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Craft Brewing and Community in Austin, Texas:
The Black Star Co-op

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**Craft Brewing and Community in Austin, Texas:
The Black Star Co-op**

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Report

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Abstract

Craft Brewing and Community in Austin, Texas: The Black Star Co-op

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This report attempts to determine what craft beer can tell us about American culture, and to situate craft brewing within the larger discourse on food and locality. Following political scientist Carlton Larsen, who posited that craft beer associations are creating a “nascent public sphere within the dynamics of profit-driven production,” and that proponents of the craft beer community see it as “constituting a pragmatic, alternative community to international capitalist mass production,” I investigate Austin, Texas’ Black Star Co-op, the first cooperatively owned brewpub in the United States. I also take inspiration from Amy Trubek’s formulation of the American “taste of place,” which builds on and adapts the French concept of *terroir*. Trubek argues that the taste of place in America needs to be entrepreneurial and based in community, and that “taste makers” in America are engaged in a process of synthesis, blending our nation’s many historical pasts with its present to create a new taste of place. I argue that Black Star’s unique position as both a taste-making institution and as a business based in the economic radicalism of cooperative self-management and participatory economics allows them the possibility of a degree of local influence that goes beyond what Trubek or Larsen had previously envisioned. I conclude by arguing for an expansion of Trubek’s model that would comprehensively chart the taste of place in a single location, such as Austin, Texas, by looking at various institutions in all aspects of community life.

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Introduction

Craft brewing is an increasingly important part of the brewing industry, and it is striking in that unlike so-called “macro” brewing, the purview of multinational corporations like InBev, its growth largely depends upon local markets. According to the Brewer’s Association, a craft beer advocacy organization, craft beer has continued to grow at double digit rates each year, even through the recent recession, while total beer sales continue to slip. In 2010, 1,753 breweries were operating in the United States, the highest total since the late nineteenth century, and the vast majority of them qualify as craft or microbrewers.¹ To get a sense of how craft brewing has altered the industry, consider that in 1983 there were fewer than 50 breweries operating in the United States.² Despite its unlikely but sustained growth and the impact that it has on local economies across the country, craft brewing remains understudied, both from a cultural and economic standpoint.

Beer, as every book or article on the subject likes to point out, has been a central part of human history and civilization for thousands of years.³ Furthermore, its path as an industry mirrors western civilization in interesting ways. After the industrial revolution, beer in America became increasingly commodified, its production was centralized, and the once stunning diversity of styles dwindled to essentially one – the American light lager.⁴ However, in the last thirty years, the beer market has fragmented, and small producers have begun to recapture local markets and reintroduce diversity. In the same way that urban/local agriculture, “slow food,” and “locavore” food movements have captured the imaginations of a wide variety of Americans, beer seems to speak to a desire for an increased sense of community and craft for many who choose to drink it.

This paper is part of an attempt to determine what craft beer can tell us about American culture, and to situate craft brewing within the larger discourse on food and locality. I take as my starting point a 1997 article published by political science professor Carlton Larsen entitled “Relax and Have a Homebrew: Beer, the Public Sphere, and (Re)Invented Traditions,” in which he attempts to demonstrate that craft beer associations

are creating a “nascent public sphere within the dynamics of profit-driven production,” and that proponents of the craft beer community see it as “constituting a pragmatic, alternative community to international capitalist mass production.”⁵ My question is, quite simply, are Larsen’s claims supported in fact?

The Black Star Cooperative Brewpub in Austin, Texas, which acts as the case study in this paper, is an interesting proving ground for Larsen’s claims. As a brew pub, it falls squarely into the late 20th/early 21st century American craft brewing story, which he was attempting to interrogate. It is unique in the sense, however, that it has formally adopted a hybrid worker- and consumer-owned cooperative model that constitutes a more direct refutation of dominant corporate capitalism than your average craft brewery, and that has the potential to actively further a sense of place and community among its patrons. As the first cooperatively owned brewery in the United States, Black Star has embraced an alternative economic model that is a means for consumers to wedge themselves back into the economic picture. That picture - the growing disparity between rich and poor, financial crisis after recession - is at least partially the cause of the social alienation that Robert Putnam diagnosed in *Bowling Alone*, the study to which Larsen was directly responding.

Texas is also an interesting place to begin any investigation of craft beer. The state consistently ranks number two nationwide, second only to California, in terms of beer sold at wholesale, and yet the state ranked 47th in terms of breweries per capita in 2008, according to the Brewers Association.⁶ The craft brewing industry – defined as brewers who are small, independent, and traditional – in the United States has grown steadily for the last 20-plus years. Unfortunately in accounts of that ongoing story, Texas beers have largely been passed over. In recent years, however, craft beer in Texas has expanded greatly in terms of consumption, public profile, and very recently in the number of brewers operating. Austin, in particular, is experiencing a renaissance of craft brewing. Five breweries have begun operation since Black Star opened in the fall of 2010, and a number more are in various stages of planning.

Place and locality also figure heavily into any discussion of community formation, and although Larsen doesn't address it directly, I think it is important to do so. After all, "locavore" was the word of the year in 2007, and the number of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms increased by over 50% from 2001 to 2004.⁷ Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, is a bona fide literary celebrity. But the question of how best to address concerns of locality or of place remains somewhat of a mystery: what counts as local? Is locavore-ism a phenomenon limited to the white and affluent? Why does one feel compelled to buy locally, and what concerns does that action address?

In order to make sense of the local, I turn here to Amy Trubek's book *The Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey into Terroir*, where she attempts to map the French concept of *goût de terroir* – the literal taste of place, most often associated with wine – to the United States. Terroir, at its root, is a concept that makes it possible to name community and authenticity with an unusually high degree of certainty. The French system of *appellation d'origine contrôlée* (AOC) provides that Champagne, for example, can only be produced in Champagne. The soil constitutes the community, quite literally, and the community gives life to the soil. As Trubek notes, terroir for the French is all about roots: "the moment when the earth travels to the mouth is a time of reckoning with local memory and identity."⁸ For Americans, who do not have the same sense of historical rootedness as the French, terroir seems unachievable. Trubek, however, proposes a new, more flexible definition for what she calls "the taste of place" in America. We are "not inheritors, not inventors," she says, "but *bricoleurs*, tinkering with what we have, imagining what is possible, and borrowing from our many ancestral pasts."⁹ In America terroir is more entrepreneurial – it comes often from restaurateurs or other local taste-makers – it is built on the backs of people as much as it is on the soil, and it is created by people who are pursuing "a business, a mission, *and* a craft."¹⁰

The Black Star Co-op, in addition to being interesting for its economic radicalism, seems to be a prime candidate for testing Trubek's theory. As entrepreneurs, the founders of the co-op pursue all three of her elements with a passion, and as one of their founders put it to me, their "roots are sunk" not in the soil but in their membership. Ultimately, this

paper is one piece of a larger puzzle that attempts to see how the concept of "taste of place" actually gets built in one location, in this case Austin, Texas. Austin, much like Black Star, is an apt location to test Trubek's theory, both in terms of the beer community and a nascent sense of place and taste. It is, as I mentioned, the nation's latest brewing boom town, and the city itself is widely known for "local-first" campaigns like "Keep Austin Weird," a slogan that now graces t-shirts across the country. "Farm-to-table" dining is increasingly important in the city's food scene, and local CSAs are growing quickly. It is my assertion that Trubek's framework is more flexible than even she realizes, and it has the possibility of being expanded into economic and community discourses that are not even directly related to food. A larger exploration would chart institutions and groups across the city of Austin that are engaged in building a particular taste of place. This is one piece in that as of yet inconclusive puzzle.

The goal of this paper is, then, to determine what role craft beer can play in re-establishing the public sphere (or, following Nancy Frasier, in establishing an entirely new counterpublic sphere), building social capital, a sense of community, and the taste of place. My main primary source is an interview I conducted with the three founders of the Black Star Co-op, Steven Yarak, Johnny Livesay, and Jeff Young, but I will also attempt to work from industry publications and websites, such as *BeerAdvocate*, that are a leading voice in building the craft beer community. In order to assess the role of beer in these contexts we need to understand first, at a conceptual level, why Black Star is such an apt test case, and get a sense of the organization's history. I address these concerns in the following section, and then continue on to evaluate Larsen's claims about craft beer and the public sphere more thoroughly, in order to set the stage for the three closing sections that make up the meat of the paper. In the first of these, I will address Trubek's framework and concerns of the local; in the second, I turn to the cooperative model, participatory economics, and local sites of resistance to globalized corporate capitalism; and in the third, I will attempt to integrate the ideas presented previously, using Black Star as an test case to assess how Trubek's model might be expanded to address community in a broader sense.

The Black Star Co-op

Although craft brewing in Texas might best be personified by the iconic Spoetzl brewery in Shiner, Austin has emerged as the definitive center of the small Texas craft brewing industry over the last 20 years. Pierre Celis, the legendary Belgian brewer who resurrected the Hoegaarden wit style, came to Austin in the early 1990s to start Celis Brewery, but the venture didn't last: Celis ended up selling to Miller, who promptly closed the doors of the operation, in the late 1990s. The beers that he brewed, however, helped set the stage for companies that have become stalwarts in the Texas craft beer scene, like Austin's Live Oak Brewing, and Real Ale in Blanco. His legacy lives on in Austin through the (512) Wit, which brewmaster Kevin Brand designed specifically to pay homage to Celis, who passed away in April of 2011, and his influence on the city.¹¹ Austin is now home to eight breweries (five of which have opened since 2008) and five brew pubs, the newest of which is the Black Star co-op.

Black Star was originally conceived of in 2006 by Yarak, who leads the business team at the brewpub, as "a beer bar that was owned by the regulars," not as a formal cooperative or as a brewery. The idea to brew their own came from Young, who is now the full-time brewer at Black Star, and the cooperative element was brought to the forefront by Livesay, who was one of the staff board members at the Wheatsville food cooperative at the time. Although the pub didn't have its grand opening until early December 2010, the cooperative managed to grow from 3 to 1,641 members by April of that year, when they started construction at the Midtown Commons development in North Austin. As of March 2011, membership is hovering around 2,500 members. Adding a thousand members after the brewpub itself opened is less surprising, as the profile of the co-op jumped after reviews in local newspapers, but being able to amass 1,600 members for a cooperative brewpub while not yet having a brewpub is more remarkable. Livesay, who has been instrumental in building the menu and continues to work in the kitchen at the brewpub, was quick to credit Black Star's willingness to include the community as quickly as possible for its early success. As early as the spring of 2006, there was, in his

words, “a pretty serious snowball” in terms of setting parameters and goals for the organization, and as he said, “in order to really actualize [those plans] I think we were pretty smart to actually open it up to the public pretty quickly.”¹²

For the next four years, Black Star held periodic “beer socials,” which were essentially fundraisers and membership events. Starting in the summer of 2006, Young began producing what were to become the house beers at the Black Star pub, and bringing that homebrew to the socials. Even at that point, brewing and community were at the center of the enterprise. As Yarak put it:

one of the important moments for our success was after we’d had the formal organization and raised the first membership capital, which was like 1200 bucks or something like that, we took – we were willing to risk the overwhelming majority of it right away to buy homebrewing equipment, and we did that, and we built a homebrewing system far beyond the scale of your average homebrewer’s system.¹³

The system they created produced somewhere on the order of 2 barrels (62 gallons) of beer, and was built from stainless steel drums that previously belonged to Oak Ridge Laboratories in Tennessee. Although demand pretty quickly outstripped supply, and the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC) stepped in and “pretty directly” told Yarak, Livesay, and Young to stop producing homebrew for parties, the homebrew aspect of Black Star set the tone for community involvement going forward. Getting the used barrels from Tennessee required them to find someone willing to drive them to Austin via Craigslist. “Even at that level,” Livesay added, “we were organizing things through people.” Homebrew days were, he continued, “an opportunity to get the people who were interested at that time involved, and hands-on.” Even though they were forced to stop, both by economies of scale and by their legal situation, the early days of beer socials – some of which were held at Monkeywrench books, a “collectively owned and operated radical bookstore,” “piggybacking on their community,” as Livesay put it – set the tone for Black Star going forward.¹⁴

Although they admitted to facing some degree of skepticism from both consumers and some local producers at the outset, the founders of Black Star were proud of the fact that their status in the local brewing scene had come “full circle,” as Yarak put it. Texas breweries like Real Ale, located outside Austin in Blanco, were instrumental as a support

system for Black Star at the outset, according to Livesay. He and Yarak named Real Ale and Ty Phelps, head brewer at the North by Northwest brewpub in Austin, as their biggest supporters early on. “In the beginning,” Livesay recalled, “it was like us going to Ty and asking if we could have some yeast, we need some yeast, can you help us out?” Black Star’s position has changed significantly since then, as he noted. “Now, five years later,” he continued, “we’re the support system and the retail outlet for people who are doing the exact same thing that we were trying to do then.”¹⁵ Austin’s craft beer community has continued to solidify in recent years, and as Young said, “anybody that has an idea for a new place, they’ve really come out there and they’ve become part of the group, and we know all of the new people coming up ... so it’s a very embracing scene.”¹⁶ Black Star “couldn’t have happened in Houston,” Livesay concluded, because “they don’t unify like Austin does ... it’s not going to happen, people are going to ask what’s in it for me?”¹⁷ Community support and a willingness to come together behind a common cause, then, have been central to Black Star from the outset.

The brewpub, which has been open for business since fall of 2010, is located at a transit-friendly development in north-central Austin, at the intersection of North Lamar and Airport Boulevards. The Capitol Metro light rail system has a stop less than a hundred yards from the door, and the busy 1L/1M bus line stops directly in front of the pub. The facility itself is a bright, airy, and modern space, with the brewery behind glass doors at the back. The food menu is sourced as extensively from local producers as possible, and the “guest beer” tap selection, which augments the five house beers presently available, heavily favors Texas breweries. As Young said, any new local brewery is assured one or two taps and established breweries from Austin and other parts of the state are well-represented.¹⁸

From the moment you walk in the door, there are subtle clues to customers that Black Star doesn’t run quite like a normal restaurant. For one, everyone is required to wait in line to order food and beers; there is no table service, which has caused some tension between the co-op and its patrons, as Yarak alluded to. “You put in a little bit,” he said half-jokingly, “you’re going to get out great food, great beer, at a reasonable

price.”¹⁹ That organizational style, combined with the fact that restaurant workers at Black Star do not accept tips, helps make it clear to customers that this is a space designed to change the terms of the service economy, and create a little more parity between workers and consumers.

When I asked about the no tipping policy, Livesay was quick to note that it had been a tenet of the organization from the beginning:

That was something that we fundamentally thought was right for a member-owned business. Five years ago ... probably the same day as the mission statement, I think, is when we came up with that idea, [that] we shouldn’t take tips. We’re already being paid by the membership, why do they need to pay us more ... and I think we’ve talked about this too, five years from now, if we’re still successful and we’re going to be this viable business, it starts to be at that point a challenge for other businesses.²⁰

Far from being a detriment to good customer service, not accepting tips and pursuing a counter service model is part of Black Star’s cooperative strategy that provides incentives to engagement for workers and customer/members alike.

Black Star is organized as a hybrid worker- and consumer-owned cooperative, meaning that there is a worker’s assembly, a membership, and an elected board of nine directors.²¹ The organization’s structure is designed to foster community, create good jobs, and build equity for both workers and members. In addition to the seven core cooperative values laid out by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), which include democratic member control, member economic participation, and concern for community – and which I will address in-depth in subsequent sections – Black Star has chosen to adopt five additional principles: participatory self-management, living wage, sustainability, privacy, and responsible consumption of alcohol.²² For the purposes of my argument, participatory self-management and living wage, along with democratic control, economic participation, and concern for community, are the most significant of these principles.

There are three reasons that Black Star is an apt test case for exploring and expanding Trubek’s model of American “taste of place.” The first is Black Star’s singular position and ability to foster community-building at the local level; the second is its

implications for building taste of place with regard to food and beer, as Trubek conceived of it; and the third is the radical economic and governance model that Black Star has adopted. The combination of these factors leads me to my speculative conclusion that Black Star is, potentially, a model for an expanded version of Trubek's ideas that allows us to see "taste of place" as an all-encompassing idea in 21st century America – a way to build a comprehensive local identity that structures not only food and drink but the way people live and work, local community values, and other factors. Before I go any further, however, it seems prudent to provide provisional evidence for why I think each factor is compelling.

The first factor is community, which was a theme that came up often during my interview at Black Star. When I posed a question about the role that craft beer plays in their lives and at the co-op, Young used the term engagement repeatedly, and when I asked him whether he meant sensory engagement in the act of drinking, or something larger, Livesay interjected, saying that:

the sense of space and location is definitely a level of engagement – people do have a sense of pride about this organization and they have for a long time, even before there was a brick and mortar, people were like “that’s my brewpub,” when there wasn’t even a brewpub, and I think we were able to engage them at that level with just a dream, and I think that’s a very powerful thing – I mean when we’re in the weeds and trying to knock shit out, we don’t think about that anymore, [but] we really floated for a long time on the dream of getting to this point, with a lot of people wanting that, and I think that level of engagement is really important. They were just throwing their money into a pot at that point, you know what I mean?²³

In this sense, the physical space of Black Star provides concrete evidence of community, which is a sentiment both Yarak and Young echoed later. For all three, building community seemed to be nearly as important as staying in business, and it is built into the business model. “Why do people need to make so much money?” Livesay asked. “Why is that the motivation? Why is that the factor, instead of helping people have good jobs, helping people have equity, helping a community have equity in a business?” With cooperatives, as Yarak noted earlier, you get out what you put in, which quite simply means that for Black Star to flourish, they need the community to be involved.²⁴

Second, the taste of place. In her book, Trubek notes that Americans tend to subscribe to one of two possible models when they buy and cook food. On the one hand, you can accept that globalized food supplies produced at industrial scales are “the unavoidable consequence of our modern ways,” and on the other, you can believe that a return to an apocryphal agrarian utopia is the only moral path.²⁵ This is essentially a false choice, she says, and local-minded entrepreneurs like the chefs at L’Etoile in Madison, Wisconsin, are demonstrating that it is both possible and productive to think of a third way. As Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash say in their book *Grassroots Postmodernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures*, the adage to “act locally, think globally” ignores the power inherent in forms of “rooted local thinking which inspire local actions.”²⁶ The result of businesses like L’Etoile and, I would say, Black Star, that think and act in intensely local ways is an “emerging model of food that combines social values with entrepreneurial activities.”²⁷ Terroir in the classically French sense is essentially a dead concept in America, which does not have the AOC or the underlying strength of agrarian tradition to foster its growth, but that does not mean that the taste of place is any less important for fostering strong local communities. Sometimes, as Trubek notes, it needs to be invented as much as it does to be preserved, the only question is who is doing the inventing, and what elements of the environment and the community are they pulling from?²⁸

Third is Black Star’s adoption of a business and governance structure that embraces the principles of participatory economics, or “parecon.” As a model, parecon is directly responsible for the language in Black Star’s bylaws about participatory self-management. “The co-op aspires to achieve a fair and just outcome,” they read, “through decision-making in accordance with the norm of participatory self-management: that those affected by a given decision be granted a say or influence in proportion to the degree they are affected.”²⁹ Participatory economics, as developed by Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, is essentially a system based on four tenets: democratic worker and consumer councils, balanced “job complexes” that assure parity in empowerment and job desirability, compensation according to effort as opposed to talent or skill, and

participatory planning on a local and national scale.³⁰ This model seeks to actively replace capitalism, and although no one at Black Star named that as an organizational goal, their governance structure and mission seem clearly to challenge the dominant system in interesting ways that bear the marks of participatory economics.

Before I can address these factors satisfactorily, however, one task remains. All of the preceding argument (and much of what is to come) is based on Larsen's claims that beer, of all things, has revolutionary potential. His argument that craft brewing creates a "nascent public sphere" may well seem like a stretch, and so it is important to evaluate his claims about beer both generally and in the specific context of the Black Star Co-op and Austin, Texas.

The Revolutionary Potential of Beer?

Christopher Mark O'Brien, author of *Fermenting Revolution*, a staunchly pro craft beer treatise subtitled *How to Drink Beer and Save the World*, claims that the American "brewing renaissance ... is a movement championing beer as cultural capital rather than corporate commodity," but he offers little in the way of a theoretical framework to understand how something like beer might be suited to bring about the revolution of which he speaks.³¹ The purpose of this section is to unpack Larsen's claims and to apply them to Black Star, in order to lay the groundwork for something approximating O'Brien's "revolution" that is based primarily in community action and artisan process. I will briefly explore some of the concepts that Larsen calls upon here, like the public sphere, invented traditions, and imagined communities, before moving on to Trubek's argument in the subsequent section.

Much of Larsen's argument rests on Jurgen Habermas's theories about the public sphere. As I noted before, Larsen claims that craft brewing and homebrewing associations are:

creating a nascent public sphere within the dynamics of profit-driven production. Its proponents and participants see emerging networks of associations, festivals, and microbreweries as constituting a pragmatic, alternative community to international capitalist mass production.³²

Additionally, he positions himself in opposition to Robert Putnam's study *Bowling Alone*. By looking at the rise and fall of voluntary associations and other demographic shifts from WWII through the end of the 20th century Putnam claimed that social capital in the United States was on the decline.³³ Larsen asserts that Putnam failed to acknowledge "the effects of capitalism's ongoing transformation as an international phenomena" and says that "without contextualizing the changing nature of civic life," Putnam ignored the other "forms of discursive community," such as beer, that seek to re-build the public sphere.³⁴

Larsen goes on to claim that the brewing community reflects the tension between social activities and the "isolating dynamics" of modern capitalism, and that by looking at the "reinvention" of brewing traditions evident in the emergence of local and regional

producers, beer associations and festivals, we can learn more about how people interact with international economic systems. As he says, “the new beer renaissance challenges both the decline of civic life and the internationalization of capitalism by reconnecting people to each other and to their past leisure and public traditions.”³⁵ Larsen concludes by suggesting that while the future of beer in public life is as yet uncertain, “the emergence of this community does suggest new possibilities and paths for recreating public life.”³⁶ Black Star, by virtue of its cooperative model and local member base, has the potential to be a leading member in the community Larsen gestures towards.

Outlined in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jurgen Habermas’s original conception of the public sphere asked, in Habermasian scholar Craig Calhoun’s words “when and under what conditions the arguments of mixed companies could become authoritative bases for political action.”³⁷ In his essay “The Public Sphere,” Habermas says quite simply, “Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion.”³⁸ Habermas came under fire, as Calhoun says, “for focusing on the bourgeois public sphere to the exclusion of the proletarian one, for an inadequate grasp of everyday life in advanced capitalism, and for exaggerating the emancipatory potential in the idealized bourgeois public sphere.”³⁹ Although his bourgeois focus is admittedly problematic, Habermas’s ideas stretch beyond his original historical focus. Larsen attempts to make his point without abandoning or significantly re-figuring Habermas’s conception of public spheres. In his words, “Habermas, who sees the public sphere as an arena of discursive rationality for common concerns, can potentially provide a framework for understanding the rise and demise of a public sphere centered around beer.”⁴⁰

In her essay “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” Nancy Frasier attempts to respond to and update Habermas’s theory by postulating the existence of what she calls “counterpublic” spheres. Challenging the Habermasian assumption that “a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics,” she positions the bourgeois public sphere as a hegemonic instrument that sought to block broader participation in

public life. Contrary to Habermas, Frasier claims that in stratified societies, “those whose basic institutional framework generates unequal social groups in structural relations of dominance and subordination,” multiple publics, some of them oppositional counterpublics, are a necessity if the gap in “participatory parity” between groups is ever to be closed.⁴¹ Here Frasier is speaking primarily of feminist, gay rights and civil rights groups, but I would argue that it is possible to see Black Star as a space that could foster a counterpublic built from a shared appreciation of craft beer.

The ability to speak as a public, to deal with matters of “general concern” without coercion, is dependent on having the space to do so, and the framework to declare yourself independent of the social structures that might otherwise stop you from speaking. Although Habermas, Frasier, and Larsen all avail themselves of the elevated language endemic to academia, the founders of Black Star seemed to acknowledge a similar function in their physical space. When I asked whether they thought a consumer choosing craft beer might be reflective of something more than taste, Young responded:

there are a lot of products out there, even a lot of really nice products, that don't necessarily engage people like craft beer does, and then you put it in a social setting, and it's just gold, because to have something so engaging and so able to bring people together, and you know, we talk about that all the time, is we just want to create a space where people can come in and enjoy life, and it just happens to be over a beer that of course we love and put a lot of effort into, over some food that we think is fantastic, and in a space that we are really proud of.⁴²

The conversation quickly turned towards whether or not craft beer constitutes a movement, which I will address in a later section, but Yarak brought it back to the space itself as being an enabler for community and social capital:

I think Jeff really hit it on the head – people enjoying themselves and having an anchor in this space, and I think that's valuable ... I think that what we're doing has a value for social capital, without a doubt. People coming together – we had a group here from one of the progressive churches [and] I was bussing their tables and they were talking about their church's position on social justice, and they were having their meeting at Black Star and I was just like damn, that's awesome. I think that's where – if we're not a movement in ourselves, then we provide a space for movements to build, we provide that kind of social capital, and we provide the gathering place for those things to take root.⁴³

Providing a space in which to build social capital – the classic and greatly mourned “third place” – paired with the organizational goal of increasing equity, social and economic justice, is at least the basis for forming “an arena of discursive rationality for common concerns,” as Larsen said. While Black Star is still too new to assess the robustness or actions of its incipient work in the public sphere, the groundwork is there.

Social actions centered around beer are not merely an abstract concept waiting to be realized, however. Often, consumers of craft beer have taken an unusually aggressive stand against globalized capitalism, as in the case of the British Campaign for Real Ale, or CAMRA, which began in 1971. CAMRA was and is “a consumerist movement to defend the traditional beers of the United Kingdom.”⁴⁴ Real Ale, as defined by CAMRA, is a living product, not filtered or pasteurized, that is naturally carbonated and served by hand-pump – 21st century Americans might know it as cask ale, a product that is now widely served in beer bars and pubs across the country. CAMRA was, according to Brit and international beer authority Michael Jackson, the “most successful consumer movement in history,” and it succeeded, albeit on a limited scale, in convincing beer producers in England that there was a market for traditional styles.⁴⁵

Beer itself has been the basis for community in localities for centuries, as well. A close to home example for Austin is the Spoetzl brewery in Shiner, Texas. In *Fermenting Revolution*, O’Brien quotes Jim Hightower, who recounted the story of Shiner: “One of the first things done by the leaders of the new town ... was to form a beer-making cooperative, called the Shiner Brewery Association.” The residents of Shiner needed expertise, however, and so they pooled their money to relocate Kosmos Spoetzl, for whom the brewery is named.⁴⁶

The social space of drinking places like Black Star is also rich with examples of community building, solidarity, and opposition to dominant structures. As Roy Rosenzweig laid out in *Eight Hours for What We Will*, which dealt with labor history in late 19th century Worcester, Massachusetts, saloons “reflected and reinforced a value system very much different from that which governed” in society at large. Although they were often exclusionary on the basis of race, class, or gender – I will address these issues,

class and gender especially, later in this paper – saloons fostered a kind of “*internal* democracy where all who could safely enter received equal treatment and respect.” Although the strict restrictions concerning who could enter placed hard limits on that democracy, the saloon culture allowed a select group of immigrants of various backgrounds to retain older, reciprocal social structures that built solidarity.⁴⁷ Indeed, according to anthropologist Thomas Wilson, “drinking is itself cultural ... it is an integral social, political, and economic practice, a manifestation of the institutions, actions and values of culture.”⁴⁸ The simple act of consuming alcohol is in itself an important practice in the expression of identity, on a personal and collective level. Combined with the social space of the pub, it is entirely possible to see how a thing like beer might create a new public.

In addition to the work of Habermas and Frasier, Larsen invokes Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined communities to help explain how the craft beer community functions. Originally formulated to help explore discourses of nationalism, it is an idea that has widespread application. As Anderson said, “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even those) are imagined” in the sense that “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion,” based on their shared belief in a “deep, horizontal comradeship.”⁴⁹ Although it is clear that Anderson conceived of imagined communities with matters weightier than beer on his mind, this concept is clearly applicable to the wider community of craft beer makers and drinkers in America.

Despite Black Star’s singular focus on the local, one diffuse community that has most certainly taken root at the organization are the so-called “beer snobs” or “beer nerds.” A key demographic for any American craft brewery, Livesay acknowledged that although beer snobbery is an “unfortunate, intrinsic factor in any level of connoisseurship,” where:

what I like is better than what you like, and that starts to be kind of a point of pride, but that also builds community, I think, in a weird way, it’s the people that like – that have that similar sense of snobbery, they ultimately find each other – when we first

started, we tried to tap into the homebrewers in Austin, and I think that's kind of what we did, but it took a while, and I think that we had to crack through that sense of snobbery, we had to prove our worth with them.⁵⁰

Snobbery seems objectionable at any level, but Livesay, Yarak and Young acknowledged the positive aspects of the type of community that gets built among so-called beer snobs on websites like BeerAdvocate.com, where users often engage in rare beer trading via mail, for example. In creating a diffuse “imaginary” community of users online, organizations like BeerAdvocate create a ready base of activist consumers – all Black Star had to do was “prove their worth.”

Arjun Appadurai's work on the imagination in his book *Modernity at Large* (1996) is also useful as a kind of bridge between Anderson's elevated language and the more ordinary world of beer. As Appadurai says, “the imagination has broken out of the special expressive space of art, myth, and ritual, and has now become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in many societies.”⁵¹ In a transnational world, the imagination is no longer merely vehicle for escape: it is “a staging ground for action.” Importantly, this transformative imagination is “a property of collectives,” not individuals.⁵² Although Appadurai focuses on transnational movements, this formulation of the imagination as constitutive of collective action remains useful in the employ of those who study intensely local communities like CSAs or Black Star, especially in light of their cooperative structure.

The last theoretical apparatus Larsen brings to bear on craft beer is Eric Hobsbawm's concept of invented traditions. American craft beer is full of invented traditions – for example, the July/August 1991 issue of *Archaeology* contained an article entitled “Brewing an Ancient Beer,” in which bioanthropologist Solomon Katz and Anchor Brewing's Fritz Maytag decoded an ancient poem, “Hymn to Ninkasi.” Ninkasi, the Sumerian goddess of brewing, received this hymn in approximately 1800 BCE, and Maytag and Katz were able to reconstruct from it a recipe for 3,800-year-old Sumerian beer. Anchor Brewing then produced a limited-edition beer from the hymn. This sort of deliberate rooting about in the archive to look for evidence of the centrality of beer in society is not uniquely American, either. Tradition, invented or not, is a much stronger

element of European brewing culture. The British have CAMRA, which attempts to preserve a cask-ale tradition dating back at least to 1300, the Germans have the Reinheitsgebot, a beer purity law enacted in 1516, and the Belgians have the ancient abbey basements in which sour Lambic ferments. Americans, on the other hand, have the storied tradition of Budweiser, brewed primarily with rice and corn to save money. For this reason, the American craft beer movement has sought and is still actively seeking to invent (or re-invent) a coherent tradition for itself, independent of the bulk of American brewing history.

In *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm defines invented traditions as a “set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.”⁵³ The continuity that invented traditions claim, however, is “largely factitious. In short,” he continues, “[invented traditions] are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.”⁵⁴ The type of invented tradition that seems most applicable to craft brewing is that which “establishes or symbolizes social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities.”⁵⁵

Larsen refers to craft beer having “reinvented” brewing traditions in America, but he sticks fairly closely to Hobsbawm’s original theorization. He accepts the link between American craft brewers and Old World brewing traditions, and quickly moves on: “Perhaps more important than the recreation of ‘older’ brewing styles is the development of networks and organizations which share common discourse and interests.”⁵⁶ While Larsen is right to focus on the oppositional nature of craft brewing’s invented traditions, what he skips over here is the fact that the kind of beer American craft brewers are producing has little or no history on this side of the Atlantic. America moved from homebrewed ales and porters to mass-produced lagers in a comparatively short period of

time. India Pale Ales, arguably the beer style most closely associated with American craft beer, has essentially no history in America before the 1970s.

Heather Paxson, whose work on artisanal cheese production in contemporary America constitutes some of the clearest thinking I have encountered about terroir, locality, and artisanal or “craft” process, puts a unique spin on invented traditions. “In the United States,” she says, “where entrepreneurial innovation is celebrated and farmers of the past have been hailed not as peasants but as pioneers, the ideological tale of American artisanal cheese is better characterized” not as an invented tradition, but as a “tradition of invention.”⁵⁷ This certainly fits with the mongrel stylings of American craft brewers like Black Star, who purposefully do not apply style labels to their beers. The closest thing they have to an IPA for example, the Vulcan, is simply described as a hoppy rye beer, nothing more. As Livesay said,

not assigning a style kind of helps in that once you attach a name to something people instantaneously get that in their mind and you like a pale ale and you come in here to get our pale ale, which we don’t have a pale ale, you judge it through every filter of every pale ale you’ve ever had.⁵⁸

Those who do choose to apply style labels, like “bohemian pilsner,” “German hefeweizen,” or “India Pale Ale,” however, are drawing on an essentially false past, in order to bolster their and their consumers’ sense of tradition, continuity, and authenticity.⁵⁹ As Paxson notes about cheese, producers “deploy economic, social, and political knowledge that overlaps with, but extends beyond, that of their consumers, who are freer to romanticize ‘local imaginaries.’”⁶⁰ It is to this local imaginary, and to the concept of terroir, that I turn next.

Taste of Place, Locality, and the politics of food “Movements”

As Paxson notes, “culture is productive of economics, and vice versa.”⁶¹ The French vision of *goût de terroir* is a product of French culture, and as such it expresses certain values that will never be mapped precisely to the United States. Nevertheless, the California wine industry and, as Paxson details in multiple articles, the Vermont artisanal cheese industry have begun to deliberately invoke the French sense of terroir quite simply because the evocation of place gives the act of drinking wine or eating cheese an “emotional dimension.”⁶² The question at hand here is whether beer can follow in the footsteps of American wine and cheese makers, and if not, what they might do to build an alternate, more uniquely American, taste of place.

There are a number of tasks that must be accomplished before I can reach any such determination: first, a definition of terroir, followed by a discussion of the emerging sense of beer terroir in the United States, as well as of Amy Trubek’s argument in *The Taste of Place*. Next, I aim to tackle the question of the local, an often ill-defined term in food studies and in the minds of conscious consumers across the country. Why, at the base of it, is food such an excellent vehicle for expressing the local? Third, I will discuss models for building community around food, and their status as being dependent on “movements” such as slow food, which raises questions about goals, authenticity, and the role of class in constructing the local via foodways. Fourth, I will discuss discourses of “craft” in 21st century America, and question who the craftspeople are, as well as the class and gender implications of the “tradition of invention” that has spawned a new generation of craftspeople.

For Americans and food scholars, terroir is often a difficult, shifting concept. Bill Nesto sums up what I might call the practical application of terroir nicely when he says, “[it] is the web that connects and unifies raw materials, their growing conditions, production processes, and the moment of product appreciation.”⁶³ Others have more recently defined it on a chef-by-chef basis. In her profile of chef Thierry Marx, Charlotte Druckman frames terroir as “an inimitable culinary fingerprint,” and the food that a chef cooks as an index of their past. Terroir, Marx says, is inside the chef, and Druckman

agrees: “Nothing can be as local as what emerges from the *terroir* of a single self. Isn’t this the ultimate localization?”⁶⁴ In a global society, *terroir* seems to have become more mercurial, or at the very least more flexible, which undoubtedly informs Trubek’s argument. Its increasing mutability presents problems for what I might call “strict constructionists” of *terroir*, but on the whole I believe it is a natural byproduct of renewed interest in the term. For those who seek to re-formulate *terroir*, Trubek among them, any attempt they make to do so is likely born of respect for and desire to harness its utility.

According to the French, the concept of *terroir* is simple and immutable. It reflects reality. As Trubek says, “the fundamentalist mode always begins with a defined place, tracing the taste of place back from the mouth to the plants and animals and ultimately into the soil.” *Terroir* frames a community’s connection to the land, and that connection is considered, “essential, as timeless as the earth itself.”⁶⁵ Things are not quite as simple as they seem, however. *Terroir* as the French understand it now – the definition that undergirds the AOC – is perhaps the perfect example of an invented tradition, in the classic sense. *Terroir* is contingent, Trubek says, on the “cultural domain.” In the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, a group of interested parties in France began to solidify around what Trubek calls this “naturalized interpretation of taste,” for cultural (perhaps nostalgic) and economic reasons. Not wanting the agrarian way of life they revered to disappear, these (literal) taste makers constructed the orthodoxy of *terroir*. Although the concept had been used in conjunction with agriculture for hundreds of years previously, “its association with taste, place, and quality is more recent,” Trubek says. It is “a reaction to changing markets, the changing organization of farming, and changing politics.”⁶⁶ The system that was constructed around this new sense of cultural *and* physical *terroir* has proven robust in the intervening century, and it has been accepted as simple statement of fact by many.

So, as described, can American beer lay claim to *terroir*? A select few producers can, without a doubt. Rogue, an Ashland, Oregon brewing company, has begun producing a series of estate beers called “Chatoe Rogue.” According to the company, these beers are “GYO (grow your own) Certified, First Growth, Appellation products made with hops

and malt from our Department of Agriculture's Hopyard and Barley Bench."⁶⁷ The use of the term appellation here is about as intentional as one could be – Rogue claims that this product is just as deserving of the marketplace and cultural benefits of terroir (or as they put it, "dirtoir"), even without the protection of the AOC. Sierra Nevada, one of the oldest craft brewers in the country, also produces a series of estate beers, brewed with hops and barley grown on the property.⁶⁸ Crucially, Rogue and Sierra Nevada are two of the most successful craft brewers in the country, and they are located in prime country for growing hops and barley. The vast majority of brewers in the United States don't share the same good fortune in terms of either financial wherewithal or physical location.

Nevertheless, some in the industry claim that beer terroir is the route forward. In the "last call" column of the February 2011 issue of *BeerAdvocate* magazine, Tim Schnars II, the "assistant zymurgist" (AKA brewer) at Erie Brewing Company, expressed his frustration about the dilution of the term "craft." The Brewer's Association recently raised the ceiling on what can be considered "craft beer" from 2 million to 6 million barrels produced annually, to accommodate the growth of the Boston Beer Company, which produces Sam Adams. This controversial redefinition has caused many brewers, Schnars included, to worry about the future of their industry. Should it matter who makes the beer, if it's good? Ultimately, he determines, "it depends on how much you care about your local economy and community. Are you just a consumer, or does the beer you drink reflect your thoughts, aspirations, politics and ethical concerns?"⁶⁹ If it does, he insinuates, you should care who makes it, where, and how. And so he proposes to redefine craft on the basis of terroir and imagines a diffuse industry built on hopyards, blending houses and appellations given regionally for styles.

The problem with this vision is that, as I noted before, the vast majority of brewers don't have access to the right conditions for growing hops or barley. In the case of Black Star, neither is a good local crop. Even water, which makes up the vast majority of beer, is problematic. When I asked Young whether he saw terroir as a meaningful factor in beer, he replied:

With brewing, it really doesn't play a big part. It's unfortunate. It's not as simple as that, because our biggest ingredient is water, and that is one of the local things, but

we treat the shit out of it because just brewing with tap water is not awesome. So even then it's doctored. None of the ingredients, the main ingredients, come from anywhere near here. We still get as much American stuff as we can, but there are German malts over there and most of the hops are – terroir, no. Not really.⁷⁰

Although Black Star makes a concerted effort to use local ingredients in their beer when possible – for example, Round Rock honey and locally-sourced peaches – the classic French definition of terroir simply doesn't figure into their beer, or into the vast majority of craft beer in modern America. Even those brewers like Dogfish Head, or Jester King, locally, that capture wild yeast from a particular location and brew with it, are forced to resort to laboratory science. As Yarak said, “even with Sam (Calagione, president of Dogfish Head), when he goes to Egypt and captures wild yeast, he then sends it to Belgium to be refined so he gets a pure strain out of it that he can brew with.”⁷¹

Through our discussion, the only way in which Yarak, Young, and Livesay were able to apply terroir to beer was by using culture as a stand-in for physical product and geographical location. As Young said, “the vision that I have for our beers is something that had to naturally emerge from the culture, which in this case we're kind of saying is paramount to the actual terroir.” Although Young is the expert and ultimately decides what a particular beer will look and taste like, he readily acknowledged that “it's more important for us what the culture is here, and that's something that deals with a relevance to a time and a place.”⁷² Livesay put it most succinctly when he said “the membership is the terroir.”⁷³ Although I will address the “membership as terroir” argument in the final section of this paper, as well as Yarak's frustrations with the French definition of terroir, it seems clear that Trubek's argument about the taste of place being built on the backs of people, entrepreneurs, and community resonates within Black Star.

“Locating food makes it ours,” Trubek says, “and it can also train us to appreciate it in new ways.” When a community stakes a claim to certain foods, or even when the AOC determines where it can and cannot be produced, this sense of ownership and control acts as “our bulwark against the incredible unknowns of our interdependent global food system.”⁷⁴ In France, as I noted before, this naming and placing ritual has been thoroughly codified as a tradition that links people to the literal soil. In the United States,

this equation is complicated by the absence of a continuous tradition. It is also troubled by the fact that those who have dedicated themselves to using the “dinner table as springboard” for consciousness-raising – the 1960s “countercuisine” that Warren Belasco outlines in his book *Appetite for Change* – have generally been fringe, radical groups.⁷⁵ For the taste of place to gain traction in society at large, as it has done in France, we need a different, more entrepreneurial approach, Trubek says. We need leaders and tastemakers, just like they did in France a century ago, in order to combat not only industrial agriculture and foodways, but also to guide people in markets that all of a sudden exhibit increased diversity. As Trubek says, “*cuisine du terroir*” in Wisconsin needed to be “invented as much as preserved.” It had to be invented in a restaurant setting simply because the average home cook had no idea how to prepare the native hickory nuts that Trubek holds up as a prime example of Wisconsin terroir.⁷⁶

In the United States, attempts to erect a French-style regime of terroir are hampered by American “struggles with history.” Californian winemakers who emulate the “old world” style of winemaking are doomed to continually reinvent the wheel, because there is no “gravitas ... no weight of tradition to guide decisions and practices.” Does our past guide any attempt to fashion terroir, Trubek asks? For winemakers, the answer appears to be yes, but she concludes otherwise.⁷⁷ America’s relative lack of common history can be used to our advantage, if we act not as inheritors or strict inventors, she says, “but *bricoleurs*, tinkering with what we have, imagining what is possible, and borrowing from our many ancestral pasts.”⁷⁸ The key phrase here is *many* ancestral paths: although American beer-making is dependent on invented traditions, both inherited from Europe and fashioned here, it is the synthesis of these traditions that is most productive. The strength of an entrepreneurial American taste of place may well be its ability to pick and choose elements from the past as well as the present to build a picture that represents the unique here and now of a certain place. Using the grassroots postmodernism I referenced earlier, the architects of taste of place in America combine specific, locally-rooted social values with entrepreneurship.⁷⁹

The emerging taste of place that Trubek charts in her chapter “Tasting Wisconsin” is, in her opinion, centered on the Dane County Farmer’s Market and L’Etoile restaurant in Madison, Wisconsin. Odessa Piper, the long time chef at L’Etoile, cooks what she calls the “regionally reliant cuisine inspired by the creativity of necessity,” and the restaurant continues to break ground in terms of fostering partnerships between growers and chefs.⁸⁰ She believes that “many people have already begun to recognize a Wisconsin taste in the ingredients from the region,” and that the restaurant is successfully “patterning and imprinting” upon the local population what it means to cook and eat food from Wisconsin.⁸¹ Interestingly, however, Trubek concludes that the community is essentially as important as the food in constructing the taste of place in Madison. “The emerging regional cuisine in southern Wisconsin,” she says, “isn’t based on allegiance to the past but on nurturing each and every ally.”⁸² Without first building a network of consumers and businesses, the emergent taste of place in Madison would never have gotten to this point.

At Black Star, there is a definite sense that the institution and its membership are growing together, and continuing to discover more about their common identity. All three founders acknowledged a certain amount of give and take in the relationship between the worker’s assembly and the membership. Although, as I noted before, they see the beers “naturally emerging” from the culture, when I asked whether the relationship between consumer and producer is one way or mutually reinforcing, whether the people in Austin have a sense of what they want, or of what expresses them, Livesay replied:

I don’t think Austin is unified enough to really have that sense. There’s a lot of competing factors as to what Austin is trying to do, I think, food- and beer-wise. I don’t think that people even know what they want yet. I think we guide our patrons’ hands a little bit, and have always guided the membership’s hand or mouth, or hand to mouth, with beer, but they’re not angry about that, they still feel like they control that. I think that’s the point, whether they do [have control] or not, they still have that sense that this is their thing and we are doing it for them, ultimately. I think that they have that sense in their mind and this is done for me, and that I did this.⁸³

Young characterized the relationship as a productive “give and take,” but all three were quick to note that they don’t feel the weight of the entire city of Austin on their shoulders, just their membership. The fragmentation that Livesay noted, Yarak said, was not

necessarily indicative that people don't know what they want. Rather, it is "emblematic of the fact that Austin is big and it's diverse – there's people here who want different things, and that's a great thing. We're not going to get everyone to love craft beer, we're not going to get everyone to love our food. Fine. There are plenty of other Austinites." That being said, he did acknowledge a certain desire to "pattern and imprint," as Piper put it:

What Johnny [Livesay] was talking about, we put something out there for the members, what I really think is we're kind of the leadership. We're asked, and we've taken responsibility to go out on a limb and say this is what we think is good, and if they don't think so, they'll let us know really fast. But so far we're batting pretty well.⁸⁴

Black Star's willingness to "go out on a limb," combined with their unique relationship to the patrons of the pub, is what I believe Trubek was looking for, and found in Madison.

A central problem remains, however. The regional or city-specific taste of place is dependent on some knowledge of what constitutes the local. How do we determine the "taste of place" boundary around a quickly growing and changing city like Austin, for example? As Trubek notes, the vast majority of the knowledge that Americans have about food is "abstract, a series of received recommendations, guidelines, or sales pitches." That being said, "the chasm between what we know for ourselves about food and wine and what we must be told lies at the core of any contemporary effort to build the taste of place."⁸⁵ Although I do not pretend to be able to close that gap, it seems necessary to address the question of what constitutes the local.

In France, the AOC takes a step towards defining the boundaries of the "local." In the United States, things are often more confusing. Livesay, who was previously the produce manager at the Wheatsville food co-op in Austin, acknowledged the difficulties in defining the local:

You start to have a sense of credibility at a certain point. Wheatsville's produce department had a sense of credibility. You went there for local produce, and it's local because it's local, and what is local? Is it 150 miles, is it 10 miles, is it from the yard behind Wheatsville – which we did get some basil from there – what is local? And they want "local," and at that point, to me, Texas is local. It's regional, really, but it's from where we are, and where we're from.⁸⁶

Livesay's ready definition for local, Texas, is ostensibly a geographic boundary. However, it's clear that he picked Texas because of the human factor involved. "It's from where we are, and where we're from." People, not land, animate the local in our imagination. Often, the two are tied together, just as food and the land that produces it are tied together, but as Trubek noted at the outset, definitions of terroir are essentially cultural. And so it seems to me that when we speak of the local, we are looking for a human definition, one that is closely tied to a self-identified community.

Unfortunately, the term "community" is often as ill-defined as "the local." As David Bell and Gill Valentine note, it "cannot be 'mapped' in any straightforward ways; it is more a 'structure of feeling' than a territory."⁸⁷ Although particular communities often draw physical boundaries around themselves – neighborhood associations, for example – others are not necessarily located in space at all. Something approximating a working definition of local community seems necessary here. Local communities, according to Robert Sack, have a "particular system of production, consumption and other social relationships that overlap and are enclosed within a single place. For the people living there, the place becomes their world."⁸⁸ Sack is quick to note the potentially negative effects of this definition, arguing that if rootedness becomes the chief virtue in a community – as it could be seen to have in the AOC's definition of terroir – the local can "interfere with the dynamism of modern life and with the expansion of moral responsibility to include all human beings and even all of nature."⁸⁹ This is a valid critique and I will address at least one aspect of the local community that is problematic in terms of class in a moment, but Sack's argument seems far more applicable to rural communities or fully established localities that have begun to calcify than it does to Austin or to Black Star. The nascent community at Black Star, and the various forces involved in building an Austin taste of place have not reached the level of orthodoxy that Sack is concerned with. Although his definition is still a bit abstract, Sack's local community is a model that bridges the gap between communities based on affinity, such as the *BeerAdvocate* devotees, and those based purely in space, like the state of Texas. If Trubek is right and the taste of place rests on the backs of people and institutions, Sack's

network of social relationships and systems of production/consumption seem to fit the bill.

But why is food or beer or wine such a powerful catalyst for building or solidifying community? Bell and Valentine quote from another Appadurai essay, in which he makes the point that small habits, like what we might eat for breakfast, structure larger patterns.⁹⁰ Deborah Heath and Anne Meneley put it another way:

What we eat and drink, and how we do so, indexes both the corporeality of our habitus and the practices of distinction that embody relations of power/knowledge. Inextricably intertwined with the cultural-material processes that transform Nature into Culture, food and drink draw our analytical attention to the twinning of production and consumption.⁹¹

In other words, it's hard to ignore what you put in your mouth. Local food movements are less alienating because, as Patricia Allen and Clare Hinrichs note, they "reduce not only physical distance, but also social distance between producers and consumers. They are seen as fostering direct democratic participation in the local food economy and cultivating caring relationships among people in a community."⁹² When it is expressly tied to the concept of local community, food naturally takes on social and moral aspects. Although Allen and Hinrichs outline the "best case" scenario for local food movements, and many – or most – will fall short of their promise, they at least have the potential to cultivate community.

As Schnars said in *Beer Advocate*, it's important to consider not only what something tastes like, but who made it and under what conditions. Your choice of beer addresses, then, not only taste, but "your thoughts, aspirations, politics, and ethical concerns." The two systems of experience are inextricably intermixed. In his essay "Yuppie Coffees and Class in the United States," William Roseberry classified coffee as the beverage of choice for postmodernism. It is designed, he says, to take the consumer on a journey across the world, to act as simulacrum for real experience. "My vicarious experience of the world's geography," he worries, "is not *just* a simulacrum; it depends upon a quite real, if mediated and unacknowledged, relationship with rural toilers."⁹³ Living in the local allows consumers to have a more direct relationship with producers, and at least takes a

step towards solving Roseberry's quandary. If you can walk into Black Star and meet the brewer, that is one link in the previously invisible supply chain that has been eliminated.

As Young readily acknowledged during our conversation about beer terroir, however, Black Star inevitably *does* sit at the top of a globalized supply chain. A purer example of the local, then, might be something like Community Supported Agriculture. CSAs are essentially subscriber farms, in which local people pay for a share of the farm's produce, and arrange to pick up whatever is available weekly. In a sense, CSAs resemble cooperatives, but they tend to be more direct than classic agricultural cooperatives that operate on larger scales and whose membership consists solely of growers.

As Lois Stanford outlines in her article "The Role of Ideology in New Mexico's CSA Organizations," consumers and producers often view the farms differently. At the simplest level, the contributing members of a CSA "demonstrate their commitment to local food systems and growers through their financial investment in the farm," no more, no less. The ideological underpinnings of the American CSA movement are somewhat more radical, however. The leaders of the movement see the structure of CSAs as a tool to "reformulate direct, permanent ties between producer and consumer and form the economic and political base for creating social justice, re-establishing rural community, and undermining the power of large-scale agricultural corporations."⁹⁴ Stanford devotes most of her article to charting the ideological gap between the non-core supporting members who see the CSA as a group buying club, and the heavily ideological core members and producers who see the farm as an agent of social change.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, she concludes, CSAs are a powerful tool for developing community around expressly local food, in the face of "organic Wal-Marts" who have effectively co-opted the terminology of Belasco's countercuisine. Although they frame the problem in less ideological terms, Jeff Sharp, Eric Imerman, and Greg Peters deliver a similar assessment in the *Journal of Extension*, saying that CSAs are a good way to reduce farmer/non-farmer conflict, as well as build community and social capital.⁹⁶

The concerns that Stanford voices are relevant, however, not only to CSAs but to Black Star and to the state of food "movements" in general. Are the differences in

ideological commitment between producers and consumers a problem for CSAs and for co-ops like Black Star? As another ethnographic article on CSAs pointed out, the majority of contributing members like “*the idea* of supporting small, local and environmentally healthy farms” much more than their minimal level of interaction suggests.⁹⁷ When I asked Young, Yarak, and Livesay whether they saw craft beer as a “movement,” and if so whether it shared affinities with movements like slow food or locally supported agriculture, they were immediately skeptical of the label “movement.” As Yarak said, “it’s definitely a consumer trend. I don’t know if I would call it a movement. I mean, is twitter a movement? A movement in my mind,” he continued, “denotes some kind of profound social change, right? The civil rights *movement*, women’s suffrage as a *movement*.”⁹⁸ Although Livesay made the point that the recent organizing around HB660, a bill in the Texas legislature that would allow brewpubs to distribute beer and production breweries to sell on site, could be construed as a movement, Yarak resisted:

That doesn’t change the way that you perceive your life. I think Jeff really hit it on the head – people enjoying themselves and having an anchor in this space, and I think that’s valuable. I’m not in any way trying to disparage what we do, I take enormous pride in it, even when I am just sitting there washing glasses for 8 hours on a shift, but I don’t see it necessarily – I don’t want to be self-aggrandizing, I don’t want to try and say that we are doing something that we’re not.⁹⁹

Trying to find a middle ground, Livesay suggested that perhaps craft beer, slow food, and community agriculture aren’t movements because they are, at a root level, simply market corrections:

Craft beer prior to prohibition was just beer. And I think that’s kind of the thing, right? It’s the return to the right way. I mean, you don’t have things like CAMRA in England because people don’t give a shit about their beer. Maybe craft beer in itself isn’t a movement, but it is definitely attached to an ideology that people want better product. And it might not be its own movement, but it definitely has that social underpinning of people wanting more than Lone Star. CSA was the way until 50 years ago. Every community had its farm that supported it, gave it food, and everybody cooked at home, and it took a long time for people to make food. It wasn’t like some chi-chi yuppie had a slow cooked pork roast and wanted to have his friends over to drink Champagne, you know? Craft beer and CSAs and all of that, it’s all just a return to the way things used to be when there wasn’t a choice for that

to be the way that it was. That was the way that it was. There was good beer, there was slow food, there were farms.¹⁰⁰

Yarak relented slightly, allowing that while craft beer, slow food and CSAs might not be a movement, they “definitely are a manifestation of the ethos you’re describing, people wanting something that is real, that they have some connection to the supply, that they feel that it is rooted, and that I think that we definitely feel that.”¹⁰¹

Clearly, though, something about the term “movement” in conjunction with beer, slow food or CSAs rankled Yarak. If any of them are movements (he also characterized them as “faux-movements”), each would be a “movement of the affluent,” he concluded.¹⁰² This characterization gets to the heart of another concern Stanford raises with CSAs. Only a small percentage of the CSA farms in New Mexico are run by minority farmers, and CSAs only flourish in areas close to relatively affluent cities, where wealthy customers make up most of their market. These “economic and cultural constraints,” she says, do not bode well for widespread adoption of the CSA model.¹⁰³ “Whether or not the new food movement provides options for the poor, Hispanic growers and consumers,” she concluded, “requires both a clear recognition of this cultural and economic chasm and a concerted effort to bridge this gap.”¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, it seems as though the gap in ideological fervor that she charts between producers and consumers in the CSA model may well prevent locally supported agriculture from becoming a true “movement,” even though Stanford demonstrates that a majority of CSA growers hope that it will offer a space to transform the marketplace.

Black Star, Yarak acknowledged, is aware of this dynamic. As he said, “we are not chasing the budget-conscious consumer ... we don’t have any specials tonight, because we don’t *need* any specials tonight.” Far from being denigrating towards their customers, Yarak sees their position in the market as an opportunity. “So if we’re guilty of being part of the movement of the affluent,” he said, “we’re at least taking affluence and then putting it into good investments” such as LEED certification for the building, paying a living wage, and reducing solid waste (Livesay proudly made the point that Black Star produces “one bag of trash a day in the kitchen. Trash trash”). Much like the Rochdale pioneers, Yarak said, the entire enterprise is built around increasing justice. In this sense,

their market orientation has at least the potential to increase justice by catering to the affluent, who may not share the same ideological goals as the leadership.¹⁰⁵

The problem with this strategy, however, is that Black Star's patronage doesn't seem to be shaping up the way they assumed it would. "If this is a movement of the affluent, or movements in general that are geared towards that," Livesay pointed out, "I think we've done a poor job of capturing that market, though not for lack of trying. I think we've tried to market ourselves to wealthy people."¹⁰⁶ Tellingly, though, those wealthy people have not proven to be a large part of Black Star's success. "We have a very large membership, 2500 people. Even if we only have 10% of that," Yarak said, "that's still 250 people, that's not an insignificant quantity, but I do feel like we've viewed that as a natural base and they've never actually come out for us."¹⁰⁷ All three founders expressed a degree of dismay that their attempts to gain traction in the "green community" fizzled, for example. But why? In Livesay's opinion, it's a question of returns and priorities:

But you know why they don't want to be part of Black Star? Because the question "what's in it for me" is the first thing they ask, and there's not really anything you're going to get back at the end of the day. There's no profit, you're not going to make a ton of money, and so if you're wealthy and we're asking you for an investment, they're like yeah, 6 percent on my principal, that's not a whole lot, and it's not guaranteed, even.¹⁰⁸

Although the question "what's in it for me" is more important to the following section, which deals with economic models and the cooperative aspect of Black Star, the ideological gap in goals that Livesay and Yarak describe here is reminiscent of the problem that Stanford describes with CSAs, and it is descriptive of the kind of class-based concerns that can tear "local-first" movements apart, if they are not dealt with. If CSAs and cooperatives are nothing more than "movements of the affluent" and have surrendered their social and economic goals, are they substantially different than any group buying club, like Costco? At this point, the class implications don't seem to be hampering Black Star's success in recruiting members, but going forward it may become a more pressing issue.

Unlike the "green community," which Livesay and Yarak used to refer mainly to wealthy people who are interested in creating sustainable homes, Black Star does get

“more crossover from the CSA people,” according to Livesay. CSA, he said, is “making a comeback in the middle class, the lower middle class, because it’s like ok, I can get some good vegetables and not have to go anywhere.”¹⁰⁹ That Livesay names the market for both Black Star and local CSAs as “lower middle class” is telling, and will factor more heavily into the following section. The Black Star crossover from CSAs goes beyond mutual affinity or class identification, though, and extends into the world of “craft” – in this case, carrots. Johnson’s Backyard Garden, an Austin CSA, supplies the local market with a lot of carrots, and at the time of my interview, Black Star had them on the menu, in a number of dishes. “I think people see what we’re doing with food,” Livesay said. “Ok, I get that same thing in my [CSA] box, and when I get my carrots – we have Johnson’s Backyard Garden carrot right now, and they recognize that.”¹¹⁰ But what is that carrot saying to the Black Star customer, and why is it alluring?

Simple name recognition plays a large role in the added popularity of the carrots, and that extends to many other items on the Black Star menu. Even though the average customer doesn’t know what the name “Richardson Farms pork” suggests, there is “definitely something to be said about just us being able to say those things and be excited about it that helps the sales of those things,” Young said. “Whether they really appreciate it or really even understand what we’re saying, they show the enthusiasm that we can name where the ingredients came from.”¹¹¹ Yarak pointed to the “snack plates” as a prime example of this. On a board above the bar at Black Star, there is a chart of snack items that includes pickled vegetables, cheeses, and cured meats. Customers can pick a number of these, and make their own snack plate. The cured meats come from a local charcuterie company named “Salt and Time.” Even though “they generally don’t know what it is,” Yarak said, “all it takes is 30 seconds to say they make artisanal charcuterie here in Austin ... and people will snatch that stuff up immediately.”¹¹²

Beyond name recognition, however, there is an element of craft that plays into people’s willingness to buy Richardson Farms pork or Salt and Time or Black Star *craft* beer. The “craft consumer,” according to British sociologist Colin Campbell, is enamored of the idea of craft. Drawing on Marxist theory, Campbell frames craft consumption as a

response to the alienation of the worker inherent in postindustrial economies. “Craft,” he says, the form of labor “undertaken by the craftsman or craftswoman, was the most quintessential of all human activity. It was seen as ennobling, humanizing, and hence, the ideal means through which individuals could express their humanity.”¹¹³ The craft consumer, Campbell says, is someone who “transforms ‘commodities’ into personalized (or, one might say, ‘humanized’) objects” along with the craft producer.¹¹⁴ Naming something as a “craft” product enables a direct, if sometimes imagined, connection to product and producer for the consumer, and can act as a powerful antidote to the alienating, faceless global food system that Trubek refers to. This immediacy is also at the base of Schnars’ polemic in *Beer Advocate*. The “craft” in craft beer, he reminds us, is short for “handcrafted.” The scale of production is crucial – anyone who produces on the order of 6 million barrels per year (that’s roughly 1.5 billion pints of beer) “must employ multi-handed mutants to ‘handcraft’ that many barrels,” he says.¹¹⁵

But contemporary discourses of craft, even though they provide respite from alienation, are potentially problematic in themselves. As Paxson reveals, 21st century craftspeople are not quite as invested in history as they seem to be, and that “the disconnect between the current artisan movement and America’s enduring cheesemaking tradition reproduces class hierarchies even as it reflects growing equity in gendered occupational opportunities.”¹¹⁶ American artisanal cheesemakers are, in large part, “*not* traditional farmers making the transition to niche-market production but successful businesspeople who retired early” and started making cheese as an art, not a vocation.¹¹⁷ They turn to Europe for inspiration and training and buy into the idealized, invented tradition of an agrarian model that is the foundation for the AOC, not realizing that a) cheesemaking in Europe has become an industrial process and b) the local American producers in their backyards that may have been in business for the last century are actually more “traditional” than many of their European counterparts.¹¹⁸ The upshot of this is that new, artisanal producers come from a “different socioeconomic world” than those small cheese producers who have been in business for decades. “Because their work-related identities are differently formed, today’s artisans do not generally perceive a

kinship with previous craft producers,” Paxson says. Making cheese is not a job for the new artisans, it is a calling.¹¹⁹ Their class position makes it difficult to establish any continuity with past producers that occupied the land they now work, which ultimately hampers the possibility of building a truly American sense of place in conjunction with cheese.

Although the average craft brewer is not a retired person or necessarily wealthy, the classic craft brewing story runs something like this: an avid homebrewer decides he or she is sick and tired of the daily grind as a lawyer or an engineer, and makes a break for it to follow their dreams in the world of craft beer. For better or worse, that is the trope. Much like with Paxson’s cheesemakers, there is very little sense of continuity with past producers who are *not* identified with American craft beer or European traditions. The rapid deterioration in market diversity for beer after Prohibition is at least partly to blame, but even in Texas, the Shiner brewery is hardly, if ever, held up by craft brewers as an example of a Texas beermaking tradition. The Black Star founders were willing to put the blame for that on the fact that, much like the Boston Beer Company that drew Schnars’ ire, Shiner has expanded too much. As Livesay said, “it was a scale thing – people still say that Shiner used to be good. Shiner used to be really good.”¹²⁰ Doubtless, the revised formulas that Shiner employs now result in beer that probably doesn’t taste as good as it used to, but the willingness of American craft beer consumers and producers to forge an entirely new tradition of beermaking is reminiscent of Paxson’s work with cheesemakers.

One element of modern craft that Paxson points to as being positive, beyond the products themselves, is the softening of the gender barrier in cheese production. In the nineteenth century, scientific discourse heavily emphasized the benefits of factory production over the in-home model that had previously dominated. As the production of things like cheese and beer moved from the home into the factory, however, their production became increasingly masculinized.¹²¹ The move in modern artisanal cheese production has restored some semblance of gender equity. Cheesemaking is no longer considered a feminine or masculine process in the artisanal world, and mixed gender teams are the norm.¹²²

In the beer world, however, men continue to dominate, and female craft brewers are still few and far between. A *BeerAdvocate* profile of Portneuf Valley Brewing's Penny Pink, a female brewer in Idaho, makes a point of her gender while attempting not to do so. Emphasizing her stature – “I’m 5 foot 10 inches, and I’m a pretty good sized gal,” Pink said. ‘I can schlep around a 160 pound keg with the best of them. I’m not some dainty little gal’” – while also attempting to acknowledge her feminine aspect – she is more receptive to customer feedback than your average brewer – the admittedly well-intentioned article demonstrates just how poorly equipped craft beer is to deal with women as brewers.¹²³

Women, however, have been directly tied to brewing for thousands of years. The male dominated industrialized brewing process that craft beer descends from is a relatively new tradition, as O’Brien and many other scholars point out. In Ian Hornsey’s comprehensive history of British brewing *A History of Beer and Brewing*, he makes the point that female brewers or brewsters, as they were called, accounted for the vast majority of beer production in medieval England.¹²⁴ In *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters: Women’s Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* Judith Bennett details the story of how brewing changed from an in-home domestic business to a fully industrialized industry, and the process whereby women were marginalized as producers throughout. She stresses that the nature of women’s work remained the same – they were underpaid and their labor was underappreciated – throughout the transition, but that the economic character of brewing changed fundamentally.¹²⁵

Craft brewing’s status as a male-dominated industry is directly linked to the industrialized processes that grew up in England, Germany, and other European nations, and less so from the home brewed, female-dominated tradition. Although in-home production was the main method of beer-making in early colonial America, historians like James McWilliams have written extensively on the process whereby beer production was quickly removed from the home and put into the general economy.¹²⁶ The pre-prohibition network of regional breweries that modern craft brewers like Tim Schnars want to re-establish grew out of a tradition of largely German immigrants in the 19th

century, who brought an already industrialized process with them and established it in places like Milwaukee and Chicago.¹²⁷

Oddly, even homebrewing has become a thoroughly male-dominated pastime in modern America. Because home beer production is no longer an economic necessity, homebrewing has, as Rachel Maines characterizes it, “hedonized.” It is one among many activities through which participants are able to “enjoy and explore the aesthetic, sensual, intellectual and emotional rewards” of work without the requirement that they do so.¹²⁸ By virtue of the ever-increasing technological complexity of the process, and due in part to the assertive male dominance over heavy tool usage that historian Steven Gelber outlines in his article “Do-It-Yourself: Constructing, Repairing and Maintaining Domestic Masculinity,” homebrewing ended up as a hobby that is practiced mainly by men, for better or for worse.¹²⁹

This characterization of homebrewing as a hobby that performs the “maintenance of masculinity” does not apply to all brewers. As Larsen says, despite the overwhelmingly male population of homebrewing communities, “formal prohibitions on entrance, based on gender or ethnicity, no longer appear to exist.”¹³⁰ It does, however, seem to typify the core members of the community, the brewers who are most likely to turn professional. Jack McAuliffe, for example, founded the short-lived but pioneering New Albion Brewery in 1976. In his quest to open a brewery of his own, William Mares, author of 1983’s *Making Beer*, visited McAuliffe, and while he said that “most home brewers probably identify with McAuliffe more readily” than with other professional brewers, it quickly became clear to him that McAuliffe, who fabricated his entire brewery by hand from junkyard parts, had more “perseverance, ingenuity and outright brass” than Mares. As such, he was ostensibly better prepared to start a professional operation of his own.¹³¹

Craft beer, then, does not seem to share the same predisposition to breaking down gender barriers as artisan cheese production. It remains largely the domain of men like McAuliffe, who exhibit stereotypically masculine traits like “brass” and technological skill. As activists like O’Brien point out, the “cultural functions” that were so closely tied with pre-industrial in-home production of beer by women were largely erased by

industrialization. As beer became tied solely to its economic value, much of the social value that craft beer in modern America seeks to restore was lost. As such, he calls for the wholesale reincorporation of women into brewing, professionally and as amateurs.¹³² Pieces like the *BeerAdvocate* profile on Pink could be read as a conscious attempt to make a more prominent place for women in craft beer, but the vocabulary necessary to do so doesn't seem to be present, yet.

Despite these shortcomings, discourses of craft play a major role in institutions like Black Star. Along with food movements, engagement, the local community and a nascent taste of place, craft is an integral part of what the co-op is trying to do in Austin. So, if Black Star and other businesses in Austin, Johnson's Backyard Garden, for example, are attempting to build a sense of place via the taste of place, what elements of the community get wrapped up in it? Does what Black Star is doing go beyond sourcing food locally, brewing beer that is responsive to the desires of the membership, and providing a space and forum for the development of social capital? Their economic model suggests that it does.

Markets, Cooperatives, and Participatory Economics

The Black Star cooperative, as a brewpub and a co-op, draws on multiple economic models and strategies. Young, Yarak, and Livesay were straightforward in saying that the cooperative aspect of the business is as important as the food or the beer, and that it directly contributes to the overall success of the business. For that reason, this section deals with cooperative models and their potential for social and economic justice, as well as with participatory economics. Livesay named participatory economics, or “parecon,” as the “base, where a lot of the ideological knowledge” that makes Black Star work, came from.¹³³ Craft beer itself, however, occupies an interesting position in the market, one that Black Star takes advantage of. The “big three” brewers, Anheuser-Busch, Miller, and Coors, still occupied 85% of the domestic beer market in 2005, a full 40 years after Fritz Maytag bought Anchor Brewing in San Francisco and kick-started the American craft brewing industry. Especially in a crucial beer market like Texas, the second biggest in the nation, how do small businesses like Black Star continue to find room to compete?

In *The Long Tail*, Chris Anderson notes how cultural preferences are shifting away from mass-market goods like Budweiser, for example, and towards “niche” products like craft beer. As the “head” – mass marketed products – shrinks, the “long tail” of niche products grows, and as a result that is where business opportunity lies.¹³⁴ Glenn Carroll and Anand Swaminathan apply more rigorous economic theory to the brewing industry than Anderson might, but they arrive at a similar conclusion in their article “Why the Microbrewery Movement? Organizational Dynamics of Resource Partitioning in the US Brewing Industry.” Resource partitioning, according to Carroll and Swaminathan, “addresses the interrelationship between two organizational trends. The first of these is the trend of increasing market concentration found in many industries ... The second trend is the increasingly common appearance of many small specialist organizations in certain mature industries.”¹³⁵ As market consolidation increases, the dominant players in the mass market end up concentrating all their efforts on those corporations also trying to occupy that space. Ultimately, they experience diminishing returns, and leave the margins of the market open for specialists like craft brewers.¹³⁶ Carroll and Swaminathan also

point out that “identity-based” strategy on the part of specialist producers has been a successful tactic, in that microbrewers like Black Star have “cognitively defined” their segment of the market as being in direct opposition to the macros.¹³⁷

If we can forget Yarak’s skepticism about the term “movement” for a minute, it is possible to see how the social aspects of craft beer play an important role in shaping its market presence as well. In *Market Rebels: How Activists Make or Break Radical Innovations*, Hayagreeva Rao argues that academic economists and sociologists tend to “gloss over the role of social movements in shaping radical innovation in markets.” Rao sees rebels as mobilizers of collective action that utilize the language of collective identity to force changes in the market. As he says, “the challenge for market rebels becomes how to forge a collective identity and mobilize support by articulating a *hot cause* that arouses emotion and creates a community of members, and relying on *cool mobilization* that signals the identity of community members and sustains their commitment.”¹³⁸ Although his terms seem a bit too McLuhan-esque, Rao’s theory meshes well with the Black Star community. So-called “hot causes” reflect shared and reciprocal emotions – they demonstrate a common ground and a common enemy – and “cool mobilization” enables identity formation by engaging “audiences through collective experiences that generate *communities of feeling*.” In these collective, or cooperative, perhaps, experiences, craft beer consumers “encounter what literary critic Raymond Williams has called *social experiences in solution*, where participants actively *live* meanings and values associated with a social movement.”¹³⁹ The concrete social space that Black Star provides for community, along with the economic statement of member/ownership, would seem to add measurably to Rao’s framework.

Rao also lays out a structure that could potentially explain the unusually strong connection between the homebrewing community and professional microbrewers. He asserts that generalist producers like Anheuser-Busch and Miller “constitute psychologically salient targets for activists and potential entrepreneurs alike.” But before the microbrewing movement could transform itself into a market power, an oppositional discourse had to emerge. Rao points to the homebrewing renaissance of the late 1970s as

just such a discourse: “The home-brewing movement educated consumers about traditional beers and artisanal techniques. It exacerbated the discontent among beer aficionados about the lack of choice and the dearth of fresh and tasteful beer” and in so doing directly led to craft brewing.¹⁴⁰ For microbrewing to take off, the “community level infrastructure” of homebrewing needed to be combined with entrepreneurs willing to take financial risks. As Yarak said, this is precisely what Black Star did in 2006 – they decided to “go out on a limb,” take an already existing sentiment, and turn it into a space within the market for that community to flourish.

Black Star goes beyond and builds on market innovations endemic to craft beer, however, by embracing the cooperative model. As Yarak said and I noted earlier, co-ops are entirely dependent on the community they create. “If I were to sum up the cooperative in one phrase,” he said, “it would be ‘you get out what you put in,’ and I think that applies to both sides of our operation, for sure.”¹⁴¹ Black Star is breaking new ground in terms of extending the cooperative model into, as they say “new and innovative sectors.” Currently, it is the only cooperative brewery in the country. Yarak appeared to take some small delight in the fact that a colleague from Portland, Oregon – a craft brewing paradise and home to multiple food co-ops – “was broken up about the fact” that Portland doesn’t have a cooperative brewery. But despite that, it has been and remains part of their mission to help others follow in their footsteps. When I asked if they were aware of any other cooperative breweries in process (they were – at least two are), Livesay responded:

We once had this conversation back in the day, and we were talking about strike teams, basically. If we get to the point where our operations are sound we can uproot people from our community to these other communities that want this, and be like boom, plug it in. Because what we had to do is write the book, and that’s really hard. We’re only five years old and we didn’t have that, and that’s something that’s really powerful, and if we inspire any of those people, or they had the idea themselves without even knowing about us, awesome. But if we inspired them that’s even more powerful.¹⁴²

While all three were positive about the power of the cooperative model and of their unique position to help others structure their businesses similarly, Yarak was cautious about definitions:

I think when you're talking about the cooperative there's a real problem of definitions. What are you *actually* talking about? The problem is exacerbated by the fact that so many different kind of organizations identify themselves as cooperatives, and the cooperative model doesn't do itself any services by being so flexible. That you can have Land O' Lakes as a cooperative, no one has any idea where they buy their butter, or Ocean Spray, or hell, Nationwide Insurance is technically a mutually owned insurance cooperative, but Nationwide you cannot identify, it's just like a hydra, that's got a publicly traded arm, called Nationwide Financial Services, and Nationwide Investments, it's got hundreds of for-profit subsidiaries, so what does that organization become anymore?¹⁴³

If massive growing concerns like Ocean Spray and “hydras” like Nationwide Insurance are on the same ideological plane as small, local consumer and worker cooperatives, the term itself is threatened. In light of the fact that Yarak made reference to the Pioneers of Rochdale, England multiple times during the interview, it seems prudent to give a short overview of what their tenets were, and how they have been updated by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA).

Although cooperatives existed for at least half a century before the Rochdale Pioneers began their experiment in 1844, they have remained one of the most influential groups of cooperators, and their principles and organization were taken up by the larger movement.¹⁴⁴ “Motivated by ideals of a more just social order, as well as by pragmatic economic concerns,” the Pioneers sought to “link vision and practice, economic goals with social purposes,” according to Ellen Furlough and Carl Strikwerda.¹⁴⁵ They sought to replace competition with cooperation, in order to become more moral, and quite simply to avoid being cheated. As Yarak said, “the whole thing was about justice. It was that a pound weighed 12 ounces and the coal had rock in it, and things like that.”¹⁴⁶ The Rochdale experiment started as a store, and was planned to ultimately include ventures like housing, wholesaling, education and social work, as well as manufacturing. Although they met with only moderate success in expanding, their system became the inspiration for many of the cooperative ventures that sprang up during the 19th and 20th centuries.¹⁴⁷ One of the most significant upshots of the Rochdale experiment and those that followed was the sense that a working class identity could be something that was identified with “activity and confidence rather than submission ... with capacity rather than with

apathy.”¹⁴⁸ This class-awareness is reflected, I believe, in Black Star’s commitment to paying a living wage, and re-shaping what it means to have a service industry job.¹⁴⁹

The cooperative movement has taken many twists and turns since Rochdale: it is responsible for the formation of massive agricultural and manufacturing cooperatives in Canada and the United States, as well as food retailing co-ops that were closely linked to the counterculture in the 1960s and 70s.¹⁵⁰ Ideology and utopian visions were never far behind a new food co-op in the 70s, and entire books have been written about the political goals and infighting that they can produce (see Craig Cox’s *Storefront Revolution*, about the countercultural co-ops in Minneapolis-St. Paul). For the purposes of this paper, however, it is more important to establish simply what cooperative commerce looks like, and how it is enacted at Black Star. Furlough and Strikwerda succinctly define cooperation in the marketplace as a “hybrid organizational structure” that blends dealings in the market with an alternative organization style:

In economic terms, we can define consumer cooperatives as democratically run, collectively owned, private enterprises, which return a share of their profits to the customers and members who collectively own the organizations of whose member-customers decide to invest the profits for social goals. Cooperatives compete in the market, but their internal organization is shielded to a degree from market forces.¹⁵¹

Democratic processes, they stress, are at the center of modern cooperatives, and do much to differentiate them from traditional businesses. The ICA has updated their “statement on cooperative identity” multiple times, most recently in 1995. Currently, they identify 7 core principles that any cooperative must meet: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; cooperation among cooperatives; and concern for community.¹⁵² To this Black Star has added commitments to participatory self-management, living wage, sustainability, privacy, and responsible consumption of alcohol.¹⁵³

Black Star is a hybrid form of cooperative, in that it is worker- and member-owned which, as Yarak alluded to, is a potential source of tension internally.¹⁵⁴ It allows for the organization to focus on the needs of workers, however, as well as on the benefits of cooperative consumption and community equity. Worker-owned cooperatives are rare in

the United States. The US Federation of Worker Cooperatives “conservatively estimates” that there are somewhere around 300 democratic workplaces in the country, and that worker co-ops employ around 3,500 people. Despite their limited scale, worker co-ops, the Federation says, are a model for increasing economic and social justice, empowerment and change, as workers “own their jobs” and worker cooperatives “tend to create long-term stable jobs, sustainable business practices, and linkages among different parts of the social economy.”¹⁵⁵ As Steven Leikin notes in his article “The Citizen Producer,” worker cooperatives in the mid 19th century – the only time in American history when they were relatively common – were often vague about what workplace democracy meant, and what form it should take. “Paradoxically,” he argues, “it is in this vagueness that the meaning of cooperation can be discerned.” The loose framework of workplace democracy fostered alternative visions of more than simple economics, and it structured working-class life for those who were involved.¹⁵⁶

The founders of Black Star were similarly effusive about the power of worker cooperation and workplace democracy. When I asked how necessary co-ops are in contemporary America, Yarak quickly responded that, in his opinion:

All private sector enterprises should be co-ops. Should be. I think it’s a better way to do business. I do think co-ops are a movement that is very different to craft beer or something like that, because it is explicitly tied to people, to values, to an ideal ... when I come to work every day I come to work because I feel proud of the fact that we are a cooperative, and that’s what really motivates me.¹⁵⁷

Livesay characterized his first experience with the cooperative model as “life-changing,” and said that he continually wonders why cooperation isn’t the “dominant paradigm” in society:

Why do people need to make so much money? Why is that the motivation? Why is that the factor, instead of helping people have good jobs, helping people have equity, helping a community have equity in a business. That’s a big thing, I mean we – I think we’ve talked about this before, too, is like we’re not an ownership culture. We rent. We are transient, we don’t give a shit about things anymore. And it goes back to that question ‘what’s in it for me?’ – you own it. That’s not enough, and that’s a problem. That’s always been a problem for me, since before I met [Young and Yarak], since I really got into co-ops, that’s a problem for me, and that’s like, owning it isn’t enough? That’s the end! It doesn’t go any further than that, you own

it. That should be enough, right? People don't care about that, they're like well, what do I get? You get the place, you get the ownership. That's a lot.¹⁵⁸

The “worker-owner” status of the workers at Black Star is not something that fades into the background, Livesay said. Unlike the experience of silently paying union dues or having stock options, being involved in the democratic control of your workplace alters the very character of the work experience:

We're in the position to try to make this succeed and make it be a model that we can do, that we can show that it works, to show that there can be more justice in the workplace. We're still a workplace, there is still day-to-day drama, it's lots of moving parts, that's the way that it works, but at the base of it, there's a greater sense of responsibility on all of our shoulders. I've worked at restaurants, nobody at any of those restaurants I've worked at gave a shit, because it wasn't our money, it was the owner's money, and he was an asshole. So why did it matter if we broke a plate or drank a drink or whatever – all these things that you do to slowly steal from your employer – but when you are your own employer, you don't want to do that. It helps to create a sense of retention that you don't see at normal places, especially in the service industry.¹⁵⁹

Worker-owners, just like member-owners, only get out of Black Star what they put into it, as Yarak said, and those workers that “don't show up, don't get to participate.”¹⁶⁰ For the community as a whole – workers and members – though, the cooperative model at its best is a powerful unifying force.

As Livesay pointed out, if you were to drive around Austin for a week or two, you'd see “thousands of Wheatsville bumper stickers, and they're probably not members, and that's the thing, even if you're not a member, you still have a sense of place” and pride tied to the *idea* that the co-op exists, and that you are able to take part in it, if only casually.¹⁶¹ Yarak, in particular, recounted two episodes that demonstrated the affective power of the cooperative model, and its power for unifying people with disparate life experiences. The first was an opportunity that he had at a beer social before the pub opened, to watch a prospective member emerge from simple enjoyment of beer and engage in an in-depth discussion of the “economic and philosophical implications” of cooperatives. He recounted this moment to the director of the worker cooperative federation, and “her mind was blown too,” he said. “She just said, well, that's the power

of a consumer cooperative, having that connection that you can actually get people to engage with it.” The second experience happened at a cooperative business conference:

I’m riding the street car in New Orleans and this straight as an arrow engineer from Madison, Wisconsin who is wearing jean shorts and his company polo is sitting on a bench seat next to a stripper from San Francisco at the Lusty Lady, and they’re having a conversation about productive meetings. I mean, you can’t get more polar opposite than that, you know?¹⁶²

The message here is simply that the element of solidarity in cooperative enterprise, which extends to both workers and members, strongly suggests that democratic workplaces have the potential to be more than just another job, and that a beer at a cooperative brewpub is more than just another beer.

Black Star’s commitment to participatory self-management, which I have mentioned a number of times, is a reference to participatory economics, a framework that envisions replacing capitalism wholesale with a more democratic model. Livesay named parecon as the ideological wellspring for the organization, and both he and Yarak referenced the foundational work of Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel as central to their thought. Parecon, which seeks to build a “classless economy,” is based on “workers’ and consumers’ self-managed councils, balanced job complexes, remuneration for duration, intensity and onerousness of socially valued labor, and participatory planning.”¹⁶³ The underlying argument of parecon, according to Albert, is that market economies create anti-social behavior when they encourage competition, and parecon would foster social behavior at all levels.¹⁶⁴ In order to do so, and to “ennoble work and enrich consumerism,” parecon rejects capitalism and the generally accepted alternative, market socialism, out of hand.¹⁶⁵ As Hahnel says, political economists who promote democratic planning “do so because we believe private enterprise is incompatible with economic justice and democracy, and therefore must eventually be replaced.”¹⁶⁶ Parecon, then, is a “full program to secure the economics of equitable cooperation.”¹⁶⁷ Principles of parecon that have made their way into the Black Star model include most prominently the provision that “those affected by a given decision be granted a say or influence in proportion to the degree that they are affected.”¹⁶⁸ Effort and involvement are weighted more heavily than talent or training in parecon, in an attempt to increase solidarity,

participation, and empowerment. As Albert says, “people don’t mind work – if gives their lives meaning – what they hate is alienated labor.”¹⁶⁹ Increasing the day-to-day involvement and investment of workers, then, changes the face of work entirely.

Parecon and cooperative movements have many things in common, but the crucial difference between the two is that, as Furlough and Strikwerda point out, co-ops deal in the market and parecon is an attempt to replace it entirely. Even “non-capitalist” ventures that operate in the market, like cooperatives, Albert says, are compelled to seek surplus.¹⁷⁰ Although that surplus is then re-directed into the membership, the market still determines how the co-op operates outwardly. This is a problem for ideological models like the one that supports community support agriculture. CSAs, Laura DeLind warns, run the risk of being pigeonholed into what she calls “niche markets” within the dominant capitalist system. Thinking in these terms is problematic for two reasons. First, it “encourages circumscribed and individualized solutions to systemic problems.” Seeing your CSA farm as an island in capitalism as opposed to part of a network that “suggests a new game entirely” is counterproductive because it requires every producer to fight the same battles, and not learn from one another. Second, niche markets “keep smaller producers focused outward for their economic rewards” instead of turning inwards and building an authentically new community outside of capitalism.¹⁷¹

Hahnel, who is more hopeful than DeLind, defends the need for “imperfect pockets of equitable cooperation in the midst of global capitalism,” like Black Star.¹⁷² As Yarak said, if they are a part of a movement of the affluent – and that appears to be more of an “if” than he originally considered it to be – at least they are taking that money and making good investments with it. The lesson, Hahnel continues, is that “living experiments in equitable cooperation are of critical importance” because they provide a testing ground for ideas and evidence that a more just world is possible.¹⁷³

Cooperation and participation have a long history in the western world, but as Cox’s work on Minneapolis food co-ops demonstrates, the ideology that guides them is continually shifting. As John Curl, author of *For all the People*, put it, cooperative enterprise is “a response to a situation, and the situation is always in flux ... each new

generation creates structures to solve its needs, not mimicking some ideal form, but always in an intensely practical relation to the actual situation on the ground.”¹⁷⁴ When I asked what situation they saw Black Star responding to, Yarak first made the point that what they are responding to is “choice. We want to do it this way,” and he acknowledged that their relatively privileged position as educated middle-class American males allowed them the freedom to build Black Star the way they wanted to. Quickly, though, he turned to economics:

I think what [I’d like to do is] make people ask the question why am I tipping, why are these people getting shit wages? The situation I’d love to address is that Austin, I feel, has this divergent economy where in another 10 years or so you’re either going to work at home or you’re going to work in the service industry. You’ve got the tech sector that doesn’t really need offices, you’ve got the state, which isn’t going anywhere but isn’t setting any fires anywhere either, and then you’ve got the service industry, and I think in the macroeconomic condition of our microcosm, that’s the path that’s going forward.¹⁷⁵

Livesay agreed, putting the focus more directly on the situation for service-sector workers in 21st century America:

And if you’re going to have to work in the service industry, it better be worth it, and is it really worth it to kowtow to somebody that’s making more money than you are every day of your life so you can get your 15 to 20% from them, from the money that your restaurant’s gouging, or is it going to be something that’s more responsible, and people are going to start to buck up and do it themselves, and see that they can do it and not have to go work for other people. I think that’s the other thing, is that we don’t have a boss. We’re our boss. We know what we need to do, and that’s a lot more of a motivating factor than knowing that I’m going to be held up if I don’t do what I need to do. We know every day when we come to work that there’s an end result that has to happen and it has to be achieved, but no one is telling us to do that.¹⁷⁶

Black Star’s continued success, as I mentioned before, constitutes what Livesay framed as “a challenge to other businesses” that they don’t have to continue to pay \$2.13 plus tips for service employees, that there *is* a better way of doing business. Following in the footsteps of parecon, Black Star addresses consumer and worker alienation, in the hopes of increasing solidarity and economic justice.

Expanding the Taste of Place

“The taste of place,” Trubek says in her introduction, “like food and drink, may end up being a universal phenomenon with very localized stories, practices framed by particular cultural memories, meanings, and myths.”¹⁷⁷ The taste of place is always present, she says, it just needs to matter to the people of a region, city, or state. The degree to which they are invested in tasting terroir determines, in large part, how much terroir they will find.¹⁷⁸ It is my argument that we might do well to add “community” to the list of framing, or even precipitating, factors for the taste of place, and to consider how to better make the taste of place a populist phenomenon. Black Star, I believe, is an example of an entrepreneurial “taste-making” institution that has the potential to more explicitly expand the model that Trubek lays out into economic and community-based discourses. In this concluding section, then, I will quickly address what I see as the limited scope of Trubek’s model; the reasons I believe it is still an important insight; my rationale for proposing an expansion of the model; and some next steps that future research might take to determine what, exactly, gets rolled up into the taste of place in a particular community.

Trubek’s final chapter, entitled “The Next Phase: Taste of Place or Brand?” deals with Vermont maple syrup, and an attempt she was involved in to decisively link syrup to the soil. In claiming maple syrup, the state of Vermont has effectively “realized and fulfilled” its brand image, which is based on nostalgia: snowy woods, cabins, flannel, and rocky hillsides. The “elysian dream” of a bucolic Vermont is an effective strategy, she says, but “unlike products involved in the AOC system, the making and the selling do not have to reinforce each other; there are no regulations linking process, place, and taste.” This lack of enforcement, she continues, “reflects our prevailing foodview that compartmentalizes the process from the result.”¹⁷⁹ Her solution is very French: she assembled a tasting panel to determine whether or not the particular soil and meteorological conditions in Vermont do in fact produce a product that is distinctive from other maple syrups. And while the panel discovered that there is indeed a taste of place hidden within Vermont maple syrup – which leads to her assessment that the taste

of place is universal, you just have to care enough to unearth it – her conclusions reveal the ultimate limitations of the model.

Are the AOC and efforts like hers to codify and regulate the taste of place ultimately a sham, she wonders? “To use modern American parlance, are we being sold a bill of goods? Should we adopt the same skepticism when purchasing place-specific food and drink as we do when buying a used car?” Ultimately, she concludes that we should not, provided that our motives are correct:

I think not, as long as the primary explanation for *why* we should purchase the quart of medium amber syrup or the disc of goat cheese is not based on abstract notions of authenticity or distinction. Rather, we should buy it for the possibility of an exquisite taste sensation, an experience that will lift us above the Aunt Jemima and Kraft Cracker Barrel. We should also make these purchases because by choosing the pure Vermont syrup or the cabecou we are voting for a future that includes strong localized agrarian and culinary culture around the globe.¹⁸⁰

It seems to me that while Trubek is correct in questioning the application of Vermont’s brand identity, she is not really invested in moving beyond it in a meaningful way.

Although she staunchly supports local agriculture and makes a point of condoning entrepreneurship throughout the book, her vision of Vermont and of “taste sensations” is not particularly populist, or useful for those people who are not artisan producers.

Stanford, as well as Paxson in her work on cheese production in the very same state of Vermont, worry about the limits of sentiment. Even if effective identity branding *is* tied demonstrably to taste, as Trubek shows maple syrup to be, the potential limits of this affective economy are troubling. In Stanford’s examination of New Mexican CSAs, the pitfalls of success weigh heavily on ideologically-motivated producers. As they become more successful, large-scale agro-business will inevitably usurp their model and market, the growers worry. As Belasco outlines in *Appetite for Change*, the ideological beginnings of the organic food movement have been lost in a flurry of consolidation and industrialization. CSA farmers see the desperate need for “consensus, strong ties, membership loyalty, and collective consciousness” in the CSA community in order to fight off the “organic Wal-Marts” of the world.¹⁸¹ Trubek’s model offers little protection

in this case – anyone who grows salad greens organically in California is entitled to the taste of place that is developed there, regardless of scale.

For Paxson’s cheese producers, the worry is twofold: those artisan producers who choose (or are forced) to stay small and thoroughly handcraft their product share the same concerns as the CSA growers, and those who have been able to grow have an entirely new set of concerns: “if success runs the risk of compromising sentiment,” Paxson asks, “what are the limits of sentiment in driving market success?” One producer in particular, Neighborly Farms – which satisfies all of Paxson’s conditions for “artisan” status – was having trouble selling their “everyday cheese” to the consumers that make up the bread and butter of Trubek’s terroir marketplace, the so-called “foodies.” The Dimmicks, who run Neighborly Farms, were in search of a marketplace for what Sidney Mintz calls “food of moderate speed” somewhere between fast and slow on the ideological spectrum. Their inability to find such a market raises questions for Paxson, and for an industry like craft beer, about the elasticity of sentiment in driving consumers to craft or artisan products.¹⁸²

The Boston Beer Company, which produces a number of critically acclaimed (and generally popular) beer styles, has garnered a harsh backlash from the craft beer community – both drinkers and smaller producers – for embracing a business model that resembles that of the “macro” breweries. Most of the beer sold under the Sam Adams label is, and always has been, contract brewed not in a Boston Beer Company brewery, but in selected breweries across the country that essentially rent fermenter space to Sam Adams. Although the company and its products remain popular, as evidenced by their growth beyond two million barrels produced annually, some would argue that their practices threaten craft beer as a market segment. In his *BeerAdvocate* column, Tim Schnars voiced an admittedly extreme version of a fairly widespread sentiment: “If you aren’t brewing the beer,” that is, if it is contract brewed for you based on your recipe, “it isn’t your beer ... in my opinion, it amounts to downright fraud.”¹⁸³ The Boston Beer Company, which helped pioneer contract brewing, has been controversial for this reason ever since their inception. For producers like Shiner, that developed from a small local cooperative to a national brand, the worry is that as you grow and push outside of the

local market, you will inevitably begin to resemble your nationalized competitors more and more. Livesay's statements about how Shiner "used to be good" are, anecdotally, increasingly common in Austin. In this example, as well as with Stanford and Paxson, the apparent limits of the terroir marketplace seem to limit the usefulness of Trubek's model.

There is also the question of backlash against what could easily be seen as an elitist model borrowed from the French. As Yarak said of the AOC version of terroir:

I'm utterly dismissive of the French, because I think the only real honest analysis of the French pride, and I have no problem with pride, but the AOC and the terroir is prideful in kind of the sinning way, but it's also about money. *You* can't make camembert because we make camembert, and we've passed a law that says only people that are in camembert can make camembert, and until the 1970-something blind tasting of American wines the French just believed the only people on earth that could make wine were the French, that it was some kind of god-given right that they had. In some ways that makes me want to discredit the entire concept of terroir, because it's just like what the fuck – you know? It's really just born of an egotism, and I don't think I'm at all alone as an American that bristles under that.¹⁸⁴

These are the difficulties that Trubek's model faces in America – the limits of sentiment in the marketplace, and accusations of elitism. What is it, then, that makes Trubek's insight worth preserving, expanding, and modifying to fit a wider audience?

First, her assessment of those people – the entrepreneurs who combine the rationales of the market with utopian social visions – who are building the taste of place is instructive, and an excellent place to start in terms of diagnosing the rise of the local in American food culture.¹⁸⁵ Next, the flexibility of her terms. Although she hews close to the original French conception of terroir, she eschews its essentialist trappings. Following winemaker Randall Grahm, she concludes that there is no "terroir extract" formula, only local "terroir intelligence" that must be deployed according to the conditions on the ground.¹⁸⁶ Finally, her emphasis on people and community, the necessity of invention, and calls to activism in constructing the taste of place offer a doorway to expanding the model to include institutions that are more radical, economically and socially.¹⁸⁷

When Yarak dismissed the AOC out of hand, I asked whether he thought the idea was worthwhile, whether the AOC might be a system worth chasing. What if you had the

capacity to tweak the idea, and make it your own? “The AOC is sort of dated in that regard,” he replied:

I would look more towards like the creative commons, which is something that we’ve talked about many times. We get emails – a couple weeks ago a guy asked for the recipe for one of the beers, Moontower (an imperial stout) maybe, and Jeff sent it out to him, here’s our recipe for it. I think the AOC is all about control, and what we have in the 21st century is the re-mix, it’s the take it and play with it.¹⁸⁸

The creative commons license and the “mash-up” aesthetic that has become prevalent on the internet are powerful tools for synthesis, because they free producers from the strictures of intellectual property laws, and put an emphasis on creativity. Creative commons, an alternate copyright licensing system, allows producers to make their creative work, which in this case would be the recipe, available for copying and use while still retaining some limited rights. Unlike traditional copyright, it puts control in the hands of the author. The license, Marc Garcelon points out, “thus represents an attempt to roll back the intellectual property approach to copyright in order to facilitate more open access to creative works,” and is a first step towards establishing what he calls an “information commons.”¹⁸⁹ Black Star’s willingness to share recipes is not uncommon in the craft beer community, or in Austin. Recently, Jester King made their recipes available to Austin Homebrew Supply as kits that customers could purchase, and other breweries around the country have taken similar steps. The underlying attitude, however, is a radical one in terms of classic capitalism. From a market perspective, it’s hard to understand why empowering your customers to make your product at home is a good idea. But Black Star’s willingness to share recipes, paradoxically, demonstrates that they do know their market and are working to capture it. Establishing a connection with homebrewers encourages a sense of pride and attachment to the brewery, and in the end, has the potential to help business *and* build a sense of solidarity or kinship.

Utilizing synthesis in the realms of food, beer, and business, Black Star begs the question: why shouldn’t you be able to have “craft,” “artisan,” local products *and* make a more inclusive economic and social statement all at once? As the previous section demonstrates, the economic foundations of Black Star are radical in the sense that they propose a wholesale replacement of capitalism with a more democratic, self-managed

alternative. The jobs that Black Star creates are unique in the service industry, and the founders hope that at some point they will stand as a “challenge” to the market at large. I want to stress at this point that I don’t think anyone at Black Star would say the things they have done to date achieve that level of synthesis, but I do think it is safe to say that the ideas they have begun to put into action seem to be moving in that direction.

Class is still an important factor to address, however. Even food co-ops, which were founded largely to side-step the middleman and bring prices down, have begun to be seen as elitist, “foodie” institutions in some circles. In a recent discussion on the Association for the Study of Food and Society listserv, Carol Spurling addressed these concerns, saying essentially that cries of elitism are misplaced, and that they suggest muddled priorities on the part of American consumers. “I think most people who complain about cost “treat” themselves to the co-op for certain things,” she said, “but continue to buy at Costco, etc. when they can find things there that suit their standards. Often, the more people learn about why the cost differential exists, the more willing they are to pay the difference.”¹⁹⁰ The truth is that CSA shares or the local honey that Young uses in Black Star beers often cost more than “market value” would suggest that they should.

Black Star, it is important to remember, needs to compete in the restaurant and craft beer marketplaces – they aren’t out to lose money on ideological grounds. But like Yarak said, you get out what you put in with co-ops. In terms of pricing, that means that patrons of the co-op get to take advantage of the fact that Livesay and the kitchen staff are aware of what fair market value is, and see no reason to charge above it. Yarak recounted a story during our interview about a menu price adjustment meeting in which Livesay resisted increasing the price of a chicken entrée from \$11 to \$12. “You said you didn’t want to have a dollar go up on the chicken,” he said to Livesay, “because that would be gouging – how many other restaurants in Austin do you think would have said that?”¹⁹¹ The implied answer being zero. Presumably, other restaurants would not raise the price higher than the customers were willing to pay, but it seems doubtful that they would feel obligated to resist a \$1 increase on the grounds that it was unfair. Livesay’s unwillingness to “gouge” customers comes from the same place as Black Star’s decision not to take

tips. Because they are supported by the membership – “the community has already paid that bill,” Livesay said – they can be more honest about pricing.¹⁹²

But what of the limits of sentiment? Will Black Star face diminishing returns as they grow and appear to the consumer to be more like a corporate brewpub chain like Rock Bottom or BJ’s? Ultimately, it’s hard to say. As beer authority Randy Mosher has said, “it is arrogant to assume that local people will support you simply because you are local. This is a transaction – you have to deliver to people something of value ... establish a relationship. This includes not only the liquid, but the story that is wrapped around it.”¹⁹³ The co-op lists opening a second location as one of their organizational ends, but even if one location turns into one hundred, the stated emphasis on building equity and increasing economic justice in the community via membership might well act as a bulwark against the troubles that Neighborly Farms faces. Livesay and Young both acknowledged that while staying local is the best case scenario for Black Star, “you have to have a strong base” to deal with the vagaries of the market in one location. “If you don’t have that strong base,” Livesay said, “it doesn’t matter” what you do, you are destined to fail.¹⁹⁴ Yarak pointed out that co-ops, by definition, are better suited to deal with adverse conditions and cited the opening of H.E.B.’s Central Market upscale grocery store on North Lamar as an example:

I think it’s a testament to the strength of our consumer ownership that I do think that when we find ourselves on the rocks, we have a life line. We can call on people to step up, and going back to the Wheatsville example, when Central Market opened their North Lamar location two miles from Wheatsville, [the co-op] made a concerted call to the membership saying please do your primary shopping at Wheatsville. You don’t get that option if you’re not a co-op. Wheatsville would have been – if they had been cash and carry or whatever that building was beforehand, it would have been gone. Central Market would have buried them.¹⁹⁵

So while Black Star is not immune to the limits of sentiment, they have worked to mitigate its effects in productive ways by engaging the community.

All of this begs one final question: does the taste of place need to be tied to the soil at all? Is it possible to re-wire the concept to reflect the “membership as terroir” philosophy that emerged from my interview at Black Star? Would Trubek have been better off attempting to create a community of people – consumers *and* producers – around maple

syrup in Vermont? Or would loosing terroir from the soil do irrevocable damage to the integrity of the concept, and undo what Trubek points to as the productive work being done in Wisconsin? The answer is most likely somewhere in between, which leads us to consider how things like craft beer, community, and economic radicalism that have the potential to reflect taste of place mesh with things like locally made cheese that *do* reflect traditional terroir. How is the taste of place for a city like Austin formed? Hopefully this paper has demonstrated how a single institution can contribute to the larger process, but charting the entirety of the taste of place is a daunting task. Next steps would have to include charting the entire city and looking for “taste-making” institutions like Black Star – other breweries, distilleries, charcuterie producers, markets, local farms, and organizations like the Sustainable Food Center for example – doing a comprehensive series of interviews or participant observation, and investigating less formal communities like homebrewing clubs or community gardens.

Conclusion

The city of Austin continues to grow and change at a rapid pace. According to the US Census Bureau, the city's population increased from roughly 650,000 people in 2000 to over 790,000 in 2010. Annual growth rates remain at or around 3.5%, and the city's strong tech sector and reputation as the "live music capital of the world" continue to attract new residents.¹⁹⁶ This growth is undoubtedly beneficial for a business like Black Star, but it creates a number of difficulties for any attempt to map the taste of place in Austin. Although Black Star is, by definition, a product of the community, their constituency will continue to change and grow over the coming years, and many of the people who join will be new transplants to Austin. How would the project I outlined above account for what is essentially a moving target? In a discussion of craft beer and the taste of place, would it be more productive, perhaps, to look at a brewery like the one in Shiner, Texas, 80 miles to the southeast? Shiner is small, just over two thousand people, and the brewery employs more than 50 of them. The Spoetzl brewery has dominated the town's history for most of the 102 years it has been in business. Shiner Bock, the company's most popular offering, is essentially a Texas icon, and by volume, Spoetzl brewing is the 10th largest beer producer in the country.¹⁹⁷

Shiner, I believe, suffers from the same taste of place deficiencies as the maple syrup Trubek found lacking in Vermont. Shiner has very effectively "realized and fulfilled" its brand image of a homegrown, easy drinking, Texas beer. But just as with the syrup, there is no backbone to their claim of place. The making and the selling, as Trubek said, are compartmentalized from one another, which is reflective of our prevailing foodview that compartmentalizes the process from the result."¹⁹⁸ Beer, more than maple syrup, is the product of a mystical process that transforms grain into alcohol via the magic of fermentation. As I discussed earlier, the ingredients are difficult to source locally, and the water is often treated. With a beer like Shiner, very little of the actual land makes it into the bottle, so its claim to place is based primarily on nostalgic self-identification. Lone Star beer plays on these tropes as well, and has branded itself the "National Beer of

Texas.” But as I outlined, Black Star’s beer is subject to many of the same criticisms – it is produced with the same non-Texan barley, and similarly treated water – so what differentiates it from Shiner, and makes it a more apt target for a paper like this?

When Livesay noted that “people still say that Shiner *used* to be good,” Young responded that if you’re going to produce a beer for wide distribution:

Production-wise, you do have to do more fine filtering, you have to make something that is going to last over that amount of time and sit on the shelf, and it does alter the product for sure – it’s supposed to be pretty fresh, I mean we’re not talking Bud Light born on date kind of stuff, but you take a place like – I’m just thinking about New Glarus, one of the best breweries in the fucking world, [which] does not distribute outside of Wisconsin. From what I’ve heard from them it’s just like why would we, when we have so much here? I think another part of that is why dilute your brand in different markets just try to squeak out a little more profit?¹⁹⁹

When a brewery moves from local to national markets, it runs the risk of diluting the quality of their product. New Glarus, which ranked #21 on the biggest craft breweries list in 2010, is sold only within the borders of Wisconsin, and not for lack of demand.

Although the brewery used to distribute to Illinois and other Midwestern states, they ultimately decided that the trade-offs in terms of lax distribution and dilution of quality weren’t worth the trouble, and that they were better off serving their home market exclusively.²⁰⁰ Companies like Shiner that decide to go national and produce as much beer as they can sell, as I mentioned in the previous section, often begin to resemble “macro” brewers more than the craft market. “If you take a place like Austin that has a good variety” of beer and of beer consumers, Young continued, “then why not stay as local as you can?”²⁰¹

Despite the added difficulties of dealing with a rapidly changing city like Austin, Black Star is a more apt candidate for extending Trubek’s argument than Shiner because of the elements of their business that go beyond beer and extend directly into the community. The cooperative model allows Black Star to act more directly as the “pragmatic, alternative community to international capitalist mass production” that Larsen envisioned. Additionally, their strong ties to multiple aspects of the community, including local food production, allow them to begin to act as Trubek’s *bricoleurs* of terroir, helping to create a new and individualized taste of place. In the end, beer is just a

product. Adding social value to it through community-building, economic radicalism, and a commitment to the local is an important step in the direction of a more inclusive taste of place.

Notes

¹ <http://www.brewersassociation.org/pages/business-tools/craft-brewing-statistics/facts>

² McGahan, 230

³ O'Brien, 7

⁴ McGahan, 229

⁵ Larsen, 265

⁶ Brewer's Association, "Breweries Per Capita."

<http://www.brewersassociation.org/pages/business-tools/craft-brewing-statistics/breweries-per-capita>

⁷ Adam, 3

⁸ Trubek, 51

⁹ Trubek, 138

¹⁰ Trubek, 142

¹¹ Beach

¹² Livesay, from Black Star interview conducted March 7th, 2011, by author (see appendix for more information – subsequent notes will refer simply to speaker, and interview).

¹³ Yarak, Black Star interview

¹⁴ Livesay, Black Star interview

¹⁵ Yarak and Livesay, Black Star interview

¹⁶ Young, Black Star interview

¹⁷ Livesay, Black Star interview

¹⁸ Young, Black Star interview

¹⁹ Yarak, Black Star interview

²⁰ Livesay, Black Star interview

²¹ Black Star Co-op Bylaws (available at: <http://test.blackstar.coop/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/Bylaws-v1.4.pdf>)

²² Black Star Co-op Bylaws

²³ Livesay, Black Star interview

²⁴ Yarak and Livesay, Black Star interview

²⁵ Trubek, 141

²⁶ Esteva and Prakash, 10-11

²⁷ Trubek, 142

²⁸ Trubek, 151

²⁹ Black Star Co-op Bylaws

³⁰ Hahnel (2002), 282

³¹ O'Brien, 104

³² Larsen, 265

³³ Putnam, 25

³⁴ Larsen, 266-67

³⁵ Larsen, 268

- ³⁶ Larsen, 285
- ³⁷ Calhoun, 1
- ³⁸ Habermas, 398
- ³⁹ Calhoun, 5
- ⁴⁰ Calhoun, 1 and Larsen, 267
- ⁴¹ Frasier, 66
- ⁴² Young, Black Star interview
- ⁴³ Yarak, Black Star interview
- ⁴⁴ Jackson, in Papazian, xvii
- ⁴⁵ Mares, 102
- ⁴⁶ O'Brien, 103
- ⁴⁷ Rosenzweig, 58-59
- ⁴⁸ Wilson, 3-4
- ⁴⁹ Anderson, 6-7
- ⁵⁰ Livesay, Black Star interview
- ⁵¹ Appadurai, 5
- ⁵² Appadurai, 7-8
- ⁵³ Hobsbawm, 1
- ⁵⁴ Hobsbawm, 2
- ⁵⁵ Hobsbawm, 9
- ⁵⁶ Larsen, 275
- ⁵⁷ Paxson (2010), 39
- ⁵⁸ Livesay, Black Star interview
- ⁵⁹ It is true that ordering a Pilsner in the Czech Republic or an IPA in England affords the drinker an opportunity to directly access a locally rooted tradition. A person ordering an IPA produced in Texas, however, is going to be handed a beer that not only differs greatly from the original British product, but also plays on an idealized, un-rooted, globalized tradition. Some in the American craft brewing community, like Brooklyn Brewery's Garrett Oliver, have advocated a name change for IPAs and "double" or "imperial" IPAs especially. He suggests "San Diego Pale Ale," largely in reference to Stone Brewing, who pioneered the style. Like in the debate that surrounds the newly minted "Black IPA" or "Cascadian Dark Ale," though, naming conventions have proven difficult to shake. The weight of tradition that the name IPA lends, I would argue, is a main reason why calls for a name change have been largely ignored.
- ⁶⁰ Paxson (2006), 211
- ⁶¹ Paxson (2006), 210
- ⁶² Kuh, 144
- ⁶³ Nesto, 131
- ⁶⁴ Druckman, 14-16
- ⁶⁵ Trubek, 19
- ⁶⁶ Trubek, 21-22
- ⁶⁷ <http://www.rogue.com/beers/dirtoir-black-lager.php>
- ⁶⁸ <http://www.sierranevada.com/beers/estate.html>

- ⁶⁹ Schnars, 48
- ⁷⁰ Young, Black Star interview
- ⁷¹ Yarak, Black Star interview
- ⁷² Young, Black Star interview
- ⁷³ Livesay, Black Star interview
- ⁷⁴ Trubek, 12
- ⁷⁵ Belasco (1989), 17
- ⁷⁶ Trubek, 151
- ⁷⁷ Trubek, 121-122
- ⁷⁸ Trubek, 138
- ⁷⁹ Trubek, 142
- ⁸⁰ Trubek, 144
- ⁸¹ Trubek, 163
- ⁸² Trubek, 167
- ⁸³ Livesay, Black Star interview
- ⁸⁴ Yarak, Black Star interview
- ⁸⁵ Trubek, 209
- ⁸⁶ Livesay, Black Star interview
- ⁸⁷ Bell and Valentine, 15
- ⁸⁸ Sack, 188
- ⁸⁹ Sack, 190
- ⁹⁰ Bell and Valentine, 4
- ⁹¹ Heath and Meneley, 593
- ⁹² Allen and Hinrichs, 255-260
- ⁹³ Roseberry, 138
- ⁹⁴ Stanford, 183
- ⁹⁵ Stanford, 187
- ⁹⁶ Sharp, Imerman, and Peters
- ⁹⁷ Cone and Kakaliouras, 31
- ⁹⁸ Yarak, Black Star interview
- ⁹⁹ Yarak, Black Star interview
- ¹⁰⁰ Livesay, Black Star interview
- ¹⁰¹ Yarak, Black Star interview
- ¹⁰² Yarak, Black Star interview
- ¹⁰³ Stanford, 186-187
- ¹⁰⁴ Stanford, 185
- ¹⁰⁵ Yarak, Black Star interview
- ¹⁰⁶ Livesay, Black Star interview
- ¹⁰⁷ Yarak, Black Star interview
- ¹⁰⁸ Livesay, Black Star interview
- ¹⁰⁹ Livesay, Black Star interview
- ¹¹⁰ Livesay, Black Star interview
- ¹¹¹ Young, Black Star interview

¹¹² Yarak, Black Star interview
¹¹³ Campbell, 24-25
¹¹⁴ Campbell, 28
¹¹⁵ Schnars, 48
¹¹⁶ Paxson (2010), 37
¹¹⁷ Paxson (2006), 205
¹¹⁸ Paxson (2010), 39
¹¹⁹ Paxson (2010), 42
¹²⁰ Livesay, Black Star interview
¹²¹ McWilliams, 548, Paxson (2010), 41
¹²² Paxson (2006), 41
¹²³ Lewis, 30-32
¹²⁴ Hornsey, 331
¹²⁵ Bennett, 7
¹²⁶ McWilliams, 553-554
¹²⁷ Ogle, 1
¹²⁸ Maines, 3
¹²⁹ Gelber, 68-69
¹³⁰ Larsen, 282
¹³¹ Mares, 123-124
¹³² O'Brien, 66-67
¹³³ Livesay, Black Star interview
¹³⁴ Anderson, 5 and 183
¹³⁵ Carroll and Swaminathan, 718
¹³⁶ Carroll and Swaminathan, 719-720
¹³⁷ Carroll and Swaminathan, 731
¹³⁸ Rao, 5-7
¹³⁹ Rao, 11-12
¹⁴⁰ Rao, 51-53
¹⁴¹ Yarak, Black Star interview
¹⁴² Livesay, Black Star interview
¹⁴³ Yarak, Black Star interview
¹⁴⁴ Furlough and Strikwerda, 9
¹⁴⁵ Furlough and Strikwerda, 8-9
¹⁴⁶ Yarak, Black Star interview
¹⁴⁷ Furlough and Strikwerda, 10-11
¹⁴⁸ Yao, in Furlough and Strikwerda, 18
¹⁴⁹ Black Star utilizes the Universal Living Wage Campaign formula to determine the living wage in Austin
¹⁵⁰ Fairbairn, 9
¹⁵¹ Furlough and Strikwerda, 27
¹⁵² International Co-operative Alliance "Statement on Co-operative Principles."
<http://www.ica.coop/coop/principles.html>

- ¹⁵³ Black Star Co-op Bylaws
¹⁵⁴ Yarak, Black Star interview
¹⁵⁵ US Federation of Worker Cooperatives, “About Worker Cooperatives.”
<http://www.usworker.coop/aboutworkercoops>
¹⁵⁶ Leikin, 94
¹⁵⁷ Yarak, Black Star interview
¹⁵⁸ Livesay, Black Star interview
¹⁵⁹ Livesay, Black Star interview
¹⁶⁰ Yarak, Black Star interview
¹⁶¹ Livesay, Black Star interview
¹⁶² Yarak, Black Star interview
¹⁶³ Spannos, 15
¹⁶⁴ Spannos, 19
¹⁶⁵ Albert (2003), 2
¹⁶⁶ Hahnel (2002), 280
¹⁶⁷ Hahnel (2002), 281-82
¹⁶⁸ Black Star Co-op Bylaws
¹⁶⁹ Albert (2003), 241
¹⁷⁰ Albert (2003), 69
¹⁷¹ DeLind, 11
¹⁷² Hahnel (2005), 254
¹⁷³ Hahnel (2005), 341
¹⁷⁴ Curl, 352
¹⁷⁵ Yarak, Black Star interview
¹⁷⁶ Livesay, Black Star interview
¹⁷⁷ Trubek, 16-17
¹⁷⁸ Trubek, 245
¹⁷⁹ Trubek, 222
¹⁸⁰ Trubek, 237
¹⁸¹ Stanford, 195
¹⁸² Paxson (2006), 214-215
¹⁸³ Schnars, 48
¹⁸⁴ Yarak, Black Star interview
¹⁸⁵ Trubek, 168
¹⁸⁶ Trubek, 250
¹⁸⁷ Trubek, 150
¹⁸⁸ Yarak, Black Star interview
¹⁸⁹ Garcelon, 1310
¹⁹⁰ Spurling
¹⁹¹ Yarak, Black Star interview
¹⁹² Livesay, Black Star interview
¹⁹³ Mosher in Skilnik, 333
¹⁹⁴ Livesay, Black Star interview

¹⁹⁵ Yarak, Black Star interview

¹⁹⁶ http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/demographics/downloads/zip_forecast_update_2020c.pdf

¹⁹⁷ <http://www.brewersassociation.org/pages/media/press-releases/show?title=brewers-association-releases-2010-top-50-breweries-lists>

¹⁹⁸ Trubek, 222

¹⁹⁹ Young, Black Star interview

²⁰⁰ Day

²⁰¹ Young, Black Star interview

Appendix: Note on Interviewing

All the quotes from Steven Yarak, Jeff Young, and Johnny Livesay that appear in this paper are excerpted from an interview I conducted with them on-site at the Black Star Co-op on March 7th, 2011. I then transcribed the interview, which was recorded as audio. I have donated the transcript to Foodways Texas and it is available to view by request. Visit <http://foodwaystexas.com/contact-us/> for contact information. My methodology was very simple – I attempted to ask questions that were as open-ended as possible, although I did take some time to explain Trubek’s argument to them in order to get their reactions to it. My questions broke down, roughly, into four sections: the history of the organization; beer-related questions; locality-related questions, including a lengthy discussion about community and terroir; and co-op and business-related questions.

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