A Hipstory of Food, Love, and Chaosmos at the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes

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Lisa M. Trocchia-Baļķīts
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This dissertation titled

A Hipstory of Food, Love, and Chaosmos at the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes

by

LISA M. TROCCHIA-BAĻĶĪTS

has been approved for

the School of Communication Studies,

the Department of Sociology and Anthropology,

and the Graduate College by

Stephen Scanlan
Associate Professor of Sociology

Devika Chawla
Professor of Communication Studies

Joseph Shields
Dean, Graduate College
ABSTRACT

TROCCHIA-BAĻĶĪTS, LISA M., Ph.D., August 2017, Individual Interdisciplinary Program, Social Ecology of Food

A Hipstory of Food, Love, and Chaosmos at the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes

Directors of Dissertation: Steven Scanlan and Devika Chawla

Engaging with sensory ethnography at the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes, I bring forward ways of knowing about food and social relationships that are complex and interdisciplinary, abstract, and at the same time, intensely felt and personal. Conducting research in the Green Mountains of Vermont in 2016, during the 44th annual gathering, I explore the social spaces of the counterculture gathering where food is produced, distributed, prepared, consumed, and disposed of, as being deeply performative. These sites enable expressions of difference, and stand as incarnations of the personal as political—embodied and dynamic. Food spaces are potent affective environments, where Love, variously expressed and interpreted, directs intention. Through active participation, select interviews, historical research, and reflection, I encounter and consider how food and affect interanimate to define identities, influence relationships between ecologies, modulate environments, and shape economies. Chaosmos, the constant interplay between order (the cosmos) and disorder (chaos) provides the stage for considering the experience of self-organized food systems in affective, cooperative, and horizontal environments. This interdisciplinary study privileges embodied experiences and intuitive ways of knowing as they concern multisensorial scholarship. Hybrid creative/academic elements introduce chaosmos into the dissertation-as-artifact. In the end, through the transmission of affect, the performance of food, and the praxis of self-organizing and complex
reciprocity, a social ecology of food emerges at the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes as order from disorder. The implications of this research speak to the complex nature of food environments as social structures of empowerment and resistance.
DEDICATION

To Ivars and proximity
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PROLOGUE: (RE)COLLECTING THE RAINBOW

We are now fifteen hours on the road: My husband, our two friends, Meadow and Cricket, their two dogs and all our gear, are stuffed into a small car, heading north for my first Rainbow Gathering in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. I started this trip tired. It is worth noting I set out, without sleep, from a full two days of vending at one of Columbus, Ohio’s favorite community art festivals, ComFest. There is a great deal of theater involved in this kind of commercial exchange and the energy spent playing the role of a bright and colorful hippie-artist type selling handmade jewelry to every nine-to-fiver that stops into the booth, is considerable. Sales depend upon the quality of your work to a certain extent, but in my experience, it boils down your ability to reinforce a certain ideal. The money you make is directly related to how well you embody and project the secret desires of housewives, office workers, upper management, and college administrators to be free and creative. They buy your jewelry to wear in their ears, or on their wrists, or around their necks, so they can feel dreams of liberation through their skin.

We all take down the 10’ x 10’ pop-up in the evening, at the end of the festival, and pack up the jewelry—except for a few pieces Meadow tucks away for something she calls “trade circle,” but otherwise, we leave everything but our backpacks and camping gear at the house of someone in Columbus I have never met before. Cricket says she’s a Rainbow sister. She lets us take showers, tells us Rainbow stories, makes us scrambled eggs to eat at her table, then hot organic coffee for the road. It’s well after midnight.

After driving through the sunrise of the new day, on through mid-day, and finally approaching dusk, we find the “front gate” of the Rainbow Gathering, deep within
the Ottawa National Forest. Back in the day, news of the site of the gathering was passed by word of mouth. I got our directions online from the website: www.welcomehome.org; still, they don’t tell you everything.

We make a few wrong turns driving through intersections on unmarked Forest Service roads. I’m not sure exactly how we know they are wrong turns. It’s interesting that how we know we are going in the wrong direction isn’t articulated as much as agreed upon. In the end, we are guided to the right spot by being so inconceivably tired. Deep fatigue acts as a mild intoxicant, altering reality just enough so perception contains new possibilities. Usually clear vision becomes more diffuse, enabling a more expansive way of seeing. Breathing is punctuated by deep yawning inhales delivering bursts of oxygen to the brain. In this space, anticipation and hope begin to manifest in material ways. We start to notice carefully stacked rock cairns, a single tie-dyed streamer dangling from a limb, leaves and crystals tucked within the sprawling roots of a roadside tree, and we know the right way is to keep driving in the direction where gravel dust has blown over onto the plants and dirt on one side of the track; it is not the road less traveled.

It is another hour and a half before we find a place to park, unpack our gear, feed and leash the dogs, and walk the mile back up to the front gate. It’s almost dark. We stop, mentally preparing to walk two more miles into the gathering, and the sensory assaults in this chaotic space begin immediately. This is A-camp, just at the edge of the gathering. An old guy with no teeth and a scruffy white beard stained tobacco yellow around his mouth, with long dirty fingernails and a smile, comes up to me and tells me he’s one of the “road dogs” that “holds shit down” up here. He looks like a hundred homeless men I have seen on the street. He invites us to come sit at his campfire and
share a drink. As he walks back over to the fire, my friends tell me A-camp is a place people gather who are unable or unwilling to do without alcohol. Excluding alcohol from the Rainbow Gathering has been a longstanding social agreement between all who attend, even A-campers. Folks in A-camp self-identify as a Rainbow tribe, one that contributes valuable services—helping to park cars, providing directions, welcoming newcomers, freaking out local news reporters who think they are at the gathering, and standing as front-line resistance to any heavy-handed actions by the U.S. Forest Service Law Enforcement Officers. But what I can see is that in these roles, A-campers also generate chaos, get really messed-up, and sometimes, become violent. They respect the consensus of the larger group for non-violence and no alcohol inside the gathering, and so, remain just outside.

I am naïve. I expect to be enveloped in a love vibe from the moment I arrive. I know the Rainbow Gathering is supposed to be a peaceful event where all are welcome and love is the basis for interaction between people. By contrast, A-camp, is a loud space where “fuck you’s” hang heavy in the air, and I feel a little afraid of these people. I don’t live in this world. I feel conspicuous in my clean hiking boots and expensive camping gear. I am so tired; I feel my body only in the place on my shoulders where my backpack straps are pressing down hard. My eyes are wide—I’m on input mode—and I feel vulnerable to the aggressive behavior, the shouts and swaggering, the deep pain that drives people to a place where manic euphoria suppresses real feeling. The whole surreal dystopian scene burns clear through me. Exhausted from the trip, I can’t find myself; I am falling out of my comfortable reality into a heavy emotional space where the energy of alcohol, drugs, societal mistreatment, and mental illness manifest in a dark carnival. I
want to run away but I freeze in place as the man who first approached me comes back to talk. He says his name is BamBam and asks me what my Rainbow name is.

I don’t have one and I don’t really want to talk to him. I wish he’d go away. I don’t know what to say, and can hardly believe that I hear myself voice the word “Agapi.” I speak a little Greek. My sister is married to a Greek-American and I know agapi is the Modern Greek word for love, as well being a woman’s name. In the Bible, there is also a reference to the word “agape,” which refers to love for your fellow human being. I wonder why I say this. Why do I blurt out something so inaccessible to someone like this man? It is unexplainable in the weirdness of this moment and I feel even more privileged and ridiculous.

I am surprised that it is to the obscure Christian context that BamBam responds. I notice that in his uttering of the word, there is a shift in energy between us. I see, now, beneath wild eyebrows, that BamBam’s eyes are a piercing crystal blue and soften at the edges as he speaks. He says with enthusiasm, “Agape! I know what that means! It means unconditional love. That’s beautiful! Well, I’m lovin’ you, too, sister!” I feel my body dissolve without resistance into his bear-hug embrace. In a flash-space between fear and disgust, love ruptures and I am gifted a different way of knowing. I have my Rainbow name and because of BamBam, the opportunity to truly know its meaning. My first lesson. BamBam calls after me as I walk down the trail. “Welcome home!”

It is now fully dark and our little band walks just a few minutes more before Meadow breaks down. She’s exhausted and crying. She says she just can’t do it. We are all too numb to respond. I am certain I am hallucinating because in the dark, here by the side of the trail, I hear voices that sound like people I know. The voices get louder and
the lights from headlamps come closer. In a desperate panic I call out, “Dandelion! Julia! I feel a hand on my shoulder and we hear a hearty, “Hey! Welcome home you guys!” from two people we all know from our hometown. First I burst into tears, and then, hysterical laughter. It turns out, in the darkness of the forest at night, out of the tens of thousands of people here, our friends are the first people we meet inside the gathering. Dandelion and Julia tell me this will be the first of many Rainbow miracles, although I’m pretty sure I just experienced one in A-camp. Picking up the bucket I was carrying, Dandelion tells me, “You can manifest anything here,” without dropping a step. Our friends guide us back to their camp near the Musical Veggie Café. I imagine the large patch of bracken they point to will feel as puffy and soft as a feather bed, so we set up our tent in the dark, in a nest of ferns.

In the morning, I am awake before everyone else. I am a baker and I am up early from habit, regardless of how little sleep I have had. In the pale first light, I see a neighborhood of brightly colored tent-flys that speckle the thick forest surrounding me. There is the sweet smell of pine pitch and wood smoke. I walk up the soft dirt trail to my right, about a hundred yards, to Musical Veggie, the large field-style kitchen. No one is up and around. A long serving counter is constructed from bamboo poles lashed together. A rail separates this and the kitchen from a larger fire pit. Inside the kitchen area are prep tables made from plywood and an amazingly huge wok. It is deep woods quiet, but early morning bird song and squirrel chatter are now being punctuated here and there by sleepy laughs, coughs, and the kind of yawns that act as vocal exercise. Tent flaps unzip with long arcs of sound. There is one young man asleep by the smoldering coals tightly wrapped in a blue plastic tarp.
I close my eyes and wrap myself in the experience of how a group awakening begins to fill the soundscape. I know there must be thousands of people here. I walk back down the narrow path toward my tent, weaving through small trees and bushes, but decide not to stop; my husband isn’t awake yet. I keep walking further and deeper into the woods. At one point the strong smell of freshly ground coffee hits me head-on and I am sure I audibly exhale from a deep nasal-whistling in-breath. I am not quite running, but quickening. A few feet further and I see a small piece of cardboard propped up against the base of a tree. Written with a black marker it reads, “Monterrey Mud.”

Above the sign is a small shelf constructed of twigs and branches bound together with twine, the ends tied to the v-notch in the tree, about waist high, where the tree splits and begins to grow in two directions. On this counter, coffee grounds swirl in the largest glass French press I’ve ever seen. The fascination and anticipation of the moment is broken by a voice saying, “The mud will be ready in a couple of minutes.”

There are quart canning jars of unfiltered honey and aseptic box containers of organic soymilk beside the coffee. I look around in the way people do when they trip over their own feet, or when they find a $20 bill on the sidewalk. Does anybody else see this? If nobody sees me here in this café in the woods, is it happening? A thought breaks over me as I remember Dandelion saying to always bring your plate, spoon, and mug with you because, “you never know what you will find and you better be ready.” The coffee guy asks if I have my blissware with me and I say no. I smile realizing this is what it is called; in Rainbow parlance, free food is bliss.

No worries. Whirlwind offers me one of the kitchen’s mugs. He introduces himself and invites me to join the handful of others who have wandered in to sit on logs.
and a few folding chairs around the fire pit. While they wait for coffee and renewed consciousness, folks silently and randomly add a few sticks at a time to the ashes, occasionally a pine cone, mostly just from what they can reach lying around near their feet. Whirlwind snaps twigs in small pieces and tipi-stacks them carefully under the metal grill that sits squarely on top of four large stones. On the grill a large smoke-blackened stainless steel pot of water waits to reach a boil. Poking around at the ashes with a stick to uncover some embers, then pushing them together in a pile, Whirlwind fans these survivors of the night with another old piece of cardboard, encouraging a bright flame before settling back on his stump. The small sticks under the grate catch fire.

He has a large old-fashioned hand-cranked coffee grinder in his lap. It is a square wooden box with a small drawer at the bottom. The box is topped with an elaborate serpentine black metal handle. He makes large clock-wise sweeping motions with this forearm as he grinds the beans, setting free another waft of the coffee’s essential oils—the source of the cloud of pure coffee-ness I encountered on the trail. Whirlwind tells me that he and his buddy, Helpful, bring this coffee up from Belize and they roast it themselves in his garage in California. I am thinking: How much do you have to love coffee to go to Belize to buy green coffee beans, bring them back to the States, roast them on the west coast and drive them across the country, hiking the beans and all your coffee-making and camping gear two miles into the woods just to drink it? But that’s not the right question. When I think about it, it is more about how much do you have to love people who love coffee as much as you do, people who you don’t even know, to do all this, and give it away for free?
Whirlwind mentions there’s heavy cream in the cooler that will only last for today, because they have no more ice, so I should use it if I’m not vegan. As the full sun rises, happily caffeinated by my first cup of shade-grown organic coffee, made in the wilderness, over a wood fire, and gifted to me freely in a gesture of the extraordinary made ordinary, I stand in the amazement of my first morning at the Rainbow Gathering.

By mid-day, the woods are fully alive with the sound of chopping wood, drumming, talking, and music, all emanating from different distant spaces around me. The word is there are about 10,000 people so far, but the 4th of July, the focal day of the gathering is still a few days away. I respond to the call coming from the Musical Veggie kitchen to “Circle Up!” and look around at the group standing with me, hands clasped together. We are old and young, some “Dirty Kids,”¹ and weekend outdoor types in their catalog-perfect Patagonia gear. There are a few folks in blue jeans and t-shirts and a more than a few tie-dyed longhairs and Mr. Natural, wearing only his tam and long gauze fabric skirt. Tim-Bear is standing next to him, and Julia tells me how he tows the Musical Veggie Kitchen infrastructure in a trailer behind his truck to every gathering from his home in Texas. He is, this morning, as naked as the day he was born—save his ample kitchen apron. I am listening to all the animated talking between people beside me in the circle. All are welcome. We give thanks for the food, for each other, and we OM.

Before we eat breakfast—which is organic oatmeal, fresh fruit and all the fixings—the kitchen crew asks for volunteers to help wash dishes and to prep for the

¹ The term is a social designation originating with Millennials who self-identify as “travelers” or “Dirty Kids.” This group is characterized by spending long stretches of time on the road, frequently living outdoors, or in squats, traveling by hitchhiking, panhandling, or jumping trains. From a personal conversation with a self-proclaimed “Dirty Kid.” New Mexico 2013. Also see: http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/03/08/emily-kash-hopping-freight-trains/
evening meal. I volunteer. There is a call to help chop garlic for Elliot, a chef and restaurant owner in upstate New York, who does a pesto dinner at Musical Veggie every year. He says it’s his way of expressing gratitude for all that is good in his life. Elliot brought with him several white 5-gallon buckets of fresh organic basil processed with extra virgin olive oil. Here at the gathering he mixes in the fresh garlic and grated cheese from the large chunk of Parmigiano-Reggiano sitting on the plywood prep table. Tonight, his pesto will be tossed with pounds and pounds of pasta that Question Mark, who works for a major natural foods distributor, donated to the kitchen.

As I enter the kitchen, I am asked first to wash my hands using the foot pedal-operated hand washing system (dirty hands don’t contaminate other surfaces that way), and I marvel at the intricate system of plastic hoses connected to three 2-1/2 gallon recycled water jugs. The first is filled with soap, the second is clear water, and the third a light bleach solution. This serves as the dishwashing station for everyone who eats at Musical Veggie. The hoses connect the water bottles to a foot pump, and then back up to the bamboo frame to form a sort of spout. Below all of this there is a trough created from a plastic tarp to funnel the run-off water into a large bucket that can be emptied into the kitchen’s grey water pit.

As an annual event, the kitchen expects to feed three or four hundred people tonight—maybe more. After an hour or so, the flesh under my nails is stinging from the garlic, and my fingers are so sticky the smooth cloves of garlic become increasingly difficult to liberate from their papery skins. The kitchen is bustling. There is also a crew helping Dandelion wash lettuce for a salad she is making to accompany the pasta. Every year she carefully packs her little car with large cotton pillowcases full of lettuce from
her garden just to make a fresh salad to go with Elliot’s pesto. The kitchen volunteers carefully rinse each leaf of garden dirt, using water filtered through a high-tech, solar-powered system designed, paid for, and assembled here by Question Mark.

I’m working with men and women, some I know and others I do not. Some have never chopped garlic in their lives. As we work together around the plywood table, we laugh and talk, enjoy Henry the Fiddler and Julia playing music, the smell of the piney forest and ever-present wood smoke, the drumming from other camp circles in the distance, and the call-outs of “Welcome Home!” and “Lovin’ You!” to those newly arriving. Standing for hours on the soft pine needle floor of this outdoor woodland kitchen, I feel a growing sense of something remarkable—a peaceful something, an accepting something, a loving something, a transformative something—a tingling sense of wholeness my body experiences as the possibility of another way of being, as “part of.” It is not completely clear what is happening. I am emotionally and physically responding to the proximity of nature—and to my very real dependence on my relationship with it—to a modulating atmosphere that is the rhythm of people cooperating, the sounds of reunion and first meetings amid bird calls, drum circles, baby cries, music, and wind in the trees. It is the celebration of diversity as desirable. Here, in this kitchen, there are interactions between people that come from an open heart, and not from an open wallet, and magic that manifests when food, generously given and joyfully created together, is offered freely to all. I am changed.
CHAPTER 1: A PERMEABLE INTRODUCTION

The North American Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes is an event that first emerged in the mountains of Colorado in 1972 (Niman 2011, 32; Solnit 2009, 296). It was a self-organized expression of identity and a decentralized structure of resistance animated by young people who wished to reject oppressive mainstream values by identifying as a like-minded “tribe.” Part political resistance, part counterculture performance and celebration, and part spiritual communion, the gathering has continued to take place every year in the United States, forty-four years and counting, as a leaderless, free, and non-commercial happening. Now, in 2016, it brings together a tribe of young and old alike—ever in the context of “hippie” ideals of love and peace. The intent is still to learn how to live respectfully on the land and with each other. The Rainbow Gathering remains an extraordinary assembly by any measure.

I start the process of conducting a sensory and performance-focused ethnography at the Rainbow Gathering by reflecting on my first gathering. The act of performative, reflective writing provides me with a starting point. First, as a prologue, this narrative exercise literally begins the dissertation document, but in the act of recreating these stories, emotional responses that were experienced re-emerge. I re-encounter a time when my perceptions were changed, and it manifests now as momentary insights germinal in both their past and present. Writing about that first gathering, I am re-emplaced in spaces where money and trade were functioning differently, where bodies in proximity were manifesting leadership, organization, and governance, and where food was performing at the center of profoundly affirming and leveling spaces.
My dissertation research now undertakes an exploration of these same themes, fifteen years later, through fieldwork conducted at the 2016 North American Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes, held in the Green Mountains of Vermont. I focus on food from an interdisciplinary perspective, in ways that excavate and reveal connectedness. My research explores the ways food systems at the Rainbow Gathering enable diverse economies through acts of complex reciprocity and how food performs on multiple levels to create communitas within a self-organized assembly.

Food is not an incidental strand weaving through these structures. This research asserts a frame that interprets food as the principal ligament. I begin with the assumption of food as performative. Food performs on multiple levels, enacting through its presence (or absence) a clear understanding of who we are as individuals, while also constructing a sense of culture, home, community, and morality. My macro thesis posits human reality as a construction consequent to the foods we eat, where we eat it, and the relationships between those with whom it is (or is not) shared. Food creates strong bonds (negative and positive) between people, establishing cultures that influence organizational structures where social relationships mirror those we cultivate with the natural world.

There are many ways to analyze food as performative. As Cindy Spurlock writes, food is “rich with symbolism and contextually-produced meaning.” She adds, “As performed, [food] is capable of constructing communities and imaginaries, simultaneously drawing and obliterating boundaries” (2009, 6-7). This research is an expression of how I am invested in the exploration of food spaces as highly intersectional environments, understanding food, at all times, as intertwined with politics, ecology, culture, economics, and ethics. My interest here is to generate knowledge related to co-
creating, inhabiting, and manifesting profoundly affective, empowered, and political environments grounded in the experiential relationships between bodies and food. To address the complexity represented by this understanding of food in an interdisciplinary research context, I reference several touchstones throughout the process.

Touchstones

The objective of this study is to put food spaces at the center of sensory meaning making. It is an interdisciplinary investigation of interconnected, yet distinct elements existing within a multi-layered phenomenon. Within this complex construct, three major themes emerge as touchstones that guide and provide focus to my research and reflection. The first touchstone is the performance of food as embodied experience. The second is the praxis of self-organizing, and the third concerns the system of complex reciprocity. These three elements interrelate in the ultimate analysis of how food contributes to a sense of empowerment and resistance at the Rainbow Gathering. In this section I provide a brief orientation to the themes and suggest the underpinnings of more expansive theoretical discussions I offer in later chapters.

The Performance of Food as Embodied Experience

I have briefly outlined my understanding of how food has multiple ways of performing in our lives, but I have not addressed the choice to explore the facets of this assertion through an embodied experience. This approach is central to the first touchstone and to my overall exploration of the Rainbow Gathering as a phenomenon.

To begin, I am guided in my understanding of phenomena by Martin Heidegger’s writings. He attributes lived experience as enabling the manifestation of phenomena. Phenomena cannot be fully grasped by segregating mental processes of engagement from
physical ones; rather he suggests it is within acts of being—active relationships with others and with objects—that phenomena are revealed and can be studied. Heidegger describes phenomenological research as a reflexive approach to “encountering being and the structures of being” (1996 [1926], 32). My embodied research stance is consistent with the phenomenological attitude, which is to examine what it feels like to “find ourselves in relation with others…and other things” (Vagle 2014, 20). To explore food at the Rainbow Gathering as a phenomenon, therefore, is to investigate how it feels to physically and emotionally constitute identities and spaces with others in the relationships that exist between bodies and with the performativity of food.

As a researcher, my goal is to encompass a larger dimension than being accountable for simply all I can see. To engage with an embodied, sensory ethnography is to offer a “theoretical exploration of sensory experience, perception, sociality, knowing, knowledge, practice and culture” (Pink 2015, 4). In this sense, my work is a process of participating in ways of knowing that emerge from being part of a dynamic assembly of bodies.

To know food is to experience emotion through the senses. Especially when shared, food and food spaces generate a sensory understanding of self, culture, place, and potential. At the Rainbow Gathering, the kitchens are a key site for experiencing how bodies congregate to create distinct and powerful emotional affective environments and how foodways can modulate these atmospheres (Michels 2015, 259). To understand what this means, I point to an experience often described by those who have attended dinner parties, barbeques, or family gatherings—places where food is being created. Despite hosts offering any number of welcoming places to socialize, it is often reported that
inevitably, for some reason, people end up gathering in the kitchen. It is the “some reason,” particular to food spaces that interests me.

Exploring the performance of food as an embodied experience is an attempt to analyze how bodies and affective environments combine to assert identity, power, and potential. What is it, felt in the rhythms of Rainbow kitchens, seen in acts of transformation, smelled in the aroma of food, or physically experienced in the kitchen dance between bodies, that can inform scholars about food and its capacity to modulate, concentrate, or intensify the affect of certain environments? What of the relationship between this modulated environment and the physical desire to experience it with others? Cooperatively experienced food environments also suggest a role for affect in catalyzing a sense of collective identity or purpose. My interest is in experiencing, observing, and hearing stories to consider how food and food spaces are experienced physically between people, and how this expresses a “sense” of knowing. I am curious about how this type of “intercorporeal knowing,” might manifest as a factor in “seamlessly coordinating emerging activities” (Hindmarsh and Pilnick 18), a concept that relates directly to the second touchstone. By experiencing the interaction of bodies with food, foodways, and food spaces, attending to sensory and affective environments, I reference this first touchstone to explore how action and affect pass between bodies to assert identity, hold power, and establish charged spaces.

The Praxis of Self-Organizing

The second touchstone incorporates the concept of self-organizing with praxis. I define praxis as action (as opposed to theory), but specifically, practices that relate to theoretical constructs. My research examines the ways people put into action the theories
of self-organizing. The actions of self-organizing I focus on are in the context of food systems of the Rainbow Gathering.

To provide some orientation, the concept of self-organization has emerged from complexity theories associated with quantum physics. Over time, science has grappled with observations that the “rules” applied to our universe cannot, in fact, be adequately conceptualized as linear or consistent within a cause and effect paradigm. These inquiries led to the study of quantum physics, where discoveries at the sub-atomic level revealed patterns of behavior that create order from chaos in the creation of complete systems.

I frame my engagement with this concept as chaosmos, a term which combines the concepts of cosmos (order) and chaos (disorder). As a term, it emerged from the writing of James Joyce in *Finnegan’s Wake*, and has been theorized most notably by Gilles Deleuze (1968). Chasmos is described as

> a chiasmic concept of the world as a field or mutual and simultaneous interference and convergence, and of the subjective and objective, an endless realm of chance which nevertheless displays a persistent tendency toward pattern and order.

(Kuberski 1994, 3)

This complexity dynamic is common to all systems—this includes weather systems, environmental systems, and even the functioning of human bodies. In the symbiotic relationships between order and disorder represented by chaosmos, forms that move toward order are considered to be complex and adaptive. In theory, these complex adaptive systems have many properties, but among them are the qualities of emergence and self-organizing (Boulton, Allen and Bowman 2015, 8).
I am unaware of significant studies that explore the social dynamics of food systems as a complex adaptive system, and I do not provide a comprehensive excavation of this theory in my research. Yet, I do use this framework as a guide. I proceed, with the assumption that food systems at the Rainbow Gathering do function as a complex adaptive system and I use this as the frame for exploring the praxis of self-organizing related to food. While there is a suggested structure for the Gathering, because of the multiple variables interacting with each other, each assembly manifests somewhat differently. I presuppose the systems of food production, distribution, aggregation, access, preparation, consumption, and resource recovery are each one, at multiple levels, deeply interconnected with social, political, environmental, and economic systems, and that self-organization occurs as many integrated local interactions co-create a whole that becomes greater than the sum of its parts (Kane and Higham 2015, 146).

Self-organized systems are adaptive in their ability to organize and reorganize in response to changing conditions (Waldrop 1992, 11). In this, there is tension between chaos and organization. This place of “in-between-ness,” a term coined by affect theorists (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 2), is called the “edge of chaos” by complexity scholars (Waldrop 1992, 11). Many conceptualize this change-space, where the potential for becoming begins to materialize; however, I approach an understanding of it as expressed by the embodied experience of beings and emotions in action. The material reality of food spaces as change-spaces is what I bring forward in this research, seeking insight through a complexity lens into the way collective action is considered. When I think of a Rainbow Gathering I am reminded of what Anna Tsing writes about “assemblages” as not quite fixed or bound. She asks, “How do gatherings sometimes become ‘happenings,”
that is greater than the sum of their parts (Tsing 2015)? I find this to be a particularly salient question for a leaderless gathering. I reference this, in combination with the second touchstone, to consider “Rainbow-style” food environments as a generative model.

Lastly, with regard to the relationships between action and theory, self-organization in its social context can be considered the praxis of anarchist theory. The praxis of self-organizing is an autonomous, decentralized, non-hierarchical, and democratic social process of prefiguration that entails being and becoming at the same time. In this sense, the second touchstone encourages me to reflect on an affective food experience as empowered identity and resistance to oppression through the embodied practices of self-organizing.

Most of what is known about self-organizing in social systems is theoretical. What this study offers is a naturalistic approach. This study is uniquely based on the “ground-truthed” practices of over forty years of self-organized assemblies. As such, exploring the praxis of self-organizing—in and of itself—represents a significant contribution to knowledge that complements theoretical models.

Understanding self-organizing is a growing area of interest in the academy, and in the sphere of business, yet it is primarily theory that guides the development of tools that attempt to capture the dynamics. For example, artificial neural-network algorithms related to self-organizing have been created for use in computer science (Kohonen 1997). In the field of chemistry, there is interest in the possibilities inherent in self-organizing biochemical cycles (Orgel 2000). Urban planners and those interested in economic development also look to theoretical models of self-organizing (Rende and Donduran
The business world is seeking to understand what leadership looks like in complex systems and how self-organized collaborative tools can enhance productivity (Riedl and Woolley 2016), and researchers interested in social change are beginning to work with tools, such as the Constellation Model, to understand how self-organizing, or open-source networks, can enhance collaboration (Surman and Surman 2008).

Complex Reciprocity

One of the most obvious aspects of the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes is its structure as a completely free and non-commercial assembly. This rejection of mainstream economic principles can be understood as a collective act of resistance. The experience of co-creating a free society, albeit in this case, an ephemeral and temporally-based one, is an active affirmation that human beings can organize around systems of mutual aid, and more specifically, how this can function by establishing the primacy of food and shelter as irreducible human rights. My third touchstone provides a frame to investigate how an alternative economy of complex reciprocity manifests, with attention to the networks that support it.

Reciprocity as a system and component of exchange is well studied; however, the concept of complex reciprocity is emergent. While an expansive discussion on the topic is not the focus of my study, establishing a baseline for the concept of complex reciprocity is essential for understanding how this third touchstone emerges in the research. Knowledge of the basic idea enables a discussion and analysis of experiencing alternatives to capital within food spaces. Emplaced in the context of complex adaptive systems, and related to the second theme of the praxis of self-organizing, I explore complex reciprocity in the sense of how food drives relationships where exchange takes
place without the expectation of a one-to-one return from the specific individual with whom the exchange has occurred.

What is notable here is the condition of trust required for participation in a system of complex reciprocity. One must trust the system will provide for the needs of each individual, based on autonomous asynchronous exchanges. This is the exclusive form of exchange at the Rainbow Gathering, augmented further by the group agreeing that exchanges will never be of a commercial nature. In the Rainbow system of complex reciprocity, the infrastructure to support up to 30,000 people for several weeks is co-created without any payment for services or materials.

My interest is to investigate the motivation, social networks, and norms that enable a “free” gathering. This is an engagement with “bringing into vision” the Rainbow alternative to capital, as a contribution to constructing a new economic ontology (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 616). J.K. Gibson-Graham argue for disrupting capitalism’s relatively unchallenged ideological density with a “queering of economic identity” (2001, 264), a means of breaking down the acceptability of socially constructed homogeneity through valorizing economic diversity. In this new “ontology of economic difference,” Gibson-Graham attempt to open space for creative, non-capitalist initiatives to flourish (2008, 613). Valérie Fournier describes this as “at least as much a question of decolonising the imagination as one of enacting new practices” (Fournier 2008, 534).

Guided by this third touchstone, I attend to the relationships that make possible the food systems at the Rainbow Gathering and explore the complex relationships between the system of capitalism and that of non-commercial complex reciprocity. To what degree are the interactions between these two systems co-dependent? I am inspired
by the reflections of Anna Tsing who notes that, “within the constraints and possibilities of capitalism,” the structure of the market should be imaginable beyond the predilection for examining only “one powerful current at a time” (2015, 5). Like Gibson-Graham, she validates the existence of economic diversity, but looks deeper into the dependencies capitalism has on alternative economic forms. It is not enough to establish that economic diversity co-exists within the capitalist paradigm as an alternative. In a type of genealogical exploration of the social networks existing between Rainbow kitchens and provisioning based on commerce, I examine the food systems at the gathering as “pericapitalist spaces,” spheres where capitalist and non-capitalist forms of social exchange interact in a system of some interdependence (Tsing 2015, 66).

I approach this through historical research, observation and participation, reflections on my own Rainbow history, as well as turning to the oral histories I collected in the field, which I interpret as “hipstories of the present” (Foucault 1995, 12). The idea of evoking a Foucauldian reference to the phrase “history of the present” finds its source in mimicking Foucault’s own stance on utilizing theorists. He writes, “The only valid tribute to thought…is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest (Foucault 1980, 53-54). But, at the same time, I do read Foucault’s use of history of the present as an acknowledgement for the need to disrupt traditional ways of recounting history. To do less is to reinforce genealogies, that through their re-telling, entrench the past and direct the future. David Garland writes, “Foucault’s use of the genealogical method and his writing of ‘histories of the present’ demonstrate how historical research can be brought to bear on contemporary institutions in ways that are powerfully critical and revealing” (2014, 379).
While the research emerging from this touchstone applies to scholarship in food studies, exchange theory, and economics, it is also my intent to contribute knowledge to scholarship concerned with political economy and social change. I believe that self-organized, creative moral engagements with economies of trust and mutual respect are critical experiments. At a time when the capitalist system is being implicated in the destruction of the planet (Klein 2014, Chomsky 1999), in producing immeasurable human suffering for many in the pursuit of the accumulation of wealth for a very few (Picketty 2014), and when capitalism is being widely critiqued for the outcomes of a global hegemony based on a neoliberal ideologies (Plehwe, Walpen, and Neunhöffer 2006), understanding the ways people occupy and animate alternate spaces of exchange within the dominant system is important work.

Roy G. Biv

My engagement with a sensory-based ethnography of the Rainbow Gathering is focused on embodied experiences with the social, political, and economic underpinnings of its food systems infrastructure. This exploration is guided by three main themes: the performance of food, the praxis of self-organizing, and the system of complex reciprocity. It is important to note that in this complex interdisciplinary approach, my role, as a researcher is, itself, performative. As I discuss later, Rainbow Gatherings are familiar territory for me, which requires a transparent and deeply reflexive response. I understand positionality in this context as the responsibility to reflect on the fact that I am

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2 This “name” is a mnemonic device to remember all of the colors in the rainbow and is created by putting together the first letter of each color in order. I use it here as a metaphor for putting together all the elements of research (or “stratum” of the Rainbow).
at the same time an agent as well as being acted upon, and what I know is equally a manifestation of the social made possible by what it is that I intend (Vagle 2016, 113).

To address this, I explore the nuances of a “performative I,” a position that “gains authority less by proprietary claims on experience than by dispersion in, and through the representation of, experiences that produce a changed and changing subject” (Pollock 2007, 252). This is a type of “writing as doing,” which Della Pollack describes as writing that becomes itself. She explains performative writing as the process to become its own means and ends…turning itself inside out…not sense or meaning per se but making writing perform: Challenging the boundaries of reflexive textualities; relieving writing of its obligations under the name of “textuality”; shaping, shifting, testing language. Practicing language. Performatively writing.

Writing performatively. (1998, 75)

Pollock’s ideas are evidenced in the structure of this dissertation, which is scripted in a hybrid writing form. While there are chapters that represent more traditional academic forms of scholarship and analysis, there are sections of performative writing, or what is also referred to as creative non-fiction. In using this approach, I engage writing as a tool to explore myself as “having been written into new ways of knowing” (Pollock 2005, 251).

In the end, and to begin, this project is an excursion into a counterculture world that engages with food spaces as a means to prefigure equality, accord empowerment, support resistance to oppression and create a sense of community. John Holloway describes the acts of prefiguring relationships, communities, and economic systems—precisely what one encounters at the Rainbow Gathering—as taking “the moment or
space into our own hands... to make it a place of self-determination, refusing to let money (or any other alien force) determine what we do” (2010, 21). He uses the image of a crack to describe the spaces created when “a different type of doing” is asserted (Holloway, 21). In a complex adaptive system, there are no precise controls over where a crack will go, but it can still be said of a crack, that it initiates change. To gain a deeper understanding of change is the ultimate motivation for this research.

At the core, this is an interdisciplinary dissertation on the social ecology of food. In its broadest sense, this work contributes reflections and analyses that arise from an experience with food during the collective performance that is a Rainbow Gathering, in which the effects are those of liberation, a rupturing of domination, and the opening of pathways for establishing moral connections to each other and the natural world. Within the experience of food and foodways freely shared at the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes, I suggest there is the generative capacity to catalyze greater leveling of social relationships—this, perhaps, being the crack in the system from which a more just and inclusive world may emerge.
CHAPTER 2: COMPLEX INTERDISCIPLINARITY

In this chapter I discuss my approach to research and dissertation writing. I detail the theories, literatures, and influences that form what is an interdisciplinary undertaking rooted in a complexity paradigm and punctuated by a hybrid form of academic dissertation writing. My intent here is to provide clarity in this multifaceted project. I begin by outlining the ways I understand and undertake meaning-making. I offer a common focus for this project, and subsequently, I review key concepts. In the final section of this chapter I detail two research questions. In concert with the guiding themes, these questions establish the context and parameters of my research and form the basis for my final analysis and conclusions in Chapter 5.

Exploring Meaning

My objective is to put food spaces at the center of meaning making in an interdisciplinary investigation. Drawing upon the theories, methodologies, and literatures generated through the academic studies of Food Systems, Communications, Sociology, Political Philosophy, and Economic Anthropology, my interest is to weave together sensory and performance-based ways of knowing that occur within the context of the experience of food and food systems at the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes. The themes that guide this interdisciplinary approach—the performance of food, the praxis of self-organizing, and the social networks of complex reciprocity—excavate and reveal the distinct, yet interconnected, social, environmental, political, and economic underpinnings of food systems infrastructure and practice as part of a specific countercultural phenomenon.
I make use of story from oral histories collected in the field. I speak with people in food spaces or in a context associated with food systems. My approach to these stories is as data, and as data points, engaging in sensory-based ethnographic practices expressed through a performative writing lens. My process privileges multimodality, multisensoriality, and the performative (Pink 2011, 261). I explore the stories through experiences in spaces where food and bodies demonstrate the presence, density, and potential of affective atmospheres (Michels 2015, 255). The process of meeting people and collecting oral histories represents my experiment with “hipstories of the present.” As discussed earlier, this is an obvious twist based on Foucault’s concept of a “history of the present” (1995, 31). The word hipstory is used at Rainbow Gatherings to describe an open-storied history, and I employ the term in the context of exploring the iterative and participatory practice of creating history. These hipstories of the present serve as a record of the experiences, feelings and beliefs of those at the Gathering, but they also enact counter-memory as a disruption of historical homogeneity, as well as “outsider” interpretation, providing an entry point for critical theory in my analysis (Roth 1981, 45).

If this research seems to be a complex construct, it is intentional. I believe my role, as a scholar is to examine phenomena and generate new knowledge through forms that reflect the character of the present. To live in the world today is to know, at any given moment, the simultaneous nature of multiple local-to-global realities. Twenty-four-hour news and access to hyperconnected media make possible an awareness of, and engagement with, events and information connecting people globally in ways that are simultaneously, intimate and remote. Pluralities define an existence where it is easily

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3 “Collectively told oral history of the Rainbow Family. The Rainbow Hipstory is recited each year at the North American Gathering. Anyone is free to join in the telling of the hipstory” (Niman 1997, 288).
possible to be both here, there, and in a virtual cloud. Corporations are, at once, regarded as for-profit business entities and citizens (Moon, Crane, and Matten 2005, 431). The influence of globally shared political and economic ideologies impact the planet’s resources, local environments, and cultures in ways that are measurable, immeasurable, and occurring on differing scales (Chomsky 1999, 125). Uncertainty and unpredictability appear as prominent features of existence and association at all levels, challenging older notions of spatial dynamics and temporality (McDaniel and Driebe 2005, 3).

I identify the awareness of the conditions of the current post-modern experience as emerging from the dynamics of chaosmos, or complexity—a paradigm where linearity, the observed, and cause-and-effect find less relevance as sense-making tools than more fluid, felt, and asynchronous perspectives. Zygmunt Bauman uses fluidity and liquidity as metaphors to describe the nature of the present, evoking a state of being he describes as moving beyond modernity—the “solids” of a stagnant and entrenched society now having melted into the dynamics of a “liquid modernity” (2000, 2).

If significant knowledge is to be gathered in these times, I posit that scholars must acknowledge the limitations of research that reflects singular schools of thought, or proclaims truth as a derived from a binary or mechanistic worldview. Jerome Bruner suggests that “the changes and disruptions that have become so much a feature of modern life” require that acts of making meaning come from being deliberately cognizant “of how we come to our knowledge and as conscious as we can be about the values that lead us to our perspectives” (1990, 30). With this in mind, my research is intended to reveal complexity, insert the experience of chaosmos into the dissertation-as-artifact, and to expand what can be known about the world through engaging with food on multiple
levels and through several academic disciplines. Interdisciplinary research and writing holds open a broad space for new topics. Innovative inquires and hybrid methodologies enable dynamic meaning making derived from the free association between disciplines, discoveries, and theoretical insights.

My approach to research and dissertation writing arises as a response to the complexity I experience on a daily basis. An example to support this applied perspective is provided in an essay on interdisciplinarity where Carol Becker writes

…we no longer have the option to remain isolate in any intellectual or practical way; everything has become hybrid, including us. We are impregnated with multiple cultures. Even if we only speak one language and exist in what we think of as a homogeneous reality, the complexity of the world seeps in and as this breadth overwhelms and confuses us, it also enriches our existence. (2004, 204)

Designing an interdisciplinary dissertation is an exercise in discovering significance in the interrelationships of diverse schools of thought and experience. The challenge, therefore, is not to bind the parameters of exploration, or to make a subject diffuse; rather, it is to find an interdisciplinary structure that establishes a common focus for scholarly interpretation. Elizabeth Oughton and Louise Bracken write about framing interdisciplinary research and they suggest

Finding a common focus is analogous to directing a light onto the research area which provides a colour, depth, and intensity to the research object and creates a less rigid, more porous and softer edge to the research problem. (2009, 391)

Having described, in general terms, my approach to making meaning, my goal, in the remainder of this chapter, is to provide details on the soft and permeable edges of my
interdisciplinary research, to provide substance to the complex conceptual foundations on which it is designed. However, before discussing the theoretical infrastructure animating my engagement with the touchstone themes and key concepts, I intend to establish and expand upon the common focus of this research. To do so is to illuminate the cladding common to all aspects of this dissertation and locate my work where I suggest all food matters intersect, something I call the social ecology of food.

*A Social Ecology of Food*

Although I have embedded my work in a diverse interdisciplinary context, I consider myself, above all, to be a food systems scholar. The study of food is a relatively new formal endeavor in academia. At present, in the process of a field defining itself, food studies represent the interests of multiple disciplines and reflect different perspectives (Wilk 2015, 471). Over several decades, in the absence of recognized food studies departments within the academy, the published literature related to food has come from a variety of disciplines, including Agriculture, Environmental Studies, Geography, Health and Nutrition, Philosophy, Political Science, and Sociology. Most recently, however, the emphasis has been on cultivating an interdisciplinary paradigm for food systems scholarship. According to an article on food studies in the *New York Times*, there is a recognition in academia that “food is not just relevant, but critical to dozens of disciplines. It’s agriculture; it’s business; it’s health; it’s the economy; it’s the environment; it’s international relations; it’s war and peace” (Spiegel 2012). Even so, there has been uneven acceptance of food studies as holistic, or a concern of some universality. Anthropologist Richard Wilk, Director of Indiana University’s Food Studies program, states, “Holistic food studies are growing rapidly in traditional liberal arts
colleges, including the humanities, arts and social sciences, but so far they have very limited connections with natural sciences including food science and agriculture” (2012, 474).

Although there are certainly exceptions, such as with nutrition studies, it has been my experience that in many cases, the study of food in higher education has bifurcated with food studies programs closely associated with explorations via the humanities (history, literature, and cultural gastronomy) and the orientation of food systems programs (the study of interactions between the systems of food production, distribution, aggregation, access, preparation, consumption, and resource recovery) emerging from the sciences.

It is worth mentioning these active dynamics within the study of food in academia because the idea of a social ecology of food is my own, and not formally a part of either food studies or food systems configurations. In an emergent field, I believe there is much to be gained by attending to concepts that are expansive and amplify the value of diverse ways of knowing. Recognizing the complexities of a living social ecology as a principal sphere of influence on the ways food is regarded in society holds promise as a productive, and currently under-theorized, framework for academia. Food is a decidedly intersectional space; it occupies (but is not limited to) that which is historical, scientific, economic, literary, psychological, physical, cultural, and political. The concept of a social ecology of food encourages interdisciplinarity. As such, it stands to enrich academic research through the complexity of the construct and the collaborative opportunities it invites.
I use the construct of a social ecology of food in this dissertation as a common focus for the interdisciplinary approach my research and studies have taken, but equally, I suggest it creates valuable spaces for those who study food to wholly consider the complex implications of connectedness. I believe there is new knowledge to be gained from the interaction between food studies and other disciplines, especially by engaging with theories of complexity. I characterize these interconnected relationships that constitute a food system as a complex adaptive system. In this context, my view (as one who is interested in structures of change) is that creativity, collaboration, adaptation, and resiliency become the success strategies of a system seeking balance through self-organization. In this way, if recognized as complex and adaptive, a social ecology of food can become a networked frame for guiding the emergence of change.

The view of a social ecology of food promotes an awareness of food systems as inextricably connected to cultural and political systems that reveal a direct relationship between social practices and the condition of the natural world. As I hope to demonstrate, this approach also enables me to explore the capacity for social change present in the sense of solidarity, empowerment, and resistance cultivated through socio-ecological-based food networks.

Early in my graduate studies for a Master’s degree in Sustainable Food Systems, it became apparent that while the nutritional, economic, and environmental aspects of food were eliciting a robust response from the research community, comparatively less was being published about the social complexities involved in creating a more just and resilient food system. Even truer still, was a lack of scholarship on the implications of social relationships within alternative, or “local” food systems in terms of their potential
for catalyzing transformative social change. At that time I became interested in engaging with the concept of social ecology, a school of thought associated with the late social theorist Murray Bookchin, but having deep roots in the earlier writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Elisée Reclus, and Patrick Geddes (Clark 1997, 7-8).4 This genealogical line of social ecology is linked to social and environmental theories regarding “mutual aid, political and economic decentralization, human-scaled production, communitarian values, and the history of democracy” (Clark, 7). It is from this lineage of social ecology that I draw my primary references, however, my theories of a social ecology of food are thoroughly inoculated with the philosophical thought of Félix Guattari, who arrived at this term through his theories regarding ecosophy, an ethico-political stance for social change rooted in the relationships between the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity (2000 [1989], 28). Guattari represents the specific principle of social ecology as concerning “the development of affective and pragmatic cathexis in human groups of differing sizes” (Guattari 2000 [1989], 60).

Influenced by a radical political philosophy, Murray Bookchin’s contemporary social ecology combines ideas of ecology and anarchism (Biehl 2015, 90). Bookchin describes social ecology as the recognition that the most serious ecological problems we face on this planet “originate in deep-seated social problems” (1993). He argues it is crucial to acknowledge the direct connection between ecological crises and social struggles, making the point that social structures of hierarchy and oppression, reinforced

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4 Karl Marx also made theoretical connections between the social and the ecological; however, Marx’s critique focused more specifically on the “nature and logic of capitalism as a specific mode of production” (Foster 2010, 107).
through capitalism, normalize relationships of domination in the natural world (1993).
Bookchin’s central thesis is that an economic system privileging profit from exploitation, establishes hierarchical and oppressive relationships as normative across the board— between people and with the environment. The position of social ecologists is that without actively working to dissolve the larger social structures that support domination in the lived experiences of human beings, the crises of the planet’s natural environments—including global climate change—will never be rectified.

For my research, I build upon the environmental arguments of social ecology through a specific concentration on food systems. I address the theories and components of what constitutes a food system later in this section, but I will make the point here that my interest in establishing a social ecology of food is also to disrupt tendencies for homogeneity in what constitutes environmentalism by inserting food systems as an imperative component in the critical discourse of ecological concerns.

From a social perspective, conceptualizing a social ecology of food framework for my research is informed by critical theory and relates to the relationships between culture, power, and emancipatory democracy (Steinberg and Kincheloe 2010, 144). Complex links are revealed between the social relationships embedded in cultural, economic, and political ideological systems and how this relates to what people eat as determining the future of the planet, vis-à-vis extracted fossil fuels and mined minerals, energy use, biodiversity, and the subsequent quality of air, soil, and water as commons.

Although a complex construction itself, I suggest the social ecology of food to be the meta focus of my interdisciplinary investigation of food at the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes. I understand the performance of food, the praxis of self-organizing, and the
social networks of complex reciprocity—the three touchstone themes that guide this research—as adding a significant dimension to a social ecology of food research approach. Each of these themes engages with socio-ecological relationships. The subtleties of these interactions are at the heart of necessary conversations examining the avoidance of cultural deterioration or planetary collapse through achieving a state of resiliency. Scholars Beddoe et al., describe resilient dynamics as a “socio-ecological regime shift” which entails “a culture embedded in, and co-evolving with, its ecological context” (Beddoe, et al. 2009, 2483). With the porous interdisciplinary edges of this research meeting at a social ecology of food perspective, my goal is to generate knowledge from exploring dynamic, interdependent human and environmental systems, and to offer critical scholarship that contributes disruption, complexity, and diversity to the food studies discourse.

Building Key Concepts

Building on the descriptions of the touchstone themes I provide in Chapter 1, and establishing in this chapter the common focus of my research as being a social ecology of food, I proceed in this section to outline the key concepts contained within the themes I employ, discussing my positions as well as the associated theories and literatures I draw upon in my research, analysis, and dissertation writing. I identify these key concepts as follows: food systems, critical theory and sensory ethnography, affect, performativity, self-organizing, and complex reciprocity.

Food Systems

I use the concept of food systems to construct a frame for exploring the complex network of social, environmental, and economic relationships that exist within the
singular task of feeding tens of thousands of people at the Rainbow Gathering. I also investigate the constituent parts of a food system as performative spaces where, together, bodies and food contribute to the transmission of affect (Brennan 2004, 3), a concept I discuss in greater detail in the section on critical theory and sensory ethnography. As a working definition, food systems refers to the complex interactions between the diverse systems of food production, distribution, aggregation, access, preparation, consumption, and resource recovery. As part of the examination of the relationships in and between these component systems, it is also understood they are each dynamically engaged with economic, environmental, social, and political systems on multiple scales—local to global. Often the term food studies is used interchangeably with the concept of the study of food systems. For the purposes of my research, I understand food systems to be a very specific holistic, systems-based approach to understanding food, and in this way, as being distinct from the more generalized term of food studies.

As I discussed earlier, the study of food and food systems is a contemporary endeavor. Much of the published literature on food systems relates to critiques of the dominant globalized industrial model. In many ways, the discourse on food systems is emerging from a need to understand lived experiences within a model for food production and distribution that, over time, has become increasingly industrialized, globalized, and now, highly corporatized (Jaffee and Howard 2009, Heffernan 2000). Arguably, the foremost use of the term “food systems” implies a method of study used to consider alternatives in a form that privileges relocalization, or what is sometimes called the re-building of community-based foodsheds (Ackerman-Leist 2013). A foodshed is a spatial construct borrowed from environmental studies. Like the idea of a watershed, that
defines the geophysical area associated with the origins of a given body of water, a
foodshed represents the area that is formed by mapping where food for an individual or
community is produced. This type of food systems-based socio-geographical framing
supports the argument that scale is a critical factor in what is problematic with a
globalized food system (Union of Concerned Scientists, n.d.).

Considering what has been published, I characterize the discourse on food
systems in the United States in three basic ways: 1) the call for
local/regional/community-based control of the means of agricultural production; 2) the
creation of food distribution and production systems that are fair, ecologically
sustainable, and accessible to all; 3) an approach to food system reform that builds
community wealth, well-being, and resilience. These ideas are expressed in a wide range
of terms. They have been referred to as civic agriculture (Lyson 2000, 2004; DeLind
2002; Lyson and Guptill 2004), values-added agriculture (Ikerd 2008), food sovereignty
(Holt-Giménez 2009; Alkon 2013), the food revolution (Pollan 2009; Oliver 2010),
community-based food systems (Ackerman-Leist 2013; Conner and Levine 2006;
Feenstra 2002), food democracy (Hassanein 2003) the local food movement (DeLind
2003; Olson 2002), sustainable agriculture (Kirschenmann 2010, 50; Horrigan, Lawrence
and Walker. 2002), the alternative agrifood movement (Friedland 2010; Allen et al.
2003), as well as by many other labels.

I conceive of the study of food systems as an inherently interdisciplinary
undertaking. For example, by understanding food production and distribution as
interconnected systems, the study of food systems clarifies how it is that what we eat and
where that food comes from connects with the social, environmental, and economic
factors that determine biodiversity and the eco-integrity of the planet. Food systems studies relate agricultural practices to the quality of the air, soil, and water. It is through a systems-based study of food that it becomes possible to demonstrate how the mainstream American diet of inexpensive food and all-season availability is responsible for high energy use and the externalized costs of pollution, predicated on cheap and unlimited access to extracted fossil fuels and mined minerals. Understanding every element of food, from seed to compost, as being part of larger complex systems disrupts tendencies to overlook existing foodways as complicit in the most serious crises facing the planet. At a time when the composition of the earth’s atmosphere warrants immediate action to avoid climate catastrophe, it becomes essential to note the findings of the Climate Institute which state, “agricultural processes comprise 54 percent of methane emissions, roughly 80 percent of nitrous oxide emissions, and virtually all carbon dioxide emissions tied to land use” (Climate Institute 2010). Where drought has been reported as the catalyst for violence and civil unrest (von Uexkull et al. 2016, 12391) and mass human migration (Kelly et al. 2015, 3245) studies in food systems bring a more powerful and comprehensive reading to the knowledge that across the globe, the agricultural sector is the largest consumer of water (Soria 2013).

Establishing food systems as the point of entry for my inquiries at the Rainbow Gathering, accomplishes several things. It places a type of “big picture” frame on the study of one scale, and within one construct, as the basis for a valuable comparative analysis of the generative possibilities of Rainbow food systems on other scales and in other constructs. Also, as stated initially, a food systems focus provides a mechanism for how to characterize the sum of the efforts and interactions required to feed thousands of
people living off the grid in a national forest for free. Equally, food systems consciousness is a way to uncover relationships that speak to power dynamics, that discover structures, actions, and environments that “disrupt and challenge the status quo” (Kinchella 2002, 87), and in this way, engage with elements of critical theory, discussed in the following section.

Critical Theory and Sensory Ethnography

Ethnography is defined broadly as a “holistic approach to the study of cultural systems” (Whitehead 2004, 5). Traditionally, case studies involve fieldwork that places qualitative data collection in the realm of a researcher’s lived (or embodied) experience. When Whitehead talks about a holistic approach, I understand this to suggest a dynamic process of engaging with a culture through its multiple attributes. He asserts that culture is comprised of shared idea-systems in motion, flexible and changing, and suggests culture creates meaning, the foundation for constructing identities, communicating realities, and intersubjectivities. By Whitehead’s reckoning, culture is historically produced, functional, suggests values, and can be expressions of patterns, which are influenced by physical and social environments (Whitehead 2004, 5). Other scholars, such as Judith Preissle and Linda Grant, specify ethnography as the study of the culture of a group in the context of events that may be open-ended (Preissle and Grant 2004, 164).

Culture is described by Clifford Geertz as a web (Geertz 1973, 311). In this, I understand his use of the word web to indicate that a “cultural system” is best understood in a complexity framework; that is to say, he validates cultural order being that which emerges from chaos. Chaos, in this case, being the intersecting layers of semiotic
significance that we self-generate, or as Geertz’s refers to it, “the sort of piled-up structures of inference and implication through which an ethnographer is continually trying to pick his way” (Geertz, 313). Geertz’s approach to ethnography as a means to study culture, therefore, is one of interpretation seeking meaning, relying upon “thick description” (Geertz, 312). He notes the challenge for ethnographic research is in establishing how to “grasp and then render” the data available to the researcher (Geertz, 314).

I discuss my sensory approach to “grasping and rendering” later in this section, but in terms of ethnography and the study of culture, this methodology is, for me, a clear choice. The themes I examine are embedded within a study group fully illustrative of the many attributes of culture as described, but with an interesting difference. The Rainbow Gathering is commonly referred to as “counterculture,” not a culture outright, or even a subculture. The first use of the word counterculture was used in the early 1950s, to characterize activities running “counter” to established society by Talcott Parsons in his text, *The Social System* (Boyer 2013, 263). A counterculture is now recognized as different from a subculture, which is derived from the dominant culture and exists within it, a counterculture is defined as existing fully in opposition to the dominant culture, implying a group with a deeply political agenda. While the word counterculture is most widely associated with activities emerging in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States of America, and is almost exclusively used to describe the Rainbow Gathering and those who attend it, I employ it as a contested term. The Rainbow Gathering does enact values that are not consistently expressed in the dominant culture, however, it is problematic to suggest, especially as concerns the economic structure of the gathering, that the ability to
support tens of thousands of people, especially within a bounded period of time, could be accomplished without something less than full opposition to the dominant culture. I explore this particular concept in greater detail in a later section, through the lens of understanding complex reciprocity, diverse economies, and establishing an ontology of economic difference (J.K. Gibson Graham 2006, 5).

Clearly, conventional ethnography provides a vehicle to explore an intimate and very human “ground truthed” cultural experience through an embodied immersion in the topics and setting. However, studying a group whose identity and practice is continually constructed through the performance of active resistance to the dominant culture, as well as acknowledging a situation where “federal government law-enforcement officials now systematically harass and persecute Rainbow Gathering attendees wherever they gather (Niman 2011, 230), I am pressed to explore beyond traditional ethnographic methods. One way I do this is by combining an ethnographic approach with critical theories. While I stop short of assuming a claim to critical ethnography, for reasons I will expand upon next, critical theory renders insights on issues of structural power and domination. This relates to instances of confrontation with authority as well as the self-organized infrastructure and praxis of the food systems at the gathering. My interest is in learning how food engages people in such a way that the effect is of liberation—a rupturing of domination—configuring order out of chaos and prefiguring a more empowered, just, democratic, and horizontal world.

To a degree, I consider traditional Marxist criticism regarding issues of exploitation connected with capitalism. I also look to critical theorist Antonio Gramsci on cultural hegemony, as well as Michel Foucault on histories of the present, conformity,
and the nature of progress. However, I am predominantly guided in my exploration and application of critical cultural studies, by social anarchist discourse. To this end, ideas about mutual aid, egalitarianism, consensus, cooperation, horizontalism, voluntary association, participatory democracy, decentralization and confederal political structures, are more central to my concern. My influences on these subjects emanate, in part, from the writings of Peter Kropotkin (1902; [1892] 2012), Mikhail Bakunin (n.d.; [1862] 1972; [1871] 1972), Murray Bookchin (1982; 1986; 1991), Emma Goldman (1911), Colin Ward (1996), Žiga Vodovnik (2013), and David Graeber (2004; 2007), but also from Quaker thought and practice, particularly as it influenced Movement for a New Society (Cornell 2011).

I believe a larger point, however, is that the Rainbow Gathering itself assumes a critical theoretical stance by embodying the values that “every individual is granted dignity regardless of his or her location in the web of reality” (Steinberg and Kincheloe 2010, 140). From every perspective in this project, applying a critical lens is valuable in capturing emancipatory meaning from a co-created cultural moment of resistance.

In terms of methodology, then, while I know there is value in becoming fully emplaced through an embodied experience in the “happening” that is the Rainbow Gathering, I am compelled to “do” ethnographic practice (Pink 2015) in a way that engages with theories that assist in making meaning from sensory environments, that attend to the atmospheres created by affect as a way of knowing, and that, as I have stated, look to critical theory as a lens to examine relationships relative to liberatory change (hooks 1991). To this end, I am interested in ethnography at its edges.
Circling out from the center of traditional ethnography, I am most comfortable engaging with a sensory ethnographic practice. I understand a sensory ethnography to be, as Sarah Pink writes, “a process to re-think ethnography to explicitly account for the senses” (Pink 2015, 7). Encompassing a larger dimension than being accountable for simply all I can see, as a researcher, sensory ethnography offers a “theoretical exploration of sensory experience, perception, sociality, knowing, knowledge, practice and culture” (Pink 2015, 4).

As a multilayered sensory environment, the Rainbow Gathering has been described as a cross between a “utopian experiment and traditional carnival, incorporating costuming, dancing, music, festivity, ceremony, and large-scale mingling” (Solnit 2009, 295). A sensory ethnographic approach is particularly suited to this type of environment as it positions an experiential, emplaced, embodied knowing as arising from the engagement with others on multiple sensory levels. A key aspect in sensory ethnography is researcher reflection with the challenge being to seek theoretical meanings based on experiencing “social, material, discursive, and sensory environments” with the study group and to find ways to make meaning relate to the experiential and the intellectual (Pink 2015, 28).

Sensory ethnography is distinct from other ethnographic practices in emphasizing feeling. There is a focus on what it feels like to experience a particular phenomenon and the ways in which sensory encounters shape meaning and action (Sunderland et al., 2012, 1056). Because this represents a dynamic interaction between the positionality of the researcher and experiencing the sensory environments and actions between bodies and nature, meaning is located in process. As Brian Massumi writes, “It
is not enough for process concepts of this kind to be ontological. They must be ontogenetic: they must be equal to emergence” (2002, 8). I am attracted to Massumi’s description because it uses the language of complexity theory (emergence) to convey that sensory ethnography enables meaning as an emergent property. In a post-positivist, post-phenomenological context, the sensory experiences and affective environments of bodies sharing space enables meaning-making to reflect the non-linear and adaptive qualities of complexity, becoming “the edge of chaos,” a fluid place where new ideas confront old in a dance of creative change.

At this point, it is helpful to specifically mention how theories of affect influence my process of “collecting” data through a sensory ethnography. While it is conceivable and manageable to situate experience in the realm of feeling as regards the five senses, to attend to that which is ineffable, yet arguably palpable, in highly sensory environments is challenging. This is particularly true of the primary affective atmosphere at the Rainbow Gathering, which is Love, variously understood and expressed.

Very few would deny experiencing the “swells and intensities that pass between bodies” in certain environments (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 2), and it is clear individuals are affected by the phenomenon of experiencing feelings, such as love, empowerment, anxiety, hope, excitement, or fear that are perceived as being “in the air” (Michels 2015, 255). Theresa Brennan suggests the transmission of affect has social and psychological origins, and as such, the experience of affect in an environment alters biochemistry and neurology and “literally gets into the individual,” creating a present, physically and biologically, that was not there before (Brennan 2004, 1).
In the sense of exploring how bodies in food environments perform beyond the physical mechanics of providing nutrition in a consumable form, I engage with a sensory ethnography through sound, vision, smell, sight, and touch, but also in ways that explore affective atmospheres to uncover in those spaces—opportunities “to be affected by the ambiguities of affect/emotion, by that which is determinate and indeterminate, present and absent, singular and vague” (Anderson 2009). One way I do this is to focus on the intentional material aesthetics that comprise the food spaces at the gathering. The objects and designs that become part of the Gathering resonate with those who have created them, and in this way, they transmit and build capacity for the modulation of affect (Michels 2015, 259). Gernot Bohme asserts that modulation is facilitated by the exploring and actualizing of objects (1993, 123). My work describes the material details of the food environments and ways bodies interact with substance and aesthetic as an analysis of the presence and potential of affect. In as much as the idea of an atmosphere “can serve as a heuristic handle” for investigating affect (Michels, 261), I situate food spaces at the Rainbow Gathering—the spaces where food is aggregated, distributed, prepared, consumed, and disposed of (both in the sense of food waste and bodily waste)—as atmospheres where affects and emotions, specifically Love, has influence.

Emotions such as Love can present a challenge to research. Because it is an intangible, yet attributable element in the formation of the affective environments at the Gathering, my approach is not to attempt to define it. Rather, I understand its presence by attending to “talk-based” ways of knowing (Anderson 2016, 182), which emphasizes the
way people describe its presence and influences, as well as by experiencing the embodied expressions of Love consistent with the agapeistic\textsuperscript{5} ethics valorized at the Gathering.

Because my study represents the actions of a diverse group of autonomous individuals united by resistance to the dominant culture, I look to Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg’s discussion on affect with regard to those “living under the thumb of a normativizing power” (2010, 7). They suggest that attention to affect is important in terms of the collective and external experience of resistance, or “realizing a world that subsists within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm” (Seigworth and Gregg 7). However, in doing research that includes attention to affective environments I am guided most by Kathleen Stewart who writes

\begin{quote}
The first step in thinking about the force of things is the open question of what counts as an event, a movement, an impact, a reason to act. There’s a politics to being/feeling connected (or not), to impacts that are shared (or not)...to affective contagion and to all forms of attunement and attachment. (2007, 16)
\end{quote}

What counts as an event, and in fact, what counts as a legitimate way of knowing about and presenting events, is the subject of the section of performative writing in Chapter 4.

\textit{Performativity}

There are certainly many ways to consider the performative nature of food. As Cindy Spurlock writes, food is “rich with symbolism and contextually-produced meaning.” She adds, “[food] as performed, it is capable of constructing communities and imaginaries, simultaneously drawing and obliterating boundaries” (Spurlock 2009, 6-7).

\textsuperscript{5} This term derives from the word “agape” found in the Bible, referring to “brotherly love.” Although the Rainbow Gathering is not a Christian-themed event, the agapeistic ethic of “loving your neighbor as yourself” is the foundation for all interactions.
It is precisely in this sense that I approach my examination of food at the Rainbow Gathering. In ways that create a sense of common identity, personal identity, and resistance to capital and dominant ideologies, food at the gathering performs on many levels.

In general terms, to analyze food in a cultural context is to reveal its social meanings. One example many people are familiar with in American culture is the association of eating of red meat with masculinity; however, all symbolic effects are subject to “spatio-temporal and socio-demographic” variances (Warde 2016, 65). The variances in this study are counterculture as difference, as well as the differences between the kitchens and food spaces within the Rainbow Gathering. These provide the multiple stages on which food performs in this research. David Szanto describes these types of food dynamics as a “production in time and space, of meaning and matter and movement, interpreted through the active roles of sensing and perception—in short, it is a multi-channel ecology in performance” (Szanto 2015, 4).

In more nuanced terms, I interpret Judith Butler’s work on performativity and gender for ways to consider food. I understand food as connotative and contingent, and as such, I find it instructive to examine the making and eating of food as performative acts that maintain “associative semantic meanings” (1998, 519). I suggest that in the context of specific actions, ritual, and in the sensory food environments of the Rainbow Gathering, food acts co-create identity (group and individual) that are constituted over time and through stylized repetition (Butler 1998, 519).

Although ritual theory is not central to my exploration of food and food spaces I do explore the role of ritual at the gathering. In Catherine Bell’s discussions of the ritual
body and acts of ritualization, I find the basis for a critique of the gathering, developed from her ideas about “misrecognition” (1992, 108). Bell asserts the practice of ritual consciously and actively constitutes a re-ordering force; yet, not seen or recognized by the ritual body, the performance of ritual as an act of general consensus appropriates a social order that can be understood as hegemonic (1992, 110). The ritual circling, holding hands, and “OM” that precedes the distribution and eating of food at the daily main circle at the Gathering, is one example of the imposition of a specific spiritual sensibility as ritual.

As well, from the stance of ritual and performance, I examine the Rainbow Gathering as the drama of “doing codes,” drawing upon Victor Turner’s work on ritual, drama, and public liminality, where he writes, “public reflexivity takes the form of performance.” (1977b, 465). I find his ideas regarding the distinct differences, yet synergisms, between concepts of communities and social structure (structure and anti-structure), to be especially informative with regard to my explorations of complex reciprocity (Turner, 1977a, 127).

Food performs in mainstream culture as normalizing. What is eaten, from where, and how it is consumed mark the boundaries and directives for societal acceptance. At a Rainbow Gathering, where food might be sourced from dumpster dives or prepared without health department oversight, food and bodies enact a “performative co-authoring,” a transformative ritual happening where “there is a transgression demanded...a going against in order to construct new platforms for new social orders” (Szanto 2011, 12).
I come back to Butler and her newer performative theories of assembly to engage with ideas about performative co-authoring, particularly in spaces where food is central to the assembly of bodies. Extending her original assertions about performativity as a repeated co-engagement of the body with acts of speech, Butler sheds light on the ways meaning can be made from assembly, showing that “concerted bodily action—gathering, gesturing, standing still, all of the component parts of “assembly” that are not quickly assimilated to verbal speech—can signify principles of freedom and equality” (Butler 2015, 48).

In this dissertation, I also engage with performance through my own writing. In Chapter 4, which in some ways might be considered a methods chapter, I employ a creative/academic hybrid form referred to as performative writing. I engage with this as a method for describing my experience as process, or method, and I come to this from the desire to retain the performance sensibilities inherent in both the subject of the research and a sensory ethnographic practice. In the words of D. Soyini Madison, “In performative writing, you want your readers to come away with something they did not feel or know before they read your words” (2005, 192). In this sense, Madison insists that performative writing is mindfully relational. It is a form that acknowledges an audience—others with whom a reader-writer dynamic is nurtured for the “communicative quality of the connection” (2005, 193).

This type of “co-performance of language and experience” (Pollock 1998, 81) can be justified by reimagining the process of a more traditional ethnographic methodology. Dwight Conquergood notes that while ethnographic field work “privileges the body,” once researchers begin to write for publication, they “typically have repressed
the bodily experience in favor of abstracted theory and analysis” (1991, 181).

Acknowledging this, I believe performative writing creates a relational space for reader and writer, but also between academic and embodied social processes. The hybrid form I engage with marries academic writing, personal narrative and reflection that connects to theory and literature, and the “data” or stories collected in the field. I conceive of this as an evocative form that flirts with creative non-fiction in its intent to communicate an experiential realm that, as Della Pollock writes, suggests other worlds “that are otherwise intangible, unlocatable: worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect, and in-sight,” and in doing so, creates an interplay between reader and writer “in the joint production of meaning” (1998, 80). It is in this spirit, that the performative writing section also introduces chaosmos into the dissertation as an artifact. It is the interplay between the creative process and academic scholarship, between predictable organization and random patterns—expressions of knowing that arise from acts of being, sensing, and doing—that become examples of a kind of order that emerges from the tug and pull of disorder.

Self-Organizing

To be clear, this research does not exhaust an investigation of the principle of self-organizing; rather, I provide a working definition of the concept and contextualize it within the phenomenon of the food systems at the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes. My primary engagement with self-organizing is through praxis, which I present at the conclusion of this section.

As I discussed earlier, self-organization emerges from ideas about complexity, or chaosmos. Characterized as a “world view,” complexity offers an alternative to a
Newtonian mechanistic interpretation that asserts linearity, cause and effect, and the ability to understand and control events by breaking down independently functioning parts, making “analyses tractable” (Boulton, Allen, and Bowman 2015, 1). This view differs from the perspective of complexity science, an outgrowth of quantum physics, which views the world as interconnected and, as authors Jean Boulton, Peter Allen, and Cliff Bowman suggest, “rich with forms and patterns that have been shaped by history and context” (2015, 1). They describe a complexity worldview as one that “reminds us of the limits of certainty,” emphasizing that “things are in a continual process of ‘becoming’” (Boulton, Allen and Bowman 2015, 1). Conceived of as a function of complex systems, facilitated by interconnection and adaptive response, the principle of self-organizing enables the quality of emergence.

Self-organizing is the function of interrelationships and the process of interactions. Emergence is the resultant quality of “becoming.” The activity of self-organizing, as the name suggests, is not one of imposed hierarchy (McDaniel and Driebe 2005, 5), but a natural result of systems in a complex and chaotic state seeking stability through pathways of innovation and adaptation. There is a “rhizomatic” component to the structure of self-organizing, which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe (fittingly for a Rainbow Gathering) as

acentered systems, finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbor to any other, the stems or channels do not preexist and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their \textit{state} at a given moment—such that the local operations are coordinated and the final, global result synchronized without a central agency. (1987 [1980], 17)
There are questions regarding the extent to which these systems, recognized within the study of physics to describe the actions of atoms and molecules, can be applied to social systems (Boulton, Allen, and Bowman 2015, 10). However, I believe the success of decentralized social media platforms and the broad acceptance of the legitimacy of social network analysis, helps to confirm the validity of doing so.

Christian Fuchs argues that, “the notion of self-organization as the idea of the networked, co-operative, synergetic production of emergent qualities and systems should be employed in order to arrive at a dynamic concept of protest.” (2006, 102). Fuchs holds that the role of self-organized systems in society are to communicate oppositional values and goals (2006, 118). This is one context where I find the concepts of self-organizing and emergence to be interesting and relevant to my research. Self-organization is a significant characteristic of the Rainbow Gathering. Commonly described as “the largest non-organization of non-members in the world” (Welcomhome.org 2017), the gathering is “officially” an event that is held every year from July 1 through July 7. In actual practice, the gathering lasts for about two months (Niman 2011, 32), with people on the land preparing for, and cleaning up after, the week-long focal period where up to 30,000 people have been reported in attendance (Niman 2011, 205; U.S. Forest Service 2013). In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed account of the systems that are co-created at the gathering in order to support this many individuals in an ecologically sensitive manner, with particular attention to the food systems. The point I wish to make here is that this is all accomplished without imposed hierarchical leadership.

While self-organization is more commonly understood from the perspective of physics, (increasingly applied to social systems), it is also associated with the values of
social anarchism, which advocates for an ideal society based on people governing themselves in a classless, horizontally structured socio-ecological environment. This ties back to the common focus in this dissertation of a social ecology of food. In this sense, the Rainbow Gathering is an unparalleled model. My experience is that most people who attend a Rainbow Gathering do not necessarily do so because they adhere to the tenants of social anarchism; in fact, many are not even aware of the organizational structure at a gathering conforming to these theories. Regardless, the assembly arguably constitutes the largest anarchistic gathering in the world, and on this level, provides an opportunity for engagement with praxis over theory.

My research steps into the world of self-organizing from the perspective of praxis. There are many scholars who theorize about self-organization and the implications for leadership and social change; yet, the Rainbow Gathering, representing forty-four years of actual practice, remains largely outside academic study. Garrick Beck, an “early” and one of the group of focalizers who helped to organize the first Rainbow Gathering in 1972 writes

Everyone knows that theorizing or describing, and actually doing are often worlds apart. So it is in the doing of these things that one discovers the non-hierarchical methods of working together—the exact methods that we humans will need to know, use and teach in the future. (1986)

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7 “A word used at Rainbow Gatherings as an alternative to the world elder, which people often interpret as meaning leader or authority figure” (Niman 2011, 286).

8 “A volunteer responsible for serving as a conduit for Rainbow Family information and organization” (Niman 2011, 286).
As a researcher, it is in the practice of theory, or praxis, where I engage with self-organizing. I examine this process through the food systems and experiences at the Rainbow Gathering. Through sensory ethnography, from an embodied perspective emplaced in a social construct where the needs of those within it are co-created and met without centralized, authoritative direction, I examine what it feels like to be self-organizing.

**Complex Reciprocity**

I use the term complex reciprocity to characterize the “operating system” at the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes. I hesitate to define it as simply a system of exchange because, although it certainly is this, the idea of reciprocity at the Gathering has a broader context.

I borrow the term complex reciprocity from the work of June Holley, a network theorist and practitioner who, as a self-described “network weaver,” emerged from food and economic systems work to champion transformative social change through understanding and guiding the emergence of social networks and self-organization (Holley 2017). Holley describes complex reciprocity as “sharing information and resources with others without expecting a return from that person, because you know others will share with you (Holley 2008, 43). I place Holley’s ideas about complex reciprocity in conversation with Marcel Mauss’ anthropological-based observations about gift economies (1990 [1950]). To arrive at complex reciprocity as a working frame, I also engage with more quantitative studies on reciprocal altruism (deWaal and Brosnan 2006, 85) as well as characterizations of non-monetary exchange as social capital and as indirect or generalized reciprocity (Diekmann 2004, 488; 490). This literature supports
ideas of exchange outside of capital as building trust and cooperation (Diekmann 2004, 488), but I find particular resonance with Edward Lawler’s “Affect Theory of Social Exchange” in which he suggests, “emotions and the attribution processes they trigger transform relations, networks, or groups into expressive objects—that is, into a source of value (2001, 349).

There is considerable research published on alternative systems of exchange. I wish to establish that my research purpose is not to directly contribute to that in the sense of dissecting the system as enacted at the Rainbow Gathering per se. I use the existing literature to justify my position in portraying the Gathering as an assembly engaged in acts of complex reciprocity, based on the concept’s location within a complexity paradigm and, therefore, as a multi-dimensional construct opposed to other characterizations of reciprocity defined by dyadic or more directly relational forms of exchange. By situating acts of giving at the Gathering as part of a complex adaptive system, I establish a foundation to explore issues more central to my interest, such as exploring the networks that enable complex reciprocity and contemplating how this form of complex reciprocity relates to the concept of economic difference.

What most individuals recognize as unique about a Rainbow Gathering is the fact that it is a completely free and non-commercial event. Nyman writes that the Rainbow Family “rejects all forms of money, including alternative currencies like time credits or barter notes. Rainbows are volunteers, working without any regulatory mechanism to monitor their commitment” (Nyman 2011, 69). While “green energy⁹ is

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⁹ Money (Niman 2011, 286).
accepted,” collected in the Magic Hat,\(^{10}\) which is present at main circle meals, this is understood to be a voluntary contribution with no social expectation. About this, Niman states

> The key to the Rainbow economy is sharing. People bring what they can to share, often depositing surplus items in “Free Boxes.” While some people arrive destitute and hungry, others show up with a truckload of produce, a hundred feet of hose, a box of medical supplies, or a pocket of cash for the ‘Magic Hat.’ (2011, 68)

I would add to this description that much of what is given and accepted as part of an economy of being, is less material, such as energy work, intentionally created soundscapes or visual environments, smiles, and greetings of welcome and love. Therefore, I am comfortable supporting the term complex reciprocity for the exchange phenomenon at the Gathering. The reality of it goes beyond the sense that a gift or service given to an individual will eventually return from that individual in the same or another form. It is more than the idea that an individual’s material gift to a group be returned in a tangible form. Acknowledgement, record keeping, and the concept of “interest” are not part of the arrangement, however, obligation to the project of a co-created existence is a subtle construction that is embedded in the discourse\(^{11}\), but not enforced in any way. At the Rainbow Gathering, contributions to the system of exchange that supports it can be complex, intangible, innovative, and adaptive.

\(^{10}\) The idea of the Magic Hat was explained at an undated Rainbow Family Tribal Council as “[Its] magic lies in the miracles sharing can do” (Niman 2011, 69).

\(^{11}\) The Rainbow Family have a series of “raps” that educate and remind those in attendance about the intent of the gathering. Rap 107 explains “the noncommercial, nonviolent alcohol-free Gathering environment” (Niman 2011, 206).
All this presents a fascinating opportunity to engage with a system of complex reciprocity in a food systems context as contributing to theories of “economic difference” (Gibson-Graham 1996, 5). Understanding how complex reciprocity at the Gathering is enabled essentializes heterodox economic environments that function concomitantly with neoliberal capitalism. Gibson-Graham make a case for disrupting capitalism by acknowledging the diversity that is overshadowed by an unchallenged monolith (2001, 264). This new “ontology of economic difference” encourages new ways to understand capitalism and encourages creative non-capitalist responses (Gibson-Graham 2008, 613).

To explore what complex reciprocity feels like and to understand the social and economic networks that support it at the Rainbow Gathering I consider the dependencies capitalism has on alternative economic forms. It is not just that economic diversity co-exists within the capitalist paradigm as an alternative, but, as Anna Tsing suggests, economic difference is part of capitalist infrastructure. For example, free food as the basis for exchange at the Gathering is predicated (in the case of those kitchens who source from grocery store dumpsters) on the waste generated by the industrial food system. Large food retailers are mandated to throw out produce that is several days old, or cosmetically flawed, in what has been called the “cult of perfection,” a marketing strategy to create vibrant markets for picture perfect food (Goldenberg 2016). Generally speaking, kitchens that use recovered food do so on moral grounds. They feel they are saving this food from unnecessarily being thrown in landfills and in some cases, feeding people who might not have the means to buy fresh food. Tsing uses the phrase “peri-capitalist spaces” to describe those domains where there are interdependent relationships between capitalist and non-capitalist forms of exchange (2015, 66).
Tsing characterizes her critique of capitalism as one engaged with “the imaginative challenge” of living with precarity and indeterminancy—the products of considering a world without capitalist controls. Or, as she puts it, “living without those handrails which once made us think we knew, collectively, where we were going” (2015, 2).

In many ways, this would seem to characterize the experience of those attending the Rainbow Gathering, and if I return to Mauss on this point, an environment where “one trusts completely, or one mistrusts completely” (1990 [1950], 81).

There is no leadership in place, no planning process or accountability measures at the Gathering to guarantee that everyone will be fed adequately. Yet, because of the complex dynamics of social and economic networks embedded in an agapeistic ethic that prioritizes “treating your neighbor as yourself,” no one goes hungry. In this way, Tsing points my exploration of complex reciprocity toward the “imaginative challenges” that manifest in response to a self-organized system of reciprocity enacted on the stage of chaosmos. This is a performance where the “chaotic dynamics” of Rainbow Gathering food systems emerge as order despite fundamental aspects of “unpredictability and surprise” (McDaniel Jr. and Driebe 2005, 3).

Research Questions

The interdisciplinary nature of this investigation, in combination with a sensory ethnographic process, establishes the structure of the dissertation as complex and outside a traditional framework. To organize my undertakings, I understand the three touchstone themes—the performance of food, the praxis of self-organizing, and the networks of complex reciprocity—to constitute the primary points of engagement with food at the Gathering. However, my final analysis also incorporates two research questions that run
as principle threads throughout this work. As they weave through the themes, in conversation with my scholarship, collecting cultural and experiential density in the process, my responses to the questions form the final layer of focus to my investigation. The responses to these questions represent my “findings.” Through the experiential, and by seeking sensory ways of knowing about the themes in combination with history and scholarship, the many rivulets feeding into this research are distilled to the clearest essence that can come from such a broad interdisciplinary engagement. In this gathering and distilling process, I identify the limitations of my study and suggest possibilities for future research.

The research questions are:

1). What do people experience as the value of the kitchens at the Rainbow Gathering?
2). What is the potential for self-organized, values-based, non-commercial food environments as central structures in assemblies of resistance and assistance?
CHAPTER 3: ALL WAYS FREE: THE RAINBOW GATHERING OF THE TRIBES

We, who are brothers and sisters, children of God, families of life on earth, friends of nature and of all people, children of humankind calling ourselves Rainbow Family Tribe, humbly invite:

All races, peoples, tribes, communes, men, women, children, individuals—out of love.
All nations & national leaders—out of respect
All religions & religious leaders—out of faith
All politicians—out of charity
to join with us in gathering together for the purpose of expressing our sincere desire that there shall be peace on earth, harmony among all people.12

By any accounting, interest within academia to study the counterculture assembly known as the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes over the last 44 years of its existence has been less than robust. While there are doubtless many reasons for this, it is my strong position that the Rainbow Gathering provides an unparalleled opportunity to examine the ways in which the complex dynamics of food and love emerge in the performance of self-organized forms resistance and empowerment. At a time in the United States when mainstream culture is struggling with deep political and social divisions between its citizens and its government, the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes provides a glimpse into a living classroom and ongoing experiment in peaceful resistance. It is here, where ways of being constitute active non-violent resistance to forces that act to divide and oppress. In this space, a sense of connectedness and cooperation is collectively nurtured. As I have asserted previously, to gain an understanding about any aspect of this phenomena generates useful knowledge to the disciplines of sociology, economic anthropology, communication studies, and food studies, but surely, to society as a whole.

In this chapter, I establish the milieu for this study and provide a history of the Rainbow Gathering. I chronicle a genealogy of influences and events that led to the creation of the Gathering, and deliver an accounting of the beliefs and practices enacted when “Rainbows”\textsuperscript{13} come together as an assembly. From a food systems perspective, I provide details on the infrastructural and logistical aspects of the 2016 gathering, which include water and sanitation systems. I discuss the character of the kitchens and of “Main Supply,” the staging area for the distribution of food. My purpose in this comprehensive chapter is to establish the world of the research and to construct a sense of the Rainbow Gathering as a stage for its performative aspects. I approach this through the lens of food, therefore, with a narrower focus than the broad ethnographic study, \textit{People of the Rainbow: A Nomadic Utopia}, by Michael Niman (2011).

\textbf{Reflexivity}

I approach this chapter by acknowledging my positionality with regard to the research and I briefly discuss how I understand my role as one of “researcher-as-bricoleur” (Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg 2011, 168). Epistemologically, this study relies on an engagement with complexity, which involves finding inter-relationships between academic disciplines and methodologies, or the “bricolage.” In this environment, to negotiate complex interdisciplinary research successfully, I have chosen to “abandon the quest for some naïve concept of realism” (Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg, 168), in favor of focusing on ways of making meaning and producing knowledge “that originate in diverse social locations” (Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg, 169). This

\textsuperscript{13}A term used by those who assemble at the Rainbow Gathering. Sometimes the phrases “Rainbow Family,” “Rainbow Tribe,” or “Brothers and Sisters” are used to avoid an association with the idea that one might be a “member” of a group with no official membership.
requires that I must own my social history with the subject as a way to identify and reflect upon the influences regarding how it is I make meaning. With this in mind, I wish to be clear that my position in this research cannot be separated from my experiences as one who has attended Rainbow Gatherings for many years, has many personal connections with those who attend, and has worked in many Rainbow kitchens.

A reflexive stance is a critical element in an ethnographic approach to research. This is especially so when privileging the senses in ways of making meaning. Sensory ways of knowing necessarily spring from the deeply personal and subjective. While ethnography is at its core interpretive work, the presumption that a researcher can perform the interpretation of culture without bias, establishing an indisputable truth, is now widely challenged. Addressing this, ethnographers engage with reflexivity as a form of transparency, as a declaration in recognition that knowledge is contingent and influenced by where “knowing” is located on a continuum of perception. Mark Harris writes, “the phrase ‘ways of knowing’ is used to remind us that any knowledge is inevitably situated in a particular place and moment; that it is inhabited by individual knowers and that it is always changing and emergent” (Harris 2007, 4).

In my own response to reflexivity I am influenced by Paul Lichterman. Noting that traditionally, ethnographers assert a reflexive posture intended to confront identities and relationships that may reinforce or reflect structures of social domination, Lichterman writes, “Positional reflexivity uneasily straddles a realism” (2105, 1). His critique points out that crafting a presumption about which social position(s)—gender, age, race, class, etc.—influences the research supposes a process that is clear and relatively simple to undertake. Further, he suggests this practice is normativist, in its attempt to “demystify”
knowledge claims (2015, 3). This suggests to me that researchers should be cautious about the limiting effects of asserting confidence related to particular influences or biases. Some influences are obvious, and should be addressed, but my sense is there are always more complex, intersectional (and often unrealized) influences that construct the truth of any ethnographic research.

What Litchtermann proposes is a more interpretive reflexivity. I am attracted to this idea because it emplaces the practice within a conceptual framework more consistent with complexity theories. While I believe it is necessary to understand the dynamics of positional reflexivity, for me to perform any degree of certainty about identifying one, two, or several social positions for their specific impact on my research seems to work against acknowledging a more nuanced reckoning of the countless points for interpretation and influence that may not be clear to me as a researcher. To remain consistent with the theories of complexity asserted in this dissertation, I am keen to limit a “simple realist epistemology” which would overemphasize a linear and causally mechanistic relationship between how I am able to define my social position and my research claims (Lichterman 2015, 4). Therefore, I have experimented with incorporating a “thicker” more nuanced, interpretive approach in combination with positional reflexivity. I offer sensory-based performative writing as a means to engage with interpretive reflexivity. I engage the reader in the “how” research claims are made, inviting them to attend to my emotional state, mistakes “and lucky guesses along the way to capturing other people’s meanings” as a transparent way to addresses the concept of assumed certainty (Lichterman 2015, 4). In this, my intent is to encourage a greater degree of critical thinking in response to my research claims.
Prior to beginning my fieldwork in Vermont, I came to a place in my personal life where I made the decision to cut my hair. This was no small decision. My hair, in dreadlocks and nearly to my knees, represented almost fifteen years of an experiment with knowing and privilege I undertook the day the United States dropped bombs on Iraq in 2002. At the time, I felt completely impotent in my efforts as a peace activist. In the face of U.S. determination to engage in war on two fronts in the Middle East against an ideology—actions I perceived to be grounded in the power dynamics of retribution and exploitation—I grieved about being complicit in this violence by virtue of my citizenship. I decided it was at least within my power to extract myself from any conceivable perception of nationalistic solidarity through my appearance. My commitment to peace activism is deeply connected to my experience with Rainbow Gatherings, where a collective prayer for peace is the focal point of the assembly.

My personal witness to peace was for many years my hair and it would serve, by performing an identity outside status quo social norms, to engage me in a kind of lived solidarity with oppression. Wearing dreadlocks established my vulnerability to acts of othering and assumptions, prejudices, and mistreatment that as a privileged and educated white woman, I didn’t otherwise encounter on a daily basis.

The decision to cut my hair was made with a good deal of consideration and justification. The point of this being that although I decided the time was right for me personally, I stopped short of doing it because of an awareness that my appearance might impact the results of my research at the Rainbow Gathering. My truth in this matter was one entirely derived from the experience of being part of the counterculture “in group,”
and a “felt” emotional reality that I knew to be unspoken, but demonstrated through lived and shared experience. In “Babylon” my hair set me apart and created social tension, while in Rainbow culture, dreadlocks are received as a performance of commitment to a lifestyle of resistance to social norms. In this case, the longer (older) dreadlocks are relate directly to at least a superficial and immediate assumption of legitimacy and a position within the tribe. This, in no way means that long-time, respected participants in the Rainbow Gathering all have dreadlocks; in fact, most do not. But, I was cognizant of what amounts to an “unearned” respect my knee-length locks afforded me in Rainbow circles. I struggled with the many stories I heard from those who had cut their dreadlocks. They included everything from outright suspicion to being ignored in the same counterculture social circles that previously felt welcoming to them. This seemed like something important to note—this reality of human nature, of in group/out group dynamics that plays across cultures. It seems that among all people there is lip service given to inclusion, but wide variation with regard to the practice of it.

In this sense, my hair became an issue. I felt there was a risk involved with cutting my hair, in terms of the access I would be given, and to the trust and credibility I could expect to garner. In all social interactions, physical signatures relate to levels of trust, but studies show that perhaps more, it is the situation itself that establishes the inclination to engage in trusting behaviors (Snijders and Keren 2001, 20). I knew that partly, my role at the Gathering would be to ask questions, personal and logistical. In my experience, without visual clues (for example, dreadlocks) or other outward appearances, many at the Rainbow Gathering would feel that my behavior was suspicious, and they might not engage wholeheartedly, or even at all. Therefore, I did not cut my hair, and in
some ways, this felt uncomfortably intentional, perhaps even manipulative and disingenuous. After all, I had decided they should go, and for good reasons. But in the end, I was unwilling to let go of the privilege my locks would afford me in this cultural context. Although I was aware of other performances of legitimacy and trust I could employ at the Gathering—chiefly costume and language—I felt it would be my hair that acted as the primary signifier of my insider status and would likely manifest benefits to the research that I would not even be aware of. I used my dreadlocks to assert my privilege, a potent form of irony considering their initial purpose.

In retrospect, did being an insider impact my research? Most certainly, and in different ways. In at least three cases individuals I approached for interviews responded to my appearance positively (commenting on how nice my locks were or lamenting that they had cut theirs which were long like mine). In other situations, I believe it was only after accepting the behaviors I enacted, the language I used, and my ability to establish a connection via knowing some of the same people, that they agreed to speak with me. In one case where an interview was conducted in a busy kitchen space, friends of the person being interviewed remarked that my appearance and behavior (specifically, accepting a marijuana pipe that was being passed, not partaking of it, but raising it briefly to touch my forehead and then skyward as an offering before passing it along) convinced them I was not a “Feddy.”

**Bias**

To expand on issues of bias, I start with the selection of the Rainbow Gathering as a site for my research. Because I attended many Gatherings prior to 2016, I previously

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14 An individual working in any capacity of federal law enforcement.
witnessed and participated in what self-organizing feels like on the scale of a 20,000
person Gathering. I had concrete examples and direct experiences with food and affect as
well as knowing how it works to live without money for two weeks and still have all my
needs met. In this sense, these experiences were present as I crafted the proposal for the
project, framed the research themes and questions, and developed an oral history
protocol. I had expectations regarding how questions might be answered, and how my
experiences at the Gathering in 2016 might unfold based on my past history. However,
there were responses during the process of collecting oral histories that were completely
unforeseen and my experiences at this Gathering, in the role of researcher, were
significantly different in ways I had not anticipated. Contrasting my expectations (based
on my prior history) with my actual experiences revealed those biases as “data points,” if
you will. I consider that being conscious of my biases serves to engage with a deeper and
more honest ethnographic interpretation.

My prior experience with Rainbow culture has been personally transformational
and I have witnessed, on many, many occasions, the transformation of others—in every
case—toward the positive. It’s clear that I am an individual who values peace and has a
stake in helping to build structures that encourage peaceful interactions among people. In
these ways, it is critical that I attend to, and be clear about a bias that supposes a positive
impact upon all who attend the Rainbow Gathering. I also identify biases about my
interest in anarchist studies and the possible ways these sympathies influence my
perception of what is happening at the Gathering, as well as my approach to investigation
and interpretation.
It is more than fair to say, with regard to my positionality, that I am an insider. I am familiar with the language, history, and culture of the Gathering, I have established meaningful relationships with people who also attend the Gathering, and from every indication, I am perceived to be part of the group. In the process of analyzing my research I know that my social position(s) have influence on my interpretation and meaning making, however it is difficult to know in which ways precisely and what the effects have been. My cultural embeddedness makes me blind to at least some of this. However, as a researcher, the point is to represent meaning as a product of authenticity, transparency, and honesty. In forming responses to the two research questions as my final analysis, I am aware of where and how I may have imposed my own beliefs or projected my own biases. I listen for the voices that may be speaking between the lines of my expectations and give them space. In every way, I endeavor to open myself to the stories and experiences of others, but also to understand the time spent at this Gathering in the context of my own sensory encounters (Pink 2015, 12). Sensory responses arise from the deeply personal and are influenced by psychologically complex associations; therefore, I do not believe that privileging the body (the senses) in the practice of ethnography is capable of presenting a final knowledge product that is absolute, neat, and tidy around the edges, nor is that the objective. My intent is to champion the ambiguity and position of emotional truth and to extend an invitation to engage with the assertions and interpretations I have produced in ways that require engagement with the senses, solid scholarship, and critical thinking (Lichterman 2015, 5).
Mediated Organizing

It is interesting to note the possible effects of increasingly mediated communication among this counterculture group, the use of Facebook for organizing. This raises issues regarding inclusion (not everyone has access to the internet) but also, anonymity and freedom. Organizing on social media has created a larger public profile for activities related to Rainbow Gatherings, including easily accessible information about those who attend or are actively engaged in focalizing. In this new digital networked space, Facebook, in particular, has been alleged by some Rainbows to be complicit in acts of surveillance by state and federal officials.

Prior to wide popular use of the internet, the Gathering was essentially organized via word of mouth. This was aided by posting flyers and listing telephone numbers to call for information in the publication, All Ways Free, distributed each year at the Gathering. This type of self-organizing was “among friends,” which is to say, those outside the counterculture circle rarely encountered information about the Gathering and authorities concerned with policing the Gathering had to infiltrate groups or review copies of materials distributed by those focalizing the event.

With the growth of the internet, a subscriber news group was created¹⁵ and “listservs” were established as an online space where kitchens and other affinity groups could organize across the country. Today, Facebook has become the primary space for organizing Rainbow Gatherings around the world, although the listservs and telephone “Light Lines” do still exist. For the Vermont Gathering there is one main page created on

¹⁵ awf.rainbownews (All Ways Free Rainbow News) was initiated on PeaceNet (IGC) in April 1989 by Peter Pfraterdeus and was initially open to only PeaceNet subscribers. In 1992 it was opened to the public and in 1995 the list was moved to conf.welcomehome.org, and maintained by Rainbow family (Welcomehome.org n.d.).
Facebook, “2015 Vermont Annual Rainbow Gathering,” a closed group with 4,996 members and there is a general “The Rainbow Gathering” page with 4,591 members, also a closed group. Many kitchens also have their own Facebook pages, as does Main Supply. Although these groups are technically closed groups, essentially no one is denied access by administrators. There are, in some cases, lengthy discussions about whether someone is a “Feddy” and should be denied access to the page or if they should be encouraged to participate.

While online planning for the Gathering raises thoughts about the changing nature of how Gatherings are now shaped, and by whom (due to issues of who has easy and regular access to the internet), having a more visible public presence has arguably opened everyone who joins these groups to the possibility of surveillance. Although it may be a complete coincidence, my experience this year would seem to at least underscore these assertions.

I was quite active on Facebook prior to traveling to the Gathering, joining at least six different Rainbow group pages. At one point, I was denied access to my Facebook account, receiving a note from the company questioning my identity and blocking my account until announcing I could prove I was who I stated I was in my profile. It is common for people to use aliases on Facebook, although the company does not condone it. I do not, however, use an alias; a quick Google search would substantiate that the person I say I am exists. However, to regain access to my account, I was required

16 There are also currently three sites active on Facebook for the 2017 Gathering in Oregon. All web pages and printed materials include disclaimers noting these are not to be considered “official” websites, because of the leaderless and decentralized structure of Gathering; however, because of strong social networks (i.e., recognizing the individuals names that are making posts), they are widely regarded as primary news sources and spaces for discussion and organizing. Generally, these sites are co-administered with each administrator acting autonomously.
to electronically submit two forms of government-issued identification, which I reluctantly did. When my account was reinstated, it was hard to miss that the main Rainbow page on Facebook was abuzz with people having similar experiences.

As I previously demonstrated, Rainbow Gatherings are actively monitored by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). With allegations by Edward Snowden in 2014 stating Facebook allows the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) to access Facebook messages, Skype conversations, and Gmail (Wilson 2014), at least the potential for surveillance, or even harassment, certainly exists. I raise this point as a subject for future research and consideration. What vulnerabilities are groups exposed to if they engage with self-organizing practices online, especially if the group happens to include elements that run counter to normative society or are planning actions that challenge laws or government positions? Although perceived at the moment as convenient and a tool that brings diversity to discourse, the activities of self-organizing for the Rainbow Gathering via social media may, under more repressive political conditions, become an important issue.

Finding Main Trail

“Main Trail” is a common reference point at Rainbow Gatherings, which are assemblies convened far from heavily populated regions, usually miles-deep into the public wilderness areas of the U.S. National Forest system. Main Trail is the primary artery leading into and out of the Gathering. From this main thoroughfare, smaller paths branch off to less traveled areas, various encampments, and kitchens. It seems fitting to orient the way of the Rainbow Gathering itself as a trail, one with a clear beginning, but
many side paths, and ultimately a course that links its coming into being with its generative “going-out-froms.”

The beginning of the Rainbow story trail begins as a legacy to any number of social phenomena in history where people have asserted their desire to live together peacefully, be regarded equally, with respect and dignity, and to exercise liberty. However, to understand the context in which a Rainbow Gathering manifested for the first time in 1972 is to understand the influences and stimuli of contemporary times. In the chaotic environment of the 1960s, the challenges to staid and oppressive ideologies became so densely woven as to establish critical mass. In other words, as an outcome of a chaosmos, the Rainbow Gathering came into being as a result of a co-generated adaptation to the pleasures and conflicts of the times through many determinants and interactions of order and disorder on multiple levels. Considered in this way, it is quite arbitrary to choose a starting point, however, for the purposes of this study I assert a genesis that centers on the San Francisco Diggers.

The Diggers

The Diggers emerged in the mid-to-late 1960s, taking their name from the English Diggers (1649-50), also known as the True Levellers, a radical sect that advocated for equality of wealth and freedom from private property (Hoile 1992). The San Francisco Diggers evolved from the actors and actions of the radical San Francisco Mime Troupe and were influenced by the “bohemian/underground art/theater scene, and the New Left/civil rights/peace movement” (Digger Archives, n.d.). They were inspired to react to the social and political issues of the times, but also, guided by a belief in authenticity, they were led to respond to the needs they witnessed. In large part, this came
from the mass migration of the nation’s disaffected youth into the city of San Francisco after the much publicized 1967 Summer of Love. The Diggers started free stores, free medical clinics, and distributed free food in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park.

Digger ideas about freedom involved the work of creating “social paradigms as free men and women” so the spontaneous response “might produce self-directed (as opposed to coerced or manipulated) social change” (Coyote 2015, 70.) Their concept of “free” included a commitment to anonymity, or “freedom from fame,” as a test of integrity (Coyote, 70). In this light, it is interesting to take note of a fact that few people are aware of. The Diggers had a strong alliance with the Black Panthers, albeit facilitated by interactions of urban geography, perhaps more than any ideological similarities. The Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco, where the Diggers were located, bordered the Fillmore, considered at the time to be the black ghetto of San Francisco. Actor and Director Peter Coyote, a co-founder of the Diggers, writes

We shared the same place, followed our respective visions, and were allied by territory and a common love of freedom. Because our visions were congruent at least in these ways, because we faced common enemies, and perhaps primarily because we were neighbors, we forged an alliance. (2015, 89)

The result of this little-known association between largely white, non-violent radicals and militant Black Panthers, were social strategies regarding mutual aid that resulted in Black Panthers organizing communal housing, The Black Man’s Free Store, free breakfasts for children, and food giveaways in Bay Area black communities (Chepesiuk 1995, 130). Diggers also collaborated with the Panthers to print the first two issues of the Black Panther party newspaper (Coyote 2015, 89).
Known for creating elaborate street theatre, the Diggers organized events covered by national media, such as The Death of Money Parade, The Invisible Circus, and The Death of Hippie/Birth of Free (Digger Archives n.d.). In April of 1968, the Diggers authored “A Modest Proposal,” a platform issued to the Mayor of San Francisco that listed five recommendations for action to create a “Free San Francisco.” They signed that document with the phrase, “Welcome Home,” which was a Digger greeting and has been, from the beginning, the main greeting used at Rainbow Gatherings (Digger Archives n.d.).

There were many influences that helped to bring the Diggers into being. The Digger archives list the “seeds” as the Beat poets, the civil rights movement, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, The Merry Pranksters, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and the anti-Vietnam peace movement, among others (Digger Archives n.d.). The essence of what these groups and actions stood for would also become foundational aspects of the Rainbow Gathering, such as consciousness raising, alternative spiritual practices, creative language, equality, the rights of free speech, theatricality and spectacle, political resistance and peace. While all of these attributes, in some way, interact with the three themes I use to explore the Rainbow Gathering (the performance of food, the praxis of self-organizing, and complex reciprocity) I suggest the most salient and direct link between the Diggers and the Rainbow Gathering is the concept of living life in defense of “free.” The Diggers idea of free was that it worked like “social acid” to shatter habituated responses, calling into question “prevalent cultural attitudes about class, status, morality, consumerism, etc. Like LSD, [free] could shake people out of the rut of ordinary perception and catalyze some sort of revelation” (Lee and Schlain 1994, 173.)
When providing free food for people in Golden Gate Park, the only requirement to receive the food was for individuals to walk through a large wooden square painted yellow. This was “the free frame of reference,” intended to be “a physical metaphor [for people] to reconstruct (or deconstruct) their worldview at their own pace and direction” (Coyote 2015, 71). “Free” became the concept around which the Diggers coalesced and when the group eventually dissolved and moved away from their presence in San Francisco, they dispersed into “tribes,” a socio-ecological construct championed by the burgeoning bioregional movement which included Beat poet, Gary Snyder, and Digger, Peter Berg. The idea of tribes came forth as a returning to the land in a way that honored the idea of relationships as expressed by more environmentally sustainable indigenous cultures. Snyder writes

> Men, women, and children—all of whom together hope to follow the timeless path of love and wisdom, in affectionate company with the sky, winds, clouds, trees, waters, animals, and grasses—this is the Tribe. (1969, 116)

Initially, these tribes were small groups living communally, on the West Coast, and extending into Colorado and New Mexico, calling themselves “free families” (Coyote 2009).

As I discuss next, it was a meeting between free families in Oregon and in Washington state that galvanized the actual becoming of the Rainbow Family, however, before leaving the idea of the Diggers and their commitment to the notion of free, it is critical to mention that while sometimes cast as a hip Salvation Army (Grogan 1972, 264), the Diggers were not driven by the idea of charity. Rather, they were engaged in social anarchist praxis, prefiguring a collective infrastructure designed to enable
empowerment, freedom from economic oppression, social justice, and mutual aid. The Digger thesis of “free” was one that rejected the imposition of scarcity on society in the form of the artificial construct of money (Coyote 2008). This is not to suggest, however, that money was not needed or used to support the activities of the Diggers, because of course, it was. This example of the complex relationships between social constructs that are free of monetary exchange and the capital required to sustain them relates to the idea of diverse economies and is something I address in my analysis of the system of complex reciprocity at the Rainbow Gathering.

In many of the ways outlined, the Diggers set the stage for the Rainbow Gathering to combine the praxis of self-organizing with the performance of food as an act of resistance, but it is the idea of complex reciprocity at the Rainbow Gathering that embodies the Digger spirit of free; an assembly where money serves no purpose and shakes people awake into a new reality that encourages a transformative reckoning. Feeding people for free in a highly performative environment is a direct link from the Diggers to the Rainbow Gathering and continues to serve as a generative model.

*Shared Vision*

Garrick Beck, the only son of Judith Malina and Julian Beck, anarchists and founders of the radical Living Theatre in New York City, was one of the young people in the late 1960s who sought community among the free family tribes that formed on the West Coast. These tribes came into being through various associations with the original Diggers and their ideas, but in many ways, were incarnations and adaptations of the growing counterculture consciousness. Garrick is fond of saying that he was handed these
ideals from his parents on a “paper plate,” as opposed to a silver platter (Beck 2016b). As such, he was no stranger to the counterculture lifestyle or to anarchism. The Living Theater’s public performances and spectacles of liberator acts were designed to blur lines between performers and audience and shock participants into new ways of knowing.

About the mission of the Living Theatre, Garrick’s father, Julian writes

To call into question who we are to each other in the social environment of the theatre, to undo the knots that lead to misery, to spread ourselves across the public’s table like platters at a banquet, to set ourselves in motion like a vortex that pulls the spectator into action, to fire the body’s secret engines, to pass through the prism and come out a rainbow, to insist that what happens in the jails matters, to cry “Not in my name!” at the hour of execution, to move from the theatre to the street and from the street to the theatre. This is what The Living Theatre does today. It is what it has always done. (Beck n.d.)

References here to the word vortex and rainbow may or may not have been part of Garrick’s consciousness as a founding organizer of both the Vortex I gathering in Oregon and the Rainbow Gathering, but I suggest these images and associations were surely part of his subconscious experience. What I regard as even more significant, as related to the influences on the formation of the Rainbow Gathering, are Garrick’s remarks, that “it changed my life forever,” recounting the time his Jewish parents were arrested and jailed with Dorothy Day, of the Catholic Worker Movement, for feeding people for free on the streets of New York City. Kitchens that feed people for free has

17 Video resource: at 2:07:58.
18 Beck, Garrick. 2010. From an email to the Catholic Worker listserv. http://groups.google.com/forum/#topic/national-CW-e-mail-list/X72TaZgLhrA.
always been the cornerstone of the experience at the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes. This may be an outgrowth of the Diggers, or from Garrick’s emotional connection to such acts; it may have been inspired from the example of Wavy Gravy and the Hog Farm community feeding thousands at Woodstock (Fornatale 2009, 195), or simply a system that evolved out of necessity or chance.

Garrick was living in Portland, part of the Temple Tribe, when he met Barry Adams (a.k.a. Plunker), a Vietnam Veteran and former Haight-Ashbury resident, active in the anti-war movement. Barry lived in northern Washington State with the Marble Mount Outlaws, a tribe that emerged from the Salmon Creek family originally living near Big Sur. The Marble Mount Outlaws were part of an underground network assisting young men to cross the border into Canada to avoid being drafted into military service in Vietnam (Miller 1999, 131). Barry and Garrick knew each other in passing from different events and gatherings; however, it was in a conversation with each other at an art fair in Bellingham, Washington, where the idea of a large counterculture gathering emerged as a “shared vision” (Beck 2016a).\(^\text{19}\) Garrick describes this vision as a free space, an environment for learning how to be peaceful through the actions of learning community. The idea was that when people “gather inside the cathedral of nature and make encampments together” they begin to share in all manner of living—food, songs, histories, ideas, religious philosophies, meditations, children’s activities—and, as Garrick says, “This kind of sharing makes peace. This kind of sharing makes a difference (2016a).\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Video resource: at 15:59.
\(^{20}\) Video resource: at 19:41.
Vortex I: Roots of the Rainbow

In 1970, a little-known gathering, unusual by any standards, happened just outside Portland, Oregon. It was called Vortex I. This gathering was a catalyzing event in the creation of the Rainbow Gathering because it brought together Garrick, Barry, and a small band of about 80 others who bonded over a shared vision just before Vortex I, at a gathering of the Light Family in Green Lakes, Oregon (Beck 2016b). At the Light Family gathering, this small group began to live the vision of peaceful coexistence through mutual aid and took this energy and themselves directly from Green Lakes to Vortex I, shaping the festival in a way that would, in the end, inspire many others to share the vision and declare themselves “Rainbow Family” (Beck 2016b). What Vortex I provided was the opportunity to “ground truth” the vision.

In the summer of 1970, only a few months after the shootings at Kent State University, President Richard Nixon was scheduled to host the American Legion’s annual convention in Portland. Matt Love, who penned The Far-Out Story of Vortex I, writes that the FBI told the governor of Oregon, Tom McCall, the potential for violent conflict in the streets of Portland, with an anticipated 50,000 protestors showing up to confront Nixon and the legionnaires, “would make the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago look like a tea party” (Love 2004). At the suggestion of local peace activists, McCall responded with a creative diversion tactic; the city of Portland sponsored a free music festival just outside the city that weekend, called “Vortex I: A Biodegradable Festival of Life.”

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21 Video resource: at 2:17:16.
According the Rainbow Hipstory, 23 Garrick and several others working within the peace community of Portland at the time, became aware of well-funded plans for a violent response to Nixon’s appearance in the city and appealed to Oregon governor Tom McCall to diffuse the situation by supporting a peaceful alternative event in a park outside the city. McCall agreed, the state funded it, and in what was arguably one of the most creative responses to the potential for large-scale protests by anti-war demonstrators in recent American history, left the organizing of the event to the peace activists who suggested it. The effect was to galvanize the counterculture community around a peaceful cooperative “vibe” through the self-organizing of this event and it provided Garrick, Barry, and the others, a practice run for the vision they had in mind.

Vortex I was attended by an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 people (Love 2014) and succeed in averting bodies from engaging in protests in Portland. But, perhaps more significantly, it empowered individuals aligned through the ideals of peace, mutual aid, and a commitment to free assembly, to believe in their vision as a process and to experience their abilities to co-create (self-organize) a large gathering and the infrastructure that could support it (Beck 2016b).24

After the success of Vortex I and the solidarity of vision that was felt between broad sections of the counterculture on the West Coast, many formerly “Free Families” began to identify as Rainbow Families. Barry Adams penned the first invitation to the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes within the following year and through a concerted underground effort over the next year and a half—which included road trips across the

23 “Collectively told oral history of the Rainbow Family. The Rainbow Hipstory is recited each year at the North American Gathering. Anyone is free to join in the telling of the Hipstory” (Niman 2011, 288).
U.S., leaving flyers with activist centers, in health food co-ops, yoga centers, head shops (Beck 2016b)\textsuperscript{25} and even mailing the invitation to every member of Congress and every delegate to the United Nations—the first Gathering of the Tribes was held in late June, culminating on July 4\textsuperscript{th} with a prayer for peace, near Granby Colorado (Bateman 1988, 20).

**Other Threads**

As a dynamic structure, and the fluid stage from which performative themes emerge in this research, the Rainbow Gathering reveals many influences that continue to evolve at each gathering. It is a formidable, perhaps impossible, task to attempt to capture every aspect of these dynamics, and especially, the precise nature in which they may have been introduced into the Rainbow culture. Much can be added to my case for a lineage derived from the Diggers, radical theatre and the arts, anarchist values, and the ecology/bioregional movement. For example, the popular media of the time, with its world, spreading the influence of style and language, as well as ideas and actions. However, there are other notable threads of influence to consider as the roots of Rainbow.

Often, because of the visible presence of tipis, the assumption is that the Gathering imitates Native American traditions and spirituality. While some Native American language and spiritual practices can be observed at the Gathering, Garrick disputes this characterization as a gross oversimplification citing the roots of the Rainbow way can be found in Tibetan Buddhism, the Sufi movement, Hasidic, and Kabbalistic movements, in Christianity, in pacifism, in various ecological movements, in the Rastafarian faith, and many others (Niman 2011, 35).

\textsuperscript{25} Video resource: at 2:25:52.
There was widespread exposure to peace work done by Quakers (The Religious Society of Friends) within the anti-war/anti-nuclear actions of the 1970s. In particular, the Quaker consensus process was seen as a radically democratic structure for decision making, as well as the practice of forming affinity groups for self-organizing. These forms of group facilitation were adopted by many in the counterculture, including the Rainbow Gathering. Returning Vietnam Veterans also contributed field knowledge learned while in service to the U.S. military. As a significant group of individuals committed to the vision of the Rainbow Gathering, vets understood how to establish sanitation systems, field kitchens and medical facilities, and how to coordinate a main food supply system. Garrick Beck suggests, in fact, the two primary streams that converged to create what is now the Rainbow Gathering were the anti-war/peace movement and the returning Vietnam Veteran community (Beck 2016b).

In the spirit of the multiple porous thresholds which define the edge of chaos, the spaces where multiple forces interact in dynamic change-making, Fig. 1 represents some of the verifiable and most significant associations between the Rainbow Gathering and other organizations, individuals, events, and movements. This graphic represents past influences, but also, as I briefly address in the next section, it suggests a future.

26 Quakers describe their process as “beyond consensus,” meaning there is focus on relationships over outcomes; there is an emphasis on a collective wisdom which emerges from the shared purpose of group process that transcends the knowledge of an individual (Mahaffy 2012, 12).
28 A note on Fig.1-2: These graphics are hybrid constructions (computer-aided and hand-rendered) as an extension of my sensory engagement with the topic. They are offered to communicate meaning symbolically, but they also serve as “artefacts of knowing” (Ewenstein and Whyte 2011, 82). These images represent my interaction with drawing and color as a sensory process of understanding “spatial/temporal orientations” in an exercise that seeks to validate knowing as an embodied activity grounding conceptual structure and reason (Johnson 1981, 3).
Global Rainbow

I address the generative aspects of the Rainbow Gathering very briefly here as a foundation for discussions in the conclusion where I consider future possibilities for academic study based on this research. As an example of how the Rainbow Gathering has grown since the first assembly in 1972, the map in Fig. 2 depicts the countries where
Rainbow Gatherings have been held,\textsuperscript{29} and includes the 2017 world gathering planned to take place in Indonesia.

Figure 2. Where Rainbow Gatherings have been held since 1972. (In brown.) Image: L. Trocchia-Baļķīts

This is by no means a comprehensive list. Many Rainbow Families hold seasonal regional gatherings and/or local drum circles and potlucks regularly throughout the year and post their activities or contact information on Facebook pages or on Rainbow websites; certainly, there are many more who do not. At all of these gatherings in the U.S. and around the world, the same values-based protocol for assembly exists. While

\textsuperscript{29} This information was collected from various resources listed on the webpage: www.welcomehome.org.
this helps to establish that the North American Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes is an extraordinary event, it is clearly no longer a unique one.

The point I wish to establish is that as the North American annual Gathering matures over time, it grows, changes and sows seeds of influence. It is subject to the change dynamics of influence, complexity, and emergence. As such, notable next-generation responses to older Gathering traditions as expressions of a new counterculture and their responses to the issues of the times are coming forward. These are highly performative rejoinders often centered on food.

One example is a relatively new annual event focalized by young people at Fat Kids kitchen. It is a good-hearted jab at the baby boomers and “old school” counterculture ways. It’s called the Primary Triangle and it is held on July 1st to open the Gathering. People yell and create noise to signal its beginning, as opposed to the silence that precedes the traditional prayer for peace. Instead of circling, they form a triangle, and instead of chanting OM, they chant “YUM,” while the kitchen brings coffee and doughnuts to share with everyone in the Main Meadow. This illustrates what I have previously discussed as Turner’s theory of “doing codes,” where he suggests that public reflexivity can take the form of performance. The enactment of the Primary Triangle is group communication, or group reflexivity, and demonstrates the “ways in which a group or community seeks to portray, understand, and then act on itself (Turner 1977b, 465). This type of performance creates a state of liminality, or a space in between what is known and what might happen. From a complexity standpoint, I understand this to be the edge of chaos, the space from which change emerges. To the larger point regarding
change, as long as the Gathering is the result of the active engagement of all who attend, it is a living community with generative potential inside the assembly and beyond.

Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzelini write that with the action of engaged citizenry, systems of hierarchy, capitalism, and corrupt systems of representational democracy “are being rejected, ideologically and by default, and in that rejection mass horizontal assemblies are opening new landscapes with horizons of autonomy and freedom” (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014, 5). The authors make the case that in the act of social solidarity, such as enacted at the Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes, individuals can begin to prefigure the “beloved community,” a concept that emerged from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), as a way to actively engage in the creation of a society that rejects systems of oppression and hierarchy (Sitrin and Azellini, 57).30

In the sense of a dynamic exchange of being, letting go of, and becoming, the Rainbow Gathering continues to honor its many historical influences, founding ideals and established methods and traditions, while also attracting new attendees, with different experiences, ideas, and challenges. This strengthens the networks that extend from the Rainbow Gathering to other group actions and assemblies. I suggest, for example, the food systems of the field kitchens at various Occupy Wall Street encampments around the country (where there were also affinity groups, a consensus process, and a commitment to the politics of an embodied assembly and the environment of protest as a celebratory, creative, self-organized performance of resistance) is Rainbow

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30 It is impossible to attribute with any precision where influences occur, but it is interesting to point out that these values and the work of SNCC, which were embraced by the Rainbow Gathering, also embodied efforts of the Rev. Jesse Jackson in establishing the Rainbow coalition. All of these efforts were manifesting at the same point in contemporary history, a validation of how change occurs in a complexity construct.
consciousness. The same can be said of various self-organized responses to Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy, where Rainbow-style field kitchens integrated spaces for food, music, relationship-building, and healing, were spontaneously self-organized and established collaboratively as a “fuzzy but functioning version of the beloved community” (Solnit 2009, 297).

Up to this point, I have approached the Rainbow Gathering as the site of my research from around its edges. I have discussed the theoretical foundations of my focus for the study and how they apply to various aspects of the Gathering. I have presented a history of its origins and suggested the values that influenced its organizational structure and value system. At this point, I complete the portrait with aspects of the Rainbow Gathering that actively contribute to affect. I discuss areas for critical engagement that exist within this storied assembly, and finally, I engage with a detailed description of the kitchens and the 2016 Gathering to further establish the world of my research.

Resistance: A Rainbow Movie

As I have discussed earlier, the North American Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes is a remarkable phenomenon on many levels. It can attract up to 30,000 people (Solnit 2009, 296; Niman 2011, 205) in an annual congregation that occurs at the same time of the year, July 1 - 7, but in a different location in one of the National Forests in the United States. The assembly takes place on public land to assert the right of the people to freely assemble in such spaces. The general location (state or region of the country) is decided at a vision council through consensus at the end of the previous year’s gathering.

31 In Rainbow parlance, a movie is “the spectacle transpiring in front of you at any given time. It often refers to ridiculous antics. Most popular movies: The Gate Movie, The A-Camp Movie, The Cop Movie” (Niman 2011, 290).
Any individual is welcome to explore the selected region for a possible site. There are guidelines provided indicating what the needs of a Gathering are and scouts spend most of the year volunteering their time and travel costs to determine appropriate sites and a final location is agreed upon at “Spring Council” by consensus. This council gathering is usually held in the region where the Gathering will take place. The details regarding the specific site is circulated after Spring Council in mid-to-late June, as part of a last minute cat-and-mouse game of resistance to the harassment from the U.S. Forest Service who dislike the group’s refusal to sign a use permit (Niman 2011, 200). The rationale behind this is that the Gathering has no leaders and no members, therefore, it is illogical that one person should be compelled to sign as a principal, or even spokesperson, for the assembly (Welcomehome.org 2017).
The freedom to assemble on public land is one of the strongest assertions made by the Rainbow Gathering, and it is regarded as a right that should be afforded to every peaceful American citizen. This right, however, is highly contested by the U.S. Forest Service. Michael Niman, professor of journalism and media studies at Buffalo State College in New York, is one of the few academics who have studied the Rainbow
Family. About this particular dynamic he writes, “Federal government law-enforcement officials now systematically harass and persecute Rainbow Gathering attendees wherever they gather (Niman 2011, 230). In fact, at the 2016 Vermont Gathering, the ACLU of Vermont petitioned local and federal law enforcement to end the profiling of individuals at the Rainbow Gathering based on their constitutional right to assembly and free expression (ACLU 2016). The ways this harassment plays out establishes a charged emotional environment that is not without risk to those attending. This activity is mostly in the form of arrests for minor unrelated offenses, before the gathering begins, as a way to intimidate those arriving early.

From a critical perspective, one of the reasons this has become an issue concerns the entrenchment of hierarchical political systems and issues of domination and control enacted by the forest service. In simplest terms, the Forest Service wants large groups using public lands to pay for and sign a permit, and to provide the names and addresses of the leaders of the group. Aside from the belief that they have the constitutional right to occupy public space, the Rainbow Gathering continues to assert they have no leaders and cannot, therefore, complete a permit. It is not possible for the Forest Service to stop people from camping on public land, so their response has been to invest in a militarized presence in and around the Gathering. In 2013, this resulted in a half a million-dollar expenditure for the U.S. government, with a noted two arrests from the estimated ten to twenty-thousand people in attendance (Davis 2013). This kind of one-sided response to a peaceful gathering of people implies more than an attempt at compliance; rather, it seems to suggest very high levels of commitment within the federal government to dismantle and criminalize U.S. citizens who run “counter” to the dominant culture.
Rainbow Gathering has consistently been the object of surveillance, not only by the U.S. Forest Service, but also by the FBI, justified by reports such as the following:

*****CASE NARRATIVE*****

DATE-INFO: 06/29/1999    NAR-NO: 2344218

****END OF REPORT****

Detailing the motivation, scope, and full magnitude of such a statement, or chronicling the wide-ranging forms of harassment those attending the Rainbow Gathering find themselves subject to, is beyond the scope of this research. However, I suggest the consequence of these dynamics contributes strongly to the affective atmospheres of a Rainbow Gathering. As well, I believe the ways in which food performs (note ‘vegetarian’ being listed above) in environments such as these supports my engagement with a critical as well as sensory ethnography. In asserting the right to occupy public land, the Rainbow Gathering is performing resistance.

Before moving away from this “movie,” it is worth noting a dissonance that speaks, again, to the political nature of the actions of Federal authorities. Although there are annual attempts to discredit the Rainbow Gathering, it is also consistently recognized

by the Forest Service for excellent cleanup and site reclamation. In the 1999, the same year the above report was issued, the U.S. Forest Service released its annual final impact summary. Regarding the environmental impacts of a large gathering and the cleanup efforts, they submit facts that show the Rainbow Family did a very good job, stating, “as time passes, it will be increasingly difficult to determine that a gathering of this magnitude ever occurred in the Bear Creek area” (USFS 1999).

Plugging In

In a self-organized, highly decentralized configuration, the Rainbow Gathering is co-created. Everything is free and all are welcome. Clean water, fresh food, systems for recycling, waste, and sanitation, playgrounds and activities for children, trade, a wide variety of spiritual practices, wellness practitioners and health care, legal services, entertainment, education, public art—all the elements that nurture a peaceful, cooperative, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally expansive human society—are represented at the Gathering. Aside from being self-organized and working in a system that excludes monetary exchange, the assembly occurs in the wilderness, in intimate proximity to nature, and without electricity. The use of generators is not tolerated. There are no motorized vehicles. Alcohol is also not welcome inside the Gathering, although there are those who camp just outside the trailhead into the main gathering in an area known as “A Camp.” The use of illicit hard drugs is also strongly discouraged within the Gathering. “Mini Manuals” are distributed at the Gathering, and are now available online, which are constantly evolving and open for anyone to amend. These describe to

34 See: Appendix B.
attendees what the purpose of the Gathering is, what types of behaviors are acceptable and what are not, and the various guidelines for food, water, and sanitation systems. There are also a number of open-sourced “Raps, often hand-written as signs which are posted at various locations throughout the gathering that detail the guidelines for ensuring a successful and healthy assembly.

Kitchens and Food Systems

Food is what brings everyone together. Aside from the obvious opportunity to gather together to eat, creating and maintaining the food systems infrastructure provides ways to give in this system of complex reciprocity. In Rainbow parlance, the term is “plugging in.” A great deal of work is required to establish and sustain a kitchen, therefore, opportunities to plug in are many. Before any kitchen is established, an intricate web of water lines is laid by early arrivals, at “seed camp,” tapping natural springs to provide a consistent source of water to various locations inside the Gathering. State of the art water filtration units (Fig. 4), some solar powered, are connected to the water lines, with primary placement consideration given to the site of “Kiddie Village,” the kitchen most focused on providing food to families and children. Other filtration centers are centrally located. Unless a kitchen has organized their own filtration system, hauling water is a consistent opportunity for people at the Gathering to plug in.

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35 Instructions, introductions, diatribes, statements, primers, guides, or reminders, either oral or written, related to Rainbow ways. See: Appendix C.
Figure 3. A gravity-fed water filtration station. Water sourced from springs.

Along with clean water, sanitation, garbage, recycling, and food waste are elements of the food system that require considerable labor to establish and maintain. Niman stresses how the media tend to focus on people in the act of celebration at the Gathering (which ultimately, for those who do not attend, shapes opinion), rarely showing images of people digging latrines, hauling water, or sorting through garbage and recycling (2011, 86). The hard work of the Gathering, those elements of giving without the expectation of a direct reciprocal response, is largely overlooked as the powerful social construct that it is. Garrick Beck is cited in Niman’s book saying

Take a look at how [Rainbow] accomplishes the basic needs of society without punitive justice. Because that’s revolutionary. The fact that we dance under the moon, the fact that we believe in love as an idea and peace as a goal doesn’t make us special from hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of other groups. We’re all in that together. But, the fact that we motivate the hard work of human society without money, that’s revolutionary. (Niman 2011, 87)
Kitchens are the primary spheres where the praxis of complex reciprocity takes place. They provide a kind of structure, or opportunity, for participation, which is encouraged (see Appendix D), but never monitored or directed.

Between Gatherings, the material kitchen must be housed. At a minimum, this can mean tables and chairs, tents for the storage of food, numerous plastic bins filled with kitchen necessities—knives, stirring spoons, potholders, cutting boards, ladles, scoops, dishwashing liquid, towels, and bleach—then many large pots and pans, utensils, and metal cooking grates for open fire cooking, or propane burners and tanks. The kitchen then needs to travel to the Gathering in some sort of rig capable of towing all this equipment. The distance traveled by some kitchens is impressive. For example, this year Shining Light Kitchen made its way to Vermont from Alaska. All of this requires the gifts of organization, time, and dedication to food at the Gathering as performing a value greater than the simple act of nutrition. If providing calories were the chief concern of kitchens, I suspect bringing bread and peanut butter for 5,000 might be a slightly simpler proposition. This is not to say that kitchens do not specialize and bring only a limited selection of food; the term kitchens is one loosely used.

Each kitchen has the need to transport, or set up a system for, clean water. Food from Rainbow Main Supply, located just outside the gathering near the entrance to the Main Trail, must be brought into the gathering when it arrives. There is the need to build or assemble the physical structures to cook, clean, store food, and feed people. As well, there are the tasks of digging grey water pits and latrines (which are known to everyone exclusively as “shitters” and which must be dug, as well as ecologically remediated, multiple times over the course of the Gathering), constructing and maintaining
dishwashing and handwashing stations, chopping and hauling wood for cooking and campfires, and constructing a “bliss pit,” a place for people to assemble around a campfire, to listen to music, eat, and be social. Rainbow kitchens provide food on site as well as serving ‘Main Circle,\(^{36}\)” which means there is also the need to transport large quantities of food through the woods to a central location. This constitutes a considerable amount of work as exchange, given there can be as many as twenty to thirty kitchens at a Gathering.

Figure 4. Lovin’ Ovens kitchen. Mud ovens constructed on site. “Bakery” racks on left. Photo: K. Sobol. Note the sculptural elements on the sides of the large oven.

\(^{36}\)”Usually a central area where the Council meets and where the Fourth of July meditation and prayer celebration occurs. A dinner, prepared by many different kitchens…is also served here” (Niman 2011, 290).
Because giving, plugging in, or serving, as it is sometimes called, is critical to the ability to sustain thousands of people, the food system creates kitchens as communities. These are sensory neighborhoods that form around the kitchens. In this environment, people camp and contribute to the processes of what it takes to eat and have clean water in a way that builds relationships. The neighborhoods that emerge are guided by a themed, or performative approach to food. Creative names, such as “Musical Veggie Café,” “Lovin’ Ovens,” or “Shut Up and Eat It,” can influence the affective atmospheres experienced in these kitchen communities. This is a point of interest in my research as I experience how, through the praxis of self-organizing, food becomes a cultural act of resistance and a “symbolic construction, a performance of group-ness that retains people’s ability to have different identities (Julier 2013, 171).

It takes a good deal of energy to bring a kitchen to the Gathering and feed people thousands of people for a week or longer. As a result, the kitchens tend to be a mixture of those that set up every year, those that have significant presence from time to time, those that are localized efforts (that is, emerging from people living in the region where the Gathering is held), and those that are spontaneous and may only establish themselves once. The kitchens that have established an annual presence, acquire specific sensory and affective characteristics, sometimes by offering a unique food-event that becomes the “buzz” for what is happening that day. As distinct events, advertised by word of mouth, they draw in many more people than a typical day of providing meals. This is one way kitchens avoid the stagnation of participatory energies. In complexity terms, these events increase weak ties to diverse communities. The strongest and most vital structures are those that are constantly being influenced by outside forces. Examples
of popular annual food events include the (vegetable) sushi brunch with live jazz at New York Purple Gang, Friday Shabbat meal at Jerusalem Camp or Home Shalom, pizza at Lovin’ Ovens, tacos at Nacho Mamas, or the pesto dinner at Musical Veggie Café.

Most of the kitchens are vegetarian, but some do serve meat. There are baked goods that come from mud ovens. Some kitchens serve two to three meals a day, some only serve dinner, and others are specialty kitchens that serve only herbal tea, coffee, popcorn, or fresh sprouts. Some kitchens choose to serve only those in their immediate area and not the Main Circle. Others perform both functions. Those kitchens that do not feed Main Circle do not receive food from Main Supply.

Main Supply is the only part of the Gathering that handles money, or “green energy” by being the primary beneficiary of donations received from “The Magic Hat.” After meals are served at Main Circle, a band of musicians parade through the area with The Magic Hat, which is made available to those who wish to contribute cash to help purchase bulk food items. No one is ever directly asked or expected to donate money; rather, it is offered as one way to give that will benefit many people. There is a scrupulous and public accounting of the cash in and cash out.

Main Supply is focalized by a group of people beginning many months prior to the Gathering. Local farmers and produce auctions, as well as local stores or corporate food producers in the area, are scouted and contacted for what might be available during the time-frame of the Gathering to establish how much food will be available, and at what price. The goal of any purchasing by those at Main Supply is to keep the money as local as possible. The purchase of goods can take place before the Gathering with donations that have been given, usually online through PayPal, and during the Gathering, as cash is
available. Food is then distributed to kitchens that are feeding Main Circle. Main Supply also receives and distributes donations, which arrive during the Gathering from local citizens, as well as from supportive food businesses. For example, Organic Valley, the large dairy cooperative, consistently provisions Rainbow Gatherings with large donations of food.

The 2016 Vermont Gathering

The North American Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes in 2016 was held in the Green Mountains of Vermont, near the small village of Mt. Tabor. The “official” dates of the assembly were Friday, July 1 through Thursday, July 7, with the culminating event, the prayer for peace, held on Monday, July 4. To research an ephemeral and temporarily-bounded event, my fieldwork consisted of a relatively short, but extremely intensive period of time. I arrived “on the land” for “seed camp,” seven days prior to the start of the Gathering, and left two days after, for a total of sixteen days. My research schedule averaged 12 to 16 hours a day during that period.

Prior to arriving in Vermont, I contacted individuals associated with kitchens and food systems infrastructure through personal contacts and via Facebook to document processes of organizing. At the Gathering, I spent time in 26 of the kitchens that were set up and interviewed 16 individuals. Post-gathering, my research included follow-up discussions via email with individuals I spoke to at the Gathering or through Facebook messages. I also continued to monitor the Facebook pages related to the Gathering for any reflections or media (sound recordings, videos, photographs) that might be posted.

The Gathering was just outside the small community of Mt. Tabor, near the peak of Willard Mountain. It was steep terrain, challenging campers and kitchens to find level
spots for setting up. Because of the logistics, many of the kitchens were organized along the Main Trail (marked in red, Fig. 5), running along the contour of the mountain, on its east side.

Figure 5. Topographical map of the 2016 Rainbow Gathering site. Green Mountains, VT.

The shaded blue area represents the approximate space occupied for the Gathering. Once inside the Gathering, there is an open-sourced main map identifying the approximate location of the major encampments and kitchens. This is posted at a spot on the Main Trail designated as “INFO.” This map is created on-site, and added to over time, as camps and kitchens arrived and set up. Numbers are placed on a large hand-painted map of the Gathering site to indicate the approximate location of the camp. The “key” to the numbers found on the map is shown in Fig.6.
Encampments are important sites for creating the community around which complex reciprocity can be enacted. Communalism is encouraged, down to very small details. For example, building personal fires at the Gathering is strongly discouraged, not just from a safety perspective, but because, as stated in the 2016 Mini Manual,37 “We encourage each other to share communal fires instead of having hundreds of small, private ones. This brings us closer together, improves fire safety, and minimizes our impact on the land. Camping together and helping out at kitchens can be the most rewarding part of a gathering.”

37 See: Appendix A.
The map showed approximately 120 different camps that marked their locations on the map for the 2016 Rainbow Gathering. Most of them served food of some kind. Certainly, among these were small camp kitchens that do not serve large “neighborhoods” and there are individuals who choose not to eat with others, but the vast majority of people in attendance are eating in established kitchens, rather than at individual campsites. The 26 kitchens included in this study are represented in Table 1.

Table 2 Rainbow Gathering kitchens included in research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Camp Awesome</th>
<th>Green &amp; Purple</th>
<th>Krishna Camp</th>
<th>Outer Circle</th>
<th>Wanna Burn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cereal Bar</td>
<td>Instant Soup</td>
<td>Magic Bowl</td>
<td>Shining Light</td>
<td>We Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee Mafia</td>
<td>Iris</td>
<td>Nacho Mamas</td>
<td>Stock Pot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty Kids</td>
<td>Jesus Camp</td>
<td>NY Purple Gang</td>
<td>Tea Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty Mud</td>
<td>Kick Down Cafe</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>Turtle Soup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat Kids</td>
<td>Kiddie Village</td>
<td>Om Shalom</td>
<td>Velociraptor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Serving as a representative sample, the names of the kitchens in this study exemplify the kinds of affective performances at work in these environments. Kitchens hold space for small acts of resistance on many levels, from personal/group identity to food provisioning and consumption. The names also signify a celebration of diversity. This seeds the field of my inquiry relative to the social formation of the Gathering as both stratified and an example of assemblage. I understand the Gathering as many autonomous and affective spaces that perform as “a connection of desires, conjunction of flows, [and a] continuum of intensities” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 161).
In all, my position is that the Rainbow Gathering embodies historical influence and projects future possibilities; it is both performative assembly and assemblage. It is saturated with levels of resistance and solidarity, and in this context, speaks directly to what it means for food to be performative, how it feels to engage with self-organizing, and why complex reciprocity matters as an alternative sphere of capitalism. The Gathering represents affect as a type of sovereignty, created by of a “grouping of powers” yet constituted as “group individuations” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 341). By this, I mean that while the structure and culture facilitate opportunities for resistance, as well as solidarity, experienced as a sense of history, community, group purpose, and identity, it does so by allowing individuals to reside freely in a space that is “open to their own possibilities” (Dallmayr 2016, 9). It is in the embodied engagement with “constituent moments,” which Jason Frank describes as spaces of “enacted felicity” where my intent as a researcher is to generate meaning (Frank 2010, 8). To explore this, I look to Butler who asks, “So how do we then understand this movement of gathering, which is durational, and implies occasional, periodic, or definitive forms of scatterings? It is not one act but a convergence of actions different from one another, a form of political sociality irreducible to conformity” (Butler 2015, 178).
CHAPTER 4: HIPSTORIES OF FOOD, LOVE, AND CHAOSMOS

The performative writing section that follows is a chronicle of constituent moments. As a mélange of the artistic and academic, each piece reflects a highly personal process of making meaning from experiencing food and chaosmos at the Rainbow Gathering. I present this largely without analysis as stand-alone reflections channeled through the creative process. I provide deeper reflections on these moments in the final chapter.

To Begin: How Do I Know?

I used to be a lot better at knowing-as-being. Feeling a certain sureness.

I used to be better at withstanding the way conversations beat me up, pound me with logic and reason, dangle the possibility of respect in front of me by a single rational thread I must reach for to stop the bruising of knowing that comes intuitively.

I see now my own hand in being less than sure. What has graduate school been, if not the gradual erosion of my sureness, a result of emplacing myself in a perpetual state of discomfort in an environment invested in knowing as a sort of mechanics of logic—if-then, or like it’s always been. But when? The facts remembered, it all adds up. But, don’t you get it? Numbers as a way of knowing are very difficult for me when I can’t remember if you said 967 or 679.

But I still remember how it feels to be sure.

I am eight years old and I know what pasta fazool tastes like when you don’t really like it but you have to eat it and so you tip the salad bowl sideways when your parents have left the table and drip some of the oil and vinegar left in the salad bowl into your dish so that it makes small pools you can slide your spoon along the top of, scraping up just enough dressing with the tomatoey beans and pasta so it tastes way better than just plain pasta fazool. I am sure this is the way I will be able to eat it all and be allowed to leave the table.
One time, I was sure that my femaleness was not going to be defined by wearing a new training bra from J.C. Penny, so I threw it in the corner of my room and kicked it under the bed.

Even as an adult, I am still sure in proximity to my beloved.

But mostly, I have developed coping mechanisms to function in a world that does not wholly validate sensory lived experience, intuition, and affect as legitimate ways to know.

So I learn how to know as the world would have me know and oddly, this creates a situation where even with (or maybe because of) an advanced degree—

I feel less sure.

I’m thinking about ways of knowing before the Rainbow Gathering this year because I live differently than only a few years ago. Now, knowing does not emerge, like it used to, in a cold updraft while taking in the view from a three-sided outhouse, sitting in the presence of such profound woodland beauty that you don’t mind at all even if you do have to put on a hat and coat and shoes at 2 a.m. to walk outside and commune in this fashion.

Will what I used to be sure of—
the knowing that comes from being—
be a thing that needs to be remembered?

Have I forgotten completely what that sureness feels like?
Because where I am going, knowing does not need a citation to be credible.

Broken

When I came around the bend in the path to the log where I left my gear with my son, he was sitting with someone. I could see they were eating. When I got close enough, I was introduced to Broken and his dog Grumble. Broken—what a name. It broke my heart in two when I heard it. Names are a thing at the Gathering—a performative element, a way to present the persona of your choosing. In some cases, it’s just a name that has been chosen for you, or you fall into, but people use these names because it’s a
way to express something about themselves. In Babylon (for the most part) our names are selected for us. When you meet someone named “Bob,” the name doesn’t give you much to go on. You tend to rely on other visual clues to tell you something about him as a person. At the Gathering, names express personalities, or experiences, and perform as an immediate emotional or visceral connection, whether you understand the reference or not. For example, a person named Feather conjures an association with all we know of feathers—that they are natural, delicate, yet durable, functional, and often associated with Native American spirituality. Or, someone with a name like Crow, Green Fox, or Otter, might lead you to associate that person with the characteristics associated with the animal or color. (Green, for example, expressing an environmental consciousness.) Of course, these meanings function on multiple levels but, to be honest, I would personally be cautious in my dealings with someone named Weasel, mostly because of the generally agreed upon social connotation. But to be clear, not everyone has a Rainbow name. If you go to a few Gatherings, chances are you’ll know who Felipe is, or Karin, or Garrick. Some people stick with their real names and just add embellishment. There’s “Marty who likes to party,” “Diamond Dave,” “Question Mark,” and “Rich in Spirit. Often, you’ll find the likes of Vermin Supreme, Dandelion, Easy, Glowing Feather, Fantuzzi, Plunker, Lucid, and me, Agapi.

But Broken isn’t a Rainbow name. Broken is a Dirty Kid. That’s what they call themselves. If you don’t know what a Dirty Kid is, I’d say you could join most of America in that case. But, if you go to a Rainbow Gathering, you’ll get hip pretty quick. In the United States, there are many thousands of “Kids” that have dropped out of society. I really don’t think most people understand how many young people live like
this. They are under the radar for the most part, unless you see them flying a sign beside an on-ramp saying, “Anywhere but Here,” or you might run into them spoiling outside Walmart with their friends and dogs. This is their culture. They are travelers, they ride the rails, they hitchhike, they sleep in the rough or in squats, they pan handle, they roll their own cigarettes, recycle butts, and use the cheapest possible tobacco. They can also get pretty drunk.

Figure 7. Dirty Kids pose for a picture. 2016 Rainbow Gathering. Photo: K. Sobol.

38 Asking for spare change, usually with a sign in hand.
I can’t speak for them, but the Dirty Kids I have spoken to are just different enough—maybe gay, transgender, have addiction, depression, or other mental health issues. Many times they come from broken or complicated families, or are just wild and independent. They’ve either been thrown out of their family homes, or just choose to split, wanting to get away from a world where they are constantly reminded of all the ways they can’t measure up, don’t fit in…and don’t want to. They reject the rhetoric of capitalism. They do not believe in being forced to work to make others rich. From my experience, they’re not really into hard drugs, prostitution, or gangs. But, they are homeless and enthusiastically shun the 9 to 5 mentality. They form tight units, accept each other unconditionally, and have each other’s backs. It seems to me they are just looking for some family, like most everyone else that comes to Rainbow Gatherings.

Figure 8. Before a Dirty Kids wedding at the Rainbow Gathering. Photo: K. Sobol
In many ways, the phenomenon of the Dirty Kids might be compared to privileged suburban white kids in the 60s and 70s, “tuning in, turning on, and dropping out\(^{39}\)” into communes, or on to painted school buses and forming “free” families\(^{40}\).

There’s a Dirty Kids kitchen called Fat Kids, and they have their psychedelic bus parked at the back gate of the Gathering this year. Although they are running a dumpster-dived kitchen inside the gathering, they are also supporting folks who are organizing Main Supply by doing runs into town with the bus. They take a different path than mainstream society, displaying strong in-group/out-group behaviors, but the Dirty Kids I have encountered have developed a strong moral code that is cooperative and communal in nature.

So, Broken and my son are hanging out, talking, and eating granola bars. My son, who goes by Son Bear at the Gatherings, is 21. This is his third national gathering. He now lives in Oregon and I live in Ohio, so I didn’t tell him what to bring, but I was happy to see he bought three boxes of granola bars to share. What I notice is that Broken takes his fist and smashes his granola bar on the log first before he opens it. He can’t be more than five or six years older than my son, but Broken has no teeth. He can’t bite into a granola bar, but he can manage it pounded to dust. He’s grateful and polite and I know, as my eyes trace the outlines of the scabbed and healing cuts across the bridge of his nose and on the point of his right cheekbone that I am going to meet up with him again. I just feel it—what can I say? Before we leave him, I tell him my name: Agapi. He has trouble saying it, but I tell him it means Love, and he says, “That’s cool.” Son Bear and I give

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\(^{39}\) Iconic phrase championed by Timothy Leary in the late 1960s.

\(^{40}\) After the Diggers began to migrate away from the Haight-Ashbury in 1967 they created communes in various locations on the west coast and referred to themselves as “free families.” (Coyote 2015, 131)
him a hug, and I told him I knew we’d probably see each other again. It’s one of those Rainbow things for me. Whoever it is I first run into at a Gathering, is someone that’s going to be an important part of my experience in some way. I try to believe this isn’t true, but it is.

“Yeah,” I tell him, after I said I’d probably see him again, and he gave me a weird look, “there are gonna be, like, twenty-thousand people here, but I’m gonna catch up with you again. You wait and see.” Son Bear adds, “Lovin’ you, bro.”

Privilege and Fear

It’s pouring rain. It’s pelting the tarp over my tent with super loud thwacks and I’m starting to worry if we trenched around the tent well enough. We’re on the side of a mountain, after all, and the water is running like mad from top to bottom. There’s even thunder, but it’s funny when that happens because you hear whoops and hollers rise up out of the Gathering after a big rolling thunderclap in defiance of any attempt by the weather to dampen spirits. But, my spirit had been feeling a little damp. I came up here to have a cry, actually.

I can always count on the Rainbow Gathering to challenge me. Usually, it challenges my privilege and tests whether I can walk the walk when I say, “We are all one.” My friend Dandelion likes to say that everything that exists in Babylon exists at Rainbow, but it’s just more concentrated. I think that’s true. There are lots of folks like me here, baby-boomers, who are still committed to living peace, love, and understanding, but hold down jobs, get educated, have families, life-partners, homes, and cars. But there are lots of people not like me, and that’s more than OK. I don’t seek out sameness in my everyday life, but sometimes, it happens.
There are different ways to know privilege. As a person living in rural America, there’s a knowing that comes from being in Philadelphia recently, feeling my stride quickening as I encountered shit, piss, puke, blood, and a passed-out human being all in different places on the sidewalk along the three blocks between where I was staying and the Downtown Marriott Courtyard where I was about to present a conference paper to academics sipping double lattes and dressed for success. That kind of knowing privilege is cerebral. It’s the cognitive dissonance of reality filtered through the impossible likelihood of making a difference. So, you check it. You understand privilege theoretically, feel bad about it for a minute, and then you tip your barista really well.

What happens at the Gathering, for me, is that my privilege isn’t reckoned from a position of “other.” I’m stumbling around in the mud, just like everyone else, dirty, with not enough sleep. I’m helping you cut vegetables, and sharing the same cutting board. I’m holding hands with you as we pray for peace. I’m giving you a hug…or are you giving me a hug, when some recognition of shared humanity passes between us. There is no other. Yet, there is. I sometimes feel afraid of the solid things you do to push people away in Babylon—your defiant posture, your facial tattoos, your I don’t give a shit attitude, your loud, really loud swearing, and your eyes, which seem cold and removed.

I was afraid last night, when I was in my tent alone. We hadn’t camped in a kitchen neighborhood. We came early for seed camp, before the kitchens were established, so we just picked the most level spot we could find and it ended up being removed from the main part of the Gathering. Some Dirty Kids camped down the hill a bit from us and they came back drunk. That pissed me off, because it used to be that alcohol really did stay outside the Gathering. I felt angry that with the influx of younger
street kids, the consensus of no alcohol is being challenged. They were loud, they were really drunk and started making a fire to cook some food. That’s another thing that isn’t supposed to happen. No personal fires. It keeps us safe in the woods and it minimizes our impact on the environment, but here they were making a fire that was getting pretty huge and from the sounds of what was going on and what I could see, either someone was going to get hurt or they’d all pass out before they could hurt themselves. I was worried the fire would get out of control because it was very windy. I was upset because they just didn’t get it. I felt like they didn’t care why they were here or what it was all about. I thought it was probably just free food and a place to party for them.

It didn’t feel safe to go down to their camp, by myself, in the middle of the night. I wasn’t really sure who was down there, plus, what was I going to tell them that they’d listen to without getting belligerent? I actually felt fear. I was afraid of the potential fire hazard, but I was also afraid of them—drunk and maybe angry young men—and what they might do if I challenged them in any way. I hated that I felt fear. I was ashamed to know hate and fear in the same feeling at the Rainbow Gathering.

So this morning, I felt really sad about that. My legs were heavy as I trudged down the hill toward their tents. I passed by their camp, the tents barely standing upright because the poles weren’t in the right places—in fact the tents weren’t even zipped up, even though it was in the upper 30s overnight. Blankets and sleeping bags and a pair of bare feet were sticking out of one.

I made it out to Main Trail and I hear some scuffling and “Wake Up and Rage!” shouted from up in the woods, probably from those same young brothers. I despair. Part of me is overwhelmed with the reality of the sheer numbers of homeless young people
here this year. My kids are all grown and living on their own. They have their struggles, but are well-adjusted with a future. I also live in a college town, and I am surrounded by young people with dreams for their lives. I have the privilege of not knowing on a daily basis how our tragically broken society has failed so many, many young people.

I stop on the trail and listen to the wind in the trees. I feel the coolness sweep across my face and watch how it moves the tall grasses down in the meadow and rustles the leaves on the trees just beyond that. Why is it we cannot manage to love and nurture every baby born, every person on this planet?

I walk down the muddy trail toward Kiddie Village. I want to interview Felipe, who has been the main focalizer for this camp and kitchen for many years. He tells the story of coming to the Gathering first as a drunk, with not much to live for. He credits the Gathering with saving his life by showing him unconditional love. Now, this kitchen is his life. He is dedicated to creating a safe space for kids and nurturing environments for families at the Gathering. My son and husband join me in time for breakfast, which is an amazing assortment of stick-to-your-ribs food: pancakes, mixed fruit—dried and fresh, and a strawberry maple syrup, eggs, potatoes, and oatmeal. But before we eat, we circle up.
Felipe holds a large abalone shell filled with burning sage. He walks around the circle of maybe fifty people—from toddlers to the elderly—inviting the cleansing smoke from the sage to encircle each of us, and he speaks about why it is important to gather together. He talks about taking care of each other. He tells us to love each other.

After breakfast, I interview a young couple who were 22 and 23, and just graduated from college in Charleston, South Carolina. This was their first Gathering and they set up their tent in this neighborhood. Their teeth were white, his hair was in a hipster man-bun and hers was long and brushed. They were wearing the kind of outdoor gear that comes from a catalog. I thought it was interesting they landed in Kiddie Village,
but not really surprised. It’s a safe choice, when your eyes are just starting to open to a world that is very different from the one you have inhabited for most of your life.

Of course, the differences between them and the Dirty Kids camping in my neighborhood was heavy on my mind. If I had seen these two last night, sitting in camping chairs in front of their North Face tent, finishing a bottle of wine and starting a fire so they could make coffee in their stainless-steel French press mugs, would I have perceived what they were doing as wrong? Would I have been afraid to go talk to them?

I walked back to the tent. I was feeling low. When I got up into the woods I could see someone hanging around the tents where all the commotion was happening last night. I was resolved to go over, but not sure what I’d do. I approached, saying, “Morning, family.” A tall, skinny young brother turned around and flashed a huge toothless grin. He says good morning and offered, “I’m Pinkie,” while he wiggled the little finger on his right hand in the air. I tell him my name and that my husband, son, and I are camped just up from them, pointing up the hill, and then I tell him it worried me a little bit about the fire last night. He apologized. He said he had been drinking, although he knew he shouldn’t have been. And that he and his buddy were really hungry. I did give him the rap about small fires, but also told him about Instant Soup kitchen, and where it was, and that you could get something to eat there 24/7. He was happy to know that. He was getting dressed all this while—an absolutely amazing assembly of clothes. A real costume that he was proud to show me, pointing out what parts he had sewn himself, and how he traded for the jacket. It seemed to me like colorful armor, and he was girding himself, preparing like he probably did every day, to be Pinkie in a world that didn’t fit him very well.
Right then, I heard someone behind me. I turned and saw Broken, arms outstretched, and calling, “Agapi!” He remembered. He remembered me and he remembered how to say my name. I am guessing he remembered what it meant. In that moment, I remembered what it meant too. Didn’t I just know that Broken would turn up again? And here he is in front of me; Pinkie and Broken are my neighbors, my brothers. It is now (always) going to be Pinkie and Broken in the tents below me, not some vague threat. We talk to each other as equal human beings—and in that act, the privilege of holding an abstracted fear of the other is exhausted. My own anguish last night was precisely because of what I had the privilege not to know. Now I do. Knowing is a dissolving feeling, a clearing and a lightening. Co-creating a Rainbow Gathering is about
living in a space where social change is possible. The Gathering provides opportunities to shed the burden of fear that permeates modern existence. Know one another!

Broken went in the tent and Pinkie told me his whole story—how he had addiction issues, and he had a kid that lived with his mom. He resolved last night, to do this whole gathering with no drugs—“maybe a little weed, but no drugs and no alcohol,” he said. It was really important to him. I think we both sensed this as a performance of new commitment and best intentions. But for now, looking into each other’s eyes, we shared the belief that Pinkie was here to be part of the Gathering. I told him I thought that was cool. He told me he loved Jesus.

We talked some more and I said goodbye. Pinkie and Broken were off to find breakfast, and I told them Kiddie Village was still serving food. On my way up to the
tent, I can see the Tibetan prayer flags we strung between our tents and the trees waving wildly. As I crawled inside, it started to rain. It feels OK now to cry a little.

INFO

Doing research at the Gathering wasn’t making space for me to enjoy anything myself. I couldn’t relax much. I was “working” at least 12 hours a day. I was using my phone to record interviews and to take photographs (which I had mixed feelings about anyway), but I also had to keep a small digital audio recorder as a backup. I had to remember to keep these devices charged. I bought and brought with me a battery pack, which I kept in my tent with my laptop. Having all this technology with me was a weird enough trip in itself, but then I had to keep a notebook and pencils, and because I’m getting old and can’t read without glasses, I had to make sure my glasses were with me at all times—and that I had more than one pair of glasses, just in case. It was a hassle. My values were being challenged by how important all this “stuff” was to my purpose here—which was supposed to be about being real in environments, with people, sensing and feeling.

Then there were the constant unwelcomed and alien feelings about my “stuff” up in my tent, and how safe it was because I didn’t actually camp in a neighborhood, so to speak. I was starting to feel like the “having to” part of all this research was separating me from pure experience, noting ironically how it was all this stuff that was required to academically justify the “experience of being” at the Gathering.

After a few days, I started hanging out at INFO. This was new for me, so it was energizing. For more than a couple of reasons, I wasn’t plugged into a kitchen this year, and I realized that even with the many “Welcome Home” greetings, the spontaneous hugs
from strangers, or the sincere “Lovin’ you!” exclamations, for the first time in all my times gathering, I didn’t feel like I was home because I wasn’t “with” a kitchen. I was traveling from kitchen to kitchen, and hanging out in the meadow at Main Circle for some meals so I could catch the vibe and meet people to talk to. But, I didn’t feel like I belonged anywhere. I felt adrift among people who were starting to center down into neighborhoods, relationships, and ephemeral tribes of belonging, relating…and knowing.

It’s this kind of knowing:

Hearing the birds, early, from your tent
and knowing who will appreciate a cup of coffee
if you get up and get it going,
or knowing there will be at least one person, you may or may not know,
still awake when you do get up, stirring the ashes from last night’s fire for an ember to light a cigarette. Or, knowing
there is a 5lb bag of organic cacao that just got kicked down from a brother who rolled in yesterday and knowing
that I am free to make whatever I want from that donation to the kitchen—
knowing
there will be as much joy and appreciation generated by that act, as for the food itself. Or, it can be the kind of knowing,
at the end of a meal that started hours before with people in the kitchen chopping and talking and stirring and laughing and dancing around each other sometimes with a purpose and other times completely without one,
knowing that you helped to create and serve a dank organic meal in the middle of the woods for hundreds hungry people.

I was very conscious of how disoriented I was feeling without the ways of knowing that kitchens have always provided. I had so many interviews to record and I needed to check out as many kitchens as I could, so giving a lot of energy to any one kitchen, or even contributing to a neighborhood vibe, just didn’t seem like it was going to work. Besides, I hadn’t been to a national for several years, and for a variety of reasons, a lot of the people I knew and the kitchens I had the strongest connections to didn’t come to the Gathering this year—Musical Veggie, Katuah, Jerusalem Camp, Warriors of the Light, The Crucial, and the Casbah…none of them manifested in Vermont, so I felt the loss of comfortable spaces and was missing quite a few of the cast of characters that I usually hang out with.

When I first went over to INFO it was to say hi to Don E., who was sitting there. What I noticed right away was the little camping table in the back, behind the space on the Main Trail where they had created a bench between three trees in a row. The bench sagged in the middle, but it was made from small branch-sized logs, lashed together, and then to the trees. The spaces between logs were stuffed with mud and covered with moss. The bench was positioned under a tarp and just behind a makeshift plywood table out front for distributing printed materials. People came up to the table to grab a copy of “All Ways Free,” the newspaper for the Gathering, or to see what events were scheduled, get maps that showed which camps were where on the land, or to report missing dogs, or backpacks, or…people. It was a pretty dynamic place, but behind all this happening was

41 A slang expression meaning something of exceptionally high quality.
a lonely little metal folding table, off-kilter slightly on the hillside, with a two-burner Coleman stove sitting on it. Beside that was a large can of Folgers coffee, plastic lid off and the inner foil peeled back just half way. That was the kitchen for INFO.

I got such a charge from seeing that. It was kind of jolt-like in the way that energy and purpose came together and I knew this was going to be my kitchen. I had brought quite a few different organic teas with me, some honey from Grand Isle, in the middle of Lake Champlain, as well as a couple of pounds of locally-roasted organic coffee I got at a café in Vergennes the week before. I had a Melita and unbleached filters so I could do pour overs. And I even had a decent stash of Lake Champlain chocolates from
Burlington. I could do this. I could make a coffee/tea kitchen happen here for folks who are too busy working INFO, 24 hours a day, to get anything together.

The focus at INFO is to help coordinate communication. The folks who sit at INFO are kind and welcoming, and like to share information. They do good work for the family, but obviously, they can’t seem to get it together to keep coffee and tea going.

There was some attempt made, at least, but truth is, they haven’t got time to deal with a kitchen. There is always some hippie that needs to find an attorney (the family has several at the Gathering and more in Babylon) and then figure out how to get into town for a court hearing. Newbies are always interested in hearing the rap about how the Gathering works. Somebody has to be a friendly and informative face for the LEO’s.

And, they deal with the walkie-talkies for calling Shanti Sena when frantic parents are trying to find lost kids, or sometimes, when not so frantic kids finally resign to the fact they’d better find their parents. There are lost personal items that are found and kept at INFO to claim. (When a lost item finds its way home, there’s a big bell to ring!)

So, yeah, INFO. Lost and found. Ring my bell.

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42 For the most part, people are cited for minor violations, mostly related to random vehicle searches. There were 43 people arrested, 88 tickets, and 120 warnings issued from the 2016 Gathering (Sullivan 2016).

43 Law enforcement officers of the U.S. Forest Service that insinuate themselves into the Gathering. Everyone is welcome at Rainbow Gatherings, but the objection to their presence is that it is antagonistic in nature and they are armed. “No Guns in Church!” is a common phrase heard when someone sees a LEO.

44 Everyone is technically Shanti Sena at the Gathering. Shanti Sena is a self-organized non-violent, but participatory response to problems. If there’s a conflict, someone yells out, “shanti sena,” and if you can hear it, it’s your obligation to show up and be present as a force in co-creating a solution. There are a group of people who also wear walkie-talkies and help to coordinating next level issues, like finding ways to get someone to the hospital if they break their leg, or dealing with serious life and death threats.
I met Christopher at INFO. I started going there in the morning to make coffee and tea and would hang out for a few hours and talk to folks. He’s got an easy smile and I liked the sense of openness he projected. I don’t always get that from young people. Maybe they have too much baggage with their mothers, or with older authority figures, but more often than not kindness and friendliness feels coated with a layer of politeness, which is different from being open. Christopher seemed different. He told me he was 24, does landscaping and roofing work in New Hampshire, and this is his first national gathering. He’s got more scratches on his face and chest and arms than I have ever seen. I wonder how something like that happens to a person. My first thought was that he must
have been holding onto some kind of raging cat or something, but why would he? I guess it could be from falling or struggling in some kind of thorny bushes. I don’t assume every kid coming from the city to the gathering has ever been in the woods before.

That makes me think of my husband, who grew up in the Bronx. He went on some kind of Latvian scouting camping trip when he was a kid and the scout leader sent all the boys out into the woods to collect greens to make a sort of soft mattress spot for their sleeping bags. They picked poison ivy.

So, who knows what happened with Christopher. Whatever. I was willing to see past it. It didn’t seem to be on his mind in the least, so I just kept talking to him like I didn’t really see all the thin red scabby lines on his forehead and cheeks and running up his neck from inside his hoodie. I asked him if he’d be willing to talk with me “on record.” He was eager and found camping chairs and put them under the tarp, behind all the hubbub of the INFO table. Then I see he is holding a cat.

He told me that the kitchens at the Gathering bring people together. He says, “Yeah, you can eat, or whatever, but it’s better to pitch in and help—it’s a group. It’s about helping each other. It’s homey to me; it brings together people you don’t know…it’s one beautiful thing.” We talk about what that means to him personally and he takes my breath away.

Am I changed? Most definitely. I used to be filled with a lot of hate and regret. I had issues. My baby daughter passed away. My baby’s mama murdered her last year and I just had a lot of problems dealing with all that. And some of the best therapy I’ve had is out here with these hippies, with them showing me beautiful things, different aspects of ways to look at things. Some people don’t even
know me and they show me so much compassion. Absolutely amazing. They taught me to love myself.

Figure 14. Interactive trail sign. Main Trail.

I mumble something about being sorry for his loss. I am ashamed of my shallowness—that I was so quick to respond with socially appropriate words as a device to immediately separate me from feeling an overwhelming emotion. What I wanted to do was just rock him like a baby, hold him like I would a son, but he smiles and moves on so quickly, I pull back and just let his history pass through me and out the other side. We
keep talking about kitchens. He says he chops a lot of wood for the kitchens and he hauls water.

He doesn’t cook, but is inspired by the three-bucket sanitation system, and plans to set one up at his home, which is off the grid. I ask him what the value is in being part of the kitchens at the Gathering.

The whole “We Love You” thing and “Welcome Home” is…you don’t even know people and they say, “We love you” and they mean it. And everyone calls each other brother and sister and it’s just a very warm and inviting thing. I’ve had troubles in the past learning to love myself…one of the best things that has happened is that here, people have taught me how to love myself…have stopped me from hurting myself…and it’s quite amazing the caring of people who don’t even know you will help you…it’s absolutely amazing. When you talk to a person you can see it in their eyes that they care. Like in a city, you say ‘Hi, hello’ and they are all like, yeah, yeah, and here they are like, “Hi! Hello! How you doin’ brother…do you need some help?” And they truly mean it…they are making the effort instead of…Hey, listen, I’m telling you, here, even the pocket trash crew…some of the train jumpers and some of the meanest kids you’ll ever meet… are like little teddy bears out here!

We do finish our interview with a hug, and I can feel his jumpy nervous energy. When he smiles and walks away, Karin, who works at INFO, tells me she thinks that’s the young brother who tried to commit suicide last night.
Don’t Touch Your Thing to the Thing

Straight up poetics.

It’s a kind of schooling
that resists the need to explain the hell out of why it’s not a good idea
to touch the top of the canteen you’ve been drinking from
to the spout of the filtered water
where thousands of other people are trying to get clean water.

Just don’t touch your thing to the thing.

Figure 15. Public health notice.

When people work together
self-organizing food systems, trying to be effective and creative about keeping
each other healthy on the land, these are the kinds of signs you see.
They are strung up by yarn, or duct taped,
or leaned up against,
and you get it.

Simple. Profound.
It just has to be enough to stop unconscious behavior and lead you to think about what you are doing. No diagrams. No theories. No lecture.

Just focus.

Be mindful of others by being responsible your own actions.

Figure 16. Filtered water cooler.

Shining Light

Chop. Chop-Chop-Chop. Chop-Chop. Chop. Lucid is in constant motion. He agrees to talk to me as we cut two large waxed cardboard boxes of cauliflower into small
florets for dinner. There are others around the table. They listen, and occasionally ask Lucid some questions too. There’s big respect for Lucid here. He’s young and committed to this kitchen in a way that inspires others. His kitchen, Shining Light, is one that rolled into the Vermont Gathering from Alaska with crew and a bus pulling a flatbed trailer—he tells me it was 10,000 pounds of tarps, tipi poles, and kitchen equipment. The six or seven tipis range from two big 30’ ones down to a small 10’ shelter. These are just set up and anyone can use them for anything—sleeping, meetings, discussions, skill sharing workshops—whatever. Together with brightly painted wooden flowers and mushrooms, Shining Light is an affective environment that is suggested, but only becomes what it is through active participation.

Figure 17. Shining Light camp and kitchen. Partial view.
Lucid got started with this by inheriting some cooking equipment from folks who stopped doing a Rainbow kitchen in the late 1990s. He put it in storage while he went to college in Alaska, then afterward, resurrected the kitchen to do full moon gatherings on the West Coast. Since 2012, with all new equipment, he now does Rainbow Gatherings. Lucid bankrolls all of this, working jobs that allow him to put most of what he earns into this calling. He estimates that he puts about $10,000 a year of his own money into this project. And, it is a project for Lucid. He’s trying to perfect a mobile environment for feeding and nurturing people that can be effective in humanitarian relief efforts. He’s thinking primarily about responding to needs in Mexico, Central, and South America, because he can drive his rig there. He loves Rainbow Gatherings, though, and says, “It’s
the largest peaceful assembly situated in the ecosystem in the world, so I think it establishes our ability to peacefully assemble. And even though that’s written down on paper, it doesn’t really exist unless we do it. It connects people with nature and with each other.”

Figure 19. Lucid. Photo: K. Sobol.

Shining Light is an open kitchen, meaning that it doesn’t have “bliss rails” that separate the goings on in the kitchen from the rest of the camp. Don E., who describes himself as a “recovering attorney,” and has been to 34 of the 40 national Gatherings, told me earlier the idea of separating off the working spaces was a response to a bad outbreak of shingellosis at the 1987 North Carolina Gathering. It’s very contagious and many people became sick with dysentery. After that, a group of engineers at the Musical Veggie kitchen designed and implemented the standard kitchen protocols that exist now—bliss rails that establish a perimeter around the cooking area, foot pump operated
hand washing stations, and three bucket (wash, rinse, sanitize) cleaning systems. Since then, there haven’t been reports of large groups of people getting sick.

Figure 20. Example of a dishwashing system with compost, wash, rinse, sanitize, and grey water collection.

Lucid isn’t into separating off the kitchen space and I notice several other of the larger kitchens this year, like Stock Pot and Turtle Soup, were also open. This runs counter to the lessons learned after dealing with large numbers of people getting sick; but, no one was getting sick. This challenges some people, like myself, who maintain different protocols. An open kitchen is a kind of disruption and an example of order emerging from disorder. Resisting the restrictions of imposed structure, creative self-
organized energy, which diversifies and expands, challenges the limitations and oppressions that grow when order becomes rigid because disorder, instability, or loss of control are feared. In letting go of (the illusion of) control, natural systems of order emerge based on creative and adaptive responses.

Lucid feels the open kitchen works out really well. I notice that Shining Light has a large washing station, and replenishes the bins frequently with hot water, heated over the wood stove in large stainless steel kegs (with handles) repurposed as cooking pots. Tied to both ends of the prep table, with red hemp string looped through the handles, are plastic milk jugs containing a diluted bleach mixture for hand washing. The screw-on caps are poked with a couple of small holes. What’s important to him is people say they like the feeling in the kitchen. He says, “There aren’t any bliss rails that separate people. If people are in control of their space it’s OK. A lot of people can work in the kitchen and feel really accepted.” He chops some more and then says he doesn’t mind if people are just hanging out around in the kitchen and not working. “Cooking is kind of a spectator sport…that’s how they learn.”
I don’t ask him about his crew, but I see five or six people that work consistently in the kitchen. I’m really drawn to cook with this crew and wish I were doing that instead of this. But I am chopping veggies, and that feels good. There’s the kind of vibe here that feels relaxed but efficient, welcoming, purposeful, and, in my opinion, it is the kitchen kicking down the best and the most food at the Gathering. Lucid tells me they feed around 1,000 people at Main Circle every day.

We make 1,000 to 1,200 lbs. of food—that’s several times the amount of the next largest kitchen. We want to make sure everyone has enough to eat, but also, with all that we do, we want to help people make better life decisions…to think outside the box. We are all in this situation where the world is being made unlivable. Not
only are we destroying the diversity…it’s the sixth greatest extinction being caused by global civilization. It requires a complete consciousness shift…so at least some of this is drawing attention to that and that [people] can have an effect through simple actions. They are not powerless.

When I ask about how things get done, he describes it as “pretty consensus based.” He adds, “The only real decision is that if someone wants to help, to make sure they are mentally competent, and then, they can do whatever they want. It’s the person that matters. If everybody feels good about the person, then the group is OK with what they want to do…and with how it is we can help.” He adds that sometimes the kitchen needs to make a shout out to recruit for help with collecting firewood but for the most part, the people who come to Shining Light are there to help and are really into it.

In the end, our veggies are chopped and I can see Lucid is ready to move on to the next task. I ask him if there’s anything else he wants to add to what we’ve talked about. He says that the humanitarian aid aspect is an important, for him, the ability to physically be able “to do something.” But what he emphasizes is that he’s trying to connect a lot of people. Before he smiles and walks over to stir a pot of beans on the fire, he says, “The food is a base level element. The tipis are set up to encourage people to share skills—to have workshops to share ideas. We make a situation where people are fed, foremost, but it really is a space where people can communicate with each other and figure things out.”
Socks, Rhythm, and Kirtan

I was headed off to CALM first thing this morning. CALM stands for the Center for Alternative and Living Medicine. It’s a camp with a small kitchen, mostly for folks who volunteer there, but they do provide filtered water for anyone who stops by. Serenity Ridge camps nearby, offering twice daily AA meetings and a cup of hot tea any time. CALM is where you go if you need medical attention. It’s a MASH-style field “hospital” where healers camp, setting up spaces to treat people for the multitude of dis-ease that can accompany and befall thousands of people in the woods. They are also there to support wellness.
Those who consider themselves Rainbow Family are also medical doctors, registered nurses, and emergency medical technicians, and they come to the Gathering with donations of bandages, suture kits, burn ointments, ibuprofen, as well as condoms, toothbrushes, and packets of Vitamin C. They create a space, together with herbalists who bring tinctures and organize plant walks to teach about local herbs and plants. There are chiropractors, massage therapists, and osteopaths who bring their portable tables with them to offer free treatments, and there are therapists and psychologists ready to listen. This year, the Gathering has a dentist.
I heard that CALM was asking for donations of socks. People like to go barefoot, a response to the free feeling of being in the woods, I suspect, but with that comes the increased likelihood of cuts. When it’s muddy, like this year, if folks did bring socks with them, they get dirty, and it’s hard to keep a newly bandaged foot clean. So, CALM was looking for socks. Also, this year, it’s been cold at night and there are those who come to the Gathering in nothing but sandals, or shoes with no socks. They show up at CALM with nearly frostbitten toes, so socks are what are needed.

And, socks are just what I happen to have. This year, I decided to go to my favorite thrift store before I left home and buy socks to give away at the Gathering. The usual price of 25¢ per pair was happily reduced to 10¢ when I offered to buy ten dollar’s
worth, so I loaded up a garbage bag. This is what I was hefting over my shoulder, trudging through the mud on Main Trail toward CALM, when I run into Pinkie.

He’s complaining about the cut on his foot. He’s got boots on, but they flop around because he has no laces. He’s got no socks, so his feet are dirty, but Pinkie is looking good. The cuts have healed on his face, he’s smiling, present, and clearly not using drugs. He tells me he met a girl over at Stock Pot kitchen and they are enjoying each other’s company. Everything is good, but he thinks the cut on his foot might be getting infected. He’s happy to rummage through my bag for a couple of pair of clean socks. (These types of alignments or manifestations are what my friend Dandelion calls, “Rainbow miracles.”) I told him about Jesus Camp because they make a thing of washing people’s feet, and then I told him he could walk with me to CALM and get the cut looked at, but he was headed in the other direction, he said, and he’d check them out later.

If the smile on my face wasn’t big enough as I turned and continued toward CALM, within a few meters I run into Broken. He flashes a large toothless grin as he calls out “Agapi!” He’s pullin’ a very heavy load of water—as many five-gallon containers as can be bungee-corded onto a garden wagon retrofitted with large rubber wheels. He’s headed to Wanna Burn kitchen. He tells me they have coffee going if I want some, and that Rhythm, who works there, is a really great guy. He’s off.

I met Rhythm earlier. He, like Lucid, is a hard person to coax a few minutes from, but he agreed to an interview. I could see why Broken found an affinity with his kitchen. Rhythm runs a kitchen that he acknowledges does not have a mellow vibe. Wanna Burn is a fire performance kitchen and Rhythm’s purpose is to work with “the chaos of street kids.” He says peace and love are part of the chaos—but that the chaos in the camp can
go either way and he’s there to try to “mold the energy.” He describes himself as the builder and organizer of the kitchen and there’s someone he refers to as “Mom” (who I am sure is not his mom), who does all the cooking. He buys a lot of the food, they get donations, and he says they definitely use dumpstered food if it’s available, but he’s adamant about not cooking meat. He thinks it’s stupid for other kitchens to do it because of the health risks without refrigeration. Rhythm is happy to be in charge. He says his kitchen is not a democracy. “It’s a kind dictatorship,” he says, and admits that in a way, “this is a kitchen of war. We teach kids how to carry and use weapons…safely…because they are going to do it anyway.”

Figure 25. Rhythm. Photo: K. Sobol.
Rhythm is not as crusty as he sounds. He pauses when I ask him about the silence and prayer for peace on the 4th of July. “Silence,” he says, “that’s real important. Intention…spiritual feelings…there’s not going to be just one experience. I’m not a religious person, but I put into practice the ideals of peace and harmony.” I don’t question him about how that might contradict his previous statement about being a kitchen of war. Rhythm goes on to say that the silence is magic and that a deeper level of communication takes place without words. “With intentions, you have to be receiving…be more receptive than outgoing.” He credits the Gathering with helping him to get sober and says

What I teach in this kitchen is that you should never turn your back on someone without helping. I’m a White Light warrior. Without the Gathering I would have been a completely different person. I definitely would have been living my life for me and not for the rest of the world. Four years ago, I decided to give my life to Rainbow. Actually, the way I can be greedy is to make your life beautiful. I believe we are here on earth to teach…we’ve lost the grip between youth and elder…there’s so much lost information between the separation between ages. That’s one thing I try to do here.

Wanna Burn sits at a busy intersection, where the Main Trail and the trail to the Main Meadow meet. There’s a large fire pit with log benches that are nearly always filled with folks having coffee, smoking cigarettes, or spinning fire. They do always have lots of coffee. Rhythm says, “You gotta have coffee or people will go off and work at another kitchen.” Coffee is his currency. He talks about what it takes to make the kitchen work.

45 The term used for fire performance.
Nothing is free here. Everything is worked for. Everything took work…it’s just that the value systems change. The work we do is the joy we receive. You live on your own credit. I can’t be concerned with policing…when people see you doin’ nothing all the time, that’s their credit. You help someone and you receive in other ways. That’s the most important thing I’ve ever discovered. The social lesson we all learn is the value system between people.

Thinking back, the one thing that stuck with me about his “hipstory” was that when I asked him if he feels free at the Gathering, he said, “I feel a little more responsible for my own non-repression here.”

After I leave CALM with my bag of socks, I decide to go over to Krishna camp for breakfast. Krishna Camp has a reputation for great food. Those who criticize say it’s because they use white sugar, which is addictive, and that’s just the way they keep people coming back. Whatever. Halavah in the woods works for me.

Krishna Camp is alive with color. Bright yards of colored cloth are flowing from the crossbars of the multiple popup tents grouped together, full color banners are hanging from the trees of Ganesha and Krishna, carpets of various patterns lay on the ground under the tents. My luck! They just started serving. I am offered a large helping of kitchari—a sweet variation of the rice and lentil dish that has coconut, cardamom, and a few cumin seeds. I’m sure there’s probably more than a little sugar in it too. Whatever. It’s great.
Krishna Camp always serves up more than food, though, and as a presence at Rainbow Gatherings for many years, it’s a favorite space for many people. Devotee Deva Madhava Das acknowledges this as a performative space and what they do is more than giving someone a plate of free food. He tells me that all the food is first offered to Krishna and then, as prasadam, or spiritualized food, it is shared with everyone. He tells me about the three (actually six) exchanges of love in Hare Krishna philosophy: To give and receive food that has been offered to Krishna, to give and receive a gift, and to give and receive confidential feelings from the heart. In this environment, food, says Deva Madhava Das, accomplishes all of that. When you give prasadam to people, you are automatically giving a gift that inspires people to share their heart. He says, “I know
Krishnas are not the only one that take advantage of that dynamic…all the kitchens here are doing that here. There are just a lot of different vibes.”

I ask him about the vibe in general (since he brought it up) and how he senses the experience of being here. He describes it as one of relief and sensitivity. That’s an interesting response. I ask for more and he explains

People are relieved when they get here and so there’s a certain kind of sensitivity. The common world, the common culture we all come from, is harsh and very unnatural and for these few days, there is a strong protection here for letting someone be damn near whatever they like. They have that right based on their willingness to persevere in that harsh civilization out there. The sense of relief comes from the values Rainbow is founded upon…an inherent belief that good is a possibility for everyone. There are characteristics you come here with, those that you have taken on to deal with the harshness of the world and here we all accept the best in you and tolerate the rest…at least for these few days.

I’m curious about why Deva Madhava Das comes to Gatherings, what the value is in this experience for him. He responds by saying that he thinks there is an increase in faith experienced by many here—the faith found in connecting with each other and in understanding how important having more of this kind of culture is. Coming here, he says, we remind each other of our desires to live another way and we get to work that out…this is where the rubber meets the road, so to speak.”

My husband and I come back in the evening for dinner, the Thai curry. The servings are ample. I sense the weight of my plate as a performance. I am cared about
here. I am safe. I will not be hungry. As we eat, there is Kirtan\textsuperscript{46} happening under the
tent. Bodies are gathered closed together, swaying as they sit, heads moving in time to the
music. Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna…a jumbled mass of shoes left at
the edges of the carpets grows larger as people finish eating and feel compelled to join in
what feels joyful. We go too. The music rises and falls in intensity and speed, we are all
singing in unison until the devotees stop for a moment and the instruments continue, the
person beside me belts out the melody solo and the devotees pick up on that. It morphs
into a spontaneous call and response, with people laughing and jumping in when they feel
like it. The emotion reaches a pitch where I can hardly chant the mantra fast enough; I
feel giddy. I know I am almost laughing. We stop at the peak of this energy and erupt into
clapping and hand waving, and I feel the joy of something shared. It doesn’t really matter
that very few people here are actually Krishnas. What we all are, now, after sharing food
and this experience, is a thing without words. I feel it like all the color around me, close
and vibrational. I know the people gathered under this small tent—not their names, or
where they are from, or what they do for a living. I know them by how it felt for joy to
pass through them to me and through me to others, an intimate exchange of emotion
enabled through food, music, and proximity.

Yeast Man

When it is a reasonable time to expect dinner at Main Meadow (Rainbow time is
not “clock” time. You will hear people refer to times like “dark-thirty,” or “Rainbow
noon”), people begin sitting in a circle and they wait for the kitchens to bring down food.
It’s a very social occasion. Food arrives in various ways, often with people carrying large

\textsuperscript{46} A form of religious music. “The calling, the crying, the reaching across infinite space—digging into the
heart’s deepest well to touch and be touched by the Divine Presence” (Uttal 2017).
pots and long ladles, but it is served from the inside of the circle to everyone seated. Often weaving in and out of the serving processional is Yeast Man. He is probably in his middle 60s, with simple clothing, except for his t-shirt, which has the bold letters YEAST! screen-printed on the front. In a very large voice he walks around the circle bellowing out just one thing: YEAST! Yeast Man brings many pounds of nutritional yeast to the Gathering every year to supplement the taste and nutritional content of the food. Some people know what they are getting, others have no clue, but all form an understanding about nutritional yeast from the identity, or the “food as conduct” of Yeast Man. When someone raises a hand or responds to his call, he comes over and generously provides sprinkles of the umami yellow flakes.

Figure 27. Yeast Man.

47 Umami is now understood to be a fifth taste, along with salty, sweet, bitter, and sour.
In the food environments of the Gathering, Yeast Man is performing tradition through his conduct in several ways. To begin, he is reinforcing the free and theatrical expectation associated with the performance of food service. Yeast Man, joins with others to continually co-create a performative service structure, imbuing the collective food environment with a playful affect, with a “felnness” about self, nature, and others that is experienced in the moment and, like an interactive actor-audience exchange, can only be lived with another person.

In the second instance, Yeast Man cultivates his conduct and identity through a performance in only one specific food space, and for his own reasons. But, in doing so, he associates himself in any context at the Gathering with what is considered to be old school “hippie-ness.” His “food as conduct” is performative in this sense because nutritional yeast has strong associations with the traditions and associations of the health food movement, one of the earliest manifestations of resistance by the late 1960s American Counterculture (Belasco 1993). Food as conduct in this sense is enacting an active hipstory—a connection to the past that is constantly being re-presented, re-enacted, re-experienced as relevant in the moment.

The Gift

Just like summer camp, Rainbow has its songs. There are websites dedicated to over-produced videos of impeccably costumed Hippies with sparkling white teeth singing them. Many people do get into group singing, which can happen around a fire circle, but all the music doesn’t go down that way. Some music just pops up, in the woods or on the trail, but for the most part, the kitchens are where music happens. Sometimes it’s a planned event and other times, it just happens as a bluegrass jam in the kitchen. There are
drums. There are trombones. There are ocarinas, marimbas, or stand-up basses; there are guitars and flutes, fiddles, and people playing spoons. Of course, music modulates energies. Of course, the vibrations of music intermingle with the physical and emotional responses of a satisfying meal, with acceptance, respect, dignity, identity and the freedom to be, as one woman told me, “who I am and who I am not.” Music, like food, is a gift that is freely given.

If “The Gift,” in a Maussian sense, always has a price tag (the expectation of reciprocity), then the Gathering is a liberatory space. In this environment where a more complex sense of reciprocity is constructed, playing the nose harp repays the guy who hauled water to the kitchen that loaned their cart to the women who are using it to distribute a donation of watermelon to Main Circle on the 4th of July.
To experience this is to know there are no straight lines that lead to knowledge about the performance of food at the Gathering, how it empowers action, or enables economic systems. There are only circles that revolve around gifts, connecting the meaning of a bowl of beans and rice, to a banjo serenade, with a color, and a smile, or a clean pair of socks.
Figure 29. Common Rainbow Gathering song. From http://www.welcomehome.org
CHAPTER 5: DOES A RAINBOW END?

In this final chapter, I submit no “data.” The idea of data as the outcome of ethnography is not congruent with what the process undertakes to do. Rather, I submit analyses taken from my experiences and from what I have written about performatively. This is in keeping with the definition of ethnography provided by Sarah Pink who characterizes it as

…a process of creating and representing knowledge or ways of knowing that are based on ethnographers’ own experiences and the ways these intersect with the persons, places and things encountered during that process. Therefore…

[ethnography] does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers’ experiences of reality that are a loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences, and the negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. (Pink 2013, 35)

I have characterized my research as a sensory ethnography—a practice that draws upon an embodied, experiential way of knowing. My objective was to explore the Rainbow Gathering as a performative phenomenon and investigate how it feels to physically and emotionally constitute social identities and political spaces through the proximity between food and bodies. My experience at Krishna camp, as described in Chapter 4, was such a moment. This type of embodied perspective, grounded in the senses, enabled me to consider how bodies and affective environments combine to assert identity, power, and possibility.
At the Rainbow Gathering, the activities that coalesce around the task of feeding each other provide unique opportunities for individuals to engage directly with nature and with other people. What I experienced at Krishna camp and in other food spaces at the Gathering was that to make meaning through the senses is to come to an understanding of food relative to its amorphous capacity to modulate, concentrate, and transfer affect. From my experience, as well as taking from the hipstories I collected in the field, I understand there are intercorporeal forms of knowing that are created in the process of sharing the activities needed to sustain a food system. Often, the people I spoke to felt they didn’t have adequate words to describe how deeply they were affected by their experiences of helping to provide food for others.

One of the many hipstories I collected in the field was from a 32-year-old man who asked to be referred to as “Bornwyzeking.” We talked about the distinct “vibes” (affective environments) that kitchens have at the Gathering and what it means. His thoughts speak to the role of the affect in the process of knowing and of performing change. He said

People that vibe on a certain level meet and the response is genuine and it makes a cool working environment. The vibe at the Gathering and in the kitchens is actually freedom. This looks ultimately like what I think freedom would look like. There are many different kitchens that have many different flavors, but we are all physically connected to each one and to each other. It’s not perfect; we’re still human. But it’s the closest step to the top I can see. There’s nothing else like it. You relate to people differently. You talk to them with your bodies. And why this is valuable is that the ideology in Babylon stresses you out in your relationship to
people. You need the Rainbow Gathering in order to value the people who are stuck in Babylon.

For Heckscher and McCarthy (2014), having a connection to other people in a defined group, “with emotional connections and reciprocal obligations” (630), represents the primary source of solidarity. They suggest these critical social relationships are built on the foundations of day-to-day social relationships. Bornwyzeking’s comments describe the “day-to-day-ness” of food spaces as augmenting, or making accessible, feelings of solidarity. He talks about this as being experienced through affect and bodies in proximity.

In these self-organized creative food commons, environments where people are living together, close to the earth and with a greater dependence upon natural systems, I experienced the order that comes from chaos. What became evident is that cooperative food environments contribute to the transmission of affect—the unspoken process of emotions and energies being directly understood between people—and as such, suggests a role for food in catalyzing a strategic sense of collective identity, purpose, or action (Brennan 2004, 163).

By experiencing the self-organized food systems at the Rainbow Gathering from a sensory orientation I experienced how action and affect pass between bodies to assert identity, hold power, and establish charged spaces. Identities are closely linked to one’s role in food spaces, such as the Yeast Man at Main Circle, or Rhythm at Wanna Burn kitchen. The power that comes from engaging with food spaces empowers people who are marginalized outside the Gathering, such as the Dirty Kids, and the charged spaces that result, change lives. My future research will build upon what I have experienced
about self-organized food spaces and the transformative potential for individuals and society.

As I began my initial research, three touchstones emerged and served throughout the dissertation to guide my exploration of food. In a research project with a many moving parts, these distinct yet inter-related themes helped me clarify and concentrate on critical areas of inquiry within a complex interdisciplinary construct. With the first touchstone, the performance of food, I identified three points during my fieldwork where food and performance intersect conceptually. The three junctures of food and performance are 1) food as doing, 2) food as conduct, and 3) food as spectacle (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1999, 1-2).

In the first instance, “food as doing” relates to the infrastructure required to complete the act of eating or drinking, feeding people, and disposing of food and human waste. “Plumbing” the forest to ensure fresh water sources, building ovens from stones and mud, or using a Frisbee for a plate are examples of the performances of “getting it done” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1999, 1).
Figure 30. Building Iris kitchen. Stones have been used to create a cooking area (to the rear) and in the foreground, logs cut from dead wood are being lashed together to create a counter space for serving food.

I think of “food as conduct” as the performances of individuals and groups as they speak to the traditions, protocols, and normative behavior associated with Rainbow Gathering foodways (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1). Lucid and Shining Light kitchen are good examples of modeling and creating spaces that preserve and honor the traditions of the Rainbow Gathering.

Lastly, “food as spectacle” engages with emotion and the senses in the ways people perform how they feel about the infrastructure of food spaces, and about eating,
preparing, and serving food. One very simple illustration of this at the Gathering is the performance of joining hands in a circle and saying OM or giving thanks before a meal.

With the second touchstone, the praxis of self-organizing, I articulate the concept using the complexity paradigm, or the idea of chaosmos, the constant interplay between universal forces of order (cosmos) and disorder (chaos). The Rainbow Gathering tests this as a social theory in action by engaging in the cooperative encounters required to organize and establish food systems as part of a leaderless assembly of 10,000 people. True to the patterns of complex adaptive systems, at the Gathering it is within the shared purpose of feeding each other—in the acts of resisting the imposition of hierarchical order and a traditional leader/follower binary—that order emerges from chaos.

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48 Attendance figures for the 2016 Gathering were approximately 10,000 people (The Washington Times. 2016)
This research also views self-organizing as the praxis of anarchist theories, where cooperation and voluntary association, mutual aid, horizontalism, and direct democracy are given form through acts of solidarity in an assembly committed to respecting the natural world and in supporting peaceful social interactions. Experiencing and writing about the 2016 Rainbow Gathering brings forward acts that represent forty-four years of experience with the practice of self-organizing—a notable contribution to principally theoretical assertions regarding the characteristics and principles of self-organizing on a social scale.
The last touchstone I used to explore food at the Rainbow Gathering was the concept of complex reciprocity. This is the exclusive economic form at the Gathering and is positioned within a consensus that insists exchange will never be of a commercial nature. I explore complex reciprocity in the sense of an alternative economic system created when exchange takes place without the expectation of a one-to-one return from the specific individual with whom an exchange has occurred. My research demonstrates how individuals respond in a system that requires trust. Many individuals I spoke to, like Christopher, expressed how profoundly it changed their lives to engage in a system of complex reciprocity. This speaks to the potential for feelings of empowerment and solidarity generated by such experiences to become a catalyst for strategies of social and economic change. Exploitation, the basis for exchange in capitalism, is supplanted with acts of cooperation What is validated by experiencing this model of cooperative complex reciprocity (a system that attends to needs of each individual based on autonomous asynchronous exchanges), is that another way is possible. What is notable in this form of exchange at the Gathering is this mixture of social and economic actions meets needs without “policing” or punitive consequences for non-participation.

With this theme of complex reciprocity, I am also attentive to the networks of mutual aid that enable the system to succeed. I characterize this broader concept as a contribution to the construction of a new economic ontology (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 616). By accepting the complex relationships between the system of capitalism and that of a non-commercial complex reciprocity, the food systems at the Gathering function as “pericapitalist spaces,” spheres where capitalist and non-capitalist forms of social exchange interact in a system of autonomous interdependency (Tsing 2015, 66). Clearly,
a free event is dependent to a very real degree upon accumulated capital by at least some of those who attend. Without a monetary system of exchange, a free assembly is not possible. My experiences suggest the economics of complex mutual aid at the Gathering depend upon diverse, yet very close ties to the capitalist system. This point is critical to identify. In a place where everything is free and giving is voluntary in every regard, access to the gifts themselves is predicated on a system of capital that creates waste as well as personal wealth. This is another way of thinking about what capitalism looks like. It is not, as the dominant narrative would suggest, homogeneous, nor is it impenetrable. Recognizing the Rainbow Gathering system of complex reciprocity as part of a new ontology of economic difference (particularly as it relates to food systems) highlights the functional reality of diverse economies. The economic discourse this promotes reflects a more complex and intersectional view and the conversation becomes a space where society can begin to move away from the rigid capitalist/non-capitalist dyad toward more resilient and sustainable economic initiatives that reflect creative, adaptive, and relationship-based economic systems (Gibson-Graham 2008, 613).

My use of oral history interviews collected in the field as “hipstories,” borrows from the word hipstory in Rainbow parlance—a term used to describe the practice of maintaining an open and participatory origin story from the first Gathering in 1972 to the present day. My interest is to experience a participatory transmission of history as it relates to an iterative construction of the Rainbow counterculture through food. The hipstories I record serve as documents that record the feelings, sounds, experiences, and beliefs of those at the Gathering, but they also enact a type of counter-memory, which acts to disrupt more traditional, homogeneous forms of historical preservation, especially
as regards the American Counterculture. These stories expand knowledge about Rainbow Gatherings and those who participate in it beyond the narrative of the dominant culture.

Perhaps more importantly, I relate to the idea of a hipstory of the present as a way to demonstrate the commitment within Rainbow culture to maintain an open living history which validates the past and the present simultaneously, acknowledging the autonomous individual, and resisting the idea of truth as anything less than a continuing revelation. This remarkable characteristic of Rainbow Gathering culture resonates with what Della Pollock writes about oral histories, when she suggests

History cannot be held privately. No one person ‘owns’ a story. Any one story is embedded in layers of remembering and storying. Remembering is necessarily a public act whose politics are bound up with a refusal to be isolated, insulated, inoculated against both complicity with and contest over claims to ownership.

(Pollock 2005, 5)

Desiring a way to recognize and comprehend food systems issues of social and economic justice as inextricable from the impositions food systems place on the natural world, I use the concept of a social ecology of food to frame my inquiries and analyses in a critical context. I borrow from a social theory known as social ecology, championed by Murray Bookchin, but similarly theorized by many others, notably Kropotkin, Guattari, Recluse, and Geddes. Like deep ecology, ecofeminism, and eco-socialism, social ecology “looks to social problems to discover the roots of the ecological crisis” (Clark 2000, 62).

Social ecology, as conceived of by Bookchin, also expresses the possibilities of anarchism, or a confederal politics, which he referred to in his later years as libertarian municipalism (1991). In this, systems of oppression and hierarchy are subverted by the
prefiguration of cooperative, self-organized, horizontal structures that support social and economic relationships that are liberatory in nature. I build on an armature of a social ecology of food when I describe the ecological realities and responsibilities of food systems at the Gathering.

For this study I have used a food systems consciousness as an entry point and means to engage with the dynamics of chaosmos. I work with this as an opening to conceptualize food systems as dynamic interconnected environments that can be explored from a sensory academic perspective. Emplaced in food environments at the Rainbow Gathering, I encountered knowing from lived experience, and how order manifests without leaders and hierarchy.

For me, self-organizing is what remains the most mysterious principle of both complexity theory and anarchist theory. I think of self-organizing as non-hierarchical acts that are cooperative and serve as the genesis of emergence, the quality of becoming. From my perspective, participating in the praxis of self-organizing at the Rainbow Gathering provided a material corollary to theoretical explanations and models of organization in complex adaptive systems. At the Gathering, food systems seek stability and balance in the chaos of multiple and dynamic leaderless interactions. The task of feeding everyone provides a focus for organizational energy, but the “doing of food” manifests in different ways influenced by affect and the performance of food. Without a leadership structure, guiding principles, such as Love, or a belief in mutual aid, motivate people to participate. In this way, participation is the key (on any level) and change (order from disorder), emerges as authentic and non-linear. Deleuze and Guattari evoke a rhizomatic metaphor for the kind of self-organizing that emphasizes growth (change) as
acentered and defined by multiple and interchangeable points (1987 [1980], 17). My experiences at the Gathering reinforce my understanding of self-organizing as a natural process (thus reinforcing socio-environmental dynamics), and I suggest the praxis of self-organizing in this context is comparable to the actions of mycorrhizal fungus, which support dominant and subordinate plants together in a mutualistic and community-based system (Toju, Yamamoto, and Tanabe 2013).

The Cornerstone

“The stone that the builder refuse will always be the head cornerstone”
Bob Marley, lyrics to Corner Stone [based on Psalms 118:22].

Seed camp is the time before the main Gathering, where the infrastructure for the assembly comes together. Without this period of construction and organizing, the Gathering could not function. The physical labor required is enormous. Water crews find and tap appropriate water sources, laying miles of flexible hoses that branch in many directions toward filtration stations and probable spots for kitchens.

There are very strict rules for where kitchens and latrines can be positioned relative to water sources to preserve the health of the ecosystem as well as maintain the health of those at the gathering, and those must be observed. As the larger kitchens arrive, there is the considerable task of constructing the internal systems that will provide them all with access to clean water, sanitation, garbage and recycling. In association with each kitchen, slit-trench latrines are deeply dug and usually completed by fabricating some form of privacy—commonly sheets strung laundry-style from a roped off section of trees. Toilet paper, lime (for covering “deposits”) and some kind of hand sanitation is provided—anything from pump-bottles of hand sanitizer, to plastic milk jugs filled with a light bleach solution. Downed trees limbs are cut for firewood as well building material
(this is accomplished without chainsaws) and very large tarps are usually suspended high in the branches between trees as shelter from sun and rain. Supplies must be hauled miles into the Gathering on small forest trails, fire pits are dug near each kitchen, and trails are established, which may mean building surprisingly sound bridges over small creeks or boggy areas from found wood and mud.

The process of “disappearing” the kitchens, infrastructure, and physical impacts of the Gathering is perhaps even more strenuous. There are crews of workers who stay in the forest, sometimes for a month or more afterwards, combing through garbage to make sure what can be recycled is, and that the remaining garbage is removed and taken at least 50 miles from the Gathering site, so as not to overload the capacity of nearby small villages. Everything that was hauled in, is hauled out. Clothing or other reusable items are donated to area thrift stores. Rainbow cleanup crews fill-in and rake flat any holes or pits that were dug during the Gathering and re-seed the worn trails and camping areas using seed mixtures appropriate to the specific ecology and approved by the U.S. Forest Service. The last person out is charged with making sure everything, even cigarette butts, has been removed from the area.

Within the system of complex reciprocity, where everyone gives what they are willing and able to contribute, the question becomes who is able to give the time and physical energy required to participate in seed camp or cleanup? Those who give in this capacity perform the critical function of maintaining “right” relationships with the natural world on behalf of the Rainbow Gathering. This is interesting from the perspective of social ecology, where the thesis suggests domination and exploitation of the natural

49 “Plastics and other materials that can’t burn without toxic odors go in plastic bags to be taken to a dumpster or landfill at least 50 miles away” (Rainbow Mini Manual, see Appendix E.)
world emanates from the exploitive and oppressive patterns encouraged by competitive social relationships (Bookchin 1971, 63). Seen in this light, it becomes clear that those who physically participate in building the infrastructure for the Gathering, as well as those who mitigate the environmental impacts of the assembly after it is over, play important roles as “culture jammers.” Seed camp and cleanup are active sites for disrupting stereotypes and calling out normative (yet destructive and unsustainable) relationships between nature and people. By living Rainbow values from the beginning to the end of the Gathering, respect for cooperation, equality, and diversity, create the opportunity to perform social change in a world where otherwise, “the notion that man must dominate nature emerges directly from the domination of man by man” (Bookchin 63).

By any measure, the performative effects of this work are important. Through creating an infrastructure that honors the natural world and enables the Gathering to co-exist with nature, rather than exploiting it for the benefit of those who attend, those who do this work are clearly enacting a Rainbow model of transformative possibility.

What is thought provoking about the importance of these roles vis à vis changing the way people relate to each other and the natural world, goes back to understanding who has the time to do this work. There have been no studies completed on this, so I draw on my observations and experience from many years of attending Gatherings. Quite simply, conventionally employed individuals are less likely to be able to commit several weeks of time on either side of the Gathering itself to help with seed camp and cleanup. What this implies is the most important tasks of ensuring that a Gathering can take place, as well as the critical tasks of re-integrating the site back into
the natural ecology, are built on the labor-gifts of those, who in “Babylon” exist at the lowest end of the social spectrum. This often includes the unemployed, the homeless, the mentally ill, those who struggle with addiction, or who exist on disability checks, welfare, and food stamps, the retired, or those who live nomadic lifestyles—individuals who, in class-conscious America, are dismissed, devalued, and disenfranchised.

Without a doubt, because the Rainbow Gathering invites all people without reservation, it attracts people who are diminished as human beings outside the Gathering. In my experience, these individuals participate disproportionately in the tasks of creating a space for everyone else to enjoy. While this could set up similar exploitive power dynamics that mirror the worst parts of broader society. Framing the assembly as a family gathering may be a factor in mitigating this. Because Rainbow Gathering culture cultivates a sense of belonging to a family, the environment is one that attends to feelings of inclusivity, respect, and acceptance. At the Gathering, people work and play alongside “brothers and sisters.” As a result, those who show up for the hard work of seed camp and stay on the land for cleanup are truly respected and become cornerstones of the assembly, valued for their contributions to the family. (A popular call-out one might hear at the Gathering is, “Blessed are the shitter-diggers!”) I suggest radical inclusivity and acceptance alters normative discriminatory social patterns at the Gathering, creating feedback loops that ultimately support more integrated and ecologically responsible relationships with the nature.

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50 At Rainbow Gatherings people are referred to as brothers and sisters, for example, one might say, “There are some sisters making pizza over at Nacho Mamas kitchen!” This is traditional at Gatherings but calls for increased sensitivity to gender fluidity is challenging these binaries. Increasingly common is to replace brother or sister with “family,” i.e. “There’s family making pizza over at Nacho Mamas kitchen!”
Individuals who arrive on July 1 planning to spend several days or a week, bringing with them food, or donations of money to enable Main Supply to buy food, or even come prepared to practice various healing modalities, provide entertainment, or just work hard in kitchens, are certainly part of what makes complex reciprocity happen, but without the contributions of those who can give little else but time and muscle, the Gathering would not be. Contributing, because it matters for someone else, is the Rainbow way; in this context, all people who give for the benefit of others are one family and performing reciprocity as equals.

I understand this to be an example of a type of mutual aid and cooperation that speaks to the praxis of anarchist theories as posed by Peter Kropotkin. He considers social problems as arising from acts of “othering” in society, and he describes the solution to be the construction of a value system similar to that found at Rainbow Gatherings. Kropotkin writes that a “new family, based on community of aspirations” is required, suggesting that in this family people will be obliged to know one another, to aid one another and to lean on one another for moral support on every occasion. And this mutual prop will prevent the great number of anti-social acts which we see today. (Kropotkin 1975 [1877], 54-55)

My point here is to take a moment to consider how a consciousness that supports acceptance and diversity contributes to the ways mutual aid is understood and enacted. I believe it creates a leveling experience that acts, often within the food spaces of the Rainbow Gathering, to dissipate learned social models of hierarchy and exploitation.
The Creative Process

The experience of engaging with sections of performative writing in this dissertation, as well as hand-rendering maps, allowed me to access ways of knowing about the subject that are emergent in the act of creative process. For example, while map-making, I became aware of how I was responding physically to rhythm of my colored pencils scratching on the paper. It was rhythmic, but not regular, and much like hearing multiple drumming circles at the Gathering at night—sound bouncing between camps. At night, drummers hold circles until sunrise, many in the bliss pits of kitchens that continue to provide late night goodies, known as ‘zuzus,’ to keep the energy going. Lovin’ Ovens, for example does pizza. Many kitchens have specialties, others share their very creative responses to what is on hand.

Creativity flows and I find myself rendering a map, but thinking about zuzus. At the Gathering, I spoke to people about their experiences eating late at night. I remember One Track, a 23-year old woman traveling with Stock Pot kitchen, and how she talked with me as she was sewing a decorative piece of cloth on to a skirt with some dental floss. It makes me smile to think that she, like me now, in a busy house full of people, was engaging in a creative project in the chaotic midst of other goings on. I remember how honest she was, and I thought of how the picture she posed for made me feel that. I resolved then to use the image in the dissertation. I encountered a great deal of honesty at the Gathering and for me, her image represents this finding. In this case, the process of working creatively and non-verbally opened a space for me to understand and express feeling.
Stock Pot kitchen is a group of eight to fifteen people who live on an old school bus and travel around the country feeding people with food reclaimed from dumpsters. When we talked in the kitchen the day I took her photo, I asked One Track about the best zuzus she ever had at a Gathering and she said

We mostly serve fruits and veggies, and lots of beans and lentils and rice, but we’ve done some weird stuff. I would say the most delicious zuzu was—Oh my God—so you know how powdered sugar, when it gets old, gets all hard and lumpy? So we had a whole bunch of that and we took the lumps and battered them and deep-fried them…Oh my God it was the best—like a backward powdered doughnut…it was sooooo good. We actually stopped after a while,
‘cause we were like, oh man, we don’t want to kill anybody…but it was the most delicious.

Pressure—finger to pencil, pencil tip to paper—varied as I worked on the map, as did the speed with which I made my marks. The length and shape of the pencil strokes are based on an intentional response to considerations of design and space, form, line, color and texture, but also express my subconscious. Feelings about my experiences at the Gathering, clarity of thought, memories, like chatting with One Track, bubble up in the spaces I create by leaving words out of the process of making sense.

In the pushing and dragging of a pencil across paper, there is a vibration created. At the Gathering, vibrations speak to affect. It is widely accepted that a “vibe” has the capacity for change. (Good vibrations; bad vibrations.) Not one of my respondents hesitated to answer questions about the vibe of a kitchen. They didn’t question the basic question that kitchens have a vibe, or blink at the notion that everyone would feel it. A young woman, Rachelle, who I spoke to said

Kitchens give those little niches to people. Everyone has a different energy they are searching for—that they connect to. You find a place you really vibe with and you come back to them every year and you help. It’s kind of like your family.

Experiencing the maps as material allowed me to recognize deeper meaning in what I had written. For example, saying that Rainbow Gatherings now happen around the world became a richer reality as I located and marked the countries. Noting where Gatherings have been held sent me to a reference map several times to make sure I had marked the correct country. This act is a data point calling attention to the privilege enacted in not being certain. With each country I colored, there was a reckoning of
geopolitics. I consider the immeasurable influences of the American Counterculture, and the influences it absorbed.

I experienced the performative writing sections as liberatory sections, allowing an authentic voice to manifest as many things—a way to articulate confused emotions, a representation of the rhythms of speech and the language of the culture, and an opportunity to design a visual story. From this vantage, I was able to consider “the force of things,” as Kathleen Stewart writes, when she suggests, “thinking about the force of things is the open question of what counts as an event, a movement, an impact, a reason to react” (2007, 16). Considering this, I understand “what counts,” as an emergent force in sensory ethnography. “What we know” and “how we know” are always linked and effectively expressed by taking into account not only the whole of the ethnographic experience, but the experience as it is wholly absorbed by the body.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the brevity of the fieldwork period. Even though I managed to bring together the research occurring before and after, as an ephemeral assembly, my time in the field was limited by the time constructs of the event. I believe there are real benefits to a continuation of this study as multi-year research, adding the dimension of change over time to an analysis. For example, investigating if there are more kitchens that tolerate the use of alcohol inside the Gathering, or if the numbers of kitchens serving meat is increasing, can provide insights on social dynamics and self-organized foodways. While I personally did not encounter either of these scenarios in my research this year, I am aware these changing dynamics are present at some regional and national gatherings. These practices may, over time, change elements
of the food systems at the Gathering and the way people relate and respond to them. A longer-term assessment of Rainbow foodways could reveal this. A study over some years would provide opportunities to analyze the Gathering as a complex adaptive system and map the outcomes of change in practices relative to innovations and adaptations.

I make a strong assertion about positive interpersonal impact from the experiences of participating in food systems at the Gathering. This finding is biased by the study group being willing participants in the event. Few, if any, individuals arrive at the Gathering with antagonistic belief systems; therefore, the hipstories of individuals I encountered reflect this. Without exception, each person I interviewed, men and women from ages 20 to 74, was brought to tears at some point in our conversation. I found this to be extraordinary. What triggered this response was usually how they felt about the silence on the 4th of July, or how they felt that participating in a Rainbow Gathering had changed them. Because there was a high level of positive emotional experience present within the group, I believe this has the effect of limiting the likelihood of encountering strong negative responses to my questions and interactions.

Lastly, the performance of food, the praxis of self-organizing, and the concept of complex reciprocity are all areas that would benefit from comparative study, particularly noting similarities and differences between regional, national and international Rainbow Gathering foodways and international and traditional cultural foodways. In an expanding context of the relationships between culture and counterculture, an analysis of food environments as deeply intersectional, can inform the conversation regarding the position of food in social change.
Questions Answered

What Is Experienced as the Value of the Kitchens at the Rainbow Gathering?

This question assumes responses that take into account the obvious (feeding people) while seeking to uncover deeper insights. Without fail, every person with whom I spoke used the word “together.” To eat together, to come together, to bring together—these feelings were expressed as the value of kitchens at the Gathering. Responses were that kitchens perform the function of being a home, a neighborhood nucleus, a place to meet people, to hear music, and to feel welcomed and cared about. From the interviews I conducted, people saw the kitchens as the structure that enabled them to practice complex reciprocity, directly—through carrying water, chopping wood, preparing food, washing dishes—or indirectly, through being grateful, spreading the word about when food was being served, playing music, or generally contributing to the vibe. Kitchens also present the many tasks which must be addressed through self-organizing. Respondents felt that being part of accomplishing a task in a leaderless environment was empowering and built faith in the capacity for what people can accomplish together.

I apply my own experiences at the Gathering by deconstructing some of the more obvious examples of how food is performative, to suggest a slightly different take on the value of kitchens. Kitchens are a manifestation of the people who populate them. In this way, the food that is served performs that identity. This is a worthwhile experience for everyone in accepting diversity; yet, because the food is free and much of what is prepared finds its way into the stomachs of those who may have different identities, the value in my mind, consists of the leveling aspect to any performance. For example, NY Purple Gang, a camp with many white, middle-aged, urban-dwellers, hosts a sushi and
miso soup event every year. What might be construed as appropriation or enacting social class is actually disrupted by the structure of the food system as being free and open to all. The consumption of this food, then, becomes performative as an act of resistance to privilege: the consensus at the Gathering is to reject exclusionary contexts (with the notable exception of A-Camp).

In another example, if Stock Pot, a kitchen with many young people who travel around the country in a school bus, serves dumpster-dived food at Main Circle, they understand that food to be performing on a socio-ethical level related to issues of class and food waste. The lack of hierarchy and social differentiation at the Gathering interrupts the radical performative force of this type of food sourcing. Because people are unaware of where the food came from, serving a dumpster-sourced dinner of lentils and cauliflower at Main Circle performs closer to its nutritive and sensory roles.

In the sense of value that comes from the praxis of self-organizing, I suggest it is in the “doing” associated with kitchens and food systems where people at the Gathering experience anarchist values, albeit not necessarily something that is identified as such. “Empowerment,” as Uri Gordon writes, “is a process whereby people literally acquire power, whether concretely or psychologically” (2008, 48). Within the horizontal, consensus-based infrastructure at the Gathering, and in the experience of “plugging in” to a kitchen, power is transformed from a “power over” experience found within the hierarchical and oppressive relationships in common society, into more of a “power-to” and a “power-with” dynamic (49).

In my experience, the value of kitchens at the Rainbow Gathering is one that provides people with a unique opportunity to participate in an economy that is free from
monetary exchange. It is, but it also maintains interesting and important relationships to capital. Understanding the complex social relationships that exist between the access to capital required to establish infrastructure and to support food provisioning and the non-monetary exchange system at the Gathering might invite a facet of capitalism that contributes to an “experience of moral confusion” (Graeber 2014, 3). Is there really a “free lunch”? Is the non-monetary sharing economy at the Gathering an example of the earnest praxis of cooperative, commercial-free dynamics, or does the system exist because of real altruistic acts of those who benefit from the capitalist system?

From the perspective of complexity, it is both of these and more. I narrow my focus to the observation that food systems dynamics within the Rainbow sharing economy are values-based—in many cases supporting values that are not part of the industrial food system—yet, it is apparent that they work somewhat synergistically with it. Characterizing this relationship as pericapitalist, is part of an acknowledgement that capitalism is more diverse than only enabling the concentration of wealth (which is surely still does). A frame that asserts diversity encourages conversation that identifies the capitalist form of exchange to be less of a solid and more (like everything) a porous structure vulnerable to the change dynamics of chaosmos.

What can be known from participating in the kitchen experience at the Gathering, and/or simply benefitting from it, is highly personal and contingent upon many factors. Yet, from my experience, and from my conversations with others, it is uniformly regarded as important, uplifting, and at the core of a transformative experience. The value of knowing “other ways of being” through the experiences of a Rainbow kitchen grows in
relationship to the proliferation in broader society of every-day self-organized, participatory and democratic community-based interactions.

*What Is the Potential for Self-Organized, Non-Commercial Food Environments as Central Structures in Assemblies of Resistance and Assistance?*

From a shared vision born of the influences of 1960s American Counterculture, Rainbow Gatherings are now held many times a year in locations around the world. This suggests that participating in forms of democratic self-organizing, experiencing mutual aid in a sharing economy, and living peacefully in harmony with the earth, are encounters that are meaningful, if not necessary, for people. As corporate-controlled globalized capitalism exploits and oppresses in order to create wealth for a very few people, the skills and values found at the Rainbow Gathering cross cultures and perform, collectively, as a growing global resistance to the status quo.

Rainbow Gatherings offer the opportunity to practice living together peacefully. Participation, through the grand schema of a complex adaptive systems, accomplishes the many tasks of feeding and caring for thousands of people, but it is the activity between bodies within food spaces—the shared experiences of participating in food systems activities—that provides opportunities to live the values you profess to believe.

Food spaces become charged spaces, atmospheres that are thick with human intersectionality. Energies concentrate and generate. Potential is power. It is out of the chaos of co-creating food systems at the Gathering that a palpable sense of purpose is augmented.

It is in this context that “Rainbow-style” food kitchens are becoming visible around the world. They are occurring outside of “official” gatherings and I believe
recognizing them can drive the conversation to consider how the experience of participating in social kitchens might affect the outcomes and contributions of protest, improve the logistics of disaster relief, and re-establish the “humanity” in humanitarian aid.

The responses of those I spoke to suggest that inclusion, empowerment, dignity, respect, community, and solidarity represent the types of feelings associated with Rainbow-style foodways. These are feelings that are necessary to heal, empower, and mobilize. There have been several recent occasions where the system of feeding people at democratic public protests looked a lot like a Rainbow Gathering; for example, Occupy Wall Street. The assembly in Zuccotti Park changed ideas about the experience of public protest. Micah White, co-organizer of the event writes

A sense of community permeated the assemblies. Free kitchens provided superb daily meals to thousands of Occupiers. I was struck by the organization of the space: paths were clear, tents were neatly covered in tarps, folks were singing in one corner dedicated to song and spirit, delicious looking pizzas were being served for dinner, there were people staffing a media relations tent, and a library with books for loan…Occupy was a total experience (2016, 9).

Social networks being what they are, I know from personal experience that many Rainbow Gathering organizers participated in Occupy protests. Reading White’s account of the “scene” leaves little doubt about the similar characteristics between the Gathering and the way these protests were organized. Protests (like assemblies during the Arab Spring, and the most recent opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) at Standing Rock, North Dakota) are self-organized as autonomous zones of resistance, active, yet
safe spaces that feed and nurture people. Kitchens become focal points for networking and coordinating affinity groups.

There are many opportunities for future study on food systems as a values-based infrastructure in the practice of social protest, humanitarian aid, and disaster relief. Another example relates the experience of disaster relief after Hurricane Katrina, where Rainbow Family in the Ashville, North Carolina area formed a kitchen. They gathered supplies and were on site within several days, feeding up to 4,000 people a day, including FEMA (Federal Emergency Management) when they finally arrived to the area (REMA 2017). They set up a “wall-less-mart” where, free of charge, people could come for basic food, camping gear, first aid, clothing, and were given as much love and support as they needed (Solnit 2009, 298). The value of knowing how to set up a field kitchen, and how to keep people healthy with good sanitation practices despite disruptions to the normal infrastructure, is an asset and part of the Rainbow family skill set. Combining this knowledge with the culture and experience of Rainbow Gathering kitchens, that is to say, creating environments that nurture the value-based experiences reported by participants in this study (particularly important when individuals are traumatized) is what makes Rainbow-style kitchens an effective model for disaster relief.

Lastly, the notion of value found in the experience of a Rainbow kitchen can be seen around the world. Many creative food spaces are emerging in Greece in response to an overwhelming number of refugees arriving to that country, as well as to the crisis of

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51 There was also serious flooding that occurred during the Gathering in 2016 in West Virginia. Several kitchens re-directed their efforts, including Katuah, a large kitchen usually present at the national gathering. Because this is a kitchen with roots in Appalachia, the consensus of the group was to forgo the Gathering and provide assistance in West Virginia.
economic austerity. One effort that is operating on the island of Lesvos is a group of German anarchists who organize under the name “No Borders Kitchen.”

The situation on the ground is difficult on Lesvos. The Greek government is struggling to provide safe spaces and financial resources for issues related to refugee housing and food. They are arguably ineffective in the face of what economic austerity has imposed upon the country. No Borders Kitchen volunteers set up free kitchens near the large detention centers (where people are inadequately fed and housed, but are free to come and go) and create environments of cooperation, dignity, and political empowerment that are sorely lacking within the official infrastructure. Like the Rainbow Gathering, there is music and conversation and people participate in creating and serving the food to each other.

There are also many examples of Greece citizens self-organizing in action, in many cases sacrificing their own food security, to see that others are feed and treated with respect and kindness. My point is not to suggest the German anarchists or the Greek people have been influenced by Rainbow Gathering foodways. Rather, it is to acknowledge what is shared between cultures with regard to food. I wish to underscore the deep intuitive understanding that food brings people together. This shared cultural response to food is a basis for finding and creating common ground. This tendency is described by Graeber (2014) as “baseline communism,” the default setting for human beings (98).

These examples bring forward the range of generative potential for considering the outcomes and contributions of values-based food systems, of Rainbow-style foodways, and of resistance kitchens as effective ways to provide food in a participatory
and cooperative manner. Further, it is the creation of safe, autonomous, and just food spaces that inoculate affective potential, offering sensory experiences that support human dignity, equality, and love.

And What of Love?

And what of Love? I have referred to it several times during this dissertation. Engaging in an embodied and sensory form of research, it quickly became inconceivable to undertake a discussion about the Gathering without acknowledging the guiding influence of what people call Love. For academics, approaching Love as a subject can be tricky. I cannot pretend to have discovered a definition for it, the origins for its prominence at the Gathering, or any agreement from those I talked to on how it should be enacted. I can say of it, only, that it becomes “the way” for people; every interaction with living things is an opportunity to exercise Love. One is supported for actions guided by Love. No matter how it is felt or defined, Love is intended to be the path through the Gathering.

My experiences, personally, have been extraordinary. In the performative writing vignettes, my intent is to share what this feels like. Love manifests at the Gathering as an opening, or as Helen told me, “It is a way to hear what cannot be heard when one is gripping too tightly.”

The understanding of Love at the Rainbow Gathering is intersubjective in nature. I would characterize it from observed behavior and from the context in which it is spoken about as a form of “brotherly” love—the concept of “doing unto others” known as
the Golden Rule.52 This understanding is a form of reciprocity, itself. Giving, in a generalized sense, is a material outcome of Love.

As a powerful affect, it permeates every environment at the Gathering, especially food environments, where the adage “food is love” feels appropriate. The word Love is a constant greeting: “Loving You!” being most common. Wherever there are small groups there will likely be someone who will suggest that everyone shout out, “We Love You!” in unison. A series of “We Love You’s” will return. I captured several in the background as I was recording interviews. The responses arise from other groups in distant corners of the woods and meadows as well as from those nearby. To the uninitiated, the idea of this sounds Pollyannaish.53 I was absolutely skeptical at the first Gathering I attended. Yet, the effects of this are difficult to dismiss. Consider the palpable reality, in everyday life, of how the atmosphere changes when sincere compliments are exchanged, or when someone smiles, or when you receive a heartfelt thank-you.

At the Rainbow Gathering, immersion in a culture of kindness, a socially constructed environment that makes Love the context, is the praxis of resistance against a culture of violence. The feeling of Love at the Gathering is one of actively performing change. Because the connection between food and Love is performed in this way, food

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52 The Golden Rule is cited as reflecting the ethics of reciprocity in many cultures and religious traditions, including Bahá’í, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Ancient Egyptian, Hinduism, Ancient Inca, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Native American, and even Satanism. (Religious Tolerance 2017.)

53 A person who is considered a “Pollyanna” reacts to adversity with excessive optimism and a cloying sweet-temperament. The name refers to Pollyanna, the character in a 1913 children's book written by Eleanor H. Porter.
spaces at the Gathering become sites where people prefigure a different, values-centered way of being.

Conclusion

By engaging with a sensory ethnography at the 2016 Rainbow Gathering of the Tribes I bring forward ways of knowing about food and food environments that are complex and interconnected, abstract, and at the same time, intensely felt and personal. I consider the spaces at the Gathering where food is produced, distributed, prepared, consumed, and disposed of as performative, as social and affective environments where the personal and the political are embodied and enacted. I start with the belief that in all cases, food represents more than the calories required to fuel bodies. Through the study, I reveal the ways food defines identities, determines ecologies, modulates environments, and shapes culture. I reflect on Rainbow foodways in the context of enabling feelings of solidarity, empowerment, and ultimately, as a community-based model for resistance and assistance.

I explore the idea of a social ecology of food to situate my inquiries within food systems scholarship, and provide examples of food at the Rainbow Gathering that reveal complex interactions between anarchism, concepts of deep ecology, Love as a guiding principle, and the universal force of chaosmos.

Emerging from this is an interdisciplinary study that demonstrates the ways food and food spaces (as inherently political), become a locus for enacting equality and direct forms of democracy, for creating environmental resiliency, and for weaving dynamic and diverse social networks that resist structural oppression. In its broadest sense, this work contributes oral histories, personal reflections, observations, and embodied experiences
with analyses that emerge as my own “hipstory” of the present—a counterculture story of resistance, empowerment, and chaosmos, told through food. The dissertation represents ways of knowing about food and food environments that are based in the sensory, performative, and lived experiences of cooperative self-organizing at the Rainbow Gathering.

**Contributions and Future Research**

My research contributes to a sociological understanding of the motivational and structural dynamics of a counterculture movement. Addressing political theory, it contextualizes anarchist theories as praxis enacted in 44 years of activity at the Rainbow Gathering. The study presents a body of knowledge that adds to the discourse regarding ethnographic practice, sensory and affective communication, and champions diverse ways of knowing. From the perspective of economic anthropology, I bring forward an example of a functioning sharing economy and present this structure as deeply interconnected to capitalism. In this, I suggest the example of feeding people for free at the Rainbow Gathering is a means to understand the diverse economies of mutual aid in a pericapitalist context. From the perspective of systems change, I see this self-organized example and all other pericapitalist activities as rhysomatic actions that begin to dissolve the solid of an independent capitalist imaginary.

This study also establishes the concept of a social ecology of food as a construct of complexity. In this, I acknowledge the critical role of active social networks as a locus for the vital interconnections between food systems and social, ecological, political, and economic systems.
Further research into any of these points through a more detailed, multi-year investigation of the food systems at the Rainbow Gathering would yield important contributions to various concerns within communications studies, sociology, economic anthropology, political theory, and food studies. However, I feel three of the most promising opportunities are to extend this general line of research into an examination of free, self-organized food environments as: 1) a response to (climate change-induced) natural disasters; 2) structures that facilitate effective and democratic community-based social protest; and 3) an effective means to address the humanitarian crisis of large numbers of displaced people.

As an outgrowth of what has been shared in this investigation, interdisciplinary studies on “Rainbow-style” food kitchens can help to navigate the intersections between food and the experience of resistance and empowerment. As Henry David Thoreau writes, “Action from principle, the perception and the performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything which was (1849, 11). In this context, I suggest future interdisciplinary food studies can draw upon the complexity of a social ecology of food systems to explore dynamic and effective grassroots responses to the critical issues of our times.
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PARTICIPATION IS THE KEY

Those you see around you hauling water, toting supplies, gathering firewood, cooking or cleaning up, sorting trash or digging shitters, staffing the Info Center or the Parking Lot have learned the inner esoteric secret of Rainbow Consciousness: you have more fun if you pitch in and help. No one created this village in the wilderness for us, we did it ourselves. Our Mother Earth provided this place; everything else you see has manifested by no higher magic than the needs of the multitude is the best around. It's also the best way to meet and get to know your Family.

PARTICIPATION IS THE KEY.

The consensus decisions that guide the Family from year to year are the result of countless hours in council. Come to the councils happening at Main Circle every day at noon and participate, always remembering to listen before you speak. Witnessing this process is the best way to understand how Family traditions have evolved through the practical experience of past Gatherings. Respect the council feather; hold your response until your turn with the feather comes, or till invited by the feather-holder to speak. This way we hear each other. Remember that we council not for our own interests but for the best interest of the Whole. Respect likewise the consensus of past councils, and consider
carefully the effect of any new proposal, as the Natives of this country did, "unto the 7th generation."

PARTICIPATION IS THE KEY.

A consensus of the Rainbow Family since the beginning is that our Gatherings are absolutely free and non-commercial. It is our spiritual calling as a Family to give and share freely what the Creator has freely given, to sanctify this ground and these seven days by exchanging no money whatsoever here. This means that to feed ourselves we depend on each person's free donation to the Magic Hat that goes around at dinner. Caesar's image has no place among us except as our individual gift to the Whole. It is on this basis that we exercise our First Amendment right as a spiritual Family to Gather. Exchange of green energy on any other basis endangers our future right to Gather, and undermines our sacred purpose for doing so.

PARTICIPATION IS THE KEY.

We govern ourselves, rather than each other, by observing the consensus of peaceful respect. Weapons, fireworks, pollutants and other hazards are inappropriate. Peaceful means not only that we act responsibly in all our relations, but that each of us takes responsibility as well for the safety and calm of our area of the camp. Respect means that we not only consider the rights and welfare of one another, down to the smallest, but take care of the earth, water, plants and animals that were here before us and will remain. Feel
the vibe, listen to the harmony around you and add your unique note. Help keep your Gathering clean, happy, harmonious, peaceful and safe.

**PARTICIPATION IS THE KEY.**

The Gathering itself is a participatory workshop in self-government; the Family also encourages the free flow of information through workshops and other forms of teaching and expression. Consider this your opportunity to share any knowledge or skill you have, simply by pinning your notice up on the boards at Info Center. As always, no single person speaks for the Family. We offer this opportunity to all without endorsing any single spiritual or political point of view. Please, our Gathering is for heartsongs, not for proselytizing or selling. All workshops are, naturally, free.

**PARTICIPATION IS THE KEY.**

The center of our seven days together is the Silence at high noon of the 4th, when we Circle to send forth our gathered energy for the Peace and Healing of the World. Respect the Silence; join hands with us in the Circle. Carry this high, solemn & joyful moment through your Gathering, both before and after the 4th. Join the campfire sing, the drum jam, share what you have at Kid Village or C.A.L.M., learn what the Welcome Center or Supply is all about. But remember that it is for the Peace and Healing of the planet that we gather, and carry that vision back with you to the world of wars and preparations for war. The Circle is unbroken.
PARTICIPATION IS THE KEY.

Just as each of us is responsible for bringing what the Family needs to manifest its vision, each of us is responsible for carrying it away again. Consider as your own the Family's sacred pledge to the Mother, and leave no trace of your stay. Use community shitters and compost pits, separate your trash for recycling and deposit at community Garbage Yoga stations; disappear your camp completely before you go. Beyond that, take responsibility for the cleanliness of the camp as a Whole: pick up any litter in your path, including what was already here. Carry out a sack of trash any time you hike to the trailhead. If you can, stay after the multitude and help restore the natural beauty of the site. But be aware that cleanup is ongoing throughout the Gathering.

All of us are the cleanup crew.

HO!

We Love You!
APPENDIX B: SELECT PAGES FROM RAINBOW GATHERING MINI MANUAL

Source: Obtained by author at 2016 Rainbow Gathering

Dish Washing

Any camp that cooks needs a dish station that is changed regularly.

PRE-WASH    WASH    RINSE    BLEACH

Hot water and soap  Hot water and soap  Hot Water  2 1/2 c cold water to 1 lbs bleach

If drinking water is hard to get, lake or stream water may be boiled for 20 minutes for prewash, wash and rinse. Use cool potable water for bleach.

Scoop food into compost first!
When food is ready, we designate someone to wash their hands and use a clean serving utensil to serve it. Some kitchens serve food at a counter to lines, and others prefer to serve while we sit at the fire and relax. No matter the kitchen's style, we bring our own cup or bowl ("bliss") and wash our hands. When serving or being served food, keep bliss away from and below the food container. We don't touch a serving utensil to blissware, or put our blissware above a serving container.

When we work in kitchens, we wash our hands before working with food. We don't touch food if we're sick. If we have wounds on our hands, we wear gloves. We clean all surfaces with bleachwater before each use. We use only clean knives and cutting boards.

Supplies are not stored on the ground. They are put up on pallets, shelves, or logs. They are covered with a tent or tarp for protection from the sun and rain.

Small packages of food and food with excessive packaging like bottled water and individually wrapped cheese slices should be left in the grocery store. Buying in bulk saves money, and makes less trash to haul out later. Plugging into a kitchen and sharing the responsibilities of acquiring and preparing food is economical, and more fun. A good way to make friends in a kitchen is to collect firewood, go on a water run, or do some dishes.
Fire

Most forest fires start from a cigarette butt or an unattended fire. All are caused by carelessness. It's always a good idea to not smoke in areas with dry grass, leaves, brush, or anything else that is generally flammable. For the sake of safety and clean up, all smokers should make sure their cigarettes are completely out and keep their cigarette butts with them until they can be put in the trash.

Another common source of out-of-control fires is cooking oil and grease. Grease fires WILL EXPLODE if they have water thrown on them. If a container of grease or oil is on fire, cut off all air to the fire by carefully covering it over with a lid. Be careful to do this without knocking it over. If you can not safely do this you must smother the fire with dirt and sand. Put out a grease fire only with sand or a real fire extinguisher.

Fireworks have no place in the woods. They start fires, scare children and dogs, and attract the attention of the men—not to mention being annoying, and an old, not very funny joke.

If there is an out of control fire, it may be a long time before firemen show up. First make sure you and the people around you are safely outside the burning area. Yelling FIRE or SHANTI SHAMA to alert others is a good idea until there is a sufficient number of people there to control the fire. If you come to fight a fire you should bring a 5 gallon water bucket (full or empty) and a shovel if possible. Lines of people often quickly form to pass buckets of water from a water source to the burning area.
Rap 107
Gathering Consciousness

*Please protect this Beautiful Land.*

Walk softly. Harm no living thing. Harmonize - Blend in. Cut no living trees. Use only down, dead wood. Preserve the meadows; camp in the woods. We are caretakers of this land.

*Everyone sharing makes a strong Human Tribe!*

Please Protect the water sources by staying out of DELICATE spring areas. Avoid camping, peeing, washing above spring areas. Keep ALL soap out of streams, springs or the creek! Use a bucket to take your bath 100 feet away from any water source. To be certain of drinking water, boil it!

*Protect our Health!*

Use the slit trenches or covered latrines – cover your paper & waste with ashes or lime, wash hands. Dig no shitters near water areas or kitchens.

**Break the fly/illness connection:**

*shit > flies > food > YOU!*

Use your own cup, bowl & spoon. Wash them after eating and rinse in bleach water. Visit C.A.L.M. if you are injured or if you feel ill – especially if you have a contagious disease!

Camp Together - Establish neighborhoods. **Community Fires only!** ~ Each with 5 gallon water bucket and shovel for Fire Protection. If you are the last to leave a fire PUT IT OUT!

Watch your gear: Be Responsible ~ *“Tempt Not Lest Ye Be Lifted From.”*

Pets are discouraged but if you must bring them keep them fed, on a leash and out of the kitchens, springs, & fights. Clean up their shit. Love them.
PACK IT IN - PACK IT OUT !!!

Cleanup begins when you arrive. Bring in only what is necessary. There is no janitor here . . . you are the cleanup crew. Separate garbage for recycling. Don't litter - Find collection point. Compost in pits only.

You are the Gathering! Participate in Shanti Sena, the peace keepers – and all activities, councils, work crews, workshops. Volunteer wherever needed: kitchens, welcome home, firewatch, parking lot, shitter digging, supply, front gate, etc. R-E-S-P-E-C-T your sisters’ & brothers’ energies.

Keep the Balance: Earth, Sky, Trees, Water, & People!

Alcohol is Discouraged, Guns are inappropriate, violence is contrary to the spirit of the gathering. Please take no photographs or videos of people without permission. Discourage drug abuse.

Buying and selling endangers our legal right to be here. The Magic Hat is our bank, donate early to fund our needs. The Magic Hat goes around at mealtime circles and with the Magic Hat Band.

Our power together is many times our power separated.

Enjoy the Rainbow with an open heart and you will see the Vision.

Join us for the 4th of July Silent Contemplation & Prayer for Peace. Please respect those maintaining silence from dawn to noon.

WE LOVE YOU!!!!