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# Food for Thought: The St. Paul Farmers' Market's Contribution to a Livable City

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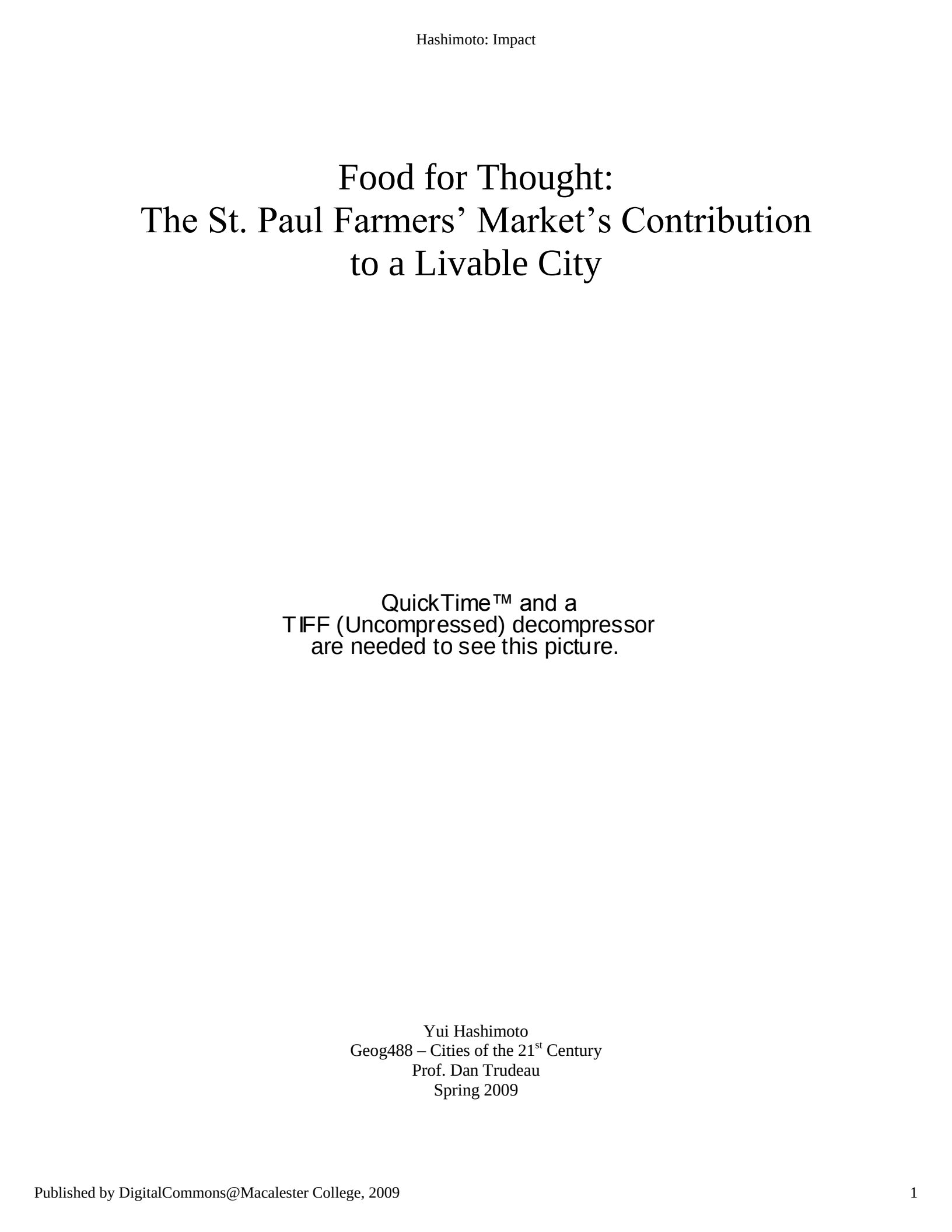


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**Introduction**

*What impact does the food I eat have on my environment?* This is a good question that Americans do not ask often enough. With our busy life styles, it is easy to assume that our food appears in the grocery store all neatly washed, packaged and piled ready for our consumption. This is just the problem: all we have to do is to drive to the local big-box supermarket and look at mounds of produce and packages of processed foods. Nowhere in the sterile supermarket environment is the experience of cultivating and harvesting crops on a farm mentioned or seen. We have been completely removed from the process of acquiring nourishment from nature, which has dire health, environmental and economic consequences for individuals and society as a whole.

How ironic, since food should be a human's utmost connection to nature, where we literally put nature into our bodies to nourish ourselves. More specifically, we harvest the sun's energy from plants through photosynthesis to do this (Pollan 2006). The more we process this plant energy, and the higher we are in the food chain, the less energy our bodies harvest. The law of the conservation of energy says that the total amount of energy in a system remains constant; however in processing food, we lose freshness, energy and nutrients to preservatives, flavourings and other additives. Moreover some of the lost energy from processing food, and industrial agriculture in general, pollutes the air that we breathe and the water that we drink. To processed foods we have lost all contact with the natural world, and only from its packaging do we realize that it is 'natural' or 'organic,' despite their amorphous meanings (Bittman 2009b; Renton 2009).

To exacerbate this removal from nature, we have antithetical ways of imagining food. Americans have what author Michael Pollan (2006) calls the "national eating disorder," (2) which comes from the American obsession with either being a stick on a

diet or being obese and eating McDonald's everyday. Ironically, this "national eating disorder" has both parties eating mass-produced, processed, packaged foods forced upon the consumer by the food industry. The dieters are eating "low-fat," "low-calorie" options that overbearingly advertise themselves as "healthy options." On the other end of the spectrum, the obese are eating high-fat, additive-infested options. In reality, we should be eating the least packaged, least advertised foods for our individual and societal health. That is real food (Pollan 2008).

Currently, our processed food's lack of connection to nature has devastating consequences for public health and the environment because ecology tells us that our food industry and its impacts do not remain isolated (Pollan 2006). Industrial, processed food requires immense amounts of energy and produces vast quantities of waste in all levels of production. Industrial agriculture uses petroleum-based fertilizers, which also use immense amounts of energy. Furthermore, due to their chemical properties, fertilizers easily leech out into water supplies, which can have far-reaching, detrimental effects on aquatic ecosystems and drinking water (Pinderhughes 2004). The products of this process are then transported to distant factories to be processed, manipulated and packaged, further requiring petroleum energy. These new manifestations of food are then packed onto another combination of trucks and planes, to be transported to big-box supermarkets where large fridges and freezers keep the products fresh for as long as possible (Halwell 2002b). Sadly, only twenty-five percent of the original shipment will actually make it to a consumer's dinner table; the rest is discarded as waste (Shuman 2004). Moreover, this process is true of any industrial food production process, conventional or organic.

Thus, the industrialization of food production begs the questions: what happened to food production to become what it is today and is industrialization on this scale inevitable? The simplified answer to the first question is that a complex interaction between the economic interests of the food industry and the political power of the government came together to create the food landscape of frozen dinners, fast food and diet shakes we enjoy today. To question two, no, the trend of industrialization is not inevitable as we can see through the revival of 'eat-local' movement and farmers' markets (Schlosser 2002). Farmers' markets and such trends show that through education and buying locally that the perpetuation of industrial agriculture is not inevitable. This paper explores the process of reverting back to localization through the example of one local farmers' market in St. Paul, MN.

My goal is to explore what I eat, and how it impacts my body and my environment. I want to explore how our food choices and our acquisition of food through the St. Paul Farmers' Market, as opposed to industrial agriculture, can contribute to St. Paul as a livable city. I explore livability specifically through food because agriculture and food are both good indicators of the health of the people and the environment, (Andreatta 2005). Livability for society strives for environmental, social and economic sustainability, as well as promoting the interconnectedness between these aspects of livability. This societal livability then impacts individual livability, or individual health (Pinderhughes 2004). Furthermore, I would also ask how politics and economics enable and constrain food's contribution to livability? How do they integrate themselves into such a seemingly individual and cultural experience?

A key component to the enactment of livability, and the subsequent environmental, economic and social sustainability, is the imagining of food. Since livability is an ethic of how to live life, it is a lived experience or a lifestyle, and thus requires a certain consciousness and imagination, or social space, in order to be enacted (Soja 1980). In this paper, I look at the importance of our imagination of food as vital in how we, the consumer, can contribute to livability.

Livability also implies an inherent interconnectedness between the producer and the consumer, and the city and the country. Moreover, I explore livability because it is yet to be defined in the context of food and the farmers' markets; nor has it been specifically defined in the context of the St. Paul Farmers' Market. Since food contributes so much to a person's health and a city's carbon and waste output, it is a vital consideration in making a city and an individual livable (Norberg-Hodge et al. 2002; Beatley 2000).

Food's contribution to livability is not in its organic certification, nor in its packaging that forces its naturalness and its low-calorie status upon us. Ultimately, food, and its contribution to livability, comes from eating real, unprocessed food, of whose origins are known, and of whose connection to the land is understood. Consequently, in this paper, the local conventionally grown food sold at the St. Paul Farmers' Market contributes more to a livable city than does the organic industrial food sold at an outlet like Whole Foods. It is more livable on a societal and individual level to eat that bowl of locally produced whipped cream and locally grown strawberries than it is to eat that organic low-fat chemical cream substitute on the organic strawberries from Ecuador.

Nonetheless, there are many misconceptions and opponents to locally grown food. One such opponent of local food are the technocrat economists, who will argue that

industrial conventional food contributes to a livable city, although livability is not their goal, by providing efficient modes of procuring cheap food (Andreatta 2005). Economists, such as Earl Butz, Richard Nixon's second secretary of agriculture, believe in opportunity-cost as the most efficient way to feed large populations. Butz himself single handedly changed the course of agriculture to promote industrialization and monocrop farms, such as the corn and soybean fields in Iowa (Pollan 2006). These economists have a blind belief in the inevitability of industrial agriculture as the only way to sustain our large population. Nonetheless, the technocratic economic perspective ignores an analysis of the social and environmental implications of industrial agriculture, such as corporate advertising practices and pollution.

On the other hand, Whole Foods customers will argue that the organic products they buy contribute to a livable city by consuming fewer chemicals per product and by knowing where their food comes from. However, this perspective omits the environmental implications of the industrial organic food chain (Pollan 2006). It creates an imagination of food where consumption of over-priced products can buy a clean conscience and prevents consumers from thinking about the true costs of such consumption. Buying lettuce from an industrial organic farm in California is hardly more environmentally friendly than the locally grown conventional lettuce. Nor is buying organic junk food better for your health than the conventional junk food. As Mark Bittman (2009), food columnist for the *New York Times* says, "organic junk food is still junk food." Thus, the Farmers' Market can be a venue where consumers can re-imagine food as a contribution to the social, economic and environmental and health vitality of a city and its surroundings.

However, this paper is not a criticism of the conventional and organic production methods and corporations; nor food policy, the cost of local and organic food and so on. It is about what we as producers and consumers can do to contribute to a livable city. If you take anything away from this paper, it is to rethink how your food is produced, how you consume your food and how it affects your environment. To buy products from local, family-owned farms at places like the St. Paul Farmers' Market, whether it is organic or not, is one such contribution. If the products are local and from family-owned farms, it is by default what Pollan (2008) calls "real food" that came from the ground, that supports the local economy and has less of a carbon footprint than their industrial counterparts (Norberg-Hodge et al. 2002). Furthermore, as an individual makes the decision to improve his/her health by economically and physically consuming local food, so the environment's health will improve; as the environment's health improves so too does the individual's health and so on in cyclic fashion (Bittman 2009). An individual can do all of this at a place such as the St. Paul Farmers' Market to contribute to the livable city.

**Where the Contribution takes Place [add photo, map]**

Picture an early Saturday summer morning, the sun shining and the wind warming your face as you walk east on Fifth Street in downtown St. Paul. You pass chatty people with hands full of flowers and reusable bags overflowing with fresh produce. You eventually come to a plaza with a covered structure in the middle, and you realize where all of these people have come from. You have stumbled upon a bustling farmers' market: the St. Paul Farmers' Market. But who thought of building such a place and how did this bustling market come to be in such a place?

That physical place currently exists at Fifth and Wall Streets, in the Lowertown area of St. Paul. It stands east of Downtown St. Paul and Interstate 35-East, south of Interstate 94, and north of the Mississippi River. On a larger scale, the St. Paul Farmers' Market is located approximately one and a half miles southeast of the Minnesota State Capitol. As a social space of imagination, the Farmers' Market exists as a space for St. Paul and its surroundings to exchange local food, as well as the knowledge that surrounds the food. Furthermore, it provides a space for the forging of social relationships based on trust and accountability.

On any summer weekend, one can pass through the aisles of the Farmers' Market and witness and listen to such social relationships being forged. More specifically, the Farmers' Market mediates social interaction for the exchange of two specific types of knowledge: *provenance* and *metis* (Morgan et al. 2006; Scott 1999). These terms will later be elaborated, but suffice it to say that it is the knowledge of where one's food comes from and the local knowledge that produced it.

Walking with the crowds of people, you can see pictures of farmers on their farms with their animals or crops. You can hear the wild rice lady talk about how she goes out in canoes with her co-workers to collect the rice. She then tells her customers how to prepare the rice and some typical Minnesotan hotdish recipes. Around the corner, the Wisconsin cheese stall is busy with people asking about the 'fish bait,' how they love it and how it is a shame that it is illegal to sell it. The cheese lady describes the microbiology of her cheeses and the education she has received in order to get to where she is presently. In the next row over, the producers and consumers are calling each other by their names and discussing the potential of this year's crop.

The St. Paul Farmers' Market, unlike many makeshift farmers' markets in and around St. Paul, has a deep history with the city in which it is situated. The concept of a farmers' market in St. Paul began as early as 1852, when the Minnesota Pioneer newspaper called for a farmers' market. In 1853, a two-story brick building was erected on Seventh and Wabasha Streets, where the Children's Museum now stands, to hold St. Paul's first public market (St. Paul Farmers' Market 2006). From then on, the city charter stated that it was the responsibility of the City to provide a farmers' market to its people.[1] Thus, the City owns the land, and the St. Paul Farmers' Market pays rent to the City.

Because the City owns the land, the market has moved from different locations in downtown St. Paul. It was housed for the longest time at Tenth and Jackson Streets. It was located there from 1902 until 1982, when Interstate 94 construction and development of the Embassy Suites Hotel forced the market to its current location (St. Paul Farmers' Market 2006).[1] Its current location at Fifth and Wall Streets is where a physical structure reminiscent of the original market, with a corrugated fiberglass roof, was erected. The current location of the market is near one of the sites originally considered by the City of St. Paul, bringing the physical characteristics of the old market back to life (St. Paul Farmers' Market 2006). The future plan of the Farmers' Market is to move to a larger site to accommodate more producers; however, the poor state of the economy is currently has put such plans on hold.

Thus, the history of the Farmers' Market begs the question: what is the City's relationship with the Farmers' Market in the context of livability? Currently, the City's motto is to be the "most livable city in America;" however, the Farmers' Market does not

[1] Personal interview conducted 25th March 2009.

have a livability statement. Thus, is it possible for the City and the Farmers' Market to have compatible imaginations of livability? How does compatibility impact their goals?

**The Ethic and Mission**

Such a place as the St. Paul Farmers' Market contributes to a livable city through its ethic and mission; however, what does livability mean and how exactly is it enacted? This paper draws on literature from two schools of thought that are useful to the discussion of food and its contribution to a livable city: livability and the imagining of food.

I use the Farmers' Market to illustrate the concept of livability because food, through a place such as the Farmers' Market, incorporates many processes that can contribute to certain ethical lifestyle. I examine livability over simple sustainability because it is the lifestyle and the imagination of sustainability, rather than the actual attaining of sustainability, to which the Farmers' Market contributes.

The livability literature brings a more holistic imagination of sustainability that inherently implies a spatial and social interconnection between city and surroundings, producer and consumer, and past, present and future (Beatley 2000; Pinderhughes 2002; Stone and Richtel 2009). The imagining of food describes specifically where and how actors themselves can enact livability through a place like the St. Paul Farmers' Market (Pollan 2006; Bittman 2009). How we imagine food can change how we imagine the production and consumption of food, and thus empower us to make ethical consumer choices.

*Livability*

Livability is a commonly utilized term, used by institutions such as the City of St. Paul to talk about "livable communities" and describe itself as the "most livable city in America" without explicitly defining the term (City of St. Paul 2009). Many other cities throughout the United States have similar statements of livability and livability indicators. But why should we use livability as a tool of analysis and what exactly does it mean?

One way in which we can evaluate livability is through our consumption, and thus our production, of food. Food, and our current industrial production method, is a resource intensive process that impacts many people and environments. On the other hand, we have the local food movement and the St. Paul Farmers' Market, which provides an alternative process that mediates enacting the ethic of livability. The Farmers' Market can be a useful medium to evaluate how the process of livability is enacted through food consumption.

However, currently, there is no consensus in the literature as to livability's exact definition. One common theme is that it is an ethic on how to live life, or an experience towards ethical consciousness of one's surroundings. To the various institutions and actors involved in livability, its meaning is disputed and its details differ. The St. Paul Farmers' Market does not explicitly define livability as its mission and thus, in this, as well as other cases, is a term that can be manipulated and molded to the users' needs. Nonetheless, the Farmers' Market, although not explicitly defining livability, contributes to livability through the social interactions and trust that it cultivates.

A second common thread is that livability and its ethic implies an interconnectedness. After all, the spatial interaction between city and surroundings

benefit the region as a whole in both economic and environmental terms (Beatley 2000; Rappaport 2005). In the context of food, this interconnectedness includes the producer and consumer, the city and its surroundings and so on (Pinderhughes 2004; Beatley 2000). More broadly, the interconnectedness implies a social interaction of community participation (Buchwald 2003). This interconnectedness also transcends time as well as space. Livability implies enacting certain practices in order to create a more sustainable city for the future as well as our spatial surroundings (Evans 2002a). This form of interdependence can reorganize how the production and consumption of food can contribute to a new form of social, economic and environmental relationship (Pollan 2006).

Greenstein and Wiewel (2000) believe that this spatial interconnectedness between the city and its surroundings have five common themes: environment, quality of life, equity, government efficiency and economic competitiveness. Since the St. Paul Farmers' Market works outside of government, I would discard the idea of government efficiency from this list to say that the remaining four aspects of interdependency are all manifested and supported in and through the Farmers' Market example.

Where the discrepancy lies in the literature is who should promote the enacting of livability. From the literature, there are three groups of actors who should enact livability: the federal government, the local government, and the community. Beatley (2000), Evans (2002a), and Martin (2009) argue that the federal government should promote livability through such acts as taxation and subsidies. In the context of food, livability should be enacted through subsidies and incentives for local and more sustainable agricultural

practices. However, presently, the government does the opposite and subsidizes industrial agriculture with the influence of the agrocorporations (Norberg-Hodge et al. 2002).

Because of the influence of agrocorporations, Evans (2002a) argues that the federal government should promote livability because communities have limited impact on larger scales. Thus, he argues that civil society and communities' ability to effect change in the context of livability is limited without political structures. Evans (2002b) believes that community can provide social capital but "… [a]s long as they act by themselves, the capacity to reshape the larger urban environment is beyond them" (2002a, p. 15). In his opinion, a farmers' markets' contribution to livability is inconsequential because they do not revolutionize the industrial food chain on a large enough scale.

However, I disagree completely with Evans' (2002a) idea that individuals and communities are unable to effect change without political structures. This disagreement arises from what we each define as change. It seems that Evans (2002a) believes in change as the overthrowing of the industrial food chain, taking a top-down approach. On the other hand, I define change as individuals contributing to an alternative lifestyle, giving agency to the individual and taking a bottom-up approach. Since I define livability as an ethic on how to live life, I believe that the Farmers' Market has the ability to contribute to livability by influencing the consumers' imagining and consciousness of food.

On a smaller scale, Pinderhughes (2004) discusses the role of local government in promoting livability. More specifically, she discusses the use of urban planning as a way to contribute to livability. Food is particularly pertinent to the impacts of urban planning

because it includes so many processes and actors. It requires production, transportation, sales, as well as economic and physical consumption. These processes require an interconnectedness between actors, which can promote livability. However, leaving the promotion of livability to urban planning removes agency of the people to create their own physical and social spaces. Urban planning emphasizes the aesthetic of a place rather than the imagination, or the social space, of the place (Boarnet and Takahashi 2005).

An alternative to the regional scale of the urban planning approach to livability is the idea of a metro food policy (Van Til and Gabel 1987). Here, local policy would be used to implement livable city principles. These policies would ideally include policy to support local farms and the preservation of agricultural lands from encroachment by the suburbs. Ideally, the implementation of these policies would occur in the immediate future; however, this is outside of the scope of direct impact by and impact of the Farmers' Market. The Farmers' Market uses community rather than politics to enact livability.

However, I would argue that the St. Paul Farmers' Market contributes to a livable city by providing a physical and social space where livability can be enacted. To the St. Paul Farmers' Market, the two common threads of livability discussed above are useful places to begin discussing food and its contribution to a livable city. The physical space provides a medium for local food to be exchanged and the social space provides a medium for the knowledge behind the local food, and thus the ethic of livability, to be exchanged.

Thus, the final set of actors that can promote livability are the communities themselves, where individuals have the ability to make change outside of the influence of

politics, despite the scale of industrial agriculture (Shuman 2004). The St. Paul Farmers' Market can provide a space for such actors. We can see that Farmers' Market contributes to a livable city by facilitating the enactment of livability. Consuming locally produced products sustain the economic welfare of local farmers and their environmentally sustainable practices. In selling their products locally, producers have a direct relationship with their consumers, promoting social interaction, trust and accountability (Stone and Richtel 2009).

In the age of salmonella and E. coli outbreaks in both the conventional and organic industrial food chains, this social interaction has never been more important in promoting and redefining food (Schlosser 2002; Severson and Martin 2009). As Jane Jacobs (1961) discusses in the context of city sidewalks, trust must be cultivated through casual contact. This trust must be cultivated outside of institutions because institutionalization infers a public intervention on a private relationship, which forces and regulates trust (Jacobs 1961). Once this relationship is forced, all trust is lost. The Farmers' Market provides a medium for the cultivation of such casual, informal interactions. Informal social interactions between producer and consumer at the Farmers' Market create an unsaid responsibility to each other: to the producer to provide quality products and to the consumer to provide loyalty.

*"Opting Out" and Imagining Food*

The producer can fortify the informal relationships through the imagination of food. At present, we Americans imagine food as a commodity: something that we buy and eat with no meanings attached (Norberg-Hodge et al. 2002; Pollan 2006). We love cheap food, as we can see through our consumption of fast food; however, monetary

cheapness does not capture the true social and environmental costs of this love (Schlosser 2002). On the other hand, we do not imagine our food as culture, nor as a social act, nor as a political act (Morgan et al. 2006; Norberg-Hodge et al. 2002; Pollan 2006). The Farmers' Market allows us to reimagine our food as all of these. Industrial agriculture is mysterious and opaque, but the Farmers' Market serves as alternative space of honesty and transparency in our food production (Pollan 2006). Furthermore, despite our lack of knowledge about farming life, we can still make the conscious decision to consume local food and trust our producers (Norberg-Hodge et al. 2002). The way producers and consumers imagine food is a way that livability is enacted and perpetuated through a physical space like the St. Paul Farmers' Market.

Pollan (2006), Norberg-Hodge et al. (2002) and other writers acknowledge that in the United States, it is the interaction of politics and economics that influences our imagination of food. Thus, we must change our imagination of food in order to produce and reproduce the local food movement. Understanding how we imagine food shows how a place such as the Farmers' Market is produced and reproduced through space and time. Through the imagining of food, there are three ways in which the Farmers' Market can facilitate the enactment of livability: food as culture, food as social interaction and food as political act.

Currently the United States has a "national eating disorder," (Pollan 2006, p. 2) in which we believe that scientists and nutritionists know what we should eat. This subsequently leads us to have multiple eating habit shifts in a matter of a few years. Rather than imagining food as nourishment for the body or as a pleasurable past time, we view it as a terrifying commodity that could make us fat. Moreover, our obsession with

consumption, coupled with a multi-billion dollar advertising industry, promotes the idea that cheaper is better; and when food is cheaper, we eat more, and we get fatter (Pollan 2006). To counteract our consequent obesity problem, we move to crash diets of eating processed rabbit food of whose provenance, or origin, is unknown (Morgan et al. 2006).

If the consumer begins to view food as culture, a "fancy word for your mother" (3), says Pollan (2008), we can begin to understand that the production and consumption of food are both deeply intertwined with culture (Morgan et al. 2006). More specifically, this imagining of food requires the exchange of two types of knowledge between the producer and consumer: *provenance*, or the knowledge of where one's food comes from, and *metis*, or the local knowledge of how one's food was produced (Morgan et al. 2006; Scott 1999). *Provenance* and *metis* require an intricate relationship with, and knowledge of one's surroundings, including the people and environment that connect with the consumption of local food. The knowledge of where one's food comes from and the methods used produce food can enhance the pleasure and appreciation that comes from eating food (Andreatta 2005; Pollan 2006). These two types of knowledge stand in stark contrast to the codified, standardized knowledge of industrial agriculture, which includes no exchange of specialized knowledge.

Thus, through the exchange of knowledge, food can be viewed as a social act (Norberg-Hodge et al. 2002). Through this process, the Farmers' Markets inherently supports community, social interaction, as well as environmental sustainability (Norberg-Hodge et al. 2002). It does this by providing both a physical and social space for the exchange of *provenance* and *metis*, and moreover, the appreciation of local food. Both of these spaces allow for the creation and recreation of each other through the continuing

exchange of knowledge between both old and new actors. Moreover, the exchange of knowledge, and fortification of social interactions create interconnectedness through space and time, between producer and consumer, a process that the industrial food chain lacks. As Buchwald (2003) discusses, moving toward a livable city requires community participation in the belief in the future of the community.

These social interactions can then allow for a broader imagining food as a political act (Pollan 2006). The idea of food as a political act is not necessarily lobbying for green incentives or other such policies. The consumer can imagine food as a political by making choices about the food chain from which to consume. The St. Paul Farmers' Market can be seen as a space of democracy, as our consumption of food is a way to show what we think of the Earth, and show our solidarity with a certain lifestyle, livability (Pollan 2006).

Moreover, local food and its connection to democracy allows for consumers to have control of their consumption choices. Through the exchange of *provenance* and *metis*, the consumer, and thus the producer, can have a conscious command over their production and consumption choices, and the ability to "opt out" of the industrial food chain (Pollan 2006; Sen 1990). Thus, eating local food not only challenges our current production processes, but also changes the physical and social landscapes, and the community within which it is situated (Pollan 2006).

Consequently, imagining food as cultural, social and political acts drastically changes how we view the St. Paul Farmers' Market enacting livability. This way of imagining food gives the consumers, or actors, the power to enact their lifestyle choices rather than being forced into industrial agriculture. The reimagination of food from

dangerous and harmful to healthy and pleasurable can help us make conscious consumer and production choices that ultimately contribute to a more livable city. The exchange of *provenance* and *metis* allow for the creation and recreation of the physical and social spaces of the Farmers' Market through space and time.

**Evaluating the St. Paul Farmers' Market's Contribution to Livability**

I will use the literature discussed above and apply it to the case study of the St. Paul Farmers' Market. Since there is minimal literature on livability, food and farmers' markets, I will use qualitative methods in order to analyze the role of the St. Paul Farmers' Market in its contribution to a livable city. The political economy of place perspective serves as a useful lens through which to answer the following research questions:

> How does the St. Paul Farmers' Market define and contribute to the livable city?
> What are the political and economic frameworks within which the Farmers' Market works?
> How do they affect the Farmers' Market and its contribution to a livable city? Do they inhibit or promote the livable city?

I use qualitative methods by conducting semi-structured interviews for a number of reasons. One is that the literature provides no insights to this specific case study. Thus, I depend on the input of the market participants for the function and structure of the market. By interviewing the two sides of the production chain, the administrator and the farmers, I am able to gain insight on the complexities of place formation at the Farmers' Market. Finally, as I am studying the importance of livability and social interaction, I feel it is vital to conduct qualitative research to forge relationships with the producers of what becomes my dinner.

In order to find participants for the semi-structured interviews, a partly purposeful and a partly snowball sampling was used. A snowball sample was used, as a list of recommended growers was obtained from the Farmers' Market administrator. From there, only farmers in the suburbs of the seven county metropolitan area (Hennepin, Ramsey, Washington, Dakota, Anoka, Carver and Scott Counties) were chosen because most products at the Farmers' Market come from within 50 miles of downtown St. Paul. Suburban areas are defined as the towns surrounding the city limits of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Such exclusionary criteria was used because this paper studies suburban-interdependency, and again, because most products at the Farmers' Market comes from within 50 miles of downtown St. Paul.

The interviews consisted of questions regarding the history, the philosophy, the Market's implementation and its constraints. A list of questions was prepared in advance of the interviews in order to cover the desired subject materials, and the content of the questions was adjusted accordingly based on the interviewee. The conversations were digitally recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

However, before moving to our case study, we must note the limitations of a case study in analyzing social phenomenon. The greatest limitation is that case studies cannot be generalized to all cases (Yin 1994). In this context, the St. Paul Farmers' Market cannot be generalized as the rule for the creation and propagation of all farmers' markets since they all have their own constrains and abilities. Nonetheless, case studies are a useful tool in observing and analyzing how a process works, and therefore it can be generalized to a theory (Yin 1994). The St. Paul Farmers' Market can thus be used as an example of one process by which a farmers' market could contribute to livability.

*The Abilities and Constraints of the St. Paul Farmers' Market*

Nonetheless, there are inevitably constraints to the Farmers' Market's contribution to a livable city. The political economy of place perspective and structuration theory serve as useful lenses into analyzing the collected data (Logan and Molotch 1987; Giddens 1995). It is easy to lose sight of the idea that the Farmers' Market is a *contribution* to a livable city, and that actors have the ability to change a place due to its constructed nature, when the odds are stacked against it. The political economy of place identifies actors, structures and social interactions in a system, and situates them within the structural framework (Logan and Molotch 1987). In this context, the actors are the Farmers' Market and its participants working within the grander structure of food politics and economics. Structuration theory, in conjunction with political economy of place, goes further to attempt identification of how actors can effect change (Giddens 1995). Thus, these theories together can be a useful lens through which to understand and frame the analysis of my interviews.

However, first, it is necessary to understand what is meant by the political economy of place perspective and structuration theory. Here, it is useful to imagine them through the analogy of an onion. Social structure, in this case the food industry, is the onion in the political economy of place: its layers can be peeled away to show the different macro, meso or micro structures involved in the production of food (Castles and Miller 2006). Each of these layers is composed of cells, which communicate with each other, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to create networks of social interactions between the different layers and between actors within layers (Cox 1998). Structuration theory attempts to describe *how* the inner layers of the onion, the Farmers' Market and its participants, are enabled by and constrained by the outer layers of the onion. Simply put,

the political economy of place describes which layers of the onion, influence place building, and structuration describes where each layer derives its power and abilities. In the context of the Farmers' Market, the influence of value-inclusive space, as opposed to value-free space, and honouring it as a social space to cultivate personal relationships in the food production process is where the Farmers' Market's power lies (Logan and Molotch 1987). Moreover it recognizes the value of social interactions as a way for the Market to persist through space in its physical form and through time in the imagination of the participants. The Farmers' Market as a value-inclusive space promotes a sense of trust and perpetuation of a livable city at a local level. Through structuration theory we can see the existence of the Farmers' Market what the industrial food chain is not: as a value-inclusive space through time that people with agency have created and reproduced through alternative decisions.

By promoting local production and consumption, the St. Paul Farmers' Market is working within the constraints of the political and economic structures of the industrial food chain. The producers work within state and federal legislation to sell their products directly to the consumer to propagate their livelihood and philosophy. The consumer works within the constraints of the industrial food chain by participating in places such as the Farmers' Market, to participate in a specific ethic to life, or livability. The key is that the producer and consumer, by participating in the Farmers' Market, have *agency* to consume a certain type of food, and thus enact a certain lifestyle despite the political and economic constraints of agricultural corporations and so on. This agency can exist because it operates on a different scale, or onion layer, to all of these structural constraints.

Nonetheless, one of the downfalls of the political economy of place is that it lacks a discussion of individuals' agency within the structures of place building. Structuration theory, therefore, acknowledges the constraints of, but simultaneously realizes the abilities of individuals by understanding how power is produced and reproduced. It describes how power is produced through or in space, and since power is socially constructed, society can take agency and change where power lies. The Farmers' Market as a physical structure and its philosophy has shifted power to the people to effect change through a change in imagination and a change in ethic. Through describing the different creations of power, Giddens (1995) also describes *where* to effect change: temporally and socio-spatially. In the case of the Farmers' Market, its temporal and socio-spatial persistence in the imagination of food is where change is enacted. Furthermore, context for both time and place are key to producing a change because a movement must be pertinent in order to have life and propagation.

Structuration theory, as well as pointing to where to effect change, admits to the 'theorem of knowledgability'; that we, as actors, are all "purposeful, knowledgable agents who have reason for what we do" (Giddens 1995). As actors, individuals participate in society with intention despite lacking a complete awareness for how structures affect actors. More specifically, despite our lack of knowledge and exposure to local farming practices, we consumers still have the ability to choose the Farmers' Market (Norberg-Hodge et al. 2002). Thus, with intention, the Farmers' Market and its producers and consumers act within a physical space to realize a social space that works outside of the industrial status quo. We do this by producing and reproducing our own

form of temporal and socio-spatial power on a smaller scale, regardless of known or unknown structural constraints.

However, we can conceptualize the Market as not *counter* to the structure, but as *alternative* to the structure. Therefore we can function as "purposeful, knowledgeable agents" because it is unnecessary to know the full extent of structural power (Giddens 1995, p. 16). In a time where the definition of livability remains disputed, the existence of knowledgeable agents is critical to the existence of the Farmers' Market as an alternative physical and social space. Moreover, connectedness in space is important, but connectedness in social space, or knowledge is what creates a powerful space for change. Morgan et al. (2006) discuss two opposing types of knowledge: local vs. industrial. Suffice it to say that the industrial knowledge is codified and uniform through space, and for the most part through time. However, the Farmers' Market has idiosyncratic local knowledge contained within, where *provenance* facilitates connectedness in knowledge.

Furthermore, I would amend Morgan et al.'s (2006) local knowledge into two separate types of idiosyncratic knowledge. They (2006) propose Storper's concept of 'productive worlds,' and the knowledge they contain, in attempting to describe the current geography of food. Storper provides four 'productive worlds,' which for the purpose of this paper, can be consolidated into the industrial and local worlds, based on the knowledge that they require (Morgan et al. 2006). They run parallel to each other[1], participating in different economic actions, with their own knowledge base and structures. Morgan et al. (2006) argue that these actions can be further extended to

[1] Storpers' four 'production worlds' can be consolidated into two (industrial and local) because the three industrial worlds are for all intents and purposes the same in the context of this paper (brand foods such as McDonalds, Genetically modified crops, and finally food preservation technology). These three worlds stand parallel to the local food chain and never converge.

cultural, ecological and political actions. For the local food chain, this knowledge base, *provenance*, or knowledge about the food's origins, in conjunction with Scott's (1999) concept of *metis*, or the local knowledge of food production, is its knowledge base. This in turn mediates social interaction and the cultivation of trust and spatial embeddedness (Morgan et al. 2006). It is important to note that these types of knowledge define the local food region, which is more a social space that a physical space.

Coupled with Morgan et al. (2006), Cox's (1998) consideration of scale is particularly pertinent because the Farmers' Market is a local alternative to the industrial food chain (Norberg-Hodge et al. 2002; St. Paul Farmers Market 2006). This is as opposed to other attempts at 'local' food movements that have appeared; for example, Whole Foods and other organic and local food merchants. Supermarkets such as Whole Foods attempt to sell local produce for marketing purposes, which from a local food perspective seem contradictory. The Market and its patrons produce leverage over the industrial food chain on a local scale using the Market as their social space to enact livability. Both consumer and producer may have little leverage on the overall structure of industrial food on a national, or even statewide, scale; however, it is the physical enactment of livability through the imagination of food that the Farmers' Market contributes to St. Paul as a livable city.

Nonetheless, it must be noted that development is not necessarily negative or contradictory to the concept of a livable city. Scale is the key consideration. The Farmers' Market must be viewed both as an alternative to the value-free growth process as well as its own form of development. Thus, in its own way, the political economy of place perspective highlights that Farmers' Markets as well as "…local growth initiatives need

to show that they make sense both at a local level as well as in more macro or cosmopolitan terms" (Molotch 1999). The Farmers' Market makes sense in local terms in that it allows the residents of St. Paul to enact an ethic through an imagination of food despite St. Paul's constraints to this process. In a macro context, the St. Paul Farmers' Market, although a social space that cannot specifically be recreated elsewhere, can be imagined and realized in other spatial and temporal contexts (Cox 1998). Molotch adds that the initiative "… needs to be feasible in its own terms," (1999) in terms of place, constraints and abilities on the enactment of livability. If the goal of a livable city is to create a more functional and healthy city, then a livable city should be one that self-sustains and relies on transparency of relationships.

**Enacting Livability**

Thus far, we have examined the literature to see how it defines livability and how an actor can enact livability. We can see that there is little consensus. However, we are yet to examine how the St. Paul Farmers' Market defines and enacts livability. Moreover, using the political economy of place perspective and structuration theory as a lens, we can see there are many factors, including the industrial food chain and government, which constrain and enable the Farmers' Market. Thus, how does the St. Paul Farmers' Market contribute to the "most livable city in America" (City of St. Paul 2009)?

The St. Paul Farmers' Market does not explicitly define livability; however, this does not mean that it does not contribute to livability. The goal of the Farmers' Market is to "…educate the public about locally grown food and nutrition; the value of fruits and vegetables… Local farmers could come to one central place to sell their food."[1] Thus, the

[1] Personal interview conducted 25th March 2009.

goal of the Farmers' Market is to provide a space for the exchange of local food while cultivating social relationships between producers, consumers and cities through education.

This education component of the Farmers' Market is a medium of exchange that goes beyond a simple economic transaction. Education provides social interaction that is critical in differentiating the Farmers' Market from the industrial food chain. From the social interaction through education comes a forging of trust and accountability, vital to the local food movement (Stone and Richtel 2009). The social interaction aspect of food production and consumption shows that it is mutually dependent on the two groups: the consumer depends on trustworthy products of the producer and the producer depends on consumer loyalty of the consumer (Pollan 2006). The power of a place like the Farmers' Market is to undermine the inevitability of the industrial food chain, through its ability to mediate social interaction and all that it affords (Giddens 1995).

Furthermore, the Farmers' Market's ability to contribute to livability is to work as an alternative to the political system. Education, one of the main goals of the Farmers' Market, is how it is able to create and recreate itself as a physical and social space. This education, in addition to being the medium through which social interaction occurs, creates a sense of trust. As Jacobs (1961) discusses, this social interaction occurs through casual contact with no implied sense of obligation. This trust cannot be regulated, codified or institutionalized because the relationship is obligation free and comes from the agents themselves. Once codified, this relationship becomes an institutionalized obligation, and when actors are obliged, the trust and agency disintegrates. Hence, the

Farmers' Market works as an alternative to politics and institutions to foster trust and its social space through physical space.

The St. Paul Farmers' Market contributes to livability by educating consumers about their food and the knowledge that lies behind it. This allows for what Giddens (1995, p. 16) describes as "knowledgeable agents," where consumers are conscious of their intention to consume locally produced food despite the lack of knowledge about the influences of the industrial food chain. The power of the group of "knowledgeable agents" is their ability to propagate the Farmers' Market through space and time. The spatial propagation and strength of the Farmers' Market comes from "…public demand for the awareness of food… that people want to be more in tune about what's happening to their food and where it's coming from."[1] Furthermore, this is "…[a] strength [he doesn't] see a limit to," which shows the temporal propagation of the Farmers' Market.[2]

However, there are socio-spatial and temporal constraints on the Farmers' Market in its ability to educate actors and to contribute to a livable city. Politically, the Farmers' Market's relationship with the City of St. Paul shows that its contribution is limited to how the city defines livability. That is to say that although the City is mandated by its charter to provide a farmers' market for its people, other considerations greatly influence the Farmers' Market's abilities. For example, in the 1850s, the City conceptualized the Market as a way of changing the image of the city from a frontier town to a cosmopolitan metropolis. Then in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Farmers' Market had to be "… downsized because the popularity of the market was disappearing…" and a shift in the

[1] Personal interview conducted 27th March 2009.
[2] Personal interview conducted 25th March 2009.

City's discourse around a successful city looked towards development.[3] In the place of the Farmers' Market, the City allowed for the development of the Embassy Suites Hotel, which still stands today. Simultaneously, the Farmers' Market moved from wholesale to retail as family-owned grocery stores, distributors and farms disappeared. As they moved from wholesale to retail, the Market was forced to reduce the number of vendors and change location, as the city saw development as more pressing. In its previous location at Tenth and Jackson, the Farmers' Market held over 660 growers, and in its current location at Fifth and Wall, it holds approximately 150 vendors.[1]

If livability is about providing a space for the actors of the Farmers' Market to enact an ethic through social interaction, then the City of St. Paul moving the Market based on development goals seems to contradict the livable city ideal. Ironically, today St. Paul claims to be "the most livable city in America," and currently has two major initiatives directed at livability: Invest St. Paul and Sustainable St. Paul (City of St. Paul 2009). These two plans do not directly address food and its connection to livability, but its actions with respect to the Farmers' Market shows the City's ambivalence about livability.

Thus, the City and its other political interests put constraints upon the extent of the Farmers' Market. The development of St. Paul, which forced the Farmers' Market from its previous location, forced the Market to shrink to approximately twenty-five percent of its original number of vendors and to approximately thirty percent of its regular hours. It was ironic that "…almost immediately after we got downsized, the movement to buy locally happened, but we're here and we're reduced. We were a seven-

[3] Personal interview conducted 27th March 2009.
[1] Personal interview conducted 27th March 2009.

day-a-week market and now we're [only] a two-day-a-week market here."[2] We can see that at present with the rising popularity of the local food movement, the spatial size of the Market and the hours of operation constrain the scale at which the Market can operate.

On a grader scale, the Farmers' Market is constrained by other forces such as the larger food industry and other competing farmers' markets. This mostly has to do with access to the Lowertown St. Paul Farmers' Market through space and time. Although one of the goals of the Farmers' Market is to have "local farmers… come to one central place to sell their food," if the physical space is too small, this can serve as a constraint.[1] Ironically, the St. Paul Farmers' Market has seventeen satellite locations, but these locations are ironically situated in the suburbs (St. Paul Farmers' Market 2006).

Time and space can be critical factors in acquiring food, and therefore, if the Farmers' Market is not in spatial proximity to consumers, and if it is only accessible for limited hours, its ability to create and recreate local knowledge is limited. Other farmers' markets, and big-box supermarkets, are more easily accessible by space and time and thus impinge on the St. Paul Farmers' Market's ability to contribute to a livable city. Hence, the Farmers' Market has to advertise heavily to communities, schools and so on to promote "…why our market is better than somebody else's market… and to bring them *here* not just to any farmers' market."[2]

Thus, the change in location of the Farmers' Market, and the subsequent destruction of the old markets and the creation of the new market, shows the change in the City's value of food as a contribution to a livable city. Nonetheless, the Farmers'

[2] Personal interview conducted 27th March 2009.
[1] Personal interview conducted 27th March 2009.
[2] Personal interview conducted 25th March 2009.

Market may not have complete control of physical place-building; however, it has the ability to contribute to imaginary place-building, or social space. That is to say that the Farmers' Market has the ability to construct space and place in the context of *provenance* and *metis*, and creating and recreating that knowledge. The physical structure of the Farmers' Market mediates the social interactions through which the knowledge is exchanged. This physical space can be seen as horizontal space through which knowledge is exchanged, that can be manipulated by larger structures such as the government. The actual exchange of knowledge can be seen as the social space, or vertical space that can only manipulated by the participants of the Farmers' Market (Soja 1980).

The Farmers' Market, therefore, exists to mediate and contribute to a livable city, despite the many constraints placed on the Market and the differing definitions of a livable city. It has its own sets of abilities and structures that allow it to create and recreate itself through physical and social space and time. It provides a physical space for enacting the ethic of the livable city, while contributing to the livable city through the values of the producers and consumers who pass through the St. Paul Farmers' Market.

**What now?**

But why should we consider livability through the St. Paul Farmers' Market, you ask? Obviously, there are other ways in which food can contribute to livability, such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) and urban community gardens. However although the St. Paul Farmers' Market is only one of many ways to join the local food movement, it can highlight ways that food in general can contribute to a livable city.

Furthermore, you maybe wondering how the Farmers' Market and other such movements contribute to livable cities while big box supermarkets and industrial agriculture still exist. It is Evans' (2002a) belief also that local, community efforts, such as the Farmers' Market, do not enact change for this reason. However, I hope through the St. Paul Farmers' Market example, I have been able to provide an alternative imagination of livability; one that gives power to the people to make change through *our* imagination and consumption of food rather than our ability to overturn industrial agriculture.

The St. Paul Farmers' Market is a space through which the ethic of the livable city can be enacted. By providing a physical and social space for the livable city, the Farmers' Market contributes to a livable city. The different actors in the Farmers' Market have different roles and different objectives for participating in the Farmers' Market; however, these different motives can still contribute to a livable city. The producer-consumer relationship, although differing in objectives, are mutually reinforcing and require the existence of the other for creation and recreation of the local food ideology.

Thus, the Farmers' Market facilitates this producer-consumer relationship in order to contribute to a livable city. Furthermore, the Farmers' Market facilitates an alternative, to the industrial food chain by providing a space that mediates the enactment of livability. It will never reach the scale of the industrial food chain; however, through the political economy of place perspective, we can see that the Farmers' Market recognizes its constraints, but that it is simultaneously has agency to work within its constraints to effect change and contribute to the livable city (Logan and Molotch 1987; Morgan et al. 2006). This can be translated to the individual actors in the Farmers' Market to say that

they have individual agency to contribute to the livable city through the Farmers' Market space.

Structuration theory highlights how the actors are contributing to the livable city by deconstructing structural power sources (Giddens 1995; Morgan et al. 2006). For the industrial food chain, they create and recreate power through the government, the time and special scale at which they work and the low cost products they produce. In the case of the Farmers' Market, however, they are able to effect change through the creation and recreation of trust, social interaction and *metis* (Stone and Richtel 2009; Scott 1999). This trust stems from direct contact between producer and consumer, where an implicit casual bond creates a sense of reciprocated responsibility: the producer has a responsibility to produce a quality product and the consumer has the responsibility of providing loyalty. Trust is created and recreated through the exchange of provenance and metis, or knowledge of origin and local knowledge of production, from producer to consumer and vice versa (Morgan et al. 2006; Scott 1999).

The key to this trust is that it cannot be institutionalized or codified. Once institutionalized, the actors are forced into a relationship where private interactions have become public obligations, and this trust is lost (Jacobs 1961). This also pertains to local food production and the *metis* that sustains it. Once institutionalized, the local aspect of *metis* is lost, and therefore the social interaction based on trust through the exchange of *metis* is lost and the Farmers' Market as a social space ceases to exist. The power of the Farmers' Market stems from its ability to facilitate producers' and consumers' agency to produce and consume as they see fit outside of the political sphere (Shuman 2004). That is to say that the goal of the Farmers' Market is not to lobby the government for policies

that promote livability, but to give agency to the producer and consumer to contribute to livability themselves.

Thus, it seems that the Farmers' Market contributes to a livable city by providing an alternative production world to the politically influenced industrial food chain (Morgan et al. 2006). These production worlds exist separately and not necessarily in opposition to each other. There are some in the local food movement, and livability in general, that call for political interventions to promote livability; however, I would argue that this political intervention undermines the agency of the actors themselves to enact change and contribute to their goals (Beatley 2000; Martin 2009). The consumer has the choice to buy from different producers and the consumer has the ability to contribute to the livable city through his/her food choices. So in the words of Michelle Obama, even if you don't have time or the space for a garden, "you can begin in your own cupboard by eliminating processed food… and trying to incorporate more fruits and vegetables" from the Farmers' Market (Bittman 2009).

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