of food material in these spaces representative of discourses of commensality. This includes shared enactments, practices, and performances of food being prepared, delivered, and consumed, the materiality of symbols and aesthetics of the trucks themselves, and bodies, material, movements, and performances connecting adjacent spaces through commensality.

Tracy (2013) suggests meanings emerge and change through iterative practices of participant-observation that develop a deep sense of culture and communication in local spaces. As such, I conducted 30 on-site participant observations from April 2021 to April 2022 between two significant places in Fort Collins: The FOCO Food Truck Rally (FFTR) weekly

spring/summer event and the collection of *loncheras* present on North College Avenue. I analyze the FFTR because it is a cultural staple of summertime in Fort Collins. It embodies the notion of commensality as a grassroots organization bringing small business and community members together through a food-truck centered event. I would visit the FFTR almost every Tuesday during the Spring/Summer months between 2021-2022 to try a dish I never had before at one of the many food trucks, listen to music, and interact with the community after a long work day.

In contrast, I conducted participant observations within various spaces along North College Avenue occupied by *loncheras* and the Latinx hub of small businesses. I approached my analysis going on frequent walks along the North College strip, purchasing food from different trucks and spending time eating at the many pop-up tables and outdoor furniture provided at the trucks. This approach allowed me to articulate and develop a sense of “being there” through repetitive presence, participation, and observation within specific spaces (Conquergood, 2013, p. 8).

During these participant observations, I utilized field notes recording and writing down my personal interpretations of rhetorical textures in food truck spaces reflective of commensality discourses. I paid close attention to various relationships between food, discourse, materiality, performance, movements, practices, and enactments reflective of identities and relations shaped through food sharing. I would describe my experiences and insights via “thick description,” or a deep process of writing and describing cultural behaviors within their specific context (Geertz, 1973, p. 311). Through thick description, I described and analyzed patterns, codes, and possible power structures and forms of power that contextualize cultural situations (Geertz, 1973). Moreover, I tried to narrate these experiences and avoid making universalizing and totalizing claims about culture while being mindful of context (Geertz, 1973).

In my field notes, I draw from Conquergood (2013) who suggests ethnographers and field critics should articulate their experiences as “dialogic performances” (p. 8). Conquergood suggests multiple voices and texts mutually interact and form meaning. Embracing this notion, dialogic performances recognize the positionality of both the researcher and people researched as mutual actors in the meaning-making process (Conquergood, 2013). It implies ethnographic work should be expressed as “co-performative witnessing” wherein the ethnographer represents their performative experiences in dialogue with others within the writing process of research (p. 9). Through thick description I consider observations of commensality discourse as dialogical performances, representative of multiple different cultural meanings negotiated and understood through collaborative performances with research participants.

### **Semi-structured Interviews & Participants**

Alongside participant observation and field notes, I also integrated and collected semi-structured interviews with six Fort Collins food truck owners. Since my analysis chapters are mostly focused on the implications of space and place on discourses of commensality, I primarily use these interviews throughout all three chapters to contextualize the history of spaces as well as insights to particular textures of commensality that manifest in these spaces. I focus on food truck owners because they are often the key agents of change when it comes to advancements and changes with food truck culture, whether that be a grassroots movement, protesting for policy change, and/or using space strategically.

I use semi-structured interviews for the purpose of engaging in dialogue with different individuals who occupy or influence local food truck spaces in Fort Collins. Semi-structured interviews provide in-depth perspectives and function as a window into the experiences of others (Tracy, 2013). Semi-structured interviews do not require ethnographers to ask questions linearly

and makes space for follow-up questioning (Tracy, 2013). They allow for enough flexibility to ask questions that best engage the topics and issues presented in the moment. This flexibility allowed me to converse in casual conversations in different settings, as many food truck owners are working more than 40 hours a week, especially during the peak of the busy season in spring and summer.

I asked questions about food truck owner experiences in Fort Collins that provide key insights to commensality discourses used at the FFTR, North College, and within the Instagram social media community (see Appendix A). I structured all interview questions as open-ended with an invitational tone. Questions are written to create an invitational space for interviewees to express agency and preserve and on-going dialogue (Parks, 2019). I set an invitational tone applying exploratory language like “in what ways?”, “what are your thoughts?”, and “how do you understand?” Asking questions with this language facilitates an open listening space, rather than absolute language that closes off other possibilities of meaning (Wise, 2017). Invitational questions avoid normalizing statements “like group X does this” or “group X feels this way.” This controls the positionality of others through questioning and risks producing reductive assumptions in dialogue (Wise, 2017). Rather, I express exploration in my questions to participants and invite a place of listening to their specific experiences with a certain situation, topic, or conversation about food trucks. With these interview strategies and participants in mind, I briefly detail the recruitment process, procedure, and data collection processes of the semi-structured interviews.

### **Recruitment, Procedure, & Interview Data Collection**

Following Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved protocols, I recruited interview participants for this study through email, over the phone, and

asking food truck owners in person. Since local food trucks have their contact information posted on social media or their public websites, I contacted them first through their listed email or phone and request their participation in my study. I used my recruitment script template (see Appendix B) to introduce myself, my project, and their interest in participating in an interview.

Each interview I conducted with food truck owners lasted between 30-50 minutes. I met participants at their desired time, location, and setting. Three interviews took place in-person, 1 took place over Zoom, and the 2 other interviews took place over the phone. I collected interview data recording conversations through i-phone's audio recording application if the interview was in-person or over the phone. For Zoom interviews, I used the application's available recording function. Before recording and beginning each interview, I provided an informed consent document requesting verbal and/or signed permission and a signature of approval to record conversations for research purposes (see Appendix A). The informed consent document asks if participants want to use their name or remain anonymous through the use of a pseudonym. Since food trucks are public entities, I assured participants I could not guarantee full confidentiality; however, participants were given the option to not use their name and describe any identifying information they would like me to leave outside the study. While I offered these options, all interview participants agreed to submit their real names and titles of their business and did not indicate any identifying information they wished to leave out of the study.

Finally, I transcribed these interviews sending audio files to a professional transcription service. I analyzed these interviews using my theoretical framework of commensality discourse, textures, and digital commensality looking for quotes and information that related to and informed my analysis of rhetorical commensality textures at the FFTR and North College. As I will unpack in my analysis, the FFTR reflected rhetorical textures constitutive of subcultural



ideologies as an event space resisting and reifying affluence, whiteness, and privilege of gourmet tastes. North College Avenue, on the other hand, enacted commensality discourses as rhetorical textures of difference against cultural gentrification.

### **Media Discourse Analysis of the FOCO Instagram Community: Using D’Acci’s Circuit Model**

While I apply space and place rhetorical criticism and EOC to analyze commensality textures of food truck spaces at the FOCO Food Truck Rally and on North College Avenue *in-situ*, I also apply a discourse analysis of the FOCO food truck community on Instagram. I use components D’Acci’s (2004) circuit model of media studies to analyze brand identity, network, and audience discourses representative of the process of digital commensality constitutive of the FOCO food truck Instagram community.

D’Acci’s (2004) circuit model suggests analysis of media discourse should consider the production, cultural artifacts, reception, and socio-historical context rather than in isolation. I analyze how individual food truck profiles *produce* food-related images, videos, and texts as *cultural artifacts*. I’m interested in how food truck owners produce this content, brand themselves, and create a “rhetorical personae” to maintain a presence and distinction in the FOCO food truck Instagram community appealing to dialectical expressions of authentic, innovative, local, and global food tastes (Greene, 2011; Bourdieu, 1984; Nakayama & Martin, 2011). In my analysis, I attune myself to the textual and visual messages of authenticity, innovation, locality, and global-ness that are embedded and communicative of identity in food-related media content shared with audiences to brand themselves on Instagram. This includes stories, narratives, images, captions, and advertising of food truck food, personhood, and connection to the Fort Collins community in Instagram. Previous scholarship analyzes how food

media such as television shows like *Top Chef* are used to highlight and speak to local issues and food-related histories of a particular regional culture (Stowell, 2022). Similarly, my analysis takes seriously how these visual discourses are shaped through contrasting identifications with cuisine representative of Fort Collins and the Colorado region.

In regard to *reception*, I analyze discursive interactions and representations of networks that make up the FOCO food truck Instagram community placing them in a particular *socio-cultural context*. In terms of networks, I analyze the “spaces of flows” representative of mediated exchanges of food media that reflect the network” between key stakeholders and relations in the physical FOCO food truck community represented online (Castells, 2011). Specifically, I analyze images, texts, comments, reposts, tagging, and other digital food-related media exchanges shared over Instagram as networks developed through commensality. This includes analyzing interactions represented online between FOCO food truck accounts and other members of the local online food community like breweries, other competing food trucks, and food producers that co-represent each other on Instagram as part of the wider FOCO food truck community and culture.

Finally, I remain attune also to discourses of reception among food trucks that try to create and/or market to particular audiences as well as communication among the audience of food truck followers that engage in the labor of representing and creating an ethos around particular food trucks in the online community (Smythe, 1981; Fisher, 2015). Using D’Acci’s “circuit model,” I theorize and extend in my final analysis chapter an understanding of digital commensality as a process of social media community building through various mediations of food sharing, brands of rhetorical personae’s, networks, and audiences represent formations of community through digital commensality.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have outlined my mix-method qualitative approach to analyzing FOCO food truck commensality discourses. Combining EOC and rhetorical criticism of space and place, I integrate critical perspectives on positionality and self-reflexivity, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews to analyze rhetorical textures of commensality that emerge in the food truck spaces of the FFTR and North College Avenue. Switching gears, I then apply a media discourses analysis informed by D'Acci's (2004) circuit model focusing on branding, network, and audiences discourses of digital commensality that make up the FOCO food truck Instagram community. Overall, this method provides critical inquiry and provides answers to my research questions exploring commensality as rhetorical textures of subcultural ideology and difference as well as a mediated process of digital commensality community building on Instagram.

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## CHAPTER 3:

### TEXTURES OF SUBCULTURAL COMMENSALITY: FOCO FOOD TRUCK RALLY AT CITY PARK

*“Food has no meaning; the people around food give it meaning. Our sociology around food shapes out cities—who our populations are, what they eat, how they talk about it.*

*Those perceptions shape policy. They change who can eat what, where.” – Robert Lemon*  
(cited in White, 2019).

The “FOCO Food Truck Rally” (FFTR) was one of the first community events that caught my attention when I moved to Fort Collins. Many of my colleagues knew I was interested in studying communication in contexts of food and culture so discourse on this space and their experiences at the FFTR were informally shared in plentitude. People raved to me about the casual atmosphere at City Park, the selection of food choices available, and the lineup of local musicians performing each Tuesday evening. Even when moving into my new apartment on a hot August summer afternoon, my neighbor shouted at me from across the street yelling, “Hey! Do you know about the food truck rallies on Tuesday? It’s a great time!”

The FFTR is a place many people in Fort Collins know about, take pride in, and look forward to as a summer pastime. The FFTR began in 2015 and is now a weekly local community food truck event that takes place in City Park every Tuesday from May to late September. Sarah Ladley, owner of the vegan soft-serve food truck, Ba-Nom-a-Nom, leads and organizes the event. Emerging as an idea from Sarah’s collaboration with other local food trucks, the FFTR is organized “to create more opportunities for food trucks” (S. Ladley, phone interview, June 15, 2021). As Sarah explained to me, “the event is really grassroots” (S. Ladley, phone interview, June 15, 2021) and it is not just the food trucks, but the culture of the community around them

has been vital to their success. In this chapter, I argue the FFTR constitutes rhetorical textures of subcultural commensality through practices, enactments, and performances that resist and reify both elitism and whiteness of dominant gourmet food truck discourses.

Subcultures refer to “cultural variants displayed by certain segments of the population” that become a “cohesive social systems” (Komarovesky & Sargent, 1949, p. 143). Subcultures express “distinction” based in varying and/or alternative ideas of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 1). They “assert their distinctive character and affirm they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass” (Thornton, 1995, p. 24). At the same time, they are shared and systematic group identities (Thornton, 1995). For example, informal self-proclaimed food identities like locavores, road trip foodies, state fair food enthusiasts or people part of institutions like the National Barbeque Association or community micro beer clubs make themselves “distinct” within mass culture and at the same time collectively share common in-group interests (Elias, 2017; Ngugi, O’Sullivan, Osman, 2020; Contois & Kish, 2022). In this way, subcultures reinforce and resist dominant identities through shared ways of being. For example, discourses of the “slow food movement” often resist the dominance of industrialized fast food service and production (Schneider, 2008); but, they also tend to reinforce elitist hierarchies of tastes and food knowledge inaccessible to lower-income communities (Schneider, 2008); Event spaces like the FFTR are key areas where “subcultural ideologies” manifest and shift (Thornton, 1995, p. 18). People enact, practice, and communicate through food sharing and manifest in this analysis as rhetorical textures of subcultural commensality, which house ideologies influential to how spaces change, maintain, and take shape.

As a placemaking rhetoric (Agyeman et al., 2017), the FFTR makes you feel like ‘you’re in the know’ in terms of food happenings in the area. It appeals to feelings of inclusion and



community through food sharing (Fishler, 2011), while maintaining a degree of subcultural distinctiveness as a localized and a ‘differentiated population’ within the Fort Collins food service industry (Thornton, 1995). In this chapter, I showcase how the FFTR’s subcultural textures of commensality communicate, challenge, and reify gourmet elitism. Rather than offering stable representations of subcultures and perpetuating binary notions of ideological formations, I draw from my ethnographic observations, interview data, and local news discourses to analyze how the FFTR’s subcultural ideologies of commensality are rhetorically textured in the space.

I suggest the FFTR reflects this subculture through rhetorical *practices* of work and play (de Certeau, 1984), local and global *taste* (Bourdieu, 1984), and the *performativity* of music and food (Conquergood, 2013). These practices, tastes, and performances shape subcultural distinction as textures of commensality against larger dominant systems of food culture, while also maintaining dominant gourmet styles (de Certeau, 1984; Bourdieu, 1984; Conquergood, 2013). In the next section, I analyze a brief historical context of the FFTR’s inception through local news, artifacts, and interview data to reveal its theoretical grounding of subcultural commensality. Then, I analyze subcultural commensality textures from my ethnographic observations that highlight practices of play/work, global/local tastes, and food/music performativity at the FFTR. I end this chapter discussing the critical implications of the FFTR’s subcultural ideologies rhetorically textured in the space.

### **FFTR’s Ideological Grounding: Commensality as Grassroots Practices**

Subcultural ideologies of commensality are not only enacted in the FFTR through practices, tastes, and performances, but also its intentions and purpose of creation (Thornton, 1995). Commensality was used as a rhetoric of constituting community and a resistance to

arguably elitist and discriminatory attitudes, stereotypes, and regulations that limited their operations and success in Fort Collins. The historical context, process, and intentions of the FFTR provide thereby provide crucial insight to the FFTR's subcultural ideological grounding in commensality.

The FFTR unofficially formed in 2012 as a grassroots movement by four local food trucks: Ba-Nom-a-Nom, La Piadina, Waffle Lab, and the Cupcake Cruiser (S. Ladley, phone interview, June 15, 2021). This group started having a series of informal "mini-rallies" taking place in the parking lot of what used to be Pantero's Creek Brewing Company (S. Ladley, phone interview, June 15, 2021). The space is now "The Exchange"—a hub of small businesses offering different local food and drink. Prior to 2012, there were many restrictions for food trucks to operate in public spaces. Food trucks could not just service anywhere, and mostly operated in the parking lots of local breweries like Odell and New Belgium Brewing, located just north of the Old Town center. Most food trucks had to make deals with other private small business owners, breweries and bars in particular. Food trucks had to engage in practices of commensality—the use of shared food space—through private and personal agreements with other local businesses and companies. Although these commensal relationships between food trucks and breweries negotiated space, the growing popularity of food trucks meant for limited spaces for food trucks to operate. Other than making deals with breweries and other local businesses, food trucks did not have many spaces to work due to existing municipal policies.

Also reflected in my interviews with food truck owners and local media discourses reporting on the popularity of food trucks in Fort Collins, some people in the community initially communicated anxieties and fears that food trucks might bring congestion and noise, unwanted street and sidewalk traffic, unfair competition with local brick-and-mortar businesses (S. Ladley,

Phone Interview, June 15, 2021). However, the more presence they made, and the more people visited food trucks, the community grew to accept them in the community. Yet, despite this growing popularity, in 2015, just when the first FFTR event was approved, City Council sent a proposal to limit the days and hours food trucks could operate on private property (Duggan, 2015). Already a challenging industry and limited in the spaces they could work, these proposals were pushing more mobility of food trucks without recognizing the everyday challenges in the industry (Duggan, 2015), wherein further space and time restrictions would negatively affect their business practices.

However, these regulations did not seem to reflect the majority of public concerns about food trucks. In an online poll delivered in the midst of considering new regulations, 81% of respondents saw no issues with the food trucks operating in locations for extended periods of time (Duggan, 2015). With the majority of respondents communicated no concern with current food truck operations, this proposal is arguably pushed by people in power, whether that be city officials trying to align with state regulation or affluent community members who have a powerful community voice in these issues. Many food trucks interviewed by local reporters at the time felt this proposal ignored that food trucks' key to success and longtime practice is making connections with owners of private property (Duggan, 2015). City Council arguably pushed neoliberal ideas of mobility among food trucks. While mobility is important for many food trucks, they reflect a subcultural ideology of slowing down regulation and fulfilling an idealized version of mobility perceived by the city because of their key relationships using shared space resisting elitist measures to control a food service industry that is different.

Further reflecting its "grassroots" and communally-minded character, Sarah and other local food truck owners participating at the FFTR at the time, went to city council and spoke on

behalf of the growing industry in response to these regulatory measures (Sarah L., phone interview, June 15, 2021; Duggan, 2015). They made the case that food trucks were helpful to the local economy and are small businesses distinct from brick-and-mortar restaurants to mitigate these public concerns. In another local news article reporting on these measures, Silver Seed food truck owner Taylor Smith reiterated the online survey data of public opinion explaining the “city was trying to solve a problem that didn’t exist” (Duggan 2015). She went on to say, “This isn’t just a few young people wanting to serve food in a cool, hip way. We are a force to be reckoned with” (quoted in Duggan, 2015). Representative of subcultural commensality discourses, the FFTR argued for the food truck industry, not just that food trucks are overall good for the community *because* they offer a distinct way of eating out and attract a particular demographic.

The collective voices of food truck owners allowed for more public acceptance and the ability to operate in public spaces, even though food trucks still cannot operate in Old Town without a special event permit or negotiation with people who own property in Old Town. Food trucks are currently able access public spaces where parallel parking is allowed as well as access to non-neighborhood districts (fc.gov). Overtime, the collective voices of food trucks in the community often represented and carried through the social and cultural clout of the FFTR, relaxed policy and reflect a growing acceptance. As a community event, the FFTR represents the food truck community’s collective need to create more spaces to operate and build a successful business and local industry through a supportive and collaborative culture. According to Sarah, events like the FFTR are helping Fort Collins and other communities, realize “that food trucks do have a place and a space. Now, more and more cities are actually utilizing food truck services for their special events and stuff. People love food trucks” (S. Ladley, phone interview, June 15,

2021). The FFTR and its use of space is critical in changing attitudes through ideologies of subcultural commensality, showing a different way of eating together mobilizing the “table” beyond the traditional brick and mortar restaurant food experience.

However, the FFTR is not an easy process to organize and enacts its collective and grassroots “DIY” ethos improvising and appropriating space to run the event, while creating relationships with the community, whether that is other competing food trucks or local organizations and institutions like the Mishawaka Amphitheatre. De Certeau (1984) describes utilizing spatial practice to “make do” with disadvantageous situations into advantageous opportunities (p. xi). Through the sharing of food and space, the FFTR pushes for a democratic effort of commensalism creating an event-style space of opportunity for local food trucks and vendors. However, to operate in this event space requires several resources to legally and ethically host and operate a public event. For example, the FFTR requires a “special event” permit which is costly. As Sarah explains:

“It’s a really big undertaking and it’s a really big budget. I have to have a really big budget because it’s not something like, ‘the trucks just are allowed to set up in the park.’ We literally have to have a special permit, pay all the fees, and also provide the utilities and things that a special event permit requires which makes complete sense” (S. Ladley, Phone Interview, 2021).

A special permit and tacked on fees to legally run the event is expensive and difficult for just one person to fund and operate the event. But food truck vendors collectively put their own money together to purchase the special event permit and required utilities needed to host the FFTR (S. Ladley, Phone Interview, 2021). There is also an effort as well to provide capital, labor, and

support to run the event, which means networking and communicating with local entities and individuals in the service and entertainment industry.

Additionally, making food affordable and accessible through the FFTR, while at the same using quality ingredients, requires a lot of labor. Sarah explained that during the summer and running the FFTR, she “easily works between 80-100 hours per week” (S. Ladly, Phone Interview, June 15, 2021). The traffic and customer base offer a large profitable cluster in event spaces like the FFTR and is essential for food truck owners to maintain success. As Sarah explains:

“...if you ever want to be profitable, at least this is my experience because we have such a low price point, I have to do as many events as I possibly can and do really high volume. That’s the only way I’ve really been able to pay myself” (S. Ladley, June 15, 2021).

Recognizing the laborious nature of the food truck industry and need of community support, food trucks strategically and collectively organize in space as “events” for participating in commensality and supporting local food trucks as small businesses. The FFTR has maintained success over in Fort Collins over the last seven years because of its subcultural resistance to fight for space and resist neoliberal control over food servicing in the community. Sarah explains:

“The [food] trucks out here are extremely unique and very homegrown. The best thing about the Fort Collins community is that people love supporting local business. I would say generally people are so supportive of small business in Fort Collins, and it’s very apparent. I contently get asked, ‘You should do your Food Truck Rally in Denver,’ and I’m like, ‘I don’t know if it would work.’” Fort Collins is just a special place in terms of that” (S. Ladley, June 15, 2021).

Therefore, I showcase in the rest of this analysis, how subcultural ideologies of commensality emerging from these efforts and embedded textures of work and play practices, local and global tastes, and food and music performativity. While resistive and grassroots, gourmet tastes and other forms of dominance are also embedded in the space. Studies of food trucks have been critical of gourmet food truck styles, pointing to issues of whiteness (Lemon, 2017), cultural gentrification (Muñoz, 2019), as well as a privileging of gourmet styles in classist taste preferences at municipal levels (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017). While these hegemonic issues are not absent at the FFTR, my goal for the rest of this chapter is to suggest the FFTR is representative of a resistance to the privileging of “brick-and-mortar” food businesses and municipal control, challenging traditional ideas and affluent gourmet tastes that equate to enjoying good food. The FFTR resists pretensions embedded in elite “slow food” ideologies, making the taste accessible and convenient to many groups of people as well as resisting mass-produced fast food ideologies. Echoing Johnston and Baumann’s (2014) claim that American food culture as in tension between values of “democracy” and “distinction,” the FFTR textures event spaces via commensality that democratize and make distinct practices, taste, and performances around food. Turning to my ethnographic observations, the first subcultural texture of commensality I analyze are the discourses of work and play.

### ***Practices of Work/Play Textures***

On a hot afternoon around 5 p.m. in June of 2021, I drive to the FTTR after work. I park in one of the free spaces wrapped around City Park pond. People are parking new heavy-duty pick-up trucks, sportscars, Jeeps, and Subaru’s as well as older and used vehicles. Hundreds of people are filtering into City Park walking from their cars, surrounding neighborhoods, or utilizing the many bike paths around the park. From observation and hearing discourses all

around as people walk on into the FFTR scene, couples young and old, groups of friends and families, people coming to and from work, cyclists, dog owners, musicians playing instruments, skaters, suburbanites, college students, and several groups in-between enter the event. The majority of the people at the event are white passing, unsurprising considering Fort Collins' current data records 80.1 % white identifying demographic (census.gov). People carry guitars, ukuleles, and instruments as well as coolers, lawn chairs, outdoor games, bikes, longboards, and other material signifying outdoor activity and leisure. Music blares from people's Bluetooth speakers playing anything from pop, indie, hip-hop, and EDM to grunge and modern rock before the event begins. Not only is the FFTR inviting a range of people in the community, but people themselves are arriving in their own fashion, bringing their own materials, interests, and identities.

While there is a range of difference present at the FFTR, key textures of commensality that emerge are enacted through practices of work and play. These practices rhetorically constitute subcultural ideologies through commensality at the FFTR that resist and reify gourmet elitism. As a rhetoric, play appeals to meanings and feeling of excitement, activity, pleasure, freedom, and carefreeness (Sutton-Smith, 2009). Work rhetoric on the other hand, appeals capitalist notions of labor and production, placing value in outcomes and practicality (Sutton-Smith, 2009). Work rhetoric also connotes a lack freedom, celebrated through notions of play as a reward or incentive in exchange for work such as a 'work hard, play hard philosophy' often evidenced widely in cultural identities located in Colorado. Practices of play can function as a "discursive diversion" that is "engaged for purposes of entertainment," but "denotes turning aside or from a settled or particular course of action" (Domingo, 2012, p. 211). In this sense, play



is also a form of resistance to the constraints work places on one's lifestyle, way of being, and cultural standpoint.

Elitist notions of commensality place a formality of gourmet food sharing practices around the table and fine dining settings that connote "high culture," such as delivering meals in organized courses, encouraging formal dress, proper ways of eating like the politeness of keeping your elbows on the table, and other discourses that control and influence the body while eating. Gourmet spaces also privilege forms of taste and pleasure around food that perpetuate exclusivity of knowledge reflecting hierarchical practices of commensality such as knowledges of the "best" practices to cook, prepare, and consume foods. In this way, commensality operates as a version of the "bourgeois public sphere," guided by "politeness" and expected conversation around issues of "aesthetics, policy, natural philosophy, and social life" (Domingo, 2012, p. 211).

The rhetoric of play, however, can function as a rhetoric that resists these norms, expectations, cultures, and identities shaped through a rhetoric of work including disrupting or reckoning with normalized ideas of "professionalism" and/or "proper" ways of being often coded with class-based assumptions like practices of "playing with your food." Prior to the food truck "foodie" revolution, food trucks were traditionally seen as places to have a meal for people moving to and from work in urban centers, but now have become part and parcel of "gourmet" conversations around food. What has been historically overlooked and taken for granted, food trucks are now popular and appreciated as an "experience" rather than an everyday occurrence democratizing tastes and food preferences of gourmet food styles.

Contrasting everyday practices of work and play, the FFTR critically resists/reifies elitist standards and norms of commensality or "eating with" people (de Certeau, 1984). Everyday

practices enact “arts of doing” (de Certeau, Jameson, & Lovitt, 1980), or mundane activities like “walking, talking, reading, dwelling, and cooking” in space that shape particular identities, beliefs, values, and ways of being of certain cultures and structures in society (de Certeau, 1984, p. x). Everyday practices are often perceived as rhetorical actions of creative resistance against the institutional, normal, ordinary, and otherwise dominant societal structures (de Certeau, 1984). These seemingly mundane practices are elevated and invited through the “event-ness” of the FFTR space forming subcultural ideologies. This is because work and play practices are embodied and carried through and with people’s bodies. Practices of place are performed through bodies (Dickinson, 2015), and the contingencies of place are “forced upon us” and our bodies (Massey, 1994, p. 154). Practices of work and play through contexts of food sharing at the FFTR ultimately communicate ideologies of subcultural commensality, move in-between the ideological bifurcation of elitism vs. everydayness simultaneously resisting and reifying elitism and hegemonic whiteness of gourmet styles of commensality. Therefore, I observe and interpret formations of subcultural ideology through discourses reflected through movements, embodiments, materials, and enactments of and around practices of food sharing, or commensality.

In many of my observations, work and play practices are embodied and enacted through material items brought with them to eat collectively at the FFTR. Reflective of play, people wear sunhats, sun dresses, tank tops, and sunglasses to protect themselves from the sun, laying out blankets and lawn chairs to enjoy their meals. Some people are wearing flip flops and swimming suits, coming from the water park across the pond sharing frozen yogurt snacks from Ba-Nom-a-Nom. Others wear relaxed tops and breathable t-shirts, sweat shorts, cut-off jeans, homemade tie dye and band t-shirts, sitting barefoot in the grass eating corn dogs on a stick and burgers and

tacos out of paper food trays. Several groups, mostly young adults, are wearing 5-panel hats, and wearing Birkenstocks or sandals of a similar style. People are also wearing Camelbacks and dry-fit athletic gear and look like they just finished a hike, holding hiking boots and bags. Some serious cyclists are in full gear standing and eating next to their bikes, while others more casually ride mountain, banana handle, and BMX bikes taking food elsewhere or to an open space to eat along the pond's bike path. Throughout this snap shot observation, it is clear that the FFTR is a place of commensality inviting subcultural identities and practices based in localized leisurely and recreational eating.

First, I notice people's embodied movements of non-automotive transportation via bikes, skateboards, and roller blades enact a rhetoric of play at the FFTR shaping a subculture of recreational consumption (Massey, 1994; Dickinson, 2019). Groups of people walk on foot in groups funneling into City Park from surrounding neighborhoods, carrying lawn chairs, coolers, blankets, and umbrellas. Others are making use of the bike lanes, cruising in on bikes, scooters, rollerblades, and skateboards. Many people have dogs with them and one person's companion is pulling them into the event entrance on rollerblades. Rather than choosing to end the day going through a fast food drive thru or drive to the parking lot of an expensive restaurant, the FFTR encourages people move as recreation and practice play to consume food truck food at the FFTR.

These play practices reflect clear expressions of exercise lifestyles and healthy living coming into the space. But deeper analysis these movements reflect a resistance to fast food models that appeal to accessibility through cheap prices and a sped-up process. Not only is the FFTR a food accessible space being hosted and advertised as a "free event" in a public park, but much of the "gourmet" food offered is relatively affordable and available. Among the near 20 food trucks serving food at the FFTR, most entrees were under \$12. While not as cheap as a Big

Mac, people are purchasing a high-quality food product at a much cheaper price than an entrée at a gourmet fine dining restaurant. As such, people are more willing to take the time to slow down and make their dinner an “experience” through practices of play at the end of day. Here, convenient and affordable food is slowed down and meant to be an experience. Enacted as practices of play in the form of recreational movements, the trip to the FFTR becomes a part of not just the consumption experience; but, a practice of play emphasizing and constituting an alternative space to the unhealthy convenience of fast food and/or expensive fine dining options. Here, these movements invite a subcultural ideology of food truck commensality that is in-between. Not quite fast food, not quite fine dining—a place where quality and accessible food is enjoyed among all members of the community who *move* to the event.

A key material artifact in the space that exemplifies this invitational rhetoric of play is further emphasized on the FFTR welcome banner located at the entrance of the event. It is light blue vinyl wrap, with an orange stock photo of a cartoon food truck screen printed across the banner advertising “live music.” The banner’s other textual discourses address visitors inviting certain practices of play in the space such as “Pets on leash welcome!,” “Bikes encouraged,” and “BYO seating.” Although alcohol is not officially allowed in the space, the “BYO” (bring your own seating) text winks at craft beer and cocktail culture as well as outdoor interests popular in Fort Collins, inviting a local subculture of “play as consumption” commensality.

Fort Collins is city a “Platinum-rated Friendly Bicycle Community and maintains more than 200 miles of dedicated bike lanes” (fc.gov). Plentiful bikes lanes and paths are placed in the city and allow people to navigate to spaces like City Park. Moreover, Fort Collins is colloquially referenced as “the Napa Valley” of craft beer with over 20 local breweries in the area (Pope, 2016). Fort Collins spaces commonly fuse local food and activity relationships between of bikes

and beer through annual events and cultural staples like “Tour de Fat.” Many bars like the Town Pump sometimes give discounts to people who ride their bikes to the space. Even the local staple brewery New Belgium’s primer beer is “the Fat Tire ale” highlighting local beer and bike subculture.

Analyzing this texture and call to beers and bikes on the FFTR banner, the FFTR material appeals to this subculture of commensality through practices of play that encourage people to ride their bikes into these spaces and “BYO” seating. City Park as a space also accommodates and appeals to the flow and common movements of biking, which explains why many people make use of this infrastructure as part of the commensality experience. Thus, riding your bike is an invited practice of play reflect in various materials of FFTR signage and City Park infrastructure. And although alcohol is not prohibited in the space, it is not uncommon to see someone mask their beer with a koozie or drink “water” from a container. Thus, the FFTR invites these embodied practices of play texturing the space through a consumption culture of people who make eating recreational play as a subcultural practice.

Inviting movements and practices of play as a preferred way of consuming FFTR, does resist the ideologies of fast food in encouraging people to slow down to walk, ride their bike, or other mode of transport other than an automobile a part of their end of the day consumption experience at the FFTR. To some extent, these invited practices of play create a space inclusive for folks that might not have cars or automobiles. Although many people were in full cyclist gear and purchased top of the line bike products, not everyone who rode their bike into the event had the top-of-the-line mountain bike, many riding in on older used or less known brand name bikes. As rhetorical textures, these movements showcase a blending of affluent recreational tastes through top-of-the-line of bikes moving in the space, with more sustainable or economically

affordable products that still fulfill the invitation to bike to the event, but in a way that showcasing expensive products are less important.

Other ways play was practiced as subcultural commensality were in the ways people set up their eating spaces like camp sites. Coolers, camping chairs, hammocks, and pop-up tents for shade slowly form as the event goes on and people move in the space, crafting pockets of small mini campsites on the City Park lawn. In one site, I notice there is a circle of young college-aged students, some holding guitars and playing indie sounding music on a blanket as they eat pulled pork sandwiches from one of the few barbeque trucks present at the FFTR. In another space, a family of four sit in lawn chairs around a Yeti cooler sharing food, listening to music, and conversing. Other pockets of people have set up hammocks in trees mixed with lawn chairs and oftentimes surround a Bluetooth speaker listening to music like a campfire.

Camping is a common practice shared among subcultures of music fans in festival settings as well as outdoor hobbyists who enjoy camping off the grid or in national and state parks. From musicians, to families, to outdoor enthusiasts, people engaged in a shared practice of play texturing commensality spaces like a campsite. These practices with people's material texture commensality beyond the formality of the table, allowing practices of food sharing and connection to be practiced around these "campfire" circles of people scattered across the main lawn of city park. As a subcultural rhetorical texture of play, "camping" decenters elitism of gourmet fine dining and resists the fast-paced practices of fast food. Camping is such a pinnacle anchor in living and life in Colorado and these practices of play camping commensality is both genuine as well as resistive to gourmet dining practices resisting the formal table.

While practices of play as recreation shape the foodie subculture of commensality around food trucks at the FFTR and resist the formality of practices and standards embedded in elitist

discourses of gourmet, there is a degree of affluence and commensality hierarchy event participants shape in the space (Fishler, 2011). This is made clear during my observations and considering the price point of some of the materials people would wear and bring with them, reifying gourmet elitism in “commercializing leisure” through rhetorics of play textured in the space (Domingo, 2012, p. 211). Many people are carried Yeti coolers that range from \$250 - \$800, depending on the style and size. Others are wearing expensive and high quality leisurely and active expensive sports gear such as Patagonia, Lulu Lemon, and Topo Design backpacks. People “brand” their play rhetorically, showcasing social and cultural capital through their embodiments of top of the line products as an affluent playground of food sharing. In a way, people are sharing through food not just their interests, but social and class status in being able to manipulate the space for complete comfort and leisure. Moreover, the lack of formality practiced through expensive outdoor products functions as a guise of neoliberal elitism of food consumption. Play reinforced through commensality reflects hierarchies of quality material to consume quality food, in a similar way that formal wear communicates a standard to practice fine dining.

These embodied interactions with food mediated through practices of play resist the elitism of slow food encouraging people to actively “play with their food.” Play shows that gourmet style food does not have to be enjoyed around a table, institution, or high-end restaurant, but in an environment of public recreation. Practices of play move commensality from the formal private into the recreational public sphere. However, it is important to note that practices of play or having the ability to “play with your food” is often a privilege and action taken for granted in the space. Moreover, certain affluent identities are invited into the space that materialize practices of play and create hierarchies within practices of commensality that reify gourmet

elitism. Contrasting these practices of play, people's practices of work further highlight these hierarchies

### **Contrasting Play with Work Practices of Commensality**

Everyone deserves food as pleasure, but not everyone, especially working people, have same time and opportunity or ability to experience food for pleasure in the same ways people recreationally enjoy biking to the FFTR and/or engaging in "camping" through commensality. But, as an open public recreation space, the FFTR opens up an accessible space for groups of working people. Working people's engagements in the space often reflect discourses in the space to "make do" with the personal and free time they have to indulge in moments of pleasure. In contrast to play, practice of work discursively shapes subcultures of commensality that resist and reify gourmet elitism and fast food in providing a space.

Beyond people prepared for leisure and enjoyment of the space, some people present at the event were oftentimes still wearing or carrying their work uniforms, looking like they are coming to and from work meeting up with co-workers or other friends to enjoy food and music as a diversion from their work life and take pleasure in these practices (Domingo, 2012). In one observation, I witnessed a young man wearing his untucked "Woodward" polo meet up with a group of friends eating in a circle on the lawn. One couple—likely co-workers—are dressed in business-casual wear chatting while waiting for their order from Rocky Mountain Coqui Puerto Rican food truck. Some people wearing or carrying work uniforms or office clothing ordered food to go, while others stuck around to enjoy their food and talk with people in the community. Applying critical rhetorical listening *in-situ*, I also overheard many discourses of working people that reflect divergent discourses as well as their constraints from work. With FFTR taking place on Tuesdays between 5:30 p.m. to sundown, utterances like "I wish I didn't have to go back to



work,” “work was insane today,” or “I can only stay for a bit, I have to get back to work after this” were common among people coming to and from workspaces that did not operate on a standard 9-5 schedule.

While folks felt rushed, it is clear in their efforts to come share a quick bite to eat at the FFTR. People on tight work schedules “make do” with time constraints to slow down and enjoy the food with friends. In these moments and reflected in these discourses, people engage in commensality at the FFTR as an expression of agency that slows down work just enough to enjoy a quick meal and the sunshine beyond the office. Rather than choosing to stop by a fast food chain, there is a resistive effort still by the working community to make the time to socialize, support local food trucks as small businesses, and enjoy quality local food over mass produced processed foods. While oftentimes unable to enjoy the event in full, the FFTR serves as a brief oasis from the mundaneness of work to engage in a moment of play all the while resisting tropes of the stereotypical traditional work day.

As such, the FFTR invites a brief haven and a commensality space of “making do” for people whose workdays do take up a significant part of their life as varying levels of privilege and disadvantage. Starting at 5:30 p.m., the event is designed to accommodate to people who work a 9-5 schedule or work during the day. This does not necessarily accommodate for many working-class people who work at night or have multiple jobs and work that constrains their time. However, observing the people who make the time for their own version of play, whether that be in-between jobs or just before work showcase their agency teasing work discourses with play practices. Part of the subcultural distinction in work and play is the notion of “making time” to eat and reclaiming the pleasure of eating as an act of agency. Time is made in interacting and

bringing certain materials in space for the purpose of enjoying food, whether that is in a leisurely way or whether that is for a quick bite to socialize with people in the space.

## **How Should We Eat? Subcultural Positionalities of Commensality and Crafting**

### ***Local/Global Taste***

Aside practices of work and play, the placement and materiality of FFTR food trucks as well as people's consumption and interactions with their representations, symbols, and materials texture subcultural ideologies of commensality through appeals and avowals of local and global taste. These local and global textures of taste discursively offer and constitute subcultural positionalities of commensality (Bourdieu, 1984). Local taste deals with a range of meanings such as the privileging of a certain location and community, the local production and consumption of food, sustainability/environmental concerns, and a "food-as-craft" sensibility through artisanal, gourmet, and handmade food (Cappellini, Parsons, & Harman, 2016). In contrast, global food tastes, appeal to cultural diversity, travel-influenced cuisine, and the economic circulation of global food products (Huggan, 2002; Appadurai, 1988).

I suggest another subcultural commensality texture at the FFTR involves the "glocalization" in space that invite specific positionalities of consumption (Robertson, 1992). Although local and global taste preferences draw boundaries and create hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1984), glocal formations disrupt global-local discursive binaries, complicate taste preferences, and transform understandings of commensality (Hemer, Tufte, & Eriksen, 2005, p. 1; Bourdieu, 1984). Many of these glocal tastes at the FFTR embody the discourse of "think globally, act locally" embracing diversity in food; but maintain localized senses of belonging. Previous studies of food and taste have suggested people engage in an "elective belonging," wherein distinctions in hierarchies are produced, but for the sake of being a part of a particular

community (Savage et al., 2005, p. 202). Different groups of people do exhibit agency and self-determination of their taste preferences that reflect certain identities; but, these taste preferences showcase different hierarchies embedded within these subcultures of commensality.

I suggest the interplay of local and global textures uphold, invite, and constitute positionalities of “*the Citizen Consumer*,” “*the Cosmopolitan*,” “*the American Dreamer*,” and “*the Active Coloradoan*.” Rhetorical textures involve the implications of our bodies and their relation to space and material (Dickinson, 2019). Global and local tastes textured in the space invite subcultural positionalities in relation to these bodies as suggestions of embodiment and specific ways of engaging in commensality and eating from food trucks. These positionalities, however, are theoretical discourses, not zero-sum representations or complete and/or stable identities of commensality subculture. Rather elements of these subcultural positionalities are expressed through more concretized global and local taste appeals, while others are fragmented and fused communicating more of the glocal blend of taste distinctions.

In my observations, many of the food trucks at the FFTR identify strongly with local tastes inviting positionalities aligning with “the Citizen Consumer” and “the Active Coloradoan.” This includes food trucks like The Goodness advertising the “localness” of their food in terms of preparation and consumption or like Sweaty Moose, emphasizing more regional representations of Colorado identity such as nature and the great outdoors. Local tastes are embedded in the textures of trucks’ design, menus, specific dishes, aesthetics, symbols, texts as well as the movements of customers invited and/or compelled into action to eat at the food truck via positionalities crafted via localized taste appeals.

During one of my observations, I paid close attention to the branding and materialism of symbols and messages of the food trucks. The Goodness truck’s logo, for example, is a mountain

top inside a cleaver accompanied with the text “Fresh. Local. Real” printed across the truck. Freshness, locality, and realness promote that their food is made from fresh, local ingredients. Additionally, The Goodness indicates on their menu that they “always source the freshest local, seasonal and delicious ingredients” and that they are “Colorado proud,” indicating their political lean to local food production. The Goodness’ rhetorical appeal of “fresh, local, and real,” similarly mirrors and appropriates meaning from the Slow Food Movement’s tenets of “good, clean, and fair” and invites a positionality of conscious consumption by fostering relationships with local food producers and supporting the community (Schneider, 2008). In this way, The Goodness encourages people to embody the positionality of a Citizen Consumer, a person whose every day consumption practices are tempered “with an eye towards the greater good” (Chaudhury & Albinsson, 2015). In rhetoric, Aristotelian notions of the greater good suggest an ambiguous notion of “living well” as a means and action to achieve happiness with in orientation toward the “greater good” (Modrak, 1986). The Goodness of enjoying tastes of locally sourced food and supporting small businesses, offers a positionality of “living well” and a “greater good” as a citizen consumer in the Fort Collins community.

This citizen consumer positionality forwards a subcultural distinction of locavorism to dismantle systems and practices of mass-produced food, many of which reflect discourses in the Slow Food Movement. The Slow Food Movement is often critiqued for elitism within their appeals to citizen consumerism, often proposing life styles, ways of being, and ingredients that are expensive or inaccessible among different class positions and standpoints (Schneider, 2008). However, The Goodness makes itself distinct in their messaging of local food avoiding these pretentious slow food proclivities. Their message is simple, and less heavy handed than some slow food and locavore discourses inviting people to adopt a Citizen Consumer positionality.

Additionally, their price point for menu items materially are more accessible and democratize locavore tastes often gated off for elite tastes. For example, one afternoon at the FFTR, I ordered a healthy Grilled Brie Panini sandwich from The Goodness and a drink for \$13. As such, The Goodness offers a Citizen Consumer positionality invited and available to adopt in their space at the FFTR that is arms reach for people across a range of demographics.

Other food trucks also appeal and foster commensality through notions of local taste that invite the both positionalities of the Citizen Consumer and the American Dreamer reinforcing community connection through artisanal foodways and small business support. These positionalities often appeal to the nostalgia of common American pastimes. The Corndoggies food truck for example, appeals to local taste values and identity serving “artisanal” corndogs. This involves values of local, handcrafted food production, and often a signifier of gourmet business practices. Many Americans and working families grow up and take pleasure eating mass produced frozen corndogs to quickly pop in the microwave or oven. Additionally, many Americans experience eating the “good” corn dogs made not always artisanal, but fresh at state and county fairs and carnivals across the nation. Corndoggies’ advertising of artisanal corndogs transforms the meaning of a hot dog beyond the mass-produced microwave frozen corndogs bought at home as well as those sold at state fairs. The corndog is arguably a deeply nostalgic product of American identity bringing people back to their childhood and pastimes going to state fairs and reinforcing images and identities of the American family.

In my observations of people purchasing items from the truck, many are families with young children who prefer familiar foods like corndogs. Offering standard corndogs as well as hybridized tastes that appeal to a more adult palate, their localization of taste appeals to families. Additionally, Corndoggies aesthetics also appeals to the community’s popular love and

identification as dog owners and family systems with hungry kids. Almost 70% of households in Fort Collins own a dog in Fort Collins (Niedringhaus, 2016). On the Corndoggies truck, their main logo of a Dachshund placed inside of a corndog bun printed across the front of their 1975 GMC RV. Locating commensality to people's popular lifestyles and love for their canine companions, Corndoggies encourages a metaphoric consumption of people's self-avowed identities as dog owners that appeal to the identity of local ways of being and interests.

As such, Corndoggies simultaneously appeals to the Citizen Consumer as well as the American Dreamer positionalities. They reconstruct the corndog and place it into the image of a small business, personalized operation encouraging people to take on Citizen Consumer status; but, emphasized through American Dreamer positionalities as supporters of local homemade crafts of small businesses rather than corporate chains removed from care and friendliness of service. Moreover, the American Dreamer positionality invited offers an artisanal flavor, texturing this positionality to local tastes not just simply concerned with family values and supporting small businesses, but places where the food is made with artisanal, creative quality.

Other food trucks at the FFTR invite a positionality of the American Dreamer for people to embody in the space. One of the more popular food trucks, who has consistent line in almost all my observations was Bigs Meat Wagon. Localizing their taste with a logo representative and appropriating colors and images of the Colorado Flag, Bigs Meat Wagon specializes in one of America's prized and cherished foodways—barbeque. Wielding connotations of patriotism and small business individualism, an American flag is waving outside the lean-to of their trailer alongside a Colorado state flag. Employees are rushing buzzers to customers. A large man in tattoos and cut off jean short-shorts and a cowboy hat is flipping and rotating burgers, hot dogs,

ribs, and other meats. Smoke billows from the smoker as the sound of crackling meat combines with the chattering of people in line

The rhetorical textures of commensality at Bigs Meat Wagon, appeal reinforce positionalities of “the American Dreamer” in associating barbeque with national pride with the American flag waving outside. The rhetorical national image of barbeque has commensality grilled into the dominant American psyche is often associated with collective celebratory past times whether that be birthday celebrations or family reunions. Although the method of barbequing is practiced globally, barbeque is often the center piece of American food culture and connected to discourses that place its origins within the U.S. It is moreover associated with symbols of freedom and collective individualism whether that be 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations in the park, a symbol of status in one purchasing their own home grill, or the foundation of a small business. Barbeque often embodies the epidemic of commensality of food sharing and connection and elicits deep feelings of nostalgia within an American identity.

Positionalities of the “Active Coloradoan” and the “Cosmopolitan” are also emphasized in people’s fusion of local and global taste preferences, especially in ways that emphasize willingness for travel and mobility. This sojourner on-the-go spirit is reflected within the models of vehicles food trucks operate in at the FFTR. For example, Corndoggies is a repurposed RV; Sweaty Moose is a repurposed bus; and Umami Mobile Eatery operates out of a silver air streamer. Fusing the global and local, the presence of these vehicles emphasizes notions of movement and travel as well as potentially playful sense of ‘can you find us’ on the go. In doing so, these textures of food trucks emplaced in the FFTR “glocalize” interests of travel through food appealing to both Active Coloradoan and Cosmopolitan positionalities.

These identities are first place into popular outdoor lifestyles representative of the Active Coloradoan positionality. For example, Sweaty Moose's message, "Follow the Moose" is printed across the truck appealing to meanings of movement related to active and outdoor adventure lifestyles. While encouraging a social media following, it is at the same time asking customers to visit them wherever they travel through Colorado; it is also a more localized plan-your-own-adventure to locate the mobile food truck as part of the goal of finding desired food. Moreover, the Moose logo, like the Corndoggies logo, invites people to consume the Active Coloradoan identity with the Moose symbolic of hikers and wildlife enthusiasts, hunting and consuming wild game, and national and state parks people who enjoy the outdoors visit. This local Active Coloradoan positionality is also represented in their menu items and dishes they serve to customers. At the Sweaty Moose, I notice that their menu advertised appetizers like "Mountain Beans" and "Mountain Nachos" and desserts like "Camp Biscuits." Their main courses also included cuisine like "Sloppy Elk Sliders" that used wild game as ingredients for the dish, wherein an Active Coloradoan positionality of commensality is reinforced.

Other food trucks at the FFTR merge this active Coloradoan positionality with more global cosmopolitan appeals. During another observation of the FFTR, I order "Thai Nachos" from Umami Mobile Eatery, a food truck designed as a repurposed silver air streamer communicative of active Coloradoan pastimes of camping and enjoying the outdoors. Throughout the state of Colorado, air streamers and mobile campers are commonplace materials that indicate a value for experiencing the outdoors and natural areas open for camping, fishing, hiking, and hunting. Horsetooth Mountain Open Space is even visible at the backdrop of the event just behind Umami Mobile Eatery, where people set up air streamers of their own, setting



the scene of common local practices of camping, hiking, and outdoor recreation offered in the area.

At the same time, Umami promotes global taste preferences around cuisine that is new, unfamiliar, and novel, appealing to the positionality of the “Cosmopolitan.” Umami Mobile Eatery is a popular food truck that plays to this notion of textured aesthetics of the regional area with food offerings that communicate global tastes in contrast to the localizing of Elk, for example. Ninja bowls, Umami tacos, Thai Nachos, Bahn mi, are all dishes one can order from Umami. Specifically, Umami blends Mexican and Pan Asian dishes, serving global tastes of fusion food from their air streamer based in a local active Coloradoan identity. The hybridity reflected in these dishes invites the consumption of multiculturalism, that benefits a local small business—quite literally practicing cosmopolitan ideologies of “think global, act local.” Moreover, the air streamer hints at the importance of travel whether that is locally or globally. These textures present the “active Coloradoan” alongside a “Cosmopolitan” positionality, encouraging commensality among local outdoor enthusiasts and global travelers.

Other trucks similarly invite the combination of Active Coloradoan and Cosmopolitan positionalities. Rocky Mountain Coqui, a food truck serving Puerto Rican cuisine, uses the “Rocky Mountain” in their business name and logo to appeal to the local community while adding a rhetorical distinction of “Coqui” to invite a frog particular to Puerto Rico. The movements and materiality of Rocky Mountain Coqui literally and symbolically place Puerto Rican cuisine in the Rocky Mountain region. While the food culture of Fort Collins prides itself of local food from Colorado, there are no Puerto Rican restaurants within the Fort Collins area. This interplay of local-global naming dominant meanings of locality that limit the diversification of food ways. Rocky Mountain Coqui strategically uses a local Colorado identity to encourage

the consumption of global Puerto Rican cuisine in ways that diversify local food through global tastes.

Beyond their logo, this is represented within their food preparation and offerings. I was drawn to Rocky Mountain Coqui because it seemed new and different. Materially, food trucks sold and exchanges products from Puerto Rico such as “Coco Rico” coconut flavored soda embedding global materials in a local space. While localizing themselves, these exchanges of food origin and placement pronounce hybridic manifestations with their positioning in Fort Collins. This fusion of Active Coloradoan and Cosmopolitan positionalities invite people in the Puerto Rican community into a predominantly white dominated space and food culture to engage in commensality. While waiting for my order and engaging rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe, 2012), I hear a couple speaking in Spanish and then code switch to English, avowing to their Puerto Rican identity. In this exchange, these folks were discussing how they saw Rocky Mountain Coqui and “needed to try it” because it was “one of the few spots doing Puerto Rican food in the area.” Significant in this interaction is that these folks did not know each other interpersonally but were invited by Rocky Mountain Coqui’s offerings and localization of global Puerto Rican cuisine in the space.

While not encompassing of the FFTR’s identity as a whole, local and global tastes create different variations of positionalities to enact commensality in the space: the citizen consumer, the cosmopolitan, the American Dreamer, and the Active Coloradoan. As a subculture that simultaneously define and resist, these food trucks collectively support local tastes supporting small businesses of food trucks in Fort Collins. However, there uses of global and local tastes also perpetuate nostalgia of dominant Americanness ignoring immigrant identities and perpetuating notions of whiteness, privileging of outdoor and active lifestyles via the active

Coloradoan. The Cosmopolitan diversifies the palate, and in some cases encourages the support and invitation among underrepresented groups. But it also risks fetishization and exoticism of cultures that perpetuate whiteness. Regardless, these identities do dismantle elitism of commensality related to gourmet taste preferences of food, in a collective effort to support small business as well as make global and local tastes accessible to the public. Therefore, these various positionalities articulated in the same space encourage multiple ways of eating among both dominant and underrepresented identities. While delivering gourmet quality and flavor, these positionalities offer different and particular subcultures for visitors to adopt that diversify and resist elite gourmet standards of eating.

### ***Parallel Performances of Food and Music as Subcultural Commensality***

In addition to subcultural practices of play/work and local/global taste positionalities, the FFTR also engages the performativity of food and music that texture the space's subculture. The FFTR as a space, represents hybrid performances of food and music that contribute to its "event-ness." This parallel performativity blends notions of food and music consumption creating a space that is both for eating local food and for listening to local music. Food truck owners and musicians are both treated as artists, and their specific performances structure the event that texture subcultural commensality in the space dismantling and reifying gourmet elitism and food culture. These parallel performances are reflected in rhetorical textures of "mutual local consumption," "collaborative waiting," and "the Line Up."

### **Mutual Local Consumption: Music & Food**

First, the performativity of mutual local consumption at the FFTR is representative of subcultural commensality. In my observations, mutual local consumption is encouraged at the FFTR with logos, stickers, and different forms of signage representative of local organizations

supporting and partnering with FFTR. This includes The Mishawaka Amphitheatre, Associates in Family Medicine, Bonfire Effect, Visit Fort Collins, KRFC 88.9 FM, North 40 News, Scene Magazine, and GSI. These clusters of signage materially perform social network capital between the FFTR and these local organization in space. This bolsters the FFTR's ethos as a food and music event, as these organizations affiliate their names and take responsibility in sponsoring the event, especially the clout of Mishawaka Amphitheatre, local radio station, and local culture and lifestyle magazines.

As I walked through the event, I also noticed a pop-up tent with "Mishawaka.com" printed across the canvas which not only indicated the "stage" where the live music was performed, but also highlighted the Mishawaka as one of FFTR's key local sponsors. These music sponsors expand their presence and popularity in taking up material space at the FFTR. Based on these spatial arrangements, signage of local organizations, especially those affiliated with music and arts and culture, mutual consumption practices are encouraged. Not only does the space promote the consumption of food truck food, but also the local community supporting music, thus preparing the platform of performances of consuming the local subculture of food and music performativity in the space. Right when people enter the event, people are encouraged to mutually consume both local food and music through shared practices of eating and listening.

In a way, this signage signals mutual consumption and invites identities and performances of a creative class that play out in the space. The food truck owners are chefs, pit masters, and grassroots foodie entrepreneurs. Mishawaka is a small local independent amphitheater, and the bands are all local and regional independent artists. As such, the type and tone of food and music performativity in the space is grounded in food and music styles that make themselves distinct as independent and local. Artists perform a range of music genres

including psyche-rock, groove, indie, blues, blues rock, Latin soul, new roots and rock, jazz, and swing. Many of the bands that play are local to Fort Collins or regional to the front range. Likewise, the food trucks also offer a variety of food genres provided by local and regional trucks that occupy and perform their foodways. One could argue that based on these rhetorical textures, food trucks fused with music performativity communicate a genre of “indie” or “alternative” food communicating local creative entrepreneurial and small business independence. In doing so, they maintain a subcultural of mutual consumption of food and music performativity.

### **Structuring Performance Textures of Food and Music**

These mutual local consumption practices are also delivered and encouraged through FFTR’s performative structuring of commensality in musical forms. Much like the musical performances of local bands, food trucks are staged and enacted in performative ways. As such, two simultaneous front stage dramas of food and music are performed. Goffman (1959) suggests cultural performances perform as “front stage drama.” We often perform public tasks or roles performatively “in front of” particular audiences that are patterned and culturally bound. When these performances influence particular audience, to partake in consumption and engagement of food and music for example, we can view them as rhetorical.

Each Tuesday, the music of local artists is staged literally on the lawn under the Mishawaka pop-up tent housing their instruments, speakers, and other materials. People ritualistically sit down with their food and crowd around the stage to listen to the music. As people are eating and waiting for the music to start, they chat with each other and watch the band set up their gear. When the music starts, people eat local food truck food and listen to local music. Like a music stage, the food trucks are also performatively staged in the space. In my

observations for example, an array of food trucks park in a long row across an empty lot in City Park each week. People form long lines outside the food trucks and prepare to order. Much like anticipating or waiting to receive or show one's ticket into a concert venue, food consumption is performed as one's tick to sit down, eat, and listening to music.

However, the performance of food truck cooking also became a part of the performativity. While people ate and listened to the music, some people simply watched the flows of people moving between food trucks as well as the food trucks themselves servicing customers. Many people were drawn to the simple pleasure of watching food trucks operate, setting up their lawn chairs facing the food trucks rather than the band, or camping out and eating behind the line of food trucks between City Park pond. Like music, people take pleasure in watching the performativity of food truck labor. This makes sense, the labor of food truck workers is face-paced, intense, and efficient, hence, a spectacle of high performativity. The foodways of food trucks are performative themselves. For example, Big's Meat Wagon uses their trailer like a stage where customers can observe the pit master cook. Smoke billows from the smoker grill, the clanking of cooking utensils rhythmically hit the metal grate, and smells of spices, sauces, and cooked meat captivate the air as I waited in line with others to receive my food. In the same moment, I was able to turn to watch the band or listen to the music after receiving or while waiting for food.

As a performance, the FFTR's staging of both music and food trucks in space encourage the mutual consumption of both local food and music while providing its consumers with an enlivened space to perform their identities around food and a place to perform their commitment, locally, while rallying their values and ways of living. While this risks an objectifying "gaze" of labor, messages of local support and community remind audiences of the "grassroots-ness" of the

event. People are encouraged through mutual consumption and performativity to maintain a consciousness of consumption, knowing that their entertainment comes from the labor and efforts of independent artists and small businesses. In this way, people consume performances of food and music as a subcultural texture of commensality showcasing that eating is simultaneously enacted with listening as forms of performance consumption.

Beyond the staging of food performativity, commensality is also rhetorically textured at the FFTR through music form as “The Lineup” of food trucks. Just as there is a “line up” of musicians every week at the FFTR, there is a “line up” of local food trucks advertised at the event on signage and social media. The FFTR promotes not only its rotating line up of music to support local artists, but their line up of food trucks present in the event space each day. Like a large music festival, this line up provides customers the opportunity and agency to pick and choose which food trucks they wish to eat from each week and which artists they want to listen to. However, while a new musician is featured each week, the line up of food trucks remain relatively stable. Some food trucks rotate or are replaced by others during the FFTR season, but there is relative consistency as food trucks ultimately secure this performance space in collaboration with Sarah Ladley before the season begins.

In a way, this line up creates a hierarchy of commensality in that there are limited spaces of parallel parking and food trucks have to buy into the event as a part of the FFTR’s collaborative grassroots support and funding to pay for a special event permit. While the FFTR creates more space for food truck operations through the “Line up,” these spaces are still competed over as events are where food trucks profit significantly in revenue and that there is limited space within the FFTR itself. Although open to any food trucked legally licensed to operate in Fort Collins, food trucks must have cultural capital in the community and the revenue

to secure a seasonal spot at the FFTR. In this way, the lineup democratizes and opens up a performance space of commensality for food trucks, but also reifies dominance in that not every food truck in the areas has the opportunity to participate.

While food trucks also have been set in the periphery of events for food servicing at carnivals, state fairs, and music festivals, the FFTR *is* the event where food trucks are front and center this is performative and spotlighting not the music, but food trucks as the performance. The FFTR engages food and music performativity to promote a subculture of mutual local consumptions and parallel performance structures. While local food and music is promoted and advertised as grassroots and community based, these performances do indicate hierarchies among food trucks able to operate and invited to the event, in ways that perpetuate elitism of gourmet commensality.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have showcased how the FFTR textures subcultural ideology through work and play practices of commensality, invitations of positionalities based in local and global tastes, and the parallel performativity of food and music. Commensality is often theorized as actions of food sharing that connect people culturally and interpersonally. However, understanding commensality as a space and place rhetoric that textures and reinforces subculture provide a deeper understanding of how commensality functions as a rhetoric of resistance and reification of gourmet elitism embedded in commensality practices, tastes, and performances. Representative in many of these textures, subcultural ideologies collectively reach an intermediate space between slow and fast food. As a subculture, people embrace pleasure and enjoyment of quality food communicating distinctions in their practices, tastes, and performances of food consumption. At the same time, there is a consistent ethic and material



practice of democratizing gourmet food and taste making them accessible to a wide range of cultural identities. However, some material practices of play, articulated tastes, and suggested performances, reinforce consumption hierarchies and commercialize leisure offered in the space. In these ways, the FFTR resists and reifies the dominance of gourmet discourses in food trucking practices, tastes, and performances. In the next chapter, I extend this understanding of rhetorical commensality textures, not as a subcultural ideology, but as a rhetoric of difference resistant to cultural gentrification.

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## CHAPTER 4:

### NORTH COLLEGE AVENUE FOOD TRUCK COMMENSALITY: CULTURAL GENTRIFICATION & RHETORICAL TEXTURES OF DIFFERENCE

Driving on North College Avenue I cross Gateway Bridge. To my right is the newly developed Poudre River Whitewater park, a recreational area made possible by the City of Fort Collins to create a space for kayakers, tubers, swimmers, and improve the river floodplain (fcgov.com). Then, I pass First Cash Pawn, the Human Bean Coffee stand, Chipper Lanes Bowling, and several auto care and repair shops like AutoZone, Pennzoil, and Big O' Tires. Traffic zips by, while people filter between different parking lots, frequent the sidewalks, and move in and out of different businesses on the strip.

Further down, I come to a hub of Latinx-owned businesses such as *La Barata*, a *carnicaría* and grocery store. Several different food trucks operate in the parking lots and side streets of local businesses. *La Sabrosite del Bajío's* bright purple food truck operates outside *Artesanías Y Mas!*, a *paeteria*, or Mexican-style ice cream shop and snack bar (Arreguín-Anderson, Salinas-Gonzalez, & Alanis, 2018). Maggie's Tacos serves their food across the street outside JAX Outdoor Gear, an effort to generate customers by the two businesses. *Los Pepe's Taqueria* works in the adjacent parking lot of Auto Zone. Further north down the strip, *La Campechana's* food truck sets up shop outside Auto Trends Automotive, feeding the off-and-on flow of people taking a break from looking at used cars as well as employees taking their lunch breaks. Half a block down is another Mexican grocery store, *Carnicarías Las Delicias* with food truck of their own operating in the parking lot. Ending the strip just before North College transitions into Highway 287, a new taco cart is selling food in the parking lot of the Loaf & Jug gas station parking lot.

These food trucks and trailers represent the social styles and innovations of Latinx immigrant-owned operations known as *loncheras* (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017, p. 1). The trucks consistently advertise selling “authentic” or “traditional” Mexican<sup>1</sup> food and operate almost daily in various parking lots of small businesses, companies, and corporations on the North College strip. Compared to the FOCO Food Truck Rally (FFTR) and food trucks present at local breweries, North College Avenue does not reflect the same aesthetics and gourmet style that popularized during post-2008 “food truck revolution” (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017; Muñoz, 2019). You will see less performances of food sustainability or terms like “local” or “artisanal” branded on North College food trucks.

As *loncheras*, North College food truck spaces are predominantly created, maintained, and frequented by the Latinx community, reflecting, to a degree, an ethnic enclave of commensality represented through this Latinx hub of competing food trucks and small businesses and services. In my observations, the customer base in these commensality spaces also reflect a degree of “coexisting heterogeneity,” cross-sections of racial, ethnic, and class identities (Massey, 1994, pp. 5-7), including working- and middle-class people, blue collar workers, people experiencing homelessness, older folks from the neighboring retirement community, residents of the trailer park, college students, and young professionals coming from nearby apartment complexes.

There is also a corporate presence of fast food chains and superstores scattered on North College including King’s Sooper’s Supermarket (Kroger), Burger King, Arby’s, Starbucks, and McDonalds—which just underwent renovations replacing an old gas station and receiving a

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<sup>1</sup> I use “Mexican” food here because that is what most *loncheras* advertise that they serve. Even if some of the Latinx folks serving or working on the food trucks may not identify specifically as culturally and ethnically Mexican.

modern architectural face lift. Urban renewal plans and infrastructure improvements in North Fort Collins were approved in 2004 to encourage new development in the area (Ferrier, 2020). As more development occurs like beautification practices and construction of suburban style/sustainable style living spaces like “Revive” neighborhood, fast food chains, superstores, gas stations, Great Clips, Starbucks, all followed and contribute to cultural gentrification.

The broader context of subcultural and gourmet taste preferences in the food truck industry referenced in Chapter 3 and the development and corporate food presence on North College highlights a creeping presence of cultural gentrification. Cultural gentrification refers to both the physical and symbolic transformations of space for the purpose of accumulating economic capital (Muñoz, 2019). It implies both the erasure and/or appropriation of local culture through the “commodification of cultural and economic forms” (Muñoz, 2019, p. 95). Cultural gentrification is often the byproduct of whiteness, “in which local-state’s neoliberal policies cater to civic elites” which privilege gourmet tastes, modern aesthetics, and affluent people (p. 100). Issues of cultural gentrification have been a concern for Latinx people living and working in Fort Collins. Latinx people living in the traditionally Hispanic neighborhoods of Alta Vista, Buckingham, and Andersonville have disclosed fears of rent and mortgage, everyday living becoming unaffordable, as well as noise complaints and customers from breweries (Kyle, 2014). Additionally, these discourses of cultural gentrification “make invisible long histories of Latinx immigrant mobile food entrepreneurship” (Muñoz, 2019, p. 100). It disseminates a dominant narrative placing the history of gourmet-style food trucks that started in 2008, overrepresenting food truck practices and innovation of the predominantly white, Eurocentric creative class appealing to gourmet tastes (Lemon, 2017; Muñoz, 2019).

However, the prominence of Latinx food trucks on North College Avenue situate a resistance to such dominance. In this chapter, I argue Latinx food truck spaces on North College Avenue function as *rhetorical textures of difference* that resist processes of whiteness cultural gentrification through commensality. I combine Dickinson's (2019) notion of "textures" with Flores' (1996) "rhetoric of difference" wherein *loncheras* on North College provide tools "in the discursive construction of space" (Flores, 1996, p. 143). North College food trucks structure difference, carve out space, and bridge the community as counterhegemonic textures resisting cultural gentrification (Flores, 1996). However, this critique of whiteness and cultural gentrification is not to dismiss the labor and contributions of more gourmet and artisan style food trucks, which have made key contributions in the overall acceptance of food trucks in Fort Collins as evidenced in the grassroots efforts of the FFTR in Chapter 3. Food truck owners work long hours like many small business owners. Income is not indispensable. Food servicing regulations can be difficult and confusing, and resources to operate are not unlimited or always easy to utilize (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017). Their labor and everyday struggles are often deemed invisible. Running a food truck with and for the community supports owners and employees' livelihoods as spaces of commensality. But, to ignore the dominance of whiteness of food truck spaces in Fort Collins would dismiss the complexity and cultural power of food truck commensality as rhetorical textures of emplaced and performative resistance among Latinx operations.

Therefore, I interpret North College Avenue food trucks as holding the potential to offer spaces of commensality that rhetorically texture difference and resist cultural gentrification as an "every day practice" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xi). I draw from ethnographic observations and interview data to analyze key food truck spaces on North College Avenue: Maggie's Tacos, *La*



*Campechana, La Sabrosite del Bajio, Los Pepes Taqueria, and Carnicarías Las Delicias*. These food truck spaces on North College collectively texture difference and resist cultural gentrification by: 1) “flipping the script” in the linguistic landscape, 2) performing a social style of “elevated everydayness” that carves out space, and 3) enact the bridging of local space with members of the community on North College.

### **“Flipping the Script” in the Linguistic Landscape: Structuring Difference through Commensality**

North College food trucks first structure difference texturing Spanish language in the linguistic landscape, or “the visibility and salience of language on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 23). The arrangements of different languages on symbols and material as well as languages used in spoken conversation or written indicate cultural identities, relations, and located ways of being that exist in the space. Tran (2019) explains (2019) “language and food practice work together to co-construct” identity into food spaces (p. 3). Understandings of self, culture, and place are reinforced or transformed through practices of consumption (Bell & Valentine, 1997, p. 3). North College food trucks’ use Spanish represent, speak about, and refer to food and services in contrast to the dominance English.

In local media and everyday conversation, food trucks are implicated as part of the “Latinx hub” of small businesses on North College. They emplace Spanish language through food practices, create discursive space, and represent a rhetorical texturing of difference in the linguistic landscape (Flores, 1996; Dickinson, 2019). North College Food trucks contrast textures of Spanish and English and employ strategic meanings of authenticity in the space, “flipping the

script” on whiteness embedded in the linguistic foodscape as a resistance to cultural gentrification.

During my in-situ observations, almost all the food trucks I interacted with used Spanish titles for their small business such as *La Campechana*, *La Sabrosite del Bajio*, and *Carnicerías Las Delicias*. Spanish-named food trucks rhetorically open up discursive space to distinguish oneself from dominant culture (Flores, 1996). The City’s “Visit Fort Collins” website suggests about 70 food trucks operate in the Fort Collins as a part of “the laid-back craft culture” and “thriving foodie scene” (fc.gov). A quick look at the list of licensed food trucks in Fort Collins, will reveal the vast majority of food trucks brand themselves and communicate their services in English (fc.gov). English dominates the linguistic landscape of food on North College more broadly among corporate food chains, grocery stores, and businesses on the North College strip. The power of whiteness is based in its invisibility and implication as a norm; but, to resist whiteness is to “name it” or make it “known” discursively (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 2). Thus, naming their small business in Spanish contrasts difference in the English dominated landscape on North College, making it visible and flipping the script on whiteness and norms of English language.

During my weekly lunch visits to food trucks spaces on North College between April 2020 – April 2022, this contrasting Spanish and English and reversing dominance through food language occurred through the rhetorical arrangements of menus, signage, logos, visual images, and text printed on the food trucks. In my observations, the contrasting of Spanish and English in food discourses “flip the script” of dominance constructing spaces of familiarity for Latinx and Spanish-speaking consumers, and as spaces of unfamiliarity and assimilation among most white, English speakers via everyday practices.

Visiting *La Campechana* after work one August afternoon, many of the menu items are listed and described in Spanish spatially privileging Spanish language. Pictures of Mexican-style cuisines are printed across the bottom of *La Campechana*'s food truck. White text accompanies images of food items they represent with the words *sopes*, *tortas*, *flautas*, *elotes en vato*, and *chilles rellenos* printed in Spanish in bold white letters. However, the pictures of the dishes on the side of the truck are not labeled in English. These arrangements of text and visuals function as a form of translation to English speaking audiences, showing what the food is without using English phrases. Contrasting textual and visual arrangements of Spanish and English language on the food trucks subordinate identities of white, English speakers in their initial interactions with the truck.

Another commonplace texture of Spanish/English contrasting was represented on the lists of available meat and protein options taped and/or posted on the truck's service window. *La Carnicerías Las Delicias*' truck lists *asada*, *lengua*, *barbacoa*, *pollo*, *chorizo*, and *carnitas* outside their truck. English translations for each protein option are also present listing steak, tongue, shredded beef, shredded pork, and chicken. Likewise, *La Campechana*, *Los Pepes Taqueria*, Maggie's Tacos, and *La Sabrosite del Bajio* all used Spanish in their menus and offered English translations for protein options. Other spaces like *Los Pepes* provided bilingual menus describing food in both Spanish and English. Each item on *Los Pepe*'s laminated menu had both Spanish names next to English translations of the dishes. These rhetorical textures of difference encourage cross-cultural commensality in that Latinx food trucks accommodate and integrate English translations; but, they do so in prioritizing Spanish in their menus and food items people consume. These translations can be interpreted as "equipment for living" (Burke,

1967, p. 304), reflecting an invitation to food trucks spaces among dominant English-speaking groups.

Observing interactions in these spaces, English-speaking people navigated these linguistic barriers through food ordering using menu items and Spanish phrases as “equipment for living.” Some English-speaking customers would mostly order food in English but make attempts to utilize Spanish referring to menu items and signage to order their food. People, including myself, would struggle with Spanish pronunciation at times depending on the food order. Amid these moments of unfamiliarity, the translation of items provided linguistic navigation in the Spanish dominated space—accommodating but not treating English as the privileged language in the space. Spanish naming encouraged cross-cultural interactions providing people linguistic equipment for engaging in the everyday task of ordering food. In this way, even English-speaking people are invited through everyday interactions via sharing food language to practice Spanish and decenter English.

While this contrasting of language structures difference—positioning English speakers under a degree of linguistic unfamiliarity and cultural adaption—the use of Spanish language concretizes Latinx identities in space maintaining familiarity and in-group ethos. Peake (2012) explains “the sound of language is a diagrammatic icon: its sound represents, by likeness, the characterization of the ethos of the space” (p. 178). During many of my observations, the Spanish-speaking soundscape of North College food truck spaces are dominated by consumers, employees, and owners speaking Spanish. Not only is Spanish textured through menu descriptions, but also in the soundscape of music and language performed in the space while preparing food and eating.

From my in-situ experiences eating in the space, I was often one of the few people who only spoke English. Eating at *Carnicerías Las Delicias* Latinx couples, families, and individuals spoke fluent Spanish with each other in Spanish, walking up to order from the food truck. As people filter into line, people ordered and conversed with owners and employees in Spanish during their food orders. Likewise, at *La Campechana*, employees are listening to music in Spanish on the radio and singing along while preparing food for customers. Waiting for my order at *Los Pepe's Taqueria*, several people also wait for their order on the phone speaking and conversing in Spanish. Listening to the languages spoken in the soundscape, it is evident that speaking Spanish is a dominant characteristic of in-group ethos enacted and structured in the soundscape of the space.

Further observation of interactions of people waiting in line for food also reinforced the predominance of Spanish speaking in the soundscape. While some food trucks like *Los Pepes* gave people handheld buzzers to indicate when people's food is ready, many of the North College food trucks like *La Campechana* and *Carnicerías Las Delicias*, did not take the names of people to organize orders. Instead, they organized orders based on the Spanish names of the food people ordered. For example, it is more common to hear employees calling phrases like “*dos asadas tacos!*” or “*lengua torta!*” to indicate that food orders were ready. During these interactions, it is the responsibility of the customer to remember what food they ordered often described in Spanish.

This encouraged non-Spanish speaking people to focus, remember, and listen intently to Spanish names of their food order. English speakers often struggled with difference and sometimes experienced confusion. For example, at *La Campechana* one afternoon, I heard the order “*dos asadas tacos*” thinking it was mine; but, instead it was someone else who ordered one

“*asada taco*.” Likewise, I observed countless times other white passing, English speaking people hesitate, unsure if it was the correct food order. In contrast, less Spanish speaking people waiting for orders had these moments of linguistic confusion based on their familiarity with Spanish. In the process of food sharing, the soundscape of North College food trucks “flips the script” on dominant English-speaking identities struggle and adapt to the linguistic landscape of the food space. At the same time, it encourages a practice of listening to Spanish as a form of commensality, decentering English through sharing and identifying with the Spanish names of food and opening spaces for intercultural competency.

Spanish-speaking ethos is also implicated and created a notable divide among people who stayed to eat in these spaces. While English-speaking, white passing customers more often than not ordered their food to-go, Spanish speaking people stayed in the space to enjoy their food. While this was not representative in every case, the soundscape of language use did influence clear patterns of people who decided to stick around to eat and engage in commensality.

Beyond, language textured and spoken in these spaces, Spanish language also structured difference in the linguistic space on food material. Spanish language is printed on many of the products sold in these North College food truck spaces. During my visit at *La Sobrosite del Bajio*, I purchase a “Mexican Coke” and an “*asada torta*,” and sit down for a meal at their pop-up picnic table outside the truck. On the Coke bottle, the label has Spanish labeling and identifies that it is a product from Mexico. Other snacks and items indicate on the labels that they are products from Mexico such as brands of *duros*, wagon wheel-shaped chips and *Jarritos* flavored sodas a popular imported Mexican beverage across the United States. Spanish names and branding displayed on these products are unfamiliar but allow me to engage with difference through these commodities many imported from Mexico.

The exchange of Spanish names through purchasing food commodities represents a resistive form of commensality against cultural gentrification. Exchanges of commodities play a role in perpetuating the dominance of social hierarchies around whiteness and within food cultures and systems (Appadurai, 1988). At the same time, “Consumption is subject to social control and political redefinition” (Appadurai, 1988, p. 5). Rather than using English terms that connote meanings of whiteness like “local” or “artisanal” to sell and exchange food, using Spanish names maintains and preserves the locality and history of Latinx identities and foodways that have been operating in Fort Collins years before the discourses and gourmet social styles of the “food truck revolution” took hold.

Representative of Latinx immigrant identities, the naming locates global products into the space. This functions as a resistance to ideal, white notions of local food production. Global products brought globally amplify the locality and experiences of Latinx immigrants complicating the local-global food production binary. It questions under the context of cultural gentrification whether or not local food practices inclusively reflect and support the local identities in Fort Collins. This flips the script on meanings of locality in food truck culture. Consumption and exchanges of these Mexico products maintain and reify Latinx identities and culture through Spanish in ways that provide a different articulation of what “local” food means to a community. The purchasing of these products maintains an underrepresented community in space providing material support rather than a larger system of local food consumption.

Thereby, *loncheras* flip the script in the linguistic space as one way of structuring difference through rhetorical textures of commensality contrasting Spanish/English in the linguistic landscape. This influences the space in “flipping the script” of cultural adaption and assimilation. This reversal counters the English-dominated linguistic landscape constructing a

commensality space with more linguistic familiarity among Latinx and Spanish speaking populations, and less familiar and more adaptive efforts are required among white, dominant English speaking only people.

*Loncheras* on North College also flip the script on whiteness strategically using the word “authenticity” or “authentic” Mexican food. On the front of the *La Campechana* food truck, an electronic banner flashes “Authentic Mexican Food” in bright red moving text. Likewise, the food truck at *Carnicerías Las Delicias* also has “Authentic Mexican Food” printed across the front. Authenticity could be interpreted as containing a “double meaning” that speaks to multiple audiences and modalities of consumption at the same time.

For Latinx people in the community, authenticity may signify a motion toward familiarity, a sense of home and in-group community through food sharing inviting in-group members as a meaning of belonging. As mentioned previously, there was a predominant presence of Latinx people eating on a lunch break with co-workers, Latinx families enjoying lunch and dinner, and couples on casual dates sharing food. It is not a revolutionary idea observing and recognizing Latinx food trucks as in-group meeting spaces or ethnic enclaves, as plenty of studies have pointed out these formations in space. Hermosillo’s (2010) research reveals how *loncheras* function like ethnic enclaves to keep profits within Latinx communities and reinforce a sense of localized collective identity in space.

For people outside the Latinx community, authenticity signals a sense of “realness” or “originality.” For the empathetic and culturally aware food consumer, authenticity is a slippery term. Authenticity could insight a degree of fetishization among white, English-speaking consumers obsessed with “origins” or “originality” (Hardt, 1993). At a representational level, this reflects bell hooks (1992) notion of “eating the other” (p. 366). In this way differences of the



Latinx community are commodified, consumed, and reduced to the image of food and Latinx culture is flattened and reduced through unconscious white consumption. Dickinson reminds us, food can “give ourselves reasons to *not* develop deeper, more caring connections with others” (in Eckstein & Conley, 2020, p. 132). These interactions, as Muñoz (2019) eludes to, can perpetuate identifications with food and culture that deem experiences of Latinx people and innovations of food truck culture invisible via whiteness.

Overhearing one interaction from a white passing couple at *La Campechana*, a man said to his friend in line, “These tacos are the real ones because they’re made of corn, not flower.” Here, Mexican identity is reduced in the fetishization of an “authentic” corn tortilla. Mexican food expert and writer at the *Los Angeles Times*, Gustavo Arellano, explains in an interview about the corn/flower authenticity debate:

“In Mexico, most Mexicans don’t even have an opinion about flour tortillas because they’re historically situated in The Borderlands of Northern Mexico—right on the U.S./Mexico border. As a result, Northern Mexico has always been considered a land apart—la tierra de los salvajes or “the land of the savages.” That’s in Mexico. Then, of course in the United States, the great Mexican food evangelists see flour tortillas as a *gabacho* or a white appropriation of Mexican food, which is totally not the case” (cited in Lam, 2018).

Arellano goes on to explain that while a product of appropriation, flour tortillas are product and practice of hybridity deeply engrained in Northern Mexican identity and culture making the authenticity claim a moot point (Lam, 2018). Here we see an assumption of claiming an understanding of culture through misinformation about Latinx foodways that perpetuate whiteness, wherein an obsession of difference appropriates rather than appreciates difference.

Admittedly, people of dominant identities unconsciously consume and fetishize the “authenticity” of difference and forget to recognize the history, humanity, and standpoint of people serving them, risking cultural gentrification in perpetuating the erasure of Latinx culture and food culture.

Even though risking behaviors and attitudes of fetishization, consumers in these spaces are still buying food truck food, interacting across difference, and supporting the Latinx community at a material level. Although commodified and risking fetishization, this appeal to authenticity maintains their profits and presence in space along North College avenue and within the Latinx community. Intentional or unintentional, language eliciting notions of authenticity communicate a degree of strategic essentialism, or political strategies of in-groups “whereby differences are temporarily downplayed, and unity is assumed for the sake of achieving political goals” (Eide, 2016, p. 3). In practice, it is a discourse that deconstructs dominance through strategic uses of essential meanings attached to cultural identity (Spivak, 1996). These exchanges of food through commensality still support members of the Latinx community and maintain their presence and operations in space. The invitation to commensality authenticity invites still supports their small businesses along the North College Avenue strip as a strategic essentialism tactic, even if authenticity is fetishized to this degree.

Additionally, “flipping the script” through the use of Spanish has the potential to elicit senses of self-reflexivity and intercultural competency among dominant groups via commensality. Reflecting on my experiences as a conscious consumer in these spaces, I think about the struggles and of challenges people in the United States who do not speak English as a first language undergo in everyday life, even something as simple as a food order can create confusion or awkwardness for people. Unintentionally, this tactic of texturing linguistic

difference in the landscape has the potential to elicit an affect that empathy for people of dominant, white, English speaking identities. This mitigates and brings down the ego or “Utopian” or “Grand Gourmet” personas and performances to get at the reality of community, the day-to-day challenges of communicating across cultural linguistic difference through spaces of commensality (Greene, 2011).

Rather than creating spaces where English speakers accommodate for Spanish speakers, these spaces are Spanish forward and accommodate for English speaking. This turns the dominance of whiteness on its head, not eliminating it but subordinating it in food truck spaces along North College avenue. Food sharing, or cross-cultural commensality is still welcomed and encouraged. However, strategic uses of naming and social style deflate meanings of whiteness embedded in meanings of corporate fast food and/or gourmet expectations. While English speaking is present in my experiences in food truck spaces on North College, it is often treated as secondary or as accommodated to in these spaces. Flipping the linguistic script on dominance, identities and ideologies of Fort Collins food trucks engage in an everyday culinary “reckoning” with difference when interacting in these spaces (Eckstein & Conley, 2020). The reckoning of food rhetoric disrupts dominance within food systems as mechanisms of change or resistance to dominant ideologies (Eckstein & Conley, 2020). As a rhetorical texture of difference, North College food trucks flip the script on the linguistic dominance of English language as well as whiteness in these spaces.

### **Carving Everyday Social Styles in Space via Commensality**

While North College food trucks “flip the script” and decenter whiteness in structuring linguistic difference, they also carve spaces of agency through social styles of everyday resistance. Social style refers to the ways our identities function as “rhetorical performances”

(Greene, 2011, p. 71). It involves the ways “we utilize language, commodities, and aesthetics in order to present ourselves to others” (p. 71). In terms of everydayness, the located, everyday practices of North College food trucks resist local “foodie” styles based in the “artisanal” and “gourmet” that dominate breweries and event spaces in Fort Collins.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, many social styles of food trucks appeal to the locality and regionality and outdoor identity of Colorado such as Sweaty Moose, Rocky Mountain Coqui, and Umami Mobile Eatery. Other trucks lean on the artisanal, slow style of the food made, and brand themselves in ways that blend in with modern, foodie styles and align with gourmet tastes like The Goodness, La Piadina, and Caupona. Gourmet/artisanal/local food trucks meet the desires and demands of “foodie tastes” that communicate preferences for food that is local and handmade (McClintok, Novie, & Gebhardt, 2017). Local serves as a marker for quality food, symbolizing an ethics of sustainability (McClintok et al., 2017), producing self-affirming effects of consumer citizenship through one’s responsible and ethical consumption of local food (Chaudhury & Albinsson, 2015).

Food trucks across the nation, especially *loncheras* social styles, carry the stigma of harming or threatening the preferred image of the city as “safe,” “white family-friendly,” and celebratory of “local” culture. However, city officials and consumers have come to accept “foodie” tastes and aesthetics of gourmet trucks often built and created by culturally white people as profitable to local economies and contribute to desired images of a sustainable, modern, cosmopolitan city (McClintok, Novie, & Gebhardt, 2017). This social style has become more accepted among dominant affluent groups, taste cultures, and city officials compared to immigrant and working-class vendors (Dunn, 2017; Munoz, 2019). *Loncheras*, meanwhile, are

often dismissed in city planning that prefers the styles and tastes of the local, artisanal, modern, and gourmet, thus reflecting cultural gentrification.

Rather than appealing to these preferred aesthetics and styles, *loncheras* within the Latinx hub on North College embody their own social style resistant to preferred gourmet foodie styles to carve spaces of their own. The social style of North College food trucks reflects aesthetics and social performances that identify with and invite Latinx people, immigrant communities, the middle to working class, or people simply curious and wanting to experience something different than the homogenized styles of the gourmet. Moreover, this everyday social style celebrates Latinx identities and food culture as a rhetorical texture of difference. This resistive everyday social style carves out spaces discursively elevating and celebrating everyday experiences in contrast to local artisanal, gourmet, and local (Flores, 1996).

One notable way *loncheras*' social style carve spaces for themselves is through the divergent infrastructure of their trucks. Many of the food trucks on North College are painted with bright colors that do not match or flow with the development infrastructure of the landscape. *La Campechana* is designed with a bright orange frame. *La Sabrosite del Bajio* is bright purple in color. *La Carnicerías Las Delicias* is bright red and orange. *La Campechana* also has as red, white, and green cardboard taped on the window representative of the Mexican flag. Across the United States, *loncheras* and immigrant street food vendors were considered eyesores in city planning (Lemon, 2017). Some even carried racist and xenophobic stigmas assuming that they attracted crime, dirty, and created unfair competition with brick-and-mortar businesses (Lemon, 2017; Martin, 2017). This social stigma dates back to the "Beautiful City Movement" of the 1890s-1920s. This movement started urban development plans across the U.S. with a philosophy that "modern" architecture would encourage a civic society (Lemon, 2017).

This functioned as a system of cultural gentrification paving over and restructuring existing low-income neighborhoods into spaces more affluent, white people could live and exist. Additionally, this infrastructure arguably encourages a certain white, affluent politeness and Eurocentric modern way of being—much like a fine dining table. As such, *loncheras* social style was deemed as “uncivil,” “unsanitary,” “illegal,” and generally deviant to city preferences (Lemon, 2017). These bright colors and designs communicate a direct resistance to preferred social styles of the lasting discourses of the Beautiful City Movement that creeps into the infrastructure of these spaces.

These food trucks are condensed into the “Latinx hub” on North College reflecting Fort Collins neoliberal taste preferences. This bias of whiteness is reflected at local breweries like Odell and New Belgium. While both spaces have significantly contributed to the growing food truck scene in Fort Collins, food trucks embodying a traditional *lonchera* social style are less often invited and present in the space. Among my many visits to Odell and New Belgium, very few food trucks besides *the Taco Stop* and *Antojitos del Suerte* were in the rotation at Fort Collins popular breweries, almost tokenized in these spaces. The majority of food trucks invited at breweries embodied a gourmet or artisanal social style reflected in white neoliberal tastes. Therefore, the bright aesthetics and celebration of Latinx and Mexican ethnic pride communicated through the infrastructure of the trucks function to carve spaces of their own on North College in maintaining their identities in contrast to gourmet/artisanal tastes and styles that fit taste preferences of whiteness.

North College *loncheras* also carve space for themselves in representing and celebrating shared identities and community around immigration in resistance to cultural gentrification, mostly from Mexico. Many of the gourmet, white-owned food trucks “outsider status and

assimilation” represent their individual stories of moving from across the nation to run a food truck operation. Among many of the food truck owners I interviewed, no one grew up in Fort Collins and came from different parts of the United States and the world. Even in many of the “about pages” on their websites and social media represent themselves though nomadic stories narrating their experiences of packing up and moving to Fort Collins after visiting to start their food truck business. Fat Tomato food truck for example references their journey on their website thanking the “Chicagoland area” for their years of support, and have “permanently relocated to Fort Collins, CO to grow our business West” (fattomatoinc.com, 2022).

However, innovative histories of people immigrating from Mexico and other Latin American countries to the U.S. to operate food trucks outdate the 2008 “foodie” truck revolution back to the 1800s (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017). Narratives of food truck innovations based in Latinx immigrant experiences are overlooked and deemed “invisible” because of cultural gentrification within the food truck industry itself. Similar to colorful infrastructure, North College food trucks carve spaces for themselves using food trucks to celebrate their global influences and immigrant backgrounds of bringing Mexican culture, cuisine, and street food to the U.S. For example, many North College food trucks like *La Campechana* and *Carnicerías Las Delicias* advertise their “authentic Mexican food,” serve products imported from Mexico, wave Mexican flags outside their trucks, and celebrate their immigrant experiences through commensality. As Maggie Acevedo, who runs marketing and social media for mother’s truck “Maggies Taco’s,” explains in an interview with *College Avenue Magazine*:

“We are proud immigrants. We are so proud of our culture and we love to share it through food with those who come around. We have lived [on] the north side of town for

about 10-plus years, and no, we don't feel isolated. The best memories we have, have been on this side of town."

As such, North College *loncheras* take on a social style representative of global experiences through immigrant representation and invite people of similar experiences and identities to come eat and enjoy their food.

Another resistive "everydayness" textured in the social styles of North College food trucks is their stability in space. Performances of mobility in the context of commensality represent diverging social styles between North College food trucks and those present at the FFTR or the many breweries in Fort Collins. North College food trucks, for the most part, are stationary and communicate concretized relationships with other businesses on the strip. Food trucks embodying more of a gourmet social style, emphasize their mobility and move between different spaces in Fort Collins. This commitment to the space communicates a more collectivistic attitude and commitment to the Latinx community. Where more gourmet trucks travel regionally and have different rotations and deals with breweries and align with mobilization policies pushed by municipal governments, North College *lonchera's* social style of stability in space represents a commitment to resist cultural gentrification.

Beyond the materials, infrastructure, and mobility, *loncheras'* resistive everyday social style is also performed among customers who patron North College food truck spaces. Many of these performances communicate meanings baked in values of work, family, and leisure. For example, the servicing of food trucks communicates a social style that carves spaces of commensality accommodating to the pace and lifestyles of many blue-collar workers. In the morning, food trucks are often operating by 9 am serving breakfast tacos and burritos. At *La Campechana* on morning, a group of electrical workers in neon reflective vests working on the



street lights order some breakfast tacos from the truck and mingle around the truck before starting their day. This adaption of food servicing and offering breakfast reflects a responsiveness to blue collar working and middle-class identities, who visit North College food trucks to grab a quick bite to eat before or after starting their work day. Blue collar works are often present in North College food truck spaces on their lunch breaks at work. At *Carniciaria's Las Delicias*, groups of construction workers in bright orange and yellow shirts start ordering from the truck. At *La Campechana*, employees from AutoTrends, Ken's Muffler, and other auto repair shops shared a meal with each other at the picnic tables set up outside the truck. During lunchtime, North College food trucks become local hot spots for people to take a break from work.

However, this resistive everyday social style reflected in customers shifts and transforms depending on the time of day and season. Around late afternoon and dinner time, especially during the summer, many couples, groups of friends, and families visited and spent time eating at food trucks as a form of connection and leisure. The performativity of leisure among of people in North College food truck spaces is also different as compared to leisure at the FFTR. People did not bring backpacks, lawn chairs, Yeti coolers, and did not stay for multiple hours. People did not bring hacky sacs, or recreation gear. However, people did spend time at the outdoor tables and benches provided. The majority of folks sharing meals would stick around for an hour or two or enjoy a family meal at the end of the day. Overall, these social styles of *loncheras* resist neoliberal whiteness embedded in gourmet tastes, and texture rhetorical difference in resistance to cultural gentrification.

## **Bridging Community: Maintaining A Home Through Commensality**

Finally, North College *loncheras* construct bridges between them with surrounding communities and spaces, crafting alliances and solidarity with surrounding communities and spaces (Flores, 1996). This bridging within the community is reflected between the interactions of *loncheras* and the parking lots of small businesses they occupy. These reflect mutual understandings and relationships that work as a rhetorical texture of bridging through commensality, resisting cultural gentrification.

One example is the spatial relationship between *Taqueria Los Pepe's* and Auto Zone Auto Parts. In an interview with *College Avenue Magazine*, owner Jesús Santiago says, “The truck [Los Pepes] has been at that spot for about 10 years, and it’s definitely one of the pioneers for the food truck business in Fort Collins” (quoted in Flores, 2022). This consistent relationship with Auto Zone and negotiations to work in their parking lot resist cultural gentrification. As Santiago explains “I feel just because our food truck was one of the original trucks, people know us, where we are, and what we have. So even with competitors and [food truck] rallies happening we still get a fair share of customers” (quoted in Flores, 2022). Food truck owners like Santiago operate in this location because of the Latinx community and their familiarity with Mexican food (Flores, 2022). Santiago explains further in the interview that “This part of town is separated from the hub of Old Town by train tracks. It may feel isolating to own a business here, but the community found here makes up for it” (Flores, 2022). Therefore, a commitment to this space is based in values of community and reflect solidarity in bridging space with AutoZone.

Space among food trucks is also bridged internally with other members of the Latinx community. At the *Carnicerías Las Delicias* food truck, there is a symbiotic relationship between the food truck and the grocery store. The food truck functions as an inviting space of

commensality that uses grocery store products at the food truck. Exchanges at the food truck simultaneously encourages exchanges and movements inside and outside the grocery store. People coming to the grocery store may stop at the food truck benefitting as such. Analyzing the spatial relationship between the food truck and brick-and-mortar store, there is a dual accumulation of capital encouraged that maintains Latinx presence in the space.

This relationship is important recognizing the presence of King Super Supermarket in the distance. A space that too often spatially “others” Latinx foodways into the “Latin” or “Ethnic Foods” aisle (Carr Salas, 2017), carnicarias like *Las Delicias* and *La Barata* offer a diversity of Mexican ingredients and Latinx food products. The food truck’s strategic placement outside and near carnicarias invites traffic and an experience of commensality to quite literally taste offerings at the grocery store. While people within the Latinx community frequent and support these stores, food trucks popularity invites people of dominant identities to purchase products and an opportunity to materially support people within these communities.

Maggie’s Tacos also holds a significant relationship with JAX Outdoor Gear who consistently serve their food in JAX’s parking lot. María, co-owner of Maggie’s Tacos, explains that she had to receive permission and made an agreement with owner of JAX to operate in the space (María, in-person interview, Nov. 11, 2021). She explains this relationship is significant because of the reliable traffic flow and the welcoming members of the community who live in this area (María, in-person interview, Nov. 11, 2021). Maggie’s tacos and JAX reflect a relationship of commensality, based in mutual local consumption. While Maggie’s tacos benefits from the consistent traffic of people moving in and out of JAX Outdoor, JAX also benefits from people who are drawn to the food served at Maggie’s Tacos. Additionally, Maggie’s Taco’s presence resists potential cultural gentrification imposed by outdoor elitist enthusiast identities

likely shopping for expensive gear at JAX, resisting some of the dominant “Active Coloradoan” gourmet identities mentioned in Chapter 3.

Looking to the periphery of space on North College, Maggie’s Tacos also tries to reach out to community members in need. In an interview with *College Avenue Magazine*, Maggie Acevedo says, “We are proud to happily serve the community and often try to give back by driving around town and handing out burritos to the homeless, or having them take out trashing and giving them a warm plate of food. We know what it’s like to not have anything, so we try to help out as much as we can” (Flores, 2022). Beyond commensality communicate in the JAX parking lot, Maggie’s Tacos uses their mobility to help people struggling with homelessness who frequent the North College strip. Here community aid and hospitality become a performance within their social style that textures practices of commensality in the space with empathy and without the immediate concern for profit.

Similarly, the *Las Delicias* taco trailer outside the Loaf & Jug gas station provides a space for the community to eat food. People filtering in and out of the gas station would pump and pay for gas inside, then order from the taco trailer. The trailer represents an alternative to gas station convenience food that people are tempted to purchase. While a spatial symbiotic relationship, the trailer ruptures the corporate presence in providing foods alternative to poor quality food served in gas stations. The trailer invites commensality and slows down the pace of traffic. People mingle outside the trailer, enjoy food in the gas station parking lot, wherein commensality functions as a rhetorical texture of difference resistant to the everydayness of a typical gas station

These spatial meanings resist white capitalism of fast food as a place to quickly grab food and carry on with one’s work day. It is a convenience in the form of a small business venture that

supports the Latinx community. Many of these food trucks also provide seating in close intimate settings. While people collectively sit together, it feels less awkward to sit alone when sharing the space. Invites a wider range of ways of being, from casual family meals, quick work breaks or business meetings in North College food truck's bridging of community to foster home and community through commensality.

### **Summary**

As rhetorical textures of difference, the Latinx food trucks on North College Avenue represent an everyday resistance to cultural gentrification. This resistance responds to dominant meanings of "gourmet" in the larger contexts of Fort Collins and the expansion of corporate fast food capitalism on the North College strip. Rhetorical textures are communicated and embedded through the presence and usage of Spanish in the linguistic landscape through practices of commensality as a rhetoric of difference. Moreover, the social style of Latinx food trucks harken to forms and histories of *loncheras*, and celebrate Latinx heritage, identity, and immigrant experiences. Moreover, these rhetorical textures of difference also make bridges with local community members. Analyzing North College Avenue as a case study, notions of commensality are expanded as a rhetorical texture of resistive difference. While commensality typically refers to shared values, interests, and identities communicated through food sharing, commensality can also engage rhetorical power in emphasizing shared struggles of underrepresentation. Sharing a meal means more than simply accommodating to dominant culture, but also a platform to change how we understand ourselves, the ways we eat, and who the people are that provide these everyday meals and nourishment. Moving from the physical space, I discuss how these notions of commensality and community are mediated and communicated through discourses of digital commensality that structure the FOCO food truck Instagram community.

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## CHAPTER 5:

### DIGITAL COMMENSALITY & THE FOCO FOOD TRUCK INSTAGRAM COMMUNITY

The table is a “protopublic space” of intermingling individuals, networks, and audiences shaping the “epistemic contours” of food knowledge and culture (Eckstein & Young, 2015, p. 205). Spence (2017) describes the table as “the original social network,” a space of commensality reserved to communicate and foster culture and community around food (p. 316). FOCO food trucks engage in digital commensality discourses using Instagram as this “metaphoric table” that constitutes a social mediated food community. Digital commensality” refers to mediated representations and interactions of food sharing (Spence, Micini, & Huisman, 2019, p. 1). When people share, interact, and create content about food and culture through technology, they practice digital commensality (Spence et al. 2019, p. 1). Eating with friends and family through platforms like Skype or Zoom, posting eating or cooking tutorials for online audiences, or sharing pictures/videos of local places to eat with wider audiences all represent actions of digital commensality (Spence et al., 2019). Digital commensality research reveals its positive communicative impacts in maintaining connections with people at a distance, whether that is long distance relationships or maintaining a social life during the COVID-19 pandemic (Spence et al, 2019; Kisino, 2022).

Applying D’Acci’s (2004) circuit model, I conduct a media discourse analysis of the FOCO food truck Instagram community focusing on converging and interacting discourses of identity, networks, and audience. These discourses are interconnected and emerge from modes of production, reception, cultural artifacts, and socio-historical contexts reflective of digital commensality (D’Acci, 2004). I argue digital commensality is a social-mediated process of *community building* represented through mediated interactions of branding, networking, and

audiencing representative of the media ecology or “built” social mediated environment of local FOCO food trucks (Hakanen, 2007).

To analyze branding discourses, I draw from postmodern theories of identity (Hall, 1987), taste (Bourdieu, 1984), and dialectics (Nakayama & Martin, 2011). I showcase how FOCO food trucks use Instagram to engage in branding in crafting mediated “rhetorical personas” (Greene, 2006, p. 84). Threading in Castell’s (2011) “flows of spaces,” I also show formations and representations of networks that build and constitute the “networked” FOCO food truck community on Instagram. Lastly, I apply media theories of audience labor (Smythe, 1981; Fisher, 2015), and suggest food trucks and their digital audiences use digital commensality as a co-constructed discourse of “audiencing” (Fisher, 2015).

Previous scholarship analyzes textual information, microblogging interactions, and the event-making media strategies of food trucks through Facebook and Twitter (Wessel, 2012; Edwards & Maben, 2018). Less research analyzes food truck’s influence on the platform of Instagram and the discursive structures and identities of their built social mediated community. Therefore, I showcase in this chapter how FOCO food truck’s Instagram community is constituted through three key processes of digital commensality: 1) branding a rhetorical persona via food media, 2) networking with local food community members, and 3) audiencing with food truck consumers.

While several food trucks have an online presence, I analyze discourses of 10 different FOCO food truck Instagram profiles who actively and consistently post content and/or have had a longstanding presence on Instagram. This is because these food trucks in particular have a prominent presence on Instagram, maintaining a consistent flow of discourses and the process of digital commensality. This is not to present an all-encompassing picture or representation of how

food trucks communicate and constitute community on Instagram. Rather, an analysis of these profiles analyzes deeply a segment of the most active food trucks on Instagram to theorize the process of digital commensality. I analyzed visual images, video clips, reels, and stories of food-related media content shared and posted on FOCO food truck Instagram profiles. I also analyzed interactive textual content such as captions, exchanges of comments, likes and views, and hashtags embedded in posts and communicated on their profiles. Moreover, I focused on how the sharing of food truck-related media interactions reflective of branding, networking, and audience discourses represent formations of the FOCO food truck Instagram community shaped through the process of digital commensality.

### **Branding Rhetorical Persona: “Authentic-Innovative” and “Local-Global” Taste Dialectics**

First, I analyze the branding discourses of FOCO food trucks’ online rhetorical personas through dialectics of authentic-innovative and local-global tastes. One part of the process of digital commensality community building, are engagements of branding FOCO food trucks that create a specific presence and identity as a member of the community. Asking Jen, co-owner of Ciao! Mobile Pizzeria during a Zoom interview how they use social media to represent their business, she explained that Instagram specifically has been crucial for maintaining their presence and connection within the community (Jen & Dan, Zoom Interview, December 6, 2021). Jen continues to explain how their customers often say, “we saw you on Instagram, and you’re the reason we came here!” (Jen & Dan, Zoom Interview, December 6, 2021).

Instagram is often the first point of contact among potential food truck customers. FOCO food trucks personify their brand through their Instagram profiles adopting particular rhetorical personas shaped through mediated expressions of taste, “a common point of identification, the foundation of a common set of everyday rituals organized around familiar ingredients, people,

and behaviors” (Kelly, 2017, p. 5). Mediated rhetorical personas of FOCO food trucks are presented through sharing different fragments of their identity and experience via personalized images, posts, stories, and other food truck-related content (Hall, 1992).

Previous food and communication scholarship discuss rhetorical personae as relatively stable framework, a homology or particular archetype of foodie personalities (Greene, 2011). However, postmodern perspectives of identity argue identity is “a moveable feast: formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us” (Hall, 1992, p. 277). Social media “dislocates” pieces of our identity, allowing representations of our self and others to be represented in multiple mediated spaces at once (Hall, 1992). Therefore, I employ a dialectical approach to analyze the branding of rhetorical personae as patterned, yet in relation to multiple different tastes, meanings, and identifications that shape identity (Nakayama & Martin, 2011; Bourdieu, 1984). Rather framing mediated rhetorical personas as identifications and appeals to one form of taste, I describe them dialectically and contend they address multiple contrasting tastes through food-based media. Specifically, FOCO food trucks brand themselves and communicate contradictory rhetorical personas as preservationists, cultural transformers, ambassadors, citizen distributors, and global ambassadors of taste. Sharing these rhetorical personas online represent the branding process of digital commensality that diversifies and homogenizes representations and identities of the FOCO food truck online Instagram community.

### **Rhetorical Personas of Authenticity-Innovation Tastes**

First, FOCO food trucks communicate their rhetorical personas through taste dialectics of authenticity and innovation that shape dialectically structured identities of preservationists and cultural transformers. Authenticity connotes “tradition,” “realness,” or “originality” (Hardt,

1993). This could mean for food trucks, representing the “right” ingredients, preferred preparation methods, and/or correct ways of consuming food. Innovation, on the other hand, connotes creativity, utility, and flexibility of food (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017). Innovative tastes equally connote “hipness” and “trendiness,” progressive attitudes creative entrepreneurialism, and cultural capital of being “in the know” with certain foods and culture (Agyeman et al., 2017). In terms of the local FOCO food truck IG community, tastes of authenticity and innovation interplay with each other and constitute particular rhetorical personas on IG profiles as preservationists and tastemakers in digital community culture.

Food trucks communicate their mediated rhetorical personae is sharing mediated images of their popular dishes through images, stories, and videos. Some rhetorical personas lean into the rhetoric of a preservationist, communicating authenticity of their food on Instagram as an expression of taste. La Piadina’s (LP) Instagram profile, for example, often promotes the authenticity of their main dish, the *piadina*. Piadinas are thin flatbread sandwiches common in the historical region of Romagna, Italy and are described as “a humble food” reflective of a “simple and rustic life” (consorziopiadinaromagnola.it, 2022). They are typically sold from special kiosks called *piadinerie*, emphasizing an “everydayness” of the dish (consorziopiadinaromagnola.it, 2022). The authenticity of piadinas are tied to references of their “handmade” processes of making them as well as their accessibility and utility as “everyday” foods.

LP reiterates this humbleness and everydayness posting appetizing pictures, stories, and descriptive captions that appeal to authenticity tastes. Many of LP’s posts use caption texts describing piadinas as “handcrafted Italian flatbread sandwiches” and as “being there for you” (@lapiadinanoco, Retrieved: March, 28 2022). One specific image on LP’s profile depicts a

piadina with prosciutto, red peppers, and cilantro peeking out of fresh baked flatbread. The image includes the text: “OUR PROMISE TO YOU: HOMEMADE, FRESH, AND SIMPLE INGREDIENTS, ALWAYS” (@lapiadinanoco, Retrieved: March 3, 2022). References to processes of food production like commitments to slow, artisanal, and craft styles rhetorically constitute meanings of culture and identity (Young, Eckstein, & Conley, 2012), and can function as persuasive signifiers of authenticity. Here, the image of the piadina invites identifications with simplicity and the artisanal and communicates their consistent practices of food quality and closeness to the food production process. LP’s rhetorical persona frames their authenticity as preservationists of the homemade, artisanal quality food that can and should be enjoyed every day by everyone.

This collection of discourses and taste preferences might seem homogenizing due to the large and wide array of food in Fort Collins offered as artisanal, fresh, organic, and local food. While using these dominant meanings of “authentic” taste, this presence of the piadina diversifies understandings of Italian cuisine. There are several Italian restaurants in Fort Collins, but many are in a brick-and-mortar setting, and do not have piadinas as an option on the menu. LP owner Menyhert Borocz, explained to me in an interview that people locally first misunderstood piadinas as “flatbread pizza” or kept referring to them as “paninis” reflecting a more rigid and Americanized perception of Italian food culture (M. Borocz, phone interview, June 2, 2021). As such, the preservationist rhetorical persona LP represents on their profile functions to diversify representations of food culture through amplifying awareness and understanding of the piadina, sharing a mediated “food for thought” representative of digital commensality.

LP also elicits tastes of authenticity in appealing to the “origins” of the piadina in their profile further situating this preservationist persona. Another post on LP’s profile presents an image of their logo—a graphic of their name in cursive with red, white, and green horizontal stripes under it representative of the Italian flag. Below these images is more cursive text quoting a google reviewer’s comment: “Taste just like the one’s in Italy! Bellissimo! – Hattie S. via Google.” The image is accompanied with the following caption:

“Thanks for the 5-star review, Hattie! Our piadinas taste like the ones in Italy because Menyus grew up in Italy and learned to cook there! We use homemade traditional piadina bread and fresh Italian ingredients every day!” (@lapiadina, Retrieved: March, 28 2022).

In this post, the authenticity is expressed through the mediated representation of a piadina connecting it to its origins in Italian food culture. Moreover, integrating the voice of Hattie S., this post communicates an ethos “being there” and confirmation of the LPs authenticity. Similarly, another post on LP’s profile is a red stencil image of Italy with a circled location accompanied by the text “Where Piadinas All Began!” The image is accompanied with the caption:

“The first known recipe of a piadina flatbread dates back to 1371 A.D., written by Cardinal Angelico de Grimoard of Avignon, brother of Pope Urban V, in the Descriptio Romandiolae. The dough recipe was written to be made with flour, lard, and milk. To stay true to the origins, our recipe, hundreds of years later, also has these three main ingredients” (@lapiadina, Retrieved: March, 28 2022).

LP appeals to tastes of authenticity narrating the piadina’s history, personifying its origin story, and forwarding expressions of their preservationist rhetorical persona. Not only are people encouraged to consume piadinas, but also the consumption of a particular history. Similar to



presenting the piadina through fresh and handmade visual and textual discourses, these images in particular further diversify understandings of Italian foodways in narrating the piadina. Encouraging the consumption of the piadina's "authentic" history maintains this formation of the preservationist rhetorical personae.

Similarly, Caupona's Instagram profile, a baked goods and smoked meats food truck, frequently posts and saves stories to their account that display their preparation of artisanal and handcrafted local food that appeal to authenticity. Caupona posted a series of clips on their story, sharing videos of co-owner Savanna preparing "madeleine" in their prep kitchen, a traditional type of cake from France (@caupona.co, Retrieved: March 3, 2022). Caupona's story integrates two segments with captions to viewers one stating "There are two signs of a well-made madeleine: 1. The bump on the back. 2. They release and fall out of the pan when tapped" (@caupona.co, Retrieved: March 3, 2022). Co-owner Savannah records her performing these actions to visually display the food production process she is explaining. The next segment of the story then stated "Dusted w/ powdered sugar. Best eating with a piping hot cup of coffee" and shows Savannah dusting powdered sugar onto a plate of madeleines (@caupona.co, Retrieved: March 3, 2022). This post appeals to authenticity tastes recording the "proper" production of a traditional French dish. Not only is this story showing how Caupona's food is homemade with quality ingredients, but it provides instructions of how to properly make and eat madeleines to their audience. Caupona appeals to authenticity tastes and enacts the preservationist rhetorical persona showing people the "real" way to make and eat madeleines.

To some extent, these discourses homogenize practices of Italian and French cooking that dominate the cultural landscape nationally and within Fort Collins. However, food knowledge of Italian cooking and French cuisine is often preserved and influenced through culinary institutions

in the restaurant industry, perpetuating a sense of gourmet elitism (Capellini, Parsons, & Harmon, 2016). LP and Caupona, however, resists this elitism in authentic Italian and French tastes democratizing this knowledge through their public Instagram profiles teaching and encouraging others about the culture and history of the piadina and artisanal French baking methods. Sharing this knowledge and mediated content of the baking process represents a form of digital commensality that appeals to their authenticity as a local artisanal community-minded food truck.

However, FOCO food trucks authentic tastes also contrast and contradict with meanings and representations of innovation expresses as cultural transformer rhetorical personas among FOCO food trucks on Instagram. Many of these posts disrupt authenticity in accommodating to taste preferences for familiar, local, vegan, and gluten-free food. Returning to LP's profile for example, one image of a piadina displays the caption:

“Today La Piadina still follows the original authentic recipe for their dough and also offers a vegan and gluten-free option! These flatbreads are handcrafted here in Fort Collins” (@lapiadinanoco, Retrieved: Feb 28, 2022).

These innovations contradict preservationist rhetorical personas embedded in meanings of authenticity because they diverge from the “traditional” and “original” recipes. Tastes of authenticity conflict with tastes of innovation for the sake of providing quality food for everyone. As an innovative tastemaker, LP accommodates with local food culture, politics, and alternative eating lifestyles innovating their cuisine to be vegan and gluten free friendly. Vegan and gluten free consumers are often blocked from enjoying Italian-American food often using ingredients like bread, cheese, pasta, wheat, and various meats. However, LP transforms the dishes disrupting the traditional and authentic ingredients of the piadina that contradict this

preservationist identity accommodating and inviting vegan and gluten friendly consumers, representative of digital commensality and diversification through their cultural transformer persona.

Similarly, Ciao! Mobile Pizzeria's Instagram account posts a video of owners Dan and Jen preparing their "Tuscan Tater Tots." The post is segmented in different clips of the preparation process. It is accompanied with the caption:

"Hey #CaioHounds!! Happy #Thursday! Have you tried our Tuscan Tater Tots? They are called "Cazzilli" in Italy and they're a fluffy mashed potato croquette with fresh herbs, served with a fresh lemon for spritzing! Also a #naturally #glutenfree food so perfect for our #glutensensitive guests!" (@ciaomobilenoco, Retrieved: April 28, 2022).

Innovation expressed showcasing Tuscan Tater Tots as a new dish, is also blended with authenticity in referencing the dish's reference as "Cazzilli" in Italy. Combined with gluten-free promotion and hashtags similar to LP, innovation is teased with authenticity through videos of preparing and educating about the inspiration behind their Tuscan Tater Tots.

While appropriating the dish, Ciao! represents its historical context gives credit to its cultural history and influence in Italy. Appropriation is an inevitable consequence of food; but, it is problematic when historical innovations of cuisine are erased historically (Young & Brunk, 2012). Representing this historical context, Ciao! engages an ethical "cultural appreciation" through appropriation as an innovative-community minded tastemaker. Through these innovations, Ciao! diversifies the options for vegan and gluten free people in a productive reiteration of Cazzilli. Here Ciao! reflects a preservationist personality giving credit to traditional Italian food ways, through the rhetorical persona of a cultural tastemaker in adapting menus to vegan and gluten free diets.

FOCO food trucks also use Instagram to communicate tastes of authenticity and innovation relying on IG's affordance of visual transparency to represent their preservationist and transformational rhetorical personas. People desire food that is locally and ethically produced, while expecting meals to be inviting and hospitable (Cramer, Walters, & Greene, 2011). Customers want to know and enjoy witnessing how their food is made. Many FOCO food trucks Instagram accounts communicate moves toward transparency with their authentic and innovative identities posting images and videos of food preparation for the community.

Contrasting authenticity and innovation taste appeals also are communicated through Instagram posts that provide a "behind-the-scenes" look and context of the labor food trucks go through to feed the community and operate as a local business. Customers also often enjoy food truck food without thinking about the labor that goes behind their work. Among the food truck owners I interviewed, many are working over 40 hours per week. This involves food preparation in commissary kitchens, repairs and construction of infrastructure/technology to serve food and maintaining licenses and permits. Displaying their labor on IG functions as a "conscious raising" mechanism revealing a snap shot into the labor practices that go into running a food truck thus reinforcing the authenticity of their identity. In doing so, food trucks enact a transformational rhetorical persona in shifting attention from people's plates, to the labor and industry knowledge in the kitchen.

Caupona's transparent IG identity is communicated through their stories provide a "behind the scenes" experience of what it is like to run a food truck in Fort Collins. The story presented in segments leads with the caption "In case ya wondered what a food truck does after it leaves its day of work" (caupona.co, Retrieved: April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022). In short videos, co-owner Savannah records herself cleaning floors, vents, fryers, fridge space, and stacking coolers of food

for the next day of preparation. Appealing to “authenticity,” Caupona represents the realness of everyday labor that it takes to prepare and operate a food truck. As a mechanism of taste, Caupona’s transparency of their labor authenticates their commitment to providing quality food everyday. Through the visual affordances to Instagram’s stories, Caupona transforms people’s perceptions of food truck service and demystifies the affordability and easy start up narratives bolstered among post 2008 food truck revolution discourses. In doing so, this transparency diversifies people’s vision and understanding of what everyday food truck practices are like and the amount of time and labor food trucks experience, especially during the busy season.

These videos sharing their transparent identity invite engagements with their food trucks through images of food media, thus representative of formations of protopublic spaces of digital commensality. Contrasting tastes of authenticity and innovation expressed through the identity of these accounts work to promote commensality in educating people about food and how it is made. A deeper empathy for food truck services encourages people to understand and value food. Rather than a pure form of authenticity or innovation, fused expressions of these concepts encourage the sharing of food media or digital commensality. This encourages a genuine consciousness through Instagram’s visual affordances of the knowledge, skills, and effort put in to serve the community quality food. Authenticity and innovation identifications through digital commensality showcase how FOCO food trucks Instagram personas diversify and homogenize FOCO food truck culture. While food trucks bring in new or authentic dishes, they expand people’s food options and perceptions of food available. At the same time, notions of “local,” “homemade-ess,” and “artisanal” homogenize these identities around shared interests of local food production.

## **Local-Global Tastes: Citizen Distributors and Glocal Ambassadors**

Alongside authenticity-innovation tastes, FOCO food truck's Instagram accounts also communicate contrasting local and global tastes as of part of branding through rhetorical personas of "citizen distributors" and "glocal ambassadors." Some food trucks lean into the "localness" of their identity and foodways in their branding their rhetorical personas emphasizing small business practice, locality in the Northern Colorado region, and as "citizen distributors" of local food. Others brand themselves as bringing food and culture and tastes from different regions of the world, functioning as digital ambassadors of global taste into local culture. Local and global tastes expressed through their rhetorical personas also diversify and homogenize meanings and representation in the FOCO food truck Instagram community as a process of digital commensality.

Many FOCO food trucks emphasize the locality of their identity reinforcing their ethical grounding in local food production. Similar to the "citizen consumer" positionality described in Chapter 3, food trucks in the online Instagram community enact a "citizen distributor" rhetorical persona through local tastes. For example, Angry Hippie Tacos' profile introduces their business in their bio as "A locavore taco stop! We at Angry Hippie believe you should know where your food comes from...and that it shouldn't suck!" (@angry\_hippie\_tacos, Retrieved March 7, 2022). Angry Hippie tacos invites locavore positionalities and beliefs, or people that actively seek and primarily eat locally produced food (@angry\_hippie\_tacos, Retrieved March 7, 2022).

Additionally, Angry Hippie's also purposefully plays into the stereotype of frustrated leftist hippies concerned with the "mundane" food politics of locavore lifestyles, communicating local, sustainable, and environmentally sensitive food identities. Angry Hippie's Instagram profile functions to reclaim this stereotype, intentionally emphasizing that people should be upset

about the flaws of mass production in our food systems. In doing so, Angry Hippies Taco's amplifies this locavore identity and rhetorical persona, while backing up these representations in serving affordable, locally produced food. As a citizen distributor, Angry Hippies tacos emphasize local taste as providers of tasty local food.

However, rhetorical persona's like Angry Hippies tacos also homogenize the politics of locavore identities through whiteness. Especially considering the *loncheras* on North College, who are not as present on social media, a gourmet style politics of maintaining local "foodways" has the potential to deem the innovations of Latinx style street food and the global migrations of people invisible that innovated food trucking practices before gourmet styles become popularized in the industry (Muñoz, 2019). While helping change issues of mass food production, rhetorical personas like this also risk an erasure of local Latinx communities who laid the foundation of the food truck industry in the first place, especially in midst of the digital divide between *loncheras* and gourmet trucks.

The Goodness food truck similarly emphasizes their support of local food consumption on their Instagram profile. This communicates their rhetorical persona and branding as a citizen distributor of local tastes. The Goodness posts several pictures providing audiences a sneak peek into "the goodness" garden. One example is an image of a collection of acorn squash, butternut squash, and zucchini with the caption:

"So many [#squash](#) coming out of the [#Goodness](#) [#garden](#) catch out and about this week to get your veggie lovers wrap featuring [#fresh](#) picked

Goodness [#foodtruck](#) [#foodies](#) [#growyourown](#) [#coloRAdo](#) [#coloradoradical](#) [#local](#) [#greenthumb](#) [#zucchini](#) [#fortcollins](#)" (@goodnesstruck, Retrieved June 23, 2021).

Other posts also made references and hashtags to the “Goodness Garden,” showcasing their enactments of local food production and boosting their ethos in identifying with local tastes. As a process of digital commensality, their sharing of food media shapes rhetorical personas as “citizen distributors” creating and inviting community to eat together through shared ethics/interests/diets keen to local food. However, while positively sending messages in transforming our food system, inviting people to consume the fresh and local as citizen consumers, there is a clear homogenization of whiteness embedded in gourmet styles that invite a narrow demographic of people to consume their food.

Other accounts communicate rhetorical personas represent varying formations of hybridized glocal tastes. Many of their rhetorical personas shared through food truck media reference bringing cultural food from travel/immigration experiences, functioning as glocal ambassadors representing their home culture or cultures they lived and visited. FOCO food trucks global experiences communicated through their rhetorical personae become an ethos that maintains their presence and success as a local small business. Considering LP’s rhetorical IG persona, several posts depict and narrate owner Menyhert’s intercultural experiences growing up in Italy and how he learned to properly prepare a piadina. One post for example, depicts Menyhert sitting next to a wall of bread rollers accompanied with the caption:

“Buon giorno and Happy Mother’s Day from Menyus! I spent my teenage years in Arezzo, Italy, a Fort Collins-sized city 40 miles south of Florence, where I studied classical music, played in rock bands, and landed my first kitchen job at a pizzeria. A year later, the first piadina shop opened in Arezzo, and it was love at first bite! I’ll never forget that first piadina I had with prosciutto, stracchino, and arugula. It’s what inspired



La Piadina's minute item 'I'Originale.' Call to order and try one yourself! We're open from 12-7pm Wednesday through Sunday!" (@lapiadina, Retrieved: April 3, 2022). This and other posts showcase Menyhert's embodied knowledge and experience with piadinas and food experiences that traveled with Menyhert to Fort Collins.

Additionally, these global tastes bring an appreciation for the piadina in representing its global popularity to local followers in the community. LP often shares stories and content of small businesses outside of the U.S. who make piadinas. As Menyhert explains in an interview "all the piadina shops follow each other on Instagram and I try to tag them and post them on my page, like ones in France and Buenos Aires" (M. Boroco, phone interview, June 2, 2021). Garnering global support and recognition of these small businesses represents the piadina as a well-traveled food shared around the world. While located in and harkening back to recipes from Italy as well as global appreciation of piadinas, LP amplifies global tastes and connections locally through digital commensality. LP takes on the rhetorical persona as global ambassador of the piadina and culture of commensality around it, diversifying and expanding the popularity of the dish within the local Fort Collins community.

Another food truck that identifies with both global and local taste is Brazi Eats, a Brazilian influenced food truck. Brazi Eats' description in their profile bio lists key characteristics of the food truck describing themselves as a "Brazilian Street Food Trailer in NoCo" and "Latina Owned." The text emphasizes a dual commitment to the communal identity and locality of the Northern Colorado region as well as their Brazilian national identity of their food and personal cultural identity as a Latina small business owner. Brazi Eats communicates the hybridity of their small business identity through Instagram drawing from notions of locality, nationality, regionality, and gender.

Brazi Eats' shares their rhetorical persona as a glocal food ambassador predominantly through their videos of cooking and still images of Brazilian-influenced dishes. Many of Brazi Eats' posts share high quality pictures representing their Brazilian influenced cuisine. Brazi eats represents their Brazilian identity on their account, while also localizing Brazilian-influenced food in hybrid fusion dishes through mediated images of food like their "Brazilian hotdog." One post for example, Brazi Eats advertises their "OG Brazi Stroganoff" with a picture of the dish and the following caption:

"The OG Brazi Stroganoff, if you know you know. #food #foodtruck #foodtrailer #colorado #brazilian #brazilianfood #fortcollins #foodporn" (@brazieats, Retrieved March 2, 2022).

This post in particular represents Brazilian foodways that hybridize popular American and European dishes like hot dogs and beef stroganoff. As such, they function as glocal ambassadors localizing globally influenced food to the food truck community. Additionally, these posts' supplemental hashtags "#foodtruck," "#brazilian," "#brazilianfood," "colorado," and "#fortcollins" amplify Brazi Eats branding of glocal tastes into the wider food truck community on Instagram. Merging hashtags in this caption communicates both global and local tastes to a wider audience, in support of one of the few Brazilian food spots in Fort Collins. In doing so, Brazi eats diversifies tastes and knowledge of Brazilian influences food, beyond the typical experience people in Fort Collins get at expensive chain restaurants like Rodizio Steakhouse in Old Town. Brazi eats diversifies their cuisine beyond steak already familiar to Colorado, while branding themselves as a local Latinx small business. In doing so, Brazi eats also resists the dominance of whiteness present in the FOCO food truck Instagram community, showcasing that gourmet, glocal food does not have to be Eurocentric in influence. In this way, Brazi eats reflects

elements of the glocal ambassador rhetorical persona, diversifying Fort Collins palates and understandings of food trucks online.

Considering these examples, FOCO food trucks communicate dialectical rhetorical personas of the local citizen distributor and the glocal ambassador. Generally, citizen distributor personas privilege identities that localize our food systems, democratize knowledge of our food system, and make local quality food accessible and possible encourage ideologies of sustainability and humane food production online. Moreover, food trucks invite and create accessible spaces for people to enjoy these cultural identities. Even if food trucks carry local products and gourmet preparation styles, food trucks are generally much more accessible and affordable than brick-and-mortar restaurants specializing in local, artisanal foodways. In a way, food truck's sharing of local identities as agents of digital commensality democratize local and artisanal tastes. Likewise, among food trucks who take on glocal ambassador rhetorical personas, diversify tastes in sharing hybrid food-based media that embeds global culture alongside local foodways in ways that bring diverse communities together online.

### **Amplifying Networks of Digital Commensality**

While digital commensality contributes to the ways FOCO food trucks brand themselves through authentic-innovative and global-local tastes, digital commensality also shapes their networks through Instagram. These networks are represented through “the space of flows” (Castells, 2011), or online exchanges of communication with stakeholders in the local food culture, economy, and food truck industry on Instagram. This includes public interactions such as liking images, re-posting other food truck's content, sharing hashtags, tagging/mentioning, and/or commenting on each other's posts. These communicative exchanges of food discourses represent networking within the FOCO food truck community making “what

was invisible, become visible, what had seemed self-contained is now widely redistributed” (Latour, 2011., p. 799). These networking discourses make visible and constitute relationships in amplifying network relationships with other competing food trucks and local breweries as key components in the process of digital commensality shaping their online community.

### **(Non)Competitive Food Truck Network Discourses**

*“I’ve made a lot of friends within the community and they give you a lot of tips, they’re really helpful people, really helpful....go to food trucks and ask them how they do it, because it’s literally going to be the most accurate information you can get”* (A. Santos, In-person interview, Nov. 29, 2022).

As Anna, owner of the Brazi Eats food truck explains, networking between competing food trucks is key for their success and development of knowledge in the industry. Equally represented through their networking discourses on Instagram, competing food trucks in the area collectively uphold attitude of non-competitiveness, even though many are in direct competition with each other every day. These networked exchanges represented in their food related-media content communicate ideas of belonging, communal support, and co-representation of their community around shared practices of food trucking as a (non)competitive process of digital commensality.

One common interaction representative of this type of networking between competing food trucks is that many “like” each other’s posts. Although mundane, simple interactions like this can be interpreted as a symbolic “nod” of support and/or approval from other food trucks in the community. Especially, among food trucks who have been in the area and operating longer like LP and the Taco Stop, this functions as a symbolic stamp of approval and support boosting

their local ethos. These engagements of mutual liking signify a commensal badge of belonging communicated publicly on Instagram.

Moreover, these likes are often reciprocated, bolstering this attitude of (non)competition. For example, food trucks consistently active on Instagram like the Taco Stop, Ciao! Mobile Pizzeria, Caupona, Double Wide Burgers, LP, Corndoggies, and Ba-Nom-a-Nom post almost daily during the height of the busy season, mutually liking of photos and content other food trucks' posts. These mutual exchanges of likes function as a form of digital commensality in that the profile names and handles are visible under the images posted once they are "liked." Usernames of local food trucks are visible under these posts, and actively link potential consumers to other food truck profiles. These exchanges of liking expand their reach and online presence maintaining a web of interconnectivity and representing the wider food truck community as digital commensality.

Food trucks network exchanges of mentioning, tagging, and hashtagging each other on Instagram also reinforce this (non)competitive digital commensality. In Rocky Mountain Coqui's post advertising for the FOCO Food Truck Rally (FFTR) is a picture of a tripeleta with the caption:

"Today at City Park 5-8 we've got Tripletas (3 Meat Sandwich) on locally baked Pan Sobao from @babalus cuisine. Check 'em out, while supplies last. And, complete your grab and go dinner with food from our

friends: @banomanom @lapiadinanoco @backyardbirdfoodtruck

#focofoodtrucks #tripeleta #foodtruckrally" (@rockymtncoqui, Retrieved April 1, 2022).

In this post, Rocky Mountain Coqui mentions other competing food trucks inviting customers to visit not just Rocky Mountain Coqui, but to also consume food at other food trucks at the FFTR

mentioned and tagged in their post. This reifying the spirit of collaboration and non-competitiveness is emphasized in Rocky Mountain Coqui's post, showcasing digital commensality.

These representative networks amplified through liking, commenting, and tagging, serve as a form of cultural and social capital. This co-consumption of media among other food truck owners and operations produces a way of "being networked" or within the "in-group" of the online community. This boosts their collective presence as individuals and collectives as a small business industry. Although these food trucks are in direct competition with each other, interactions with each other over Instagram represent a collective effort of support. Based on these online interactions, food trucks seem to be invested in the collective success of the food truck industry, rather than their individual business. Through Instagram, the visibility of these networks is emphasized contributing to the growing food truck scene in Fort Collins supported and upheld not just by customer support, but also an attitude of (non) competitiveness in that fosters such growth.

### **Networks with Local Breweries: Symbiotic Relationships of Digital Commensality**

FOCO food trucks also represent and make visible their networks with local breweries through their digital commensality content. While networking between competing food trucks establishes an attitude of non-competitiveness and increases their collective visibility, networks between local food trucks represent mediated relationships of symbiotic digital commensality relationships. They exchange, not just food-based media, but also cultural capital benefiting from each other's presence. As Theo, co-owner of the Mac'N food truck explains:

"We do the captive audience, we are an add-on business to a product we already really believe in. I believe Odell is the most fun place to hang out in this town, and I believe if

you can have macaroni and cheese there, that will enhance your experience” (Theo, In-person interview, Dec. 8, 2022).

Indicated in Theo’s statement, the networks between FOCO food trucks and breweries represented on Instagram collaboratively draw attention their presence in digitally pairing food truck food with the tastes of craft brewing. Larger breweries like Odell and New Belgium are frequently tagged or geolocated on their posts sharing information where customers can find food truck services. This is key because breweries make up a significant amount of space physically in Fort Collins, as well as digitally on Instagram. Likewise, breweries like Odell and New Belgium also tag and post pictures of food trucks operating in their space, encouraging people to grab a bite to eat while they enjoy their beer.

Another way food trucks showcase their local networks with breweries is posting images on their profile of their weekly food truck schedules. While these food truck schedules do indicate places other than breweries, breweries make up a majority of the places food trucks visit on their schedule. Additionally, these posts communicate key local relationships with food trucks and breweries. These networks discursively map these relationships in the mediated environment on Instagram communicating specific local relationships where they move throughout the week. For example, Brazi Eats frequently posts their presence at Zwei Brewing, Stogey Brewing, and Guided Goat. Caio! Mobile Pizzeria frequently posts their weekly rotation at Odell Brewing, Stogey Brewing, and Zwei Brewing. LP also makes known their network with Odell Brewing and Stogey Brewing. Not only do these network discourses represent individual food truck’s relationships with different breweries, but this consistent overlap and rotation represents the wider network and commensality culture of food trucks who visit the same breweries on different days. These networks make visible the sharing of commensality space among food

trucks, and the wider network between food trucks and breweries, thus reflecting notions of digital commensality.

Beyond a broad visibility of these networks represented in FOCO food truck posts of their schedules, food trucks also communicate through Instagram how these networks represent rooted and consistent relationships with breweries. For example, Caupona, showcases their consistent relationship with Horse and Dragon Brewing. In one of their story posts, for example, Caupona advertised Horse and Dragon Brewing's "8-year" anniversary honoring their space as key to their growing success as an up and coming food truck in Fort Collins. Likewise, in another post on their profile, Caupona posts an image of their food trailer outside Horse and Dragon Brewing with the caption:

"I am pleased to announce that we are launching a crowdfunding campaign today for a Caupona retail space. Link in bio to donate! One year ago today I did my very first popup at @horsedragonbrew and ya'll have supported us so much that we need to move into a retail space to meet the demand. YOU RULE!" (@caupona.co, Retrieved April 30, 2022).

Not only is Caupona mentioning Horse and Dragon Brewing as a place to grab a craft beer, but a space vital and accommodating for the growth of up and coming food trucks. As such, FOCO food trucks represent symbiotic networks of digital commensality exchanging cultural capital in the community through their mutual food and drink relationships.

Food trucks showcasing their relationships with local breweries on Instagram flexes network power for the collective purpose of amplifying the local food truck industry. This is important because while growing, food trucks still struggle to find spaces to operate, develop a



customer base, and become recognized in the community. The amplification of these networks occurs through discourses of digital commensality.

### **Digital Commensality: Audiencing Discourses in FOCO Food Trucks Instagram Community**

Alongside networking, FOCO food truck owners and their online audiences engage in a co-constitutive process of “audiencing.” Drawing from theories of audience labor, I suggest FOCO food truck owners and their followers both conduct communicative labor in co-constructing their online representation and presence. FOCO food truck owners put in labor in constructing and invite particular audiences through their Instagram content. Additionally, their online audiences themselves engage in labor of representing FOCO food trucks in their creation of content. These exchanges and representations of Instagram discourses represent a process of digital commensality that shapes the online community of FOCO food trucks.

### **Food Trucks Audiencing Labor: Millennial Appeals, Humanizing Food, and Codeswitching**

First, food truck owners engage in “audiencing” in ways that shape, create, and/or invite audiences to advertise their services. The ways food trucks post content on Instagram contributes significantly to the amount and kinds of customers who visit their trucks that facilitate digital commensality beyond word-of-mouth tactics. Some food trucks try to garner an online audience in posting content online frequently to attract customers. As Jenn, co-owner of Ciao! Mobile explains:

“We try to post on a daily basis.” “That’s how people find us. There’s definitely a percentage of people that just happen to be at the brewery, but I will say we get a huge

percentage of our guests at night that come up to us and say, “I saw your post on Instagram and you are why we’re here.” (Jen, Zoom Interview, Dec 6, 2021).

However, more than just their consistent presence and activity, the content food trucks post also matters in garnering audience attention. Digital commensality also influences how much engagement and attention IG content receives. Jen explains pictures of their specials go really well, especially when their posts and videos show people in them consuming or interacting with the food. As Jenn explains:

“People seem to engage a bit more when they see a human being, not just food.. Reels are obviously huge right now, so I think video content. I will say, Facebook is stupid, and I don’t like it. We don’t get much engagement on Facebook. It’s definitely more Instagram, but I think that’s because [of the clientele that we’re primarily serving are millennials and closer to our age” (Jen, Zoom Interview, Dec 6, 2021).

Analyzing likes and comments across different posts among food trucks, images with a significant amount of engagement showcase images of people *with* food over just images of food only. Previous scholarship suggests that people are attracted to food images and use place to locate themselves and their food experiences (Wong et al., 2019; Contois & Kish, 2022).

However, understanding “audienicing” from the food truck owner perspective, audience members prefer not just pictures of food, but moments of digital commensality where people are eating or working with food together. Therefore, food trucks often put in audience labor of posting images that show people eating and enjoying their food to attract audience engagement online.

Instagram is key in not attracting just any audience, but an audience of millennial-aged people who are savvier with technology and fans of craft food and brewing. That is not to say other generations of people do not visit the truck, but in terms of their audienicing, millennials

and tech savvy youth interested in food seem to be a key target audience. Audiences are looking for more than just an opportunity to share images of food and their own personal experiences, but experiences with people as an ethos of digital commensality and enjoying food. Food truck owners also use hashtags on Instagram to create a subcultures representative of their millennial audience. For example, Caio! Mobile uses the hashtag #CiaoHounds on many of their posts to address and refer to their consistent customers (@caiomobilenoco, Retrieved, Aug 3, 2021).

Likewise, Brazi eats also garners an audience of local Brazilians in the community. Sharing their images of food, functions as a nostalgic reminder of home that draws people into their profile (Tran, 2019). In my interview with Ana at Zwei brewing, she explained her presence on not just social media, but in the area has drawn in crowds of people from Brazil and Brazilian-Americans. Beyond the Brazilian community, Brazi eats also draws in the larger Latinx, Spanish-speaking community on Instagram who frequently post comments in Spanish admiring their Brazilian-influenced food and self-avowed Latina-owned business. In this way, Brazi eats dismantles the dominance of whiteness and English-speaking dominance among many people in food truck spaces and reflected in the rhetorical personas of food truck owners engaging in this audience labor.

Audiencing is also enacted through codeswitching languages through their shared posts describing their food. Food trucks like The Taco Stop and Antojitos del Suerte mix English and Spanish in their posts and captions. The Taco Stop's Instagram is one of the most active in the FOCO food truck community, often addressing their online audiences in Spanish as "Amigos." While not uncommon, in Mexican restaurants and food trucks online practices, the Taco Stop also posts captions in Spanish. The "translation" affordance on these posts represents a form of digital code switching but prioritizes Spanish and speaks to their local Latinx audiences. For

example, one of their posts of a video of Taco Stop employees preparing chilaquiles is accompanied with the caption:

“*Feliz sábado. Aquí los esperamos temenos chilaquiles, tacos y más!!*” Which translates to “Happy Saturday. Here we are waiting for you. We have chilaquiles, tacos and more!!” (@tacostopfoco, Retrieved: April 1, 2022).

While Taco Stop intermixes captions written in Spanish and English, Antojitos del Suerte’s profile posts images and captions completely in Spanish. While the translation affordance on Instagram translates Spanish captions into English, Antojitos del Suerte predominantly speaks to a Spanish speaking audience bolstering and inviting Spanish speaking audiences to engage with the English-dominant FOCO food truck Instagram community.

Codeswitching between English and Spanish, food trucks like the Taco Stop and Antojitos del Suerte identify with Fort Collins Spanish-speaking and bilingual populations and Latinx immigrant groups often underrepresented in the online community of FOCO food trucks on Instagram. Spanish-first captions flip the script on the English dominant media landscape of the FOCO food truck community, much like the *loncheras* on North College avenue in Chapter 4. These captions invite and welcome diverse populations of people publicly codeswitching between languages in various Instagram posts. This use of audiencing through codeswitching can be seen as a critical move to decenter digital representations of primarily English-speaking food truck accounts on Instagram. In this way, these food trucks shape the online IG community to recognize the community of Latinx cuisine and Spanish speaking food trucks and customers on Instagram.

Based in these snapshots of FOCO food truck audiencing discourse, audiencing is a key part of the digital commensality process created by the labor of FOCO food trucks. Appealing to

millennials, preferences for humanized food images, and codeswitching, FOCO food trucks share images of food in ways that invite and constitute specific audiences representative of a crucial component of digital commensality.

### **The Audiencing of FOCO Food Truck Instagram Audiences**

Audiences also respond and communicate with food trucks putting labor in the digital commensality process of “audiencing.” Audiences co-construct the FOCO food truck the Instagram community engaging in the digital commensality process of audiencing through foodstagramming and local food critic discourses.

#### **Foodstagramming**

One form of audiencing is “foodstagramming” or when individual accounts of online audiences post and repost pictures of food truck food online (Wong et al., 2019). This also includes tagging and mentioning the food trucks they order from. Foodstagramming “enables people to be a leader in social discourse” and “a facilitator among community members” (Contois & Kish, 2022, p. 3). While foodstagramming is often understood as an effect of the tourist gaze and self-promotion (Contois & Kish, 2022), the audience of the FOCO food truck Instagram community at the same time engages in representational labor in amplifying the online presence and support of local food trucks. While some FOCO food truck followers do post for reasons of self-promotion, many of their discourses express support for individual businesses’ over describing their food experiences as their vacation or trip.

In one post for example, the profile @get\_a\_long\_little\_abbie posts a picture of their dog and a corndog at New Belgium Brewing tagging Corndoggies with the caption “Yumm nothing like a @newbelgium\_foco and @corndoggies to start my #nationalcorndogday” (Retrieved, 2022, April 16). Likewise, @imjusttessie posts: “[@caupona.co](https://caupona.co) weekly sourdough loaf and spicy

cream cheese. Put some arugula and a well seasoned egg on that shit and you've got yourself some writer's fuel. Shout out to the newest [@foco doco](#) sticker, the first to ever make it onto my water bottle” (Retrieved, 2022, April 16). Additionally, @stacylitch posts: “*Picanha from Brazieats. Delicioso! Vou comer outra vez!*” (Retrieved, 2021, November 3). Many of these food trucks reciprocated, like-ing or commenting on these posts.

Here customers engage in audience labor that amplifies their presence of food trucks in the local community. As a form of digital commensality, the online audience of customers share images of what and how they are eating and engaging with food trucks, thereby conducting audience labor through Foodstagramming. Significantly, these posts highlight how food truck food has become a part of their consumption lifestyle online. As a form of digital commensality, online users exchange putting in labor to advertise food for a “like” or “comment,” exchanging for the affect of feelings of community and belonging baked into notions of commensality via social media. However, FOCO food truck Instagram audiences also engage in the labor of sharing of “social food pleasure” (Mendini et al., 2019, p. 544). Not only are audiences sharing images of food, but they are using Instagram to share food as a pleasurable moment, contributing to the culture of commensality based in food truck discourse. Images do more than depict images of food. They are a medium to share experiences through audiencing in ways that amplify these everyday experiences in the mediated space.

Among the audiences of food trucks on Instagram, these images are overwhelmingly positive and tend to amplify one’s localness or connectedness to the community in engaging these experiences. Shared forms of social food pleasure thereby represent a form of digital commensality that creates mutual exchanges (Mendini et al., 2019). Interpreting these exchanges, I suggest there is a degree of cultural capital within feelings of belonging and

community audience members desire. Even digitally, people want to *feel* commensality, not just experience it or produce a representation. Even if there is no material benefit of economic capital among audiences, feelings of inclusion and connection become emotional currency that amplifies the presence of local food trucks in the area.

### **Local Food Critics**

Beyond followers engaging in audiencing through foodstagramming, audiences also serve as popular formal and informal local food critics. Similar to traditional practices in the restaurant industry, where food critics opinions released in the local news were critical for the success of restaurants, both legitimate and self-proclaimed local food critics engage in audiencing to bolster the representation of FOCO food truck food and industry. Interestingly, these local Instagram food critics hardly ever report negative reviews of food, much like their audience of consumers. They engage criticism representing food trucks with an empathetic tone similar to LA Times food writer, Jonathan Gold, who's stories significantly built and ethos for small business restaurants in the overlooked in spaces in Los Angeles (Abend, 2018). They act as figures of supportive attention rather than assigning value ratings and hierarchies like traditional forms of food criticism. As such, these critics provide labor in representing local food trucks as key members of the food culture and community in Fort Collins and are enacting the labor audiencing through of digital commensality.

Many "food critics" are unpaid and informal accounts that people create to engage with food online as a hobby. However, some of these accounts do have local clout and attention and operate as a badge of ethos in the FOCO food truck community. The profile @focofoodguy for example is one example of these informal critics that bolster the public presence of local food trucks. A food blogger with 3,835 followers, @focofoodguy has a significant reach and

audience. In one of @focofoodguy's posts advertising a video of Caio! Mobile Pizzeria's dishes, "The Sweet Devil" and "The Atmosphere" exemplifies this presence with the caption:

“~The Sweet Devil~: San Marzano Sauce, Fresh Mozzarella, Pecorino Romano Cheese, Calabrese Salami, Calabrian Chili Flakes, House Made Chili Infused Honey. ~The Atmosphere~: White Sauce, Fresh Mozzarella, Pecorino Romano Cheese, Sautéed Spinach, Ricotta, Prosciutto, Cracked Black Pepper. @ciaomobilenoco #caiohounds #pizza #neopolitanpizza #focofood #fortcollins #fortcollinsfood #focofoodie #focofoodguy #eatnorthamerica” (@focofoodguy, Retrieved: March 28, 2021).

Although simply describing the two pizza orders ingredients, @focofoodguy is appealing to foodie tastes among audiences who like to know what is in their food and how it is made. Along with @focofoodguy's broad following, this reel received 81 likes and has 1,513 views. This is especially meaningful because Ciao! Mobile Pizzeria is relatively new to the food truck scene starting up their business in 2020. Additionally, Ciao! is mentioned in the post next to a string of hashtags that connect the image and Ciao! to a wider audience. In this way, @focofoodguy's informal critic approval engages in digital commensality sharing and posting other food trucks images as a form of audience labor.

Other food truck critics provide a more descriptive narrative, providing a story and face behind FOCO food trucks on Instagram. For example, @yelpcolorado shouted out Brazi Eats' owner Anna in their #MeetTheOwner spotlight segment on their IG account. @yelpcolorado comments:

“[#MeetTheOwner](#) // Anna Flavia Santos, born and raised in a small town called Unaí in the state of Minas Gerais, is the chef and visionary behind Fort Collins' newest food truck--Brazi Eats! Anna began selling food during lunch at her local high school after



moving to the U.S. at age 13. She has since been cooking for friends and family and decided to try selling her food in FoCo as a test this past November” (@yelpcolorado, Retrieved, April 27, 2022)

Here, @yelpcolorado is not only spotlighting Brazi Eats, but also using their platform to personify and share Anna’s “food story” as a small business owner. The impact of being recognized on Yelp is significant as it is a legitimate public review site for local food represented across the country. With 153 “likes,” the image received quite a bit of attention and interaction with 15 comments from Brazi Eat’s audience showing support with statements like @kaamillaes account stating “Yesss her food in high school was already amazing!” and @marydemelo’s comment “I love Ana’s food! So happy to know she decided to invest her cooking skills and wish I could be in CO to savory it!” As a product of digital commensality labor, people who know Ana and Brazi eats amplify here presence in the FOCO food truck community. Beyond the comments, the caption continues and quote Anna:

She says, "It went really well and so my Mom and I decided to put the whole food truck idea to work. So far, I am on my second week with Brazi Eats and it’s been INSANE.

There’s people coming all the way from Greeley and Denver to try out the food! I really love it and everything’s been working out great! I am still in the learning phases of this field but everything has been working out perfectly! Follow [@Brazieats](#) to see where you can try out Anna's amazing food! Her next stop will be [@HighHopsBrewery](#) on 5/2!”

Beyond simply personifying and sharing Anna’s story as a business, Anna’s voice as an early business owner is represented as well as her handle and their next operating location.

Overall, digital commensality among the audience labor of formal and informal food critics brings FOCO food trucks into a wider consumption audience, while assisting in providing location information and a compelling story people wish to consume online. From FOCO food trucks appeals to specific audiences, local food truck Foodstagrammers, and formal and informal food critics on Instagram, FOCO food trucks and their audiences engage in digital commensality co-constructing their presence online and expanding discourses that shape the FOCO food truck Instagram community.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have showcased how digital commensality functions as a process of branding, networking, and audiencing that constitutes the FOCO food truck Instagram community. Food trucks engage in branding communicating unfixed rhetorical personas through dialectical expressions of authenticity-innovation and local-global tastes. In doing so, food truck Instagram profiles take on varying rhetorical personas as cultural preservationists, tastemakers, citizen distributors, and global ambassadors. These rhetorical personas simultaneously diversify and homogenize collective and individual food truck identities in the FOCO Food Truck Instagram community. The FOCO food truck Instagram community is also structured through the digital commensality process of networking with competing food trucks and breweries. In doing so, they communicate digital commensality through discourses of (non)competitiveness and symbiotic food relationships that showcase key networks in the FOCO food truck Instagram community. Finally, the FOCO food truck Instagram community is also structured through audiencing engaging in labor to shape and invite audiences of their own, while benefiting from the labor of their online audiences of foodstagrammers and formal/informal critics to amplify their own presence. My analysis expands understandings of digital commensality as more than

just interpersonal and performative interactions, but a system and process of local discourses that have the potential to shape identities, networks, and audiences of a social media food community. In the next chapter, I expand on the implications of these findings of digital commensality and synthesize them with understandings and theorizations of commensality textures, showcasing the rhetorical and mediated influence of commensality discourses as a whole.

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## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

*“Food trucks encourage people to interact. It forces people to engage in conversations about whether they’ve had a certain food item before—it fosters a community element just because you’re in proximity to everybody else, and I think that ties into the way we approach everything in Fort Collins”* – Erik Rohman, owner of The Waffle Lab food truck (quoted in Fisher, 2016).

Whether you are riding your bike to the FOCO Food Truck Rally (FFTR) to enjoy some local food and music on a summer Tuesday evening, stopping by one of North College’s *loncheras* for a quick bite to eat, or “foodstagramming” your food truck experience on Instagram in any of these spaces, what brings these communicative interactions together is the culture of commensality reflected in the physical and digital spaces of Fort Collins (FOCO) food trucks. Drawing from my ethnographic experiences and analysis of social media, FOCO food trucks spatial and mediated discourses provide a deeper, theoretical understanding of commensality discourses and their impact in physical and digital spaces of food trucks. In this dissertation, I have argued the FOCO food trucks’ discourses of commensality operate as rhetorical textures of subcultural ideology, as rhetorical textures of difference resistant to cultural gentrification, and as a process digital commensality constructive of social mediated communities.

In Chapter 3, I answer my first proposed research question, “how does FOCO food truck commensality operate as a rhetorical texture of subcultural ideology?” I explained that rhetorical textures constitute subcultural ideologies resistive and reifying of gourmet style food through the FFTR. Drawing from the historical context of the FFTR’s inception, I showcase how the event’s grassroots foundations are based in a subcultural ideology of commensality in resisting

neoliberal policies of mobility and stereotypical fears of traffic, congestion, and unfair business competition.

Within the space itself, I show how the FFTR's subculture of commensality is textured through work and play practices. Practices of play like biking, encourage a resistance to mass produced food in displaying people's agency to take the time to enjoy local food truck food. Additionally, play practices of "camping" out on the lawn, move the formality and elitism of the table as the preferred space to consume gourmet food. At the same time, there is a hierarchy of elitism among commensality practices of play based on the expensive materials people wear and bring with them to consume food such as top-of-the-line bikes, Yeti coolers, and name brands like Patagonia. However, practices and discourses of work reveal that practices of play are often a privilege, and not everyone has the time to enjoy food in the same ways; but, people enacting these practices of work also display agency in "making do" with their time moving against the grain of their work schedule (de Certeau, 1984, p. xi). As a subculture of work and play, the FFTR house practices that resist and reify gourmet elitism. Visual representations and messages of food truck food not only reveal subcultural resistance, but they also reveal practices through the collective consumption of FFTR food which uphold and support a grassroots small businesses identity.

Additionally, the FFTR invites particular positionalities through shared local and global tastes such as the Active Coloradoan, the Cosmopolitan, the American Dreamer, and the Citizen Consumer. These positionalities encourage people to adopt locavore lifestyles, embody the nostalgia of American past times like 4<sup>th</sup> of July barbeques or enjoying a corndog at a state fair, support small businesses, appeal to active outdoor and regional Colorado identities, and invite underrepresented members of the community into the FFTR space offering global cuisine like



Puerto Rican and Pan Asian food. These positionalities' manifestation in symbolic, performed, and material discourses with food work to diversify cultural identities and food offerings in the space, while maintaining familiarity based in regional Colorado identity. In doing so, these positionalities subculturally texture both a resistance and reification of elite gourmet tastes as well as embedded notions of whiteness.

Moreover, the FFTR represents textures of parallel performativity between food and music forms in relation to materials and bodies moving throughout the event. Food and music performativity encourage mutual consumption of small food businesses and the music of independent artists as well as structure food trucks in music forms staging their presence and presenting the FOCO food truck lineup. Overall, these subcultural FFTR rhetorical textures resist and reify discourses of elitism and whiteness embedded within gourmet food truck spaces, representing subcultural discourses that ideologically split binary representations of gourmet dominance and subordination.

In chapter 4, I answer my second research question showcasing how commensality functions as rhetorical textures of difference among North College *loncheras* resistant to cultural gentrification. These textures of difference flip the script on linguistic landscapes, carve spaces of their own in celebrating difference, and form strategic bridges with other members of the community. Linguistic landscapes decenter the dominance of English language practices through interactions and textures of food sharing structuring discursive difference within the space. *Loncheras* also carve spaces of their own celebrating such difference in space in engaging a social style resistant to "beautification" discourses and whiteness. *Loncheras* on North College also bridge relationships with the community mutually benefitting from traffic flow, feeding members of the community in need, and maintaining presence in corporate spaces disrupting

whiteness and cultural gentrification. While gourmet “foodie” styles of trucks popularize and risk cultural gentrification of not just food trucks themselves, but also spaces intimate to the local Latinx community, *loncheras* on North College maintain rhetorical textures of difference through their practices of commensality. While previous scholarship highlights and describes how ethnic enclaves are performed in the space, my analysis of commensality provides a specific understanding of how shared food language used in everyday food truck spaces resist dominance and maintain cultural difference against larger socioeconomic concerns like gentrification.

Finally, in chapter 5, I highlight how branding, networking, and audiencing discourses of the FOCO food truck Instagram community represent a constitutive process of digital commensality. I reveal how digital commensality is more than just sharing a meal with someone on FaceTime, but a social mediated discourse that structures an online community. Using elements of D’Acci’s (2004) circuit model, digital commensality is in fact an intricate process of sharing, exchanging, and co-producing food media in ways that constitute the online community. Digital commensality brands unfixed, yet patterned expressions of social mediated rhetorical personas of cultural tastemakers, preservationists, glocal ambassadors, and citizen distributors that communicate taste dialectics of authenticity-innovation and global-local tastes. While theorized as relatively stable, I consider the multiplicity of commensality and space and I employ a dialectical approach to the branding of rhetorical personae as patterned, yet productive of contradictory tastes, meanings, and identifications (Nakayama & Martin, 2011; Bourdieu, 1984). These taste dialectics of digital commensality both diversify and homogenize the collective identity of the FOCO food truck Instagram community.

Digital commensality is also a community of networks among competing food trucks and breweries showcasing digital commensality networks of (non)competitiveness and symbiotic

digital food relationships in Fort Collins. These networks amplify local relationships of (non)competitive support among competing food trucks, eliciting a collaborative and community-based networked attitude of digital commensality. Moreover, social media exchanges between FOCO food trucks and local breweries mutually benefit and serve as online exchanges of cultural capital, bolstering their presence and success in the community through shared practices and spaces of food sharing.

Moreover, food truck profiles and their audiences co-construct the FOCO food truck Instagram community engaging in labor inviting particular audiences, personifying food media, and codeswitching to underrepresented audiences through their digital commensality. These audiences reciprocate in foodstagramming their experiences and taking on roles as formal/informal food critics that amplify the presence of their favorite food trucks online. Fisher's (2015) approach to audience labor focusing more on the "lifeworld experiences" and discourses of users that contribute to the process of FOCO food truck's digital commensality. In this sense, audiences also "do" labor for the food truck community's representation such as sharing, commenting, and creating relationships with the food truck community through sharing food media content. For the food truck community, this includes specifically their followers who are customers and local "foodie" critics.

As such, my analysis expands theories of commensality as rhetorical subcultural textures, rhetorical textures of difference, and as a process of digital commensality community building on Instagram. Several implications and contributions emerge from these findings that further the theorization of commensality, understandings of FOCO food truck culture, and the usefulness of mix-methods qualitative analysis.

## Key Implications and Contributions

First, my dissertation expands understandings of commensality into the realms of communication theorizing from perspectives based in rhetoric, ethnography of communication, and media studies. Previous scholarship theorizes commensality as a sociological behavior of food sharing reflective and constitutive of culture and interpersonal relationships (Fisher, 2011; Jönsson, Michaud, & Neuman, 2021). Alternatively, my study focuses on the communicative dynamics of places both physical and digital where commensality is engaged rhetorically in space. I showcase that commensality is not merely constitutive, but also resistive and reifying of discursive power and dominance in space. Commensality involves not just shared behaviors of eating (Fishler, 2011)—it is also a texture of discourses wielding rhetorical power of cultural influence in physical spaces and a complex digital process of food sharing developed through branding, networking, and audiencing. While scholarship in the humanities and social sciences have extensively theorize food and communication through notions of *taste*, the notion of *textures* provides more room to understand the rhetorical implications of spatial contexts and relations that influence people's intersubjective experiences with food. In other words, this research provides future food and communication scholarship with more complex analytical tools to assess food in our relation to our social worlds.

Regarding scholarship on food truck discourse specifically, my research complicates binary representations of food trucks often framed as oppressive gourmet styles embedded with white elitism (McClintok et al., 2017; Dunn, 2017; Basinski et al., 2017), and the representation of *loncheras* as oppressed under circumstances of cultural gentrification (Muñoz, 2019; Dunn, 2017). Cultural gentrification is a clear problem in Fort Collins and has raised concerns in the Latinx community (Ferrier, 2012). Food trucks that embody a more gourmet style are more often

invited and present in spaces of growing tourist capital like breweries and the FOCO food truck rally. Additionally, gourmet food truck have a stronger voice in navigating and advocating for themselves in municipal regulation—consistent with previous scholarship (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017).

However, to perpetuate a representation of gourmet food truckers as only former chefs or people from affluence is reductive. Many food truck owners cooked as a hobby, but never had formal culinary training or experience working in the service industry. Many gourmet style food trucks in Fort Collins work paycheck to paycheck, depend on the business full time, and for many it is not simply a creative project or experiment, it sustains their livelihood. As such, my research complicates this binary presenting gourmet tastes and styles as more of a subculture. These subcultures reinforce grassroots action, organizing and collectively making space against municipal regulations that limit food truck operations and space. At the same time, my research does not ignore elitism and whiteness perpetuated, as gourmet styles receive more staying power in the community and in some cases, commercialize the leisure and the welcoming presence they put forward.

Considering the *loncheras* on North College, while resisting the reality of cultural gentrification, my study showcases the rhetorical agency of the Latinx food truck community in their ability to “flip the script” of whiteness in the linguistic landscape, celebrate difference through social food truck styles in stark contrast to beautification and gourmet aesthetics as well as make a strategic presence to serve food and texture commensality in dominant food spaces like companies and corporations on the strip. Moreover, my study avoids a patronizing representation of North College *loncheras* as completely divided from the community. As Maggie Alvarez of Maggie’s Taco’s and Jesús Santiago of *Los Pepes Taqueria* mention, people

do not feel isolated from the community on North College (Flores, 2022). The Latinx hub of commerce where Latinx food trucks are a large part of are their own unique space with different interests and ways of practicing food trucking. As such, Latinx *loncheras* on North College express agency through a rhetorical texture of difference in resisting the creep of cultural gentrification in maintaining a purposeful difference in space and food sharing environments compared to other food truck styles as an expression of rhetorical agency.

While welcoming everyone who eats on North College, Latinx food trucks feed for the interests of a specific community—many Latinx, working class, blue collar workers, but anyone who really desires delicious Mexican food at an affordable price. Breweries and micro beers and gourmet styles are not the only textures of food truck nourishment and pleasure people desire nor want to experience. For many, it is a calm afternoon in-between work or night out to eat with the family collectively, rather than ordering McDonalds and surrounding the TV like a campfire. In representing the labor and agency of *loncheras* and recognizing the labor of gourmet food trucks, my dissertation pushes for a more equitable representation and co-existence of different styles of food trucking in decentering gourmet elitism through subcultural ideologies and rhetorical textures of difference.

Theorizing commensality beyond key rhetorical textures FOCO food truck spaces, I also showcase how digital commensality is a process of social media community building on Instagram. Previous scholarship focuses on and analyzes more microblogging discourses on Facebook and Twitter, while little research has been conducted on the visual-forward medium of Instagram (Wessel, 2012; Edwards & Maben, 2018). My research in contrast showcases how commensality functions through shared visual media whether that be images, stories, and reels of featured dishes or the production of food itself to brand, network, and engage in audience labor.

Additionally, my research of digital commensality focuses on the built social media environments of food trucks. Previous food truck media scholarship shows how food trucks use Twitter to generate “impromptu social settings” and “events” to manipulate physical spaces (Wessel et al., 2016). Other research reveals how food truck social media elicits feelings of excitement and spontaneity, attracting customers to local places they have not been before (Caldwell, 2016). Extending these influences, I maintain a focus on digital spaces, and showcase how the mediation of digital commensality through branding, network, and audience discourses represent structures key to building digital food truck communities, rather than focusing on the singular social media identities and influences of individual food truck profiles.

Furthermore, my analysis reveals ways FOCO food trucks brand themselves online to amplify their business as “authentic” and “local.” Instagram, while not giving a complete representation of food truck identities and business, is used as a social mediated network to prime and build audiences, inviting a wider range people and a more latent public to consume food in certain locations. By contrast, the physical spaces FOCO food trucks occupy are more co-constructed with people who engage the space wherein meanings of “authenticity” and “locality” are engaged more through senses, embodiment, and materialized feeling.

Finally, this dissertation expands on applications of mix-methods qualitative research. I showcase that merging rhetorical criticism of space and place with ethnography of communication (EOC) provide mutually beneficial approaches of inquiry about culture and communication. Space and place rhetorical criticism places a focus power and how space and material act and are acted upon by people, while EOC draws attention to how behaviors and relationships of people are coded patterns and discursive distinctions that reveal cultural identities, values, and beliefs. EOC is often criticized for not considering positionality and power

enough, wherein space and place rhetorical criticism's focus on the body and power provides this critical edge.

At the same time, EOC offers more explicit methods of interviewing and participation allowing a rhetorical critic to move between micro level personal analysis, to a more macro perspective in attempting to understand the experiences and context of relations among people and culture. Likewise, while the challenge representation in EOC is attempting to articulate the moving and ongoing experiences local culture (Sanjek, 2014; Madison, 2005), space and place's criticism's notion of "textures" provide a lexicon and object of analysis made up of various nodes of interactions between performances, practices, enactments, bodies, and movements rhetorically articulated in space (Dickinson, 2019). Used mutually, space and place rhetorical criticism combined with EOC set a pace of constant centering and decentering of the researcher in qualitative research, while avoiding dismissing issues of power implicated in local cultures and spaces.

Similarly, my application of D'Acci's (2004) circuit model alongside media theories of identity (Hall, 1987), networking (Castells, 2011), and audiencing (Fisher, 2015), provides a framework to analyze digital community building on visual forward mediums like Instagram. Media scholars have applied D'Acci's (2004) circuit model to analyze contexts of television and film from images on the screen to processes of production. Social media platforms like Instagram have arguably become the "new TV," where visual forward social media replace and appropriate traditional cultural forms of television. Related to food sharing, people have moved their commensality behaviors from sharing meals around the TV to sharing meals over social media. In doing so, D'Acci's (2004) approach combined with postmodern theories of identity (Hall, 1992), networking (Castells, 2011), and audienceing (Fisher, 2015) provide key tools for



analyzing food, culture, and digital commensality on Instagram and social media platforms like it. While these key takeaways, emerge from my research, this dissertation also reveals limitations that open up areas for future research on commensality and food truck communication.

### **Limitations & Future Directions**

While my research provides key insights about food truck culture and extensions that expand communicative understandings of commensality, there are key limitations worth addressing. First, much of my analysis relies on studying both physical and digital spaces. Through *in-situ* observations, I focus on the rhetorical textures of representation, material exchanges, symbols, performances, and uses of space. While I integrate voices of food truck owners who have significant knowledge and presence within Fort Collins food truck culture and community, my study is limited to six interviews. Although my study is not about food truck owners themselves, and more focused on discourses of space and place, more interviews not just among food truck owners, but from employees, customers, and regulators would help generate more specific and generalized data about the implications of commensality in space from the lived experiences of specific individuals and stakeholders involved with the FOCO food truck community.

Additionally, much of this research took place during the context of COVID-19. While many food trucks still operated under these conditions, people still avoided going out for a long period of time and were more reluctant to interact as they would in these spaces prior to the pandemic. As such, this reiterated the expansion of future research on understandings of the lived experiences of the specific groups of people in the FOCO food truck community beyond how commensality discourses rhetorically and digitally constitute space.

Considering community building through commensality shared on visual forward platforms like Instagram, the development and progression of social media communities have expanded their form and influence on different platforms. As such, communities of commensality are transitioning to new social media platforms and are created and articulated in different ways. For example, digital commensality and food and cooking in general has become an incredibly popular genre on platforms like TikTok. People on these platforms have a wider range of affordances and tools to create content such as slow-motion effects, music, manipulation and integration of graphic media, and a wider range of converging and appropriating media content. Tiktok offers users more agency and affordances to manipulate media and create content could provide deeper implications as to how digital commensality operates and creates community online. As such, some FOCO food trucks like Brazi Eats are making a presence on platforms like Tiktok that could provide deeper insights to how digital commensality is engaged as a process of online community building. Therefore, future research should expand these perspectives of commensality community building in new visual-forward platforms like TikTok.

Finally, this study is based on expanding a theoretical understanding of commensality rather than intended to make wide and sweeping claims about the entirety of the FOCO food truck community. In this way, this study relies on detailed *in-situ* interpretation and in-depth analyses of specific food truck commensality interactions in space. Considering implications for future research on food trucks and commensality discourses, more specific and focused studies on physical and local digital communities are needed. Additionally, more social scientific and generalized analysis could be useful to provide a broad and encompassing picture of how

commensality operates as a subculture, rhetoric of difference, and/or social mediated space of community building.

The culture FOCO food trucks is shaped through subcultural commensality textures, rhetorical commensality textures of differences, and a process of mediated community building through digital commensality. FOCO food trucks complicate binaries of gourmet elitism and cultural gentrification through particular rhetorical textures, positionalities, personas, expressions of difference, and social styles engaged in space. Meanwhile, their identities, networks, and audiences engage in digital commensality that structures their community on Instagram. As more research about food trucks and the ways they communicate through food sharing expands, commensality can be used as a framework to understand food trucks communicative influence in local physical and digital spaces, and how they mobilize meanings made around the table beyond their traditional locations.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interview Protocol (Owners)**

- 1.) How did you become involved in the food truck business?
- 2.) What has been your experience operating your food truck in Fort Collins?
- 3.) What influenced the types of food you prepare?
- 4.) How would you describe your relationships with other community members/stakeholders?
- 5.) In what ways do you communicate with the larger community?
- 6.) What is your most memorable experience operating the food truck?
- 7.) How do you perceive your role in the community?
- 8.) What does it take to operate a food truck?
- 9.) What are some of the most challenging/rewarding aspects operating a food truck in Fort Collins?
- 10.) What advice would you give to someone who wants to begin a food truck business in Fort Collins?

## APPENDIX B

### Informed Consent

Hello. Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today and volunteering to be part of my research. As a Ph.D. student in the Department of Communication Studies at Colorado State University, this research is part of my research on local food trucks and communication.

Today I would like to ask you questions about your own experiences with food trucks in Fort Collins. I encourage you to be as open with your comments as you can be. It's most helpful for me to hear your comments in a way that best fits how you would describe your experiences with the food truck and the larger community.

Each interview should last about an hour. I am hoping to conduct one hour-long interview and a one 30 minute follow-up interview (2 interviews total). I would like to audio record our conversation today so that I can transcribe it into hardcopy paper later. It will be helpful to have a typed-up copy of our interview as I work with the research. The audio recordings will be destroyed after I transcribe them to paper. In case you do not want to be audio recorded, I will take detailed notes on paper as we talk instead.

Please indicate below whether you wish to use your real name or a pseudonym so your responses will not be associated with your name. Also, please indicate below any other identifying information you would like me to omit from your responses. However, please know since food trucks are public entities, I cannot completely mask the identity of the food truck itself.

- 1.) Are you okay with the audio recording of our conversation?

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

- 2.) Please highlight here whether you wish to use your *real name* or a *pseudonym*. If you choose pseudonym, please write in the name you would like me to use:

- **Real name**
- **Pseudonym**

**Name Choice:** \_\_\_\_\_

- 3.) Please detail in the blank space below if there is any other identifying information you would like me to leave out of the study:

- 4.) Do you agree to a 30-minute follow up interview scheduled at a later date? **Yes/no?**

-----[DETACH HERE]-----  
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If you have any questions, you can contact me, Mitch Combs, by email at [mitch.combs@colostate.edu](mailto:mitch.combs@colostate.edu) or on personal phone: 815-871-2313.

Please know that you can stop the interview at any time without consequence. Please don't hesitate to ask me questions anytime. Again, I'll be taking notes for my own reference. This helps me remain focused on what you're saying, and it helps me remember comments I might want to follow-up on. I might ask you to repeat something or give me an example. If a restate what you are saying to me, it's often to summarize and make sure I understand what you are sharing.

**REMINDER:** Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Again, thank you for your participation with my research!



## APPENDIX C

### Recruitment Script

[To be used when talking with potential volunteer participants of Fort Collins Food Trucks in person/via email/phone]

Hello, my name is Mitch Combs. I am a Ph.D. student in Communication Studies at Colorado State University. I am conducting a research project that involves understanding how food functions as a valuable form of cultural expression and community engagement.

I believe your food truck/involvement with food trucks is a good fit for my project because of what it conveys about your lives, culinary experiences, and efforts in building community through great food. Overall, I am interested in your local “food story” and what the food truck means to you and the Fort Collins community.

Your role in the project would involve participating in two, 1 hour-long interviews. Once I have findings for this study, and if you are willing to be contacted again, I would ask permission to re-contact you for a 30 minute follow-up interview. Also with your permission, I would also like to approach some of your employees for potential interviews if they are willing. Regarding all the interviews, I will ask last no longer than 3 total hours of your time.

Would you be willing to talk to me about your experiences with running a food truck in Northern Colorado for:

- a. The initial 1 hour interview?
- b. How about the 30 minute follow-up interviews once I have findings; is it okay to re-contact you to discuss the findings of the study?

Would now be an appropriate time to talk or can we schedule a day and time that works best for your schedule?