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Feasting on Four Wheels

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FEASTING ON FOUR WHEELS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of Arts and Humanities
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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ABSTRACT

The documentary film *Feasting On Four Wheels* explores the new wave of “gourmet” food trucks on the streets of Denver, Colorado. What started as a bigger movement across the country made its way to the Mile High city in 2010 and snowballed to the food-loving community portrayed during the summer of 2011. Interviews with food truck owners, a food truck fabricator and a blogger for DenverStreetFood.com, explore the nature of the movement and how its existence creates a feel of community and culture within the city. The evolution of street food history and the influence of new technology are also discussed in relation to the current day movement.
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Before mobile kitchens, there was the ice cream truck. Adults who grew up in the cities, suburbs, small towns and rural areas will always associate the simple joy of the ice cream truck with mobile food. The vivid memories of that familiar tinkling tune transports us back to the playgrounds of our childhoods on a hot summer afternoon. This was my first perception of a food truck. I remember hearing that familiar melody signaling the arrival of the pink baseball glove ice cream pop after playing tag on the jungle gym all day.

For decades, the streets of America have been filled with vendors serving simple foods such as hot dogs and tacos to everyone from businessmen running out of their offices for a quick bite, to construction workers surrounding a mobile vendor parked at their building site. These street carts and trucks focused on creating ‘fast’ food for the workingman who did not have time to sit and dine. These vendors were not known for their creativity, originality or cleanliness. Convenience and efficiency, rather than aesthetic appeal, were the main factors when choosing these trucks.

Whether drawn by the convenience of a hot dog vendor or the feeling of delight at the approach of an ice cream truck, thousands of individuals today are triggered by the nostalgia they once felt for mobile food when they see a modern-day truck on the street. The masses are flocking to the new age gourmet food trucks flooding streets across the nation that barely resemble the simplicity of their predecessors.
In the past two years, the gourmet food truck movement has invaded the streets of Denver, Colorado. Starting with simple concepts such as Sully’s Slice Truck (a mobile pizza oven), The Biscuit Bus (selling biscuits and gravy throughout the city) and The Cupcake Truck (bringing tasty confections to a neighborhood near you), the city now boasts over forty trucks, complete with state-of-the-art kitchens, serving original creations throughout the metro area.

*Feasting on Four Wheels* showcases the chefs, fabricators and fanatics behind the food as I follow four different food truck vendors throughout the summer season documenting their successes as well as the obstacles they face along the way.

In this thesis proposal, I will take you on a journey starting with my personal interest in food and the subject of food trucks and ending with why I believe there is an audience for this film. In the first section, *My Passion*, I will discuss my interest and intention in pursuing this project. The cultural aspect of food is an important part of this film so I will next include a section describing the reciprocal relationship between culture and food, one that has strengthened over the past few decades. I will define the term “culture” and discuss its presence in the Denver food scene in the *Culture and Food* section. Next, I will describe the history of food trucks, and how they have evolved in the past one hundred and fifty years. I will then take the reader through a journey of how I met each individual, a description of their background and what role each will play in my film. From here I will move into my review of the literature. Although I was unable to find any films on the subject of food trucks (as they are such a new phenomenon), there are a number of reality television shows and Internet programs featuring the topic. Throughout the review I will highlight the few characteristics of these shows that I would
like to emulate in my own film, but more importantly I will describe how my film will
differ from these ‘reality’ shows. After discussing the current literature, I will introduce
different documentary methodologies, first focusing on three of Bill Nichols’ “modes” of
documentary and then moving on to structure and methodologies of other
documentarians in addition to my aesthetic choices. I will then describe my intended
audience (“foodies”) and explain what I would like to do with the film once it is
complete. Finally, I will display two different tables—the first outlining my timeline for
completing this project and the second describing the budget for this film.
MY PASSION: Why I Am Pursuing This Topic.

Food has been an important part of my life for as long as I can remember. As a child, my friends and I created cooking shows and made our parents film us as star chefs. When traveling with family and friends, I was introduced to new spices and flavors ingrained in the cuisine of ethnic cultures. Now, planning meals and making restaurant reservations are how I prepare for a visit from guests. Recently I started throwing dinner parties for close friends at my apartment, furthering my appreciation for good food. But in reality, enjoying food is only secondary to the over-all experience—spending valuable time with family and friends.

During the spring of 2010, I experienced my first food truck, the Denver Cupcake Truck, while it was parked on the University of Denver campus. The idea was simple: seven cupcake flavors and a mystery cupcake each day, but the quality product coupled by a friendly chat with the truck owner left an impact. As the seasons started to change, I noticed that the number of food trucks on the road had multiplied. Although the food is amazing, the novelty and trendiness of these trucks were a large part of the draw for me when it came to Denver street food. Seeking out food trucks, waiting in line and enjoying a quick bite are the perfect shareable experiences with friends. Today, instead of visiting the local ice cream shop my friends and I research the latest location of our favorite ice cream sandwich vending truck, Cream City Treats. The mystery of where the food truck
will be adds fun and adventure to the shared experience. Social media play an important role in locating Denver’s food trucks and will be further discussed in the ‘Food Trucks: A Brief History’ section.

As I invest myself deeper into this project, I believe that my passion for food (and food trucks in particular) continues to grow. Meeting myriad individuals associated with this movement has made me feel like I, too, am a part of this amazing community. I no longer attend food truck events solely for the food, although I must admit the food comes in a very close second. I love visiting the trucks and interacting with the people behind the window. I love running into different subjects from my film at each of these events. Throughout this project I have started to become a member of this food-loving community as well. Good food is a universal, cultural and social phenomenon that binds us to our surroundings. When enjoying a meal, I find that sharing food becomes an experience that enables me to share and connect with others. It’s the experience of sharing a meal that we subconsciously seek, perhaps even more than the food itself. The act of purchasing food from a food truck is a major factor in why people keep coming back—for me the entire experience includes the chefs on the other side of the window, the friends I make in line and the shared celebration of food and life that is created within this unique environment. After reflecting on these experiences, I decided to create a thesis project that would combine my love of food, socialization and my newfound passion for the mobile kitchens that are becoming part of this young city.
CULTURE AND FOOD: Society and Eating.

The word “culture” has a plethora of connotations in the modern English language. Culture can be discussed within the context of heredity, ethnicity or nationality. A culture may be formed by a group of people with similar interests. It can also grow organically through a shared location or experience. When consulting the Merriam Webster dictionary, culture as described in the context I would like to discuss is not defined until the fourth sub-definition of the fifth listed meaning. This definition is stated as follows: “the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity or societal characteristic.”¹ This definition appears straightforward but what does it have to do with food? In this section I will describe why a relationship between people and food is important. I will then explain how food can be associated with this definition of culture and end the section emphasizing how food itself can create a culture. These explanations of food, people and culture will demonstrate the possibility that the addition of food trucks in the city of Denver creates a culture and a unique community within the young city.

How Food Makes People Feel

In the three-part documentary, *The Meaning of Food*, host Marcus Samuelsson suggests that food creates one of the first interactions we have in life. He states, “The first meaningful exchange we have is based on the need to eat. It’s as complex as anything we say with words.” Without being able to recognize what it means to eat or be hungry, we have the instinctual reaction to our bodies to cry out and ask for nourishment. Though food cravings initially occur due to natural instincts, its role steadily grows in our lives as we become older. Palates may change as we age, but the tastes and flavors experienced during our early years have a way of shaping one’s idea of food for years to come. Donna Gabaccia explains,

> Psychologists tell us that food and language are the cultural traits humans learn first, and the ones that they change with the greatest reluctance. Humans cannot easily lose their accents when they learn new languages after the age of about twelve; similarly the food they ate as children forever defines familiarity and comfort.

These comfort foods, tied to our upbringing, region, religion, ethnicity and taste can bring back feelings of childhood summers or afterschool snacks. Similar to the way individuals react to music these foods transport us back years, even decades, to the moments during which they were consumed.

Food no longer simply quells a growling stomach—in many cases it can transport individuals to a different time or space bringing up past memories and experiences and allowing us to relive our greatest moments. Leslie Brenner explains in her book

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American Appetite that food can actually help individuals express emotions. In addition to feeding another, “cooking can also be an act of love…everyone knows the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. And to someone who loves to cook, doing so for one’s friends may feel like an expression of love.” Although food is much better when it tastes good, the simple act of cooking for someone can be just as appreciated and sometimes more personal and heartfelt than something received.

Cooking and baking can act as a form of therapy. Baking cakes and pies is something that many take on when stressed or in need of an escape. The calm and serenity acquired after a day in the kitchen is invaluable and the treats at the end of the day are delightful as well. As Anna Meigs explains, food can act as a cultural construction forming conceptions of the self. She also believes that food can go beyond taste, “Food as object and eating as act resonate with attitudes and emotions related to the individual’s understandings and feelings about self and other and the relationship between.” In addition to de-stressing, food also plays a large role in socializing. A dinner out with friends or an intimate dinner with a crush or loved one can bring forth similar feel-good feelings. Dining with a contemporary can strengthen a bond between two people, or give a group of friends an excuse to finally spend time together. Meigs adds, “Much anthropological labor has been invested in showing how food exchanges develop and express bonds of solidarity and alliance, how exchanges of food are parallel to

exchanges of sociality, and how commensality corresponds to social community.”⁶ In many cases, it is the importance of human interaction that exceeds the importance of the actual food consumed. Brenner believes that food’s association with fashion supports this idea, “For food to be fashion means that human interaction is a more important part of the equation than one’s appreciation and enjoyment of the food.”⁷ And this interaction associates food with that true feeling of community, creating a new, memorable, shareable experience at each meal.

*How Food Can Be Associated with Culture*

When food is discussed in the context of culture, it is often described as from a specific country, nation or ethnicity. Mexican food, Chinese food, Thai food, Italian food—they are all known due to their regions and how they represent a specific ‘culture.’ In the PBS three part series *The Meaning of Food*, an African man eats from a food truck serving cuisine from a specific region of Africa. He is able to appreciate and experience the culture in which he grew up while living in the United States simply by enjoying this food. After taking a large bite of food he describes as oilier and spicier than American cuisine, he adds, “That’s how we keep in touch with home, through the mouth.”⁸ Marcus Samuelsson, host of the three part series, explains that “Food is a way people can take a little bit of home with them wherever they go,”⁹ because the nostalgia of these foods makes one feel that they are in their native land, sitting at their grandmother’s table even though they are standing on a street corner in Chicago.

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⁶ Meigs, Anna. Page 103.
⁸ “Food and Life.” *The Meaning of Food.*
⁹ “Food and Life.” *The Meaning of Food.*
After a visit home, many individuals travel with candies and produce native to their region. I am personally guilty of this. The past few times I visited the east coast of the United States I returned with New Jersey bagels and Macintosh apples, which are hard to find where I live in Colorado. Having these items that are impossible to find in Denver makes Sunday mornings a special occasion. Luckily I am only transporting bagels and apples across the country and not from another nation where crossing borders with agriculture can become an issue. At the JFK International Airport, piles upon piles of food are confiscated each day due to agricultural restrictions. The TSA workers interviewed in *The Meaning of Food* point out fruits and vegetables native to countries in Africa, Asia and Europe. They believe that the travelers “want to have a connection…each time they bring food from there and eat it at home, they have that connection.”

I am still amazed that Abuelo, my grandfather, was able to bring fresh sugarcane from Puerto Rico to Massachusetts when I was a child. Though this was probably not within current TSA regulations, tasting the sweet sugarcane straight from the plant was one way that I was able to connect with his Puerto Rican heritage.

Linking food with culture is not a novel idea. Grossinger’s, a bed and breakfast in New York’s Catskills kept many traditions native to the Jewish religion and culture alive, incorporating a kosher menu and matchmaking traditions. As a cultural establishment, “Grossinger’s provided for community sociability on a grand scale, refreshing the connections of food with culture.” Establishments within New York City were trying to emulate this connection as well: “saloons, restaurants, and groceries served the same

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10 “Food and Life.” *The Meaning of Food.*
function of cultural preservation.”

These businesses, all food-centric, sold ingredients and specialties particular to the Jewish culture in an effort to not only make homeland staples available to immigrants, but also to help future generations to understand the importance food has played in their culture for centuries.

In addition to preserving one’s heritage through food, unique dishes are often shared in an effort to teach others about the history and meaning of one’s culture. The web site About.com is a forum for Internet users to share information on everything from recipes to cleaning solutions. One article suggests, “For many of us, our first introduction to a new culture came through sampling its cuisine.” The article continues to urge parents to cook food from other cultures (Chinese in this case) because “helping children prepare an ethnic recipe is a great way to introduce them to the customs and traditions of another country.”

Cooking and eating food from other countries and cultures helps us to learn about ancient cuisines and traditions, but can newer foods or delivery methods create the base for developing a new culture?

How Food Creates a Culture

Restaurants, chili cook-offs, dinner parties… all of these were created based on the concept of gathering with friends and socializing over good food. Nate and Ezra of the Denver food truck Stick It To Me state on their website “cooking is all about sharing and giving back to others—haven’t you noticed that food tastes better when you’re

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12 Ibid. Page 83.
14 Parkinson, Rhonda.
making it for family and friends?”

It is this gathering of close friends and family that creates an eating culture where the experience is even greater than the food shared and consumed. This ancient notion is mentioned in *The Meaning of Food*: “the best part of a good dinner is not what you eat, but with whom you eat.”

This shared dining experience is a major ingredient in the recipe for how sharing a meal can create a culture.

One example of a culture created by food is the popularity of dining out at a restaurant. This trend commenced with the first restaurant opening in Paris during the 1760s.

Though patrons traveling to an inn or stopping by a tavern had been able to acquire food outside of the home before this development, they were encouraged to eat what was available and placed in front of them. Glassner explains restaurants differed from the traditional establishments in a substantial way:

> At restaurants, local people could order from written menus, dine anonymously, and eat what and when they wanted—differences that made a world of difference. Suddenly many people, not just the aristocracy, were able to become connoisseurs of food.

The food presented at these restaurants was often different than what was served traditionally in the home. Even today, diners head to a restaurant to try something unique, something they do not usually eat at home: “Part of the excitement of going out to a restaurant is the opportunity to sample dishes that are hard to replicate at home.”

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16 “Food and Life.” *The Meaning of Food*.
Almanac and other accounts from the early decades of the nineteenth century describe a Parisian culture in which restaurants had become important social institutions, and eating was viewed as an artistic passion rather than mere biological necessity. Restaurateurs and chefs “were the equivalent of theater entrepreneurs and playwrights.” The Parisian culture grew around this concept and the city today is still known for its novel French creations and fine dining.

While food can come to represent characteristics of a country or region, food can create a culture, or subculture as well. In present day society, there is a group of people who self-identify as “foodies.” According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a foodie can be defined as “a person having an avid interest in the latest food fads.” This group is made up of individuals, who love to try new foods, discuss food, photograph food and have played a huge role in the evolution of the food truck scene.

One high profile foodie I happen to follow via blog is Ruth Tobias. Tobias regularly updates her blog analyzing each dish she orders at restaurants throughout the Denver metro area. This food writer is not known simply for writing on her blog; her portfolio extends to publications such as Saveur, Zagat, Gastronomica, and Time Out just to mention a few of her national credits. Tobias also helped to curate a film exhibit at the Denver Starz Film Center focusing on the subject of food. Before the showing of the

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first film in the line up, *El Bulli: Cooking In Progress*, the host of the event (a filmmaker who also happens to be Tobias’ husband) polled the audience as to how many self-identified as a “foodie.” The entire audience, save for a few individuals here and there, raised their hands.

A simple Google search reveals blogs (the modern on-line portal where everyone becomes an author) specifically catering to being a “foodie” in Denver, such as denverfoodies.wordpress.com and foodiefamily.org in addition to Twitter names and Facebook pages dedicated to the Denver Foodie. While most lists do not include Denver as one of the top ten foodie cities, Colorado’s capital is beginning to get noticed as more than a home for Rocky Mountain oysters: “While far from being the world’s culinary zenith, the Mile High City sits at the base of the Rocky Mountains boasting dining excellence far eclipsing beginnings as a gold mining camp and cowtown.” The emergence of Denver as a foodie city has only enhanced the food truck population. Foodies are the early adaptors when it comes to new foods and were the first people to hop onto the new wave of food trucks. Their interest in the scene helped food trucks to gain popularity and was the catalyst in creating this unique culture formed around food truck eating. The experimentation of different foods in this new venue adds fuel to the fire of this unique community of food lovers.

Along with the evolution of restaurants regarding both what they serve and to whom, people from all walks of life are able to try new and interesting foods. You don’t have to be a member of the “foodie” culture to appreciate good dishes. Foodies and non-

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foodies alike seek out new foods to whet their palates: “The good news about our food-obsessed age is the quality and variety of foods that have become available and the delight many Americans take in exploring new tastes.” Food trucks further this idea by making new and interesting food available to the masses. The convenience in timing, location and pricing make this not only fun but accessible as well. Leslie Brenner states, “When it comes to food, we’re quick to embrace anything that’s new and different, even if it’s a mishmash. Americans love novelty; we love upheaval and change.” Denver residents now have the opportunity to explore food trucks and these mobile vendors are quickly moving from a fad to a city staple. The camaraderie gained by a quick conversation while waiting in line to order, or the discussion that follows trying a banh-mi Vietnamese sandwich or one of Stick It To Me’s fried mashed potato balls creates a forum in which strangers are able to bond for a few minutes at a time. Scheduled weekly and monthly food truck gatherings quickly draw talkative crowds and repeat customers, but does this create a community? Consciously seeking out food trucks, bringing friends and family to dine from a truck and bonding over new foods demonstrates “food means so much more than simple nourishment. It is home. It is love. It is community.” The shared values and social practices created by visiting food trucks create the necessary framework for building a culture and a new community. During the process of creating this film, I will explore the unique culture formed in the city of Denver by the emergence of mobile food vendors and the themes resulting from the movement.

25 Glassner, Barry. Page X.
27 “Food and Life.” The Meaning of Food.
FOOD TRUCKS: A Brief History.

It is difficult to discuss modern, American gourmet food trucks without understanding the concept of street food. Food has been sold, pedaled and distributed on the streets for multiple generations. Many European and Asian regions are known for their street food: “Unpretentious and casual, served in a banana leaf, newspaper, or on a stick, the food captures the real essence of the heritage and philosophy of a place.”

These street foods, often crafted out of locally sourced produce came to represent a town and its culture before the wide spread of ‘cultural’ cuisine. This street food has gained popularity in recent years with many food truck owners citing influences from street stalls in Thailand and India. World-renowned chef Marcus Samuelsson even opened a restaurant in Stockholm called Street Food, which is dedicated to reproducing the cuisine after which it was named. The natural evolution of this street food was to add wheels to the mix and allow chefs and food peddlers to reach greater distances.

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Though food trucks are thought of as a modern-day invention, the first American truck popped up in 1866 thanks to one of “the most prosperous cattlemen in the American West,” Charles Goodnight.\textsuperscript{30} As a participant in ‘making the gather,’ which was a “near state-wide round-up of cattle that had roamed free during the [Civil] war,”\textsuperscript{31} Goodnight realized that there was a need to make the process of bringing food to the cattlemen much easier. As a result, Goodnight created what can now be thought of as the ‘original’ food truck. In the way that many food truck entrepreneurs re-work food delivery trucks today, Goodnight “outfitted an old Army wagon with kitchen shelves and drawers stocked with easy-to-prepare items like salted meats, beans, etc.; along with a water barrel, coffee grinder and a sling for kindling wood.”\textsuperscript{32} This precursor to the food truck was able to travel all over in support of the cowboys:

It went with the men and their herds, even on the epic treks of the trail drives to northern markets. Of roads there were few or none. The chuck wagon moved from day to day over every kind of terrain across which a cowboy could ride a horse or drive a steer.\textsuperscript{33}

Similar to today, “in this modified prairie schooner the cook was a monarch,”\textsuperscript{34} where the chef on board was able to create anything from the produce and supplies available to him.

As the years passed, the cowboys turned into consumers who were able to pick and choose what they ordered and from which truck.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. Page 360.
Food trucks underwent numerous transformations throughout the twentieth century. The catalysts behind these changes included both the economy and the needs of the consumer. During the 1910s big cities such as New York and Washington D.C. mimicked the idea of the “chuck wagon” and began sending food trolleys around the streets of the city serving meals to those they passed.\(^{35}\) Popcorn, candy and other treats traditionally pedaled on city streets soon sprouted wheels as well. The Roman Candy Company located in New Orleans, Louisiana still uses the same horse-drawn carriage built in 1915,\(^{36,37}\) and at seventy-five cents a piece, the family-run cart still sells the same hand-pulled taffy that it did almost one hundred years ago.\(^{38}\)

One of the most well-known food trucks today is the ice cream truck. This truck was created in the 1920s after Harry Burt, a confectioner from Pennsylvania, started selling his ice cream bars on a stick.\(^{39}\) By 1950, after distributing ice cream from pushcarts, he developed the “white trucks equipped with bells (the first bells came from his son’s bobsled)”\(^{40}\) known as the Good Humor Truck.

Around this time military canteens began to pop-up across the United States delivering meals to both soldiers stationed around the country, as well as their families.


\(^{38}\) Ibid.


\(^{40}\) Ibid.
back home.\textsuperscript{41} \textsuperscript{42} These canteens, travelling both on wheels and by railroad made a large impact during the 1940s: “Between March 1942 and April 1946, almost 4,000 volunteers worked around the clock to serve 1.3 million men and women with sandwiches, cookies, fruit, and coffee during the trains’ five-minute watering stops.”\textsuperscript{43} Like food trucks today, time was of the essence and food had to be prepared and delivered to the ‘customer’ in a timely manner.

Twenty years later, construction workers across the United States were introduced to a quick and easy alternative to packing the same cold sandwich for lunch every day. The 1970s was when the first ‘hot’ trucks launched and quick, hot tacos became a lunchtime staple.\textsuperscript{44} These trucks were much more of a convenience than a fad. In fact, between 1970 and 2008, hot food trucks proliferated in major cities across the country—9,000 trucks were recorded in Los Angeles, California alone!\textsuperscript{45} These trucks, however prevalent, were not the fancily wrapped, gourmet trucks that are becoming well known today. Though the food was hot and quick, these ‘roach-coaches’ were not the cleanest, most sanitary options to quell a growling belly. Many everyday citizens avoided the roach coaches and chose to visit cleaner venues like the local sandwich or coffee shop.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}
With a stigma of not being sanitary, taco trucks remained under the radar until 2008 when the recession hit. This economic downfall acted as the catalyst for the current food truck movement. During this time, numerous talented individuals in the culinary world were laid off from their prestigious restaurant jobs. At the same time, many taco trucks went out of business and there was a surplus of inexpensive taco trucks for sale all across the nation. Many culinary entrepreneurs jumped at the opportunity to purchase these trucks and with considerably low overhead costs compared to those of starting a brick and mortar restaurant, these taco trucks were transformed into the gourmet kitchens they are today.46

Los Angeles is regarded as the birthplace of the modern gourmet food truck. In November, 2008, the Kogi BBQ truck, a novel culinary idea that combined Korean flavors with tacos, rolled onto the streets of LA and became the main model for the new wave of food trucks. In her book Food Trucks: Dispatches and Recipes From the Best Kitchens on Wheels, Heather Shouse notes “the L.A.-based Korean taco truck [Kogi] was repeatedly cited as a source of inspiration by food truck owners I spoke to during my travels.”47 What once seemed like a fad soon became an inspiring business model for chefs all over the nation:

Favoring quirk over pomp, talented cooks and critically acclaimed chefs [were] ditching the brick-and-mortar standard for kitchens on wheels, churning out incredible food for a new breed of diners more interested in flavor than fuss.48

46 Ibid.
48 Ibid. Page 1-2.
Today, hundreds of food trucks are hitting the streets in major cities nationwide. Even restaurant chains such as Subway, Taco Bell and Tasty-D-Lite are entering the realm of mobile dining. Major publications are also beginning to cover and feature gourmet food trucks. In fact, Denver’s food trucks were listed as one of the Westword’s top reasons to live in the Mile High city. Shouse explains that

the interest in food trucks has become so widespread that in September of 2010 Business.gov, the U.S. government’s official website for small businesses, added a page titled “Tips for Starting Your Own Street Food Business with links to state departments of health, zoning laws and business permits. This novel approach to mobile vending is not just beneficial to chefs and foodies but to the cities where these trucks help boost both the economy and widen its view of fast(er) food.

During his presentation on the Food Truck Movement at the WestEX Trade Show in Denver, CO, Ray Villamens explained another reason for the success of the new gourmet trucks is the change in current consumer demographics and psychographics. Today’s generation has changing attitudes toward food and food service. This culture of modern, mobile food fits both the fast-paced and the experimentally inclined life-style of foodies. The hype surrounding food trucks, as well as social media marketing, makes these trucks very accessible to tech-savvy eaters of today.

49 Villamen, Ray.
51 Shouse, Page 2.
52 Villamen, Ray.
Social media has played a large role in spreading awareness and gaining food truck clientele. The Denver Cupcake Truck currently has almost 2,000 followers on Twitter and just over 11,000 followers on Facebook. Shelly Drumm of DenverStreetFood.com believes that social media helped to spark the food truck movement. She explained to me:

Social media allowed for social proximity in an online space, which gave patrons a constant reminder about the trucks and also gave food trucks regular exposure to their customers. Patrons soon recognized these trucks that they saw online, on the street.\(^\text{53}\)

Websites such as Facebook.com and Twitter.com offered free opportunities for trucks to market themselves, describe their food philosophy and advertise their location on the streets of Los Angeles, Seattle, New York City and Denver, all for free. Given that many of these trucks cater to niche markets, hungry foodies can head to the internet to locate a truck that fits their current craving, whether they are hungering for a bratwurst, can’t stop thinking about fried mashed potato balls or their sweet tooth is begging for a cupcake.

Hudson Riehle, the senior vice-president of research for the National Restaurant Association stated that the mobile food truck movement is “definitely not a fad” but instead, “the evol[ution] of the restaurant industry.”\(^\text{54}\) For this reason, I am interested in discovering what will cause this movement to have staying power. The influx of food trucks in Denver will not only impact the current culture and dining scene but will also help local chefs to grow, and establish a local fan base. Shouse puts it well when she states “for the young American cooks striving to make a name for themselves, the


\(^{54}\) Villamen, Ray.
common thread is the same: with passion, commitment, and hard work, anyone can scrape out a living serving delicious food—no restaurant needed.”

Although American food trucks appear to have made a natural evolution, there were many obstacles along the way. One huge bump in the road has been the ability to adequately regulate street food as it quickly changes form from stall to cart to truck: “Since mobile food vending does not fit into the usual property-based business model, law-makers have always had trouble categorizing them and creating appropriate laws.”

In the 1930s due to health and safety issues, food carts were swept off of the streets and ushered into indoor marketplaces. Although this law did not last very long, similar laws have been attempted over the years. For example, related issues are appearing today with the introduction of the gourmet food trucks. Trucks in Chicago can sell food but it must be precooked. In other words, food trucks in the Windy City are not permitted to actually prepare and cook their food within the truck. Boulder, Colorado has had a tough year dealing with food truck regulations. New restrictions passed at the end of April stated “trucks must stay at least 100 feet away from restaurants, 150 feet away from residential areas and 200 feet away from other food trucks.”

The regulation also imposes a 9 PM curfew on the trucks prohibiting them from partaking in one of the most promising moneymaking audiences: the college bar crowd. Chef Hosea Rosenberg of the truck

55 Shouse, Page 3.
StrEat Chefs says the “new regulations are too restrictive and coming too late,” and these regulations became the catalyst for numerous trucks closing during the summer of 2011. In Denver, the current laws have been in place since 1994—a law originally focused on hot dog carts, kiosks and other smaller vendors and created well before the emergence of American gourmet food trucks in 2008. Because of this law, food trucks are not allowed in the core Central Business District, which also happens to be Denver’s highest concentration of pedestrian traffic, the primary audience for food truck vendors. This law and the efforts to change it obviously play an important role in Denver’s ever-increasing food trucks scene; however the efforts to change this law have been at a standstill since the start of my project, and I am not sure what (if any) role this hurdle will play in my film.

In addition to location regulations, gourmet food trucks today are striving to rid their association of the stigma of the “roach coach,” a term once created to insult taco and catering trucks visiting construction sites during the 1970s, ‘80s and ‘90s. Gustavo Arellano, the managing editor and food editor for the *OC Weekly* takes great offense to the term “roach coach” and explains that the term is racist in nature:

> There’s this assumption with Mexican food that it has to be dirty… But that’s ridiculous. All these trucks abide by the same health and inspection standards. People call them roach coaches or say they don’t make gourmet food just because they’re owned by Mexicans.  

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As suspected, a quick trip out of the central core of Denver to either Federal Boulevard or Alameda Avenue reveals a food truck culture unto its own. Taco trucks parked in business parking lots surrounded by parked cars and lines of people waiting for tacos or gorditas is not out of the ordinary.

Food trucks, whether a newer gourmet truck or a seasoned taco truck must go under a series of health, safety and fire codes before they are allowed on the city streets; however, some consumers shy away from the trucks due to the past safety hazard of dining off of trucks that were unclean and unhealthy. Michael Doom, an environmental health specialist highlights many of the traditional perceptions once aligned with food trucks in America. His article, “Inherent Dangers of Catering Trucks & Street Vendors – Why They Pose a High Risk of Food Poisoning,” touches on various issues from trouble regulating food temperatures within a truck to the possibility of a visit from a mouse or swarm of flies. Doom uses the statistic that one in four LA food trucks has its license suspended due to health inspection violations while restaurants hold only a 2.3% closure rate. A challenge for the trucks on the road today is to prove to the customer that they not only serve delicious food, but that their trucks are held to the same cleanliness standards as a brick and mortar kitchen. Hopefully in time food trucks throughout the city whether they sport shiny and colorful wraps or are the staple taco trucks on Federal and Alameda, will be visited equally by serious foodies.

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61 Ibid.
While food trucks seem like an all around good idea, there has been some negative press surrounding the brand new mobile kitchens flooding the streets. Food trucks are mobile and one of the biggest issues is how they gain power to run the truck. Heavy duty generators that are both noisy and not exactly eco-friendly must run constantly to keep the refrigerators running, power the grill and keep the truck lit inside. One *Washington Post* article states, “the kind of generators typically used on food trucks and carts might emit 1.5 to 3 times as much of the carbon dioxide, per unit of electricity, as the average power plant.” In addition to generators, the food truck’s carbon footprint is extended to the required commissary where refrigeration is constantly running as well. Then comes the issue of sharing the city streets with other types of businesses, such as restaurants and cafes. Complaints of trucks clogging the streets and food truck lines holding up pedestrians on sidewalks are easily made. In many cities there are regulations preventing food trucks from parking within a pre-determined distance of a restaurant. But in cities such as Brooklyn, New York, restaurant owners see food trucks parked on their sidewalks as unfair competition. Melissa Murphy, a bakery owner from Brooklyn noted in *The New York Times*, “It’s ignorant of people in the community to think that buying from food trucks instead of from local restaurants doesn’t hurt the community.” As with any new trend, there are always people on either side of the argument. Peoples’ feathers have not been too verbally ruffled in Denver thus far; however, this is definitely

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something I should stay aware of while conducting interviews and filming individuals participating (or gawking at) the Denver street food scene.
THE PEOPLE: Bakers, Builders, Chefs and Enthusiasts.

Though cinematography, sound, editing, color correction and music are a few of the most important elements in a film project, nothing is more valuable to a film than a good story, and the key to a good story is lively, fascinating and well-informed subjects. I have spent the last few months getting to know some individuals who are key players in the Denver street food scene. After lengthy pre-interviews and (more importantly) tasting the food from these trucks, I believe that I have found a well-rounded group of food truck fanatics who will help tell the story of the food truck movement.

When I first started looking into Denver’s food trucks, The Denver Cupcake Truck seemed like an appropriate place to start. Cupcakes are delicious, but cupcakes that actually come to you? How can it get any better than that? So one cold January morning, while “Clementine” and “Clyde,” (Cake Crumbs Bakery’s two roaming mobile cupcake trucks) were tucked away hibernating for the season, I had the chance to sit down with Sean Moore and pick his brain about his experience with the Denver food truck scene.

After changing the location of the brick-and-mortar bakery that Moore runs with his wife, Denon, four times, Sean decided to move to the streets and sell his tasty treats out of a 1969 Ford Vanette. This decision, motivated by the recession, occurred after Moore was laid off twice in the same year from a job in sales. Moore’s new business plan was not only lucrative but fun as well. After experiencing a so-so response to his Park
Hill bakery, the addition of this food truck, which doubled as a billboard, allowed him to cut most of his ads and actually increased his brick-and-mortar sales by 30%.

Although the increase in sales is both impressive and great for his business, Moore explained that the point of operating the Cupcake Truck is to be spontaneous—his goal is to make people happy. Moore believes that a cupcake is a small, sweet treat that can be personalized, and with the truck carrying eight different flavors, each person is able to order what they like instead of settling for the everyday office vanilla sheet cake with vanilla frosting. Interacting with customers and loyal followers of the truck are bonuses to the Denver street food lifestyle and putting a smile on all of those faces is really what keeps Moore coming back every day. In my personal experience, interacting with the food truck owner is a huge part of the experience, and I feel that many customers would agree with me when I say that the personal interaction is one of the main reasons I return to my favorite trucks time after time.

When asked what food trucks do for Denver, Moore quickly rattled off a list of all the benefits. Food trucks create a subculture and a sense of community within the younger city; patrons are able to chat with each other in line, adding to Denver’s sense of community and individuals can enjoy the fresh air outside instead of being cooped-up in their offices all day. It appears that Moore’s reasons for appreciating the Denver street food movement were similar to my own. Although he does put forth a great product, the truck is more about creating an experience and enabling city-dwellers to interact with one another in a completely new and stimulating setting.

After meeting with Moore, I saw the need to learn more about the history of food trucks in Denver and about the street food scene as a whole. I contacted Shelly Drumm,
the creator and editor of DenverStreetFood.com to get an expert view on cupcakes, tacos, gyros, biscuits and more.

I met with Shelly and her friend Georgina Guidotti one Sunday afternoon at a small coffee shop on East Colfax Avenue. Shelly and Georgina were both friendly and informative. I was very curious how the DenverStreetFood.com database was compiled and whether or not experience as a chef or food critic was important to becoming an expert on street food.

A few years ago, Georgina started researching the Denver food truck movement because she was interested in her own business—a truck that would cater to the vegetarian crowd. After spending a summer researching and working on a truck, she scratched the idea, but thought it would be useful to keep her organized and detailed research in case she needed it in the future. Shelly decided to post Georgina’s research online and added articles about her own food truck experiences. Soon the site took off and numerous vendors asked to have their information added to the site to help promote their businesses. Today, DenverStreetFood.com is not just a spot to read about food trucks, their owners and their food; it is also a resource for foodies giving them a live Twitter feed allowing hungry customers to see the exact location of their favorite food trucks. The site is an example of how advances in social media have helped to create the food truck culture because sites like Twitter and Facebook play a major role in the “new age” food truck culture. Shelly’s own passions for great food has helped her to keep up the site during her free time, and this experience has made her one of the leading experts on Denver trucks and other street food.

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Shelly and Georgina informed me that the street food culture actually comes from other countries, like Thailand. There, one of the purposes of street food is to allow the patron to experiment and try new things. Denver food trucks serve such a variety of food and constantly appear in new places fulfilling the original street food concept. In addition to serving great food, Shelly and Georgina believe that an important reason for the success of Denver food trucks is the fun factor. With bright graphics on the sides of the trucks and music to boot, these restaurants on wheels have become traveling parties and bring an entertaining element to the dining experience.

While social media contribute to the popularity of many food trucks, some of the smaller trucks do not have web sites or blogs to communicate with their fans and other food lovers. These small truck owners also do not receive as much exposure as some of the other food vendors. DenverStreetFood.com helps to fill that void. The site tries to publicize and give more press to some of those smaller operations. Many of the smaller trucks did not start off with a brick-and-mortar location (such as the Cupcake Truck) so finding a following is more difficult at first.

Shelly and Georgina believe that there are benefits to these mobile kitchens. The presence of food trucks in Denver is important for supporting local businesses as well as enhancing the economy and improving overall morale in Denver. Their presence at different events like the first Friday art walks across the city or Denver’s numerous farmers’ markets draw crowds supporting the locals. The trucks are also very social—people in line chat about what they are going to order or how different it is to order from a truck—in addition to being culturally engaging. This reaffirms my passion for capturing the food truck culture and why I enjoy eating from food trucks. It appears that other
diners agree that food is only a portion of the attraction to mobile restaurants—the interactions and conversations complete the experience.

Shelly and Georgina alerted me to a key player in the Denver food truck movement, Chuck Courter, the founder of Team 20 LLC, which is the place to go if one wants to convert a plain old truck (or bus) into a fancy, snazzy restaurant on wheels.

As Denver started warming up at the beginning of March, I drove down to Parker, Colorado—the home of Chuck’s food truck factory. What I knew about Chuck I had read on DenverStreetFood.com (The guys at Team 20 LLC “specialize in building kiosks and refurbishing older step vans into the wonderful, eye-catching, high rolling gourmet food trucks you’ve been seeing all around Denver.”64) and from word of mouth through Shelly, Georgina and Sean. I pulled into the driveway and could not help but stare at the large hangar situated next to Chuck’s home. I walked into the hangar and was greeted by two large delivery trucks, gutted and mid-way through their transformations. Chuck and I sat down in the hangar and discussed his fascination with food trucks.

Chuck has always been in the refurbishing business—whether re-doing homes or working on trucks. In the past he has worked on carts and trailers for other food vendors, but it was not until early 2009 that he had the opportunity to work on an actual food truck. The truck was the Atomic Cowboy’s Biscuit Bus and this one job helped to shape Chuck’s new life as the top food truck ‘crafter’ in the state of Colorado.

Chuck’s four “Fs” of the business are Fabrication, Food, Fun and Friends. He spends 100-120 hours a week working on food trucks for different clients but he doesn’t

mind the hours; he loves what he is doing. Likewise, he believes his food truck clients are the best to work for. The entire process begins when Chuck and a food truck client sit down for an hour or two and discuss the details of the future truck.

About two people work on each truck at a time and with a workforce of four, he is able to work on two different trucks on any given day. Each truck takes roughly four to six weeks to complete depending on the job. One of the fun challenges of working on these food trucks is that each truck is a completely new and different experience. Chuck finds that the procedure of working on each truck changes depending on the type of truck, type of kitchen needed and each customer’s special requests. Tackling a completely different project with each truck keeps things new and fresh for Chuck and his crew.

Chuck’s love of food undoubtedly fuels both his creativity and passion for creating these unique food trucks. Whenever he visits downtown Denver, Chuck makes sure he saves time for swinging by one or more of Denver’s food trucks to sample the cuisine. He believes that the majority of food trucks have better quality food than many of the restaurants downtown. They have to in order to compete with Denver’s restaurants.

“It is great being a part of the Denver food truck scene,” Chuck explains as we wrap up our conversation. “Everyone involved has created sort of a family community in which they are able to support each other’s businesses.” Before I drove back to Denver, Chuck took me out back for a peek at his most recent creation—the Quiero Arepas truck. Shiny and new, I couldn’t wait to hear more about the truck’s owners, Igor and Beckie, in addition to sampling their gourmet version of Venezuelan street food.

About a year ago, Igor and Beckie decided to get into the food business. As a Venezuela native in Denver, Igor missed eating arepas, his country’s version of fast food.
And though they are sold twenty-four hours a day on almost every street corner back home, very few people actually know how to make these sandwich-like bites. So, twenty years ago, Igor learned how to make arepas and his business evolved from there. Igor soon met Beckie and through a love story that involved their mutual affection for arepas the two were married. At this point, the arepa lovers were looking for a fun and creative way to make a living, so they decided to start selling their favorite arepas.

Beckie and Igor soon set up a stand at the Cherry Creek farmer’s market. With camp cooking gear as their only equipment, the two began selling arepas to Denver foodies and farmers’ market frequenters. The day I met Igor and Beckie, the couple had their equipment set up at an indoor farmers’ market at 200 Santa Fe Street. While I was there chatting with the two and sampling a vegan arepa filled with black beans, avocados and sweet plantains, some of the arepa regulars stopped by to dine on their favorite South American street food. The fact that they already had regulars made me more than interested to follow their progress as their food truck, Quiero Arepas, sprouts its wheels and rolls out onto the streets of Denver.

Before entering into the farmer’s market scene, Igor and Beckie knew that they wanted to invest in a food truck. Having a clean and accessible food truck will be a nice change from the camping gear. Igor and Beckie have a vision and a dream that helps them stay focused on their business plan. They want their truck known not only for delicious food, but for food that is as fresh as possible.

Another food truck that highlights the importance of utilizing fresh, local and organic produce is Stick It To Me. Twenty-three year olds Nate Barnett and Ezra Malmuth met each other in San Francisco when they were high school classmates. After
graduating from high school, Ezra moved to Denver to attend the Johnson and Wales Culinary School. Four years later, after completing a degree in hospitality at Boston University, Nate decided that he wanted to move to Denver to join his friend.

The best friends drew upon their combined educational experiences to dream up a new business that would utilize their skills. Ezra did not want to be stuck in a restaurant right out of school, so starting a food truck seemed like the cheapest (and quickest!) option without such a large financial overhead. Five months later, in January 2011, their dream became a reality, as the young men took their food truck, Stick It To Me, out on the open road.

When developing their concept, Nate and Ezra asked themselves “what can we do that encompasses a broad range of food?” By offering food on a stick they were able to find a concept and theme while offering food from multiple ethnicities—giving their food a worldly range. They came up with some ideas, tested their food on friends and family members and stuffed themselves with stick food as well. Since they hit the road in January 2011, they have remained loyal to the same core menu items—although, of course, the menu has been tweaked. The food, they say, is much better now than when they started.

Their experiences on the truck have been exciting, stressful and exhausting. Before each large event, the guys find themselves prepping food for 2 or 3 days. These prep days help them “go into battle prepared” because once they are in battle, they never really know what they are getting in to. The days are long and hard but rewarding. They serve about 220 people at the Great Divide Brewery on Wednesday afternoons and 262 people lined up at their window during the first Justice League of Street Food event in
June. This was the largest crowd the guys have faced yet, and these numbers only increase their confidence that they are serving some great food.

Some of their food truck spots are planned, and others are more spontaneous. In Denver, due to a law that restricts food trucks from the downtown area (Denver’s highest concentration of pedestrian traffic), trucks find it helpful to partner with a business, such as Great Divide Brewery, where the truck can park and reach a receptive clientele.

The main challenge that Nate and Ezra face is balance. Their food prep is very demanding and time consuming. To ensure the greatest quality product, they make everything from scratch—they prepare their own sauces and marinades; they break down all their own meat and they take the time to ensure that each piece of organic produce is worthy of their high standards. The guys want to serve the highest quality and freshest food possible. Their mission is to be the best in the business.

Although they do face many challenges on the road, Nate and Ezra find that there are many rewarding experiences as well. Seeing the truck built only a few months after their idea came to life was exciting, surreal and rewarding. They feel success after big events (such as the Justice League of Street Food and Street Food Renegades monthly parties) when they see long lines and huge crowds enjoying their food. They love feeding so many people! Following their journey through their first summer on the road in Denver will be exciting, as Nate and Ezra tackle their daily lives on the Stick It To Me truck with enthusiasm and charisma.

Through Chuck, I have also met Ben Robbins who is an architect and Denver native. Ben and his wife, Cat, have spent the last ten years of their lives bouncing from one architecture job to another. After winning multiple architecture awards and being
hired at a prestigious Denver firm, Ben has realized that his true passion does not lie in architecture but instead in food. To work his way through college and graduate school, Ben spent his evenings and school breaks apprenticing in Colorado kitchens from Boulder, to Aspen and Denver. With the emergence of the Denver street food scene, Ben has gathered his savings and refinanced his home to invest in a food truck of his own.

In an effort to truly cover all aspects of this gourmet food truck scene, I will interview Ben while he is still in the process of designing his truck, PomFreet. I will film the progress of Ben’s truck at Chuck Courter’s shop and document the challenges and obstacles that occur along the way. I will also ask Ben to discuss the internal challenges he faces, as he decides whether or not to leave his job as an architect in favor of a food truck that sells French fries.

In addition to highlighting the trucks associated with the gourmet scene, I am taking into consideration trucks that have been in Denver for years so I can document their view on these newer trucks.

A drive down Alameda Avenue in Denver may give the impression of traveling through a lonchera museum. It appears that numerous Mexican restaurants on this street have food trucks parked in their business parking lots. Planted alongside vendors selling roasted green chilies, are these trucks part of the Mexican culture on this street and are their owners not interested in venturing closer to downtown where they would have access to a different clientele? Without being a part of the hype surrounding the gourmet trucks, do these trucks feel left out? Notoriously known as ‘roach-coaches,’ a name given to imply a lack of attention to sanitary conditions onboard, do these trucks follow the same sanitary codes? During my first visit with Sean Moore of the Cupcake Truck, he
alerted me to the fact that there is a truck on the streets of Denver that health inspectors have been trying to catch, as it is known to be below health standards. Is this comment fact, or a part of the “roach coach” stigma?

To further understand Denver’s food truck culture, I made a trip to a truck on Alameda and Raritan to experience mobile vending that was not advertised as ‘new’ or ‘gourmet’. A visit with Maria C. Garcia of La Villa Real revealed the unmistakable similarities between modern-day ‘gourmet’ food trucks and Denver’s longtime mobile vendors: The Lonchera. Garcia explained thirteen years ago a good friend of hers from California commented on Garcia’s talents in the kitchen and encouraged her to purchase a truck and create a mobile restaurant similar to the Californian taco trucks. Upon the arrival of her income tax return and with some help from the bank, Garcia headed out to California and came home with her new truck: La Villa Real. After some success with the truck, Garcia decided to open a restaurant as well, but as the recession hit after the fall of the twin towers in 2001, the restaurant went under. Not allowing the restaurant closure to kill her spirit, Garcia began to plan for a second truck and in 2006 she opened La Villa Real #2. The business is family owned; in fact, I met Garcia’s daughter a few blocks away peddling the trucks’ top two sellers, Tacos Rancheros and Gorditas to regulars.

La Villa Real #1 and #2 follow the same laws and regulations as the trucks driving through downtown. They rent commissary space at a restaurant nearby and they must move their truck to a different location every four hours. The food from these trucks is just as delicious as the more popular downtown “gourmet” trucks, yet they ring in at a much lower price point. La Villa Real was selected as Westword’s top meal under $5.00
of 2011.\textsuperscript{65} When asked her opinion of the trendiness surrounding the newer food trucks on the road, Garcia just smiled and said, “Everyone needs to feed the family.”

Though I have yet to determine what part these loncheras will play in my film, I believe that this angle will at least be important when describing the history and wide range of mobile vending in the city of Denver.

I have gathered an interesting collection of characters for my film—expert food truck owners, newcomers to the scene and subjects of all ages and food types. Their stories will reveal the different people who come together to share this unique passion for food and mobile vending, and they will reveal a human side to the business. These diverse individuals portray a well-rounded view of Denver gourmet food trucks and reflect the details inherent in starting a culinary truck business and finding success and happiness.

LITERATURE REVIEW: Reality, Reality, Reality.

Although I have not found any films that tackle the subject of food trucks, there are numerous reality shows airing on both television and the Internet. In this section, I will discuss the shows I have watched in preparation for my film and explore the concepts I have found interesting. There are numerous reasons why I do not want my film to emulate the principles of reality television, and I state how my film will be different from current television and Internet programming.

Daniel Delaney’s “webisodes” follow him as he travels around the United States sampling street food. Available on his site, Vendr.tv, these five- to seven-minute episodes implement a distinct formula for how each is shot and edited. After addressing his audience as ‘cartivores’ (those who enjoy food crafted on food carts), Delaney interviews a truck owner (who many times is also the chef) and asks for quick tips and food recommendations. Quick cuts and cut-aways highlight the process through which each dish is made. Pans with twists, colorful close-ups and detailed explanations of each ingredient precede the infamous Delany ‘biting’ shots in which he is shown diving in to a sandwich, burger or forkful of food. Handheld cameras and interviews with locals and food bloggers help to give these “webisodes” character.

I love the energy that Delaney and his crew put into Vendr.tv. Though I do not plan to have my film be one in which I sample food while delivering a short history of the
truck, there are aspects of these “webisodes” that I can incorporate into my project. One is following a chef through the process of creating a signature dish while utilizing high definition’s ability to capture the brilliant colors of fresh ingredients. Interviewing patrons of the food trucks will be interesting, too, especially as I demonstrate what a unique and cultural experience it is to partake in the Denver street food movement.

One of the first reality television shows to showcase food trucks was The Food Network’s *The Great Food Truck Race*. The show challenges food trucks from different states to complete specific missions while competing to earn the most money. Tyler Florence, the show’s host, starts off the initial episode by stating that this show has nothing to do with the traditional roach-coaches or taco trucks but instead, deals solely with gourmet food trucks. Similar to most reality shows, *Race* is fast paced and flashy. The contestants create rivalries early on in an effort to establish conflict, tension and drama.

While I will not emulate the show’s style, it incorporates interesting cinematic techniques that I can use to elevate my film. The shots of the food trucks on the road are useful because the contrast between the trucks and standard automobiles driving down the highway is quite visually catching. It will be a challenge to mimic these shots, but they will be possible if I sit in the back of my car while someone else drives and I film using pillows to support the camera. I will also imitate the window shots—shooting through the service window from the inside of the truck to view the customers. Over-the-shoulder shots of patrons ordering are also interesting because they show an intimate view of the food truck owners. These shots will be valuable thematically as the viewers
become more familiar with these individuals and carry forward the idea of food as community.

Aspects of *The Great Food Truck Race* that I would not like to emulate include the fast pace used to attract viewers and the interview style when the food truck owners address the camera directly, staring straight into the camera instead of speaking to an off-camera interviewer. My interviews will follow this second aesthetic—this tactic will not only allow the truck owners to be more comfortable in an interview setting but also allow for uniformity between the interviews. I also think that the producers of this show make a poor choice in their interview presentation—each individual sits in front of a white screen. My interviewees will be presented in front of a background that reflects their role in the film. For example, food truck owners will be interviewed in front of their truck with the background slightly out of focus. Chuck Courter will be presented in his shop in Parker, his tool cabinet behind him with a shallow depth of field. Having something colorful and contextual yet slightly out of focus in the background will keep the shot interesting and focus will remain on the individuals being interviewed.

The Cooking Channel, a relatively new network on cable television (first aired May 2010\(^\text{66}\)), also decided to join the street food reality show bandwagon with its show *Street Eats*. With the exception of the subject matter, this show’s style reflects everything that I do *not* want in my film. The producers of the show try to present the greatest amount of information possible by showcasing three food trucks from three different


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cities in a fast-paced thirty-minute episode. *Street Eats* is made up of fast zooms and cuts, food close-ups, chefs cooking and people eating. The interviews on the show are scattered between chefs, customers and food bloggers. There is not enough time to digest what the carts are creating and what people are enjoying. The show will slow down and give tedious step-by-step descriptions of how food items are made. It is difficult to enjoy this show, and watching it is quite painful due to the extreme cutting. The show exemplifies the worst in reality shows and highlights the extreme differences between an organized documentary and reality TV. The viewer does not feel a connection with the individuals portrayed on the show, and the host is strangely absent as he introduces each truck yet never appears to visit a single one. This is another technique I would like to avoid.

*Street Eats* reinforces the necessity of having understandable storylines and descriptions at a digestible pace. When creating a strong narrative, the audience must find its characters relatable. *Street Eats* falls short of establishing and developing characters, instead attempting to convey too much information in the time allotted. I plan to ask thought-provoking questions of my subjects covering not only their philosophies on food but also what drives them to cook and serve while confined to a truck day after day. The emotional connection between truck owners and their craft will create an environment in which audience members will also feel invested.

The Travel Channel realized the value of food truck programming and dedicated one episode of their show *Food Wars* to street food. One enjoyable aspect of this show was the two-minute history of the Los Angeles food truck scene during the introduction. I would like to incorporate a similar history showcasing the interview with Shelly Drumm
along with archival and Super8 footage. In addition, it is worth noting that there is a combination of handheld and tripod shots in this show. I believe that I, too, will have a healthy mixture of these shots because using a handheld camera is necessary in some cases due to the close quarters within each truck. Although I am not a fan of the show’s host appearing on camera to conduct her interviews, she does have some great questions for the food truck patrons such as “Why were you drawn to this food truck over others in the area?”

One aspect of this show that lacked merit (besides the use of fake sound effects) was the repetition of street shots used throughout the episode. The audience is bound to notice the same shots used three or more times throughout a thirty-minute program. This practice is not common in reality television or documentary programming. It is clear that the editor lacked street shots and in turn re-used the same shot multiple times. This mistake highlights the importance of collecting enough footage to keep shots diverse and visually stimulating while relevant to the storyline.

Although I do not want my film to mimic a reality show, there are two shots from *Food Wars* I would like to utilize in my film. The first is the wide shot of a food truck among city traffic in which the truck really stands out amongst its surroundings. The second is the use of a lazy Susan to display street food from all angles. I will also incorporate shots of Denverites enjoying and talking about the food they purchase and eat.

In addition to looking at reality programming, I reviewed a short film that showcases the beauty present in everyday activities. I would like to incorporate some of these ideas in an effort to make welding and soldering interesting subjects. In the film, I
will be following the construction of two food trucks in Chuck Courter’s workshop.

While this is a technical process that may seem boring to some, I would like to highlight the beauty in the mundaneness of these transformations. A film that is successful in doing so is *The Pig & The Butcher* by Stebs Schinnerer of Paper Fortress Films. One of Schinnerer’s trademarks throughout his films is playing with focus—both rack focuses and moving in and out of focus. The inspiring aspect of *The Pig & The Butcher* is Schinnerer’s ability to take something both everyday and disgusting, such as butchering a pig and transform the images into something beautiful. The cinematography and editing showcase the butcher’s concentration and care as close up shots of each slice, the butcher’s face and sharp tools demonstrate the attention paid throughout the process. Schinnerer also cuts to two observers and shows the awe, shock and interest held by each as they view the butcher at work. By referencing his work, viewers will see a strong passion and artistic effort behind the construction of each truck. This will help to show that refurbishing a truck is a true art form and not simply a mechanical process.

Although there are only a few characteristics from current food truck programming that I would like to emulate, I believe that studying each of these shows is valuable in the process of determining my own film aesthetic. I know that I am not interested in the quick overview of the trucks presented in many of these programs or the flashy manner in which each truck is portrayed. Instead, I will show what happens behind the scenes: what happens before these food truck owners are on the truck, how these

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trucks are created and why the owners want to sell food from a truck in the first place. I describe how I plan to create this aesthetic in my methodology section.
METHODOLOGY: Technical Aspects of the Film.

Before discussing how I intend to film my thesis, it is important to understand the traditional methods and aesthetics associated with documentary film. In this section, I first describe the traditional documentary styles that I plan to utilize throughout the film. I then discuss the structure of the film and follow that with the aesthetic choices I would like to make to strengthen the overall project.

Bill Nichols is one of the renowned experts on documentary film today and is acknowledged by filmmakers for his categorization of the six documentary modes. In his book *Introduction to Documentary*, Nichols uses examples of well-known films to not only highlight what each mode entails but also place the mode in the context of film history. It is important to understand these forms of filmmaking and the reasons that they were created before structuring my film. Nichols explains in the second edition of his text that the modern interpretation of these modes is to combine different characteristics of each to create a film catered to the subject and filmmaker. He explains:

A reflexive documentary can contain sizable portions of observational or participatory footage; an expository documentary can include poetic or performative segments. The characteristics of a given mode give structure to a film, but they do not dictate or determine every aspect of its organization.68

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I will incorporate specific characteristics of three different modes outlined by Nichols, as well as documentary strategy from other documentarians to create a well-crafted delivery method.

The first of Nichols’ six methods that I would like to explore is the expository mode. This mode was created as a response to the poetic mode, in which the filmmaker played with rhythm rather than time and space, creating a world of the artists’ own imagining. Instead of simply showing the viewer a created cityscape or the method behind shooting and editing a film, as is the case in the poetic mode, the expository mode “addresses the viewer directly, with titles or voices that propose a perspective, advance an argument, or recount history.” This type of film focuses on an important problem or subject and is directed toward the viewer with expert commentary. This can be delivered either as an all-knowing voice-of-God narration (a narrator that is never seen on camera) or a voice-of-authority (a well-known figure who is shown throughout the film explaining what is happening). I would like to incorporate a ‘voice-of-authority’ in my film, not necessarily as someone there to prove a point but instead as an expert voice that will both describe the history of trucks and help place each truck in the context of the Denver movement. I think that Shelly of DenverStreetFood.com would be the perfect person to fill the role of the ‘expert’ because she has not only researched the history of the street food movement, but she continuously updates her website describing the latest happenings with Denver food trucks. She will act as a ‘voice-of-authority’ because she will be introduced in the beginning of the film and will appear on camera. Shelly leading

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70 Ibid. Page 105.
the audience through the film will give viewers a constant with whom they can associate as the film weaves through the different storylines. With experience in public speaking, Shelly is a very eloquent speaker and exceptional storyteller. These talents will keep the film organized and flowing.

The expository mode was traditionally known (from the 1930s-1970s) as a method that utilized images to create a supporting role for the commentary. These visuals “illustrate, illuminate, evoke or act in counter point to what is said.”71 I would not like to simply illustrate what is or is not being said, but instead I would like the cinematography to speak for itself. This mode also “facilitates generalization and large-scale argumentation. The images can support the basic claims of a general argument rather than construct a vivid sense of the particularities to a given corner of the world.”72 In my film I do not want to make a general observation about the “new age” food truck scene, I would like to highlight the local, Denver community instead. This is where collaboration between the expository and observational modes will be useful.

Rather than proactively collecting footage to create an ideal or put forth an argument, the observational mode simply observes what is occurring around the filmmaker. In this mode, the filmmaker is often described as a fly on the wall. In the 1960s, as film technology changed and new lighter, quieter cameras were created, the observational approach began to emerge.73 Often there is no commentary when utilizing the observational mode. Moments of time can pass beautifully without voice-over commentary. Certain scenes within my documentary, such as customers interacting with

71 Nichols, Bill. Page 107.
73 Ibid. Page 110.
food truck owners or Chuck’s crew hard at work creating a new food truck, add a lyrical dimension to the flow of commentary delivered by the “voice-of-god” and subject driven portions of the film. I also love the ‘fly on the wall’ feel that allows the viewer to appreciate the Denver street food experience without being instructed to do so. Natural sound will also play a role in these scenes whether Chuck is instructing one of his crew members on a welding project or Sean is describing cupcake flavors to a customer.

I think that a healthy combination of the lyrical, observational perspective and the more traditional sit-down interview will visually enhance my depiction of the Denver street food culture. Utilizing the interview style from the participatory mode will allow me to accomplish this aesthetic. In contrast to the observational mode, which captures what a subject is like when the cameras are not rolling, this style of documentary attempts to capture what it would be like to be in the place of the filmmaker. Nichols explains that Rouch and Morin describe this method as cinema vérité, or “the truth of an encounter rather than the absolute or untampered truth.” One of the main aspects of this style is conducting interviews to discover the truth from multiple sources. Sit-down interviews with individual food truck owners and Chuck Courter of Team 20 will give viewers an understanding of what it is like to be a major part of the street food scene. These stories will allow the audience to ride along and experience the journeys and obstacles encountered by food truck owners and employees throughout the season.

In addition to referencing Nichols’ documentary modes, I would also like to explore Hewitt and Vezquez’s character-driven documentary. In their book, Documentary Filmmaking: A Contemporary Field Guide, the authors describe the

character-driven documentary as one that “relies on the powerful presence of one individual or several personalities to carry the story.” They also describe the main format of the piece as “a mix of formal interviews and sequences.” I believe that this storytelling approach is appropriate for my film because each individual is not only unique in regard to his or her involvement with the Denver food truck movement but also an entertaining individual with a compelling story to tell. Hewitt and Vazquez also highlight the importance of strong protagonists within a documentary film:

A documentary’s principal characters should be energetic or interesting personalities. If the filmed images can convey their energy, the program will hold the audience’s attention. A lively film depends on the producer’s ability to reveal this in an intimate manner.

The strong principal characters outlined above will create a documentary film that embraces a narrative structure over a dramatic, conflict-driven one. I can visualize Sean Moore’s fun-loving and playful personality filling the screen. They way he speaks about The Denver Cupcake Truck and the fans with whom he interacts speaks leagues above what a voiceover commentary would accomplish. Nate and Ezra are young and so enthusiastic about not only the amazing food that they create on their truck but also the use of technology highlighted in their business plan. The way that they speak about Stick It To Me is so interesting it is hard to look away. As the producer and editor of the film, it will be my job to find a way in the editing room to portray Nate and Ezra’s energy in a way that is subtle yet compelling. During the pre-interview process, part of what drew me to each individual food truck (beyond the food, of course) was the strong, fun and

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passionate personalities of the food truck owners. It is my goal and job to highlight these personalities to the viewer so that the plot goes beyond the food making the truck owners staples of the scene as well.

In May of 2011, I attended a workshop featuring documentary film consultant Fernanda Rossi. During her presentation on storytelling and story structure, Rossi explained that many documentary filmmakers are eager to stuff their film into the standard Hollywood dramatic (conflict-driven) structure. Instead of forcing that structure onto my own film, I plan to make it more episodic, presenting a slice of life. In place of a major conflict and climax, this structure follows a curve moving the story forward as intensity and information escalate. By removing the concept of one main conflict throughout the film, each sequence, which will be made up of the storylines from the separate food trucks, will tackle different obstacles—conflicts at the sequence level that can be overcome. This film structure will take into account the personal goals of the characters featured within the film. Overcoming obstacles and accomplishing goals will not only help to move the story along but also keep the audience interested in the film’s conclusion. Ben Robbins, for example, of the PomFreet truck has experienced numerous setbacks such as truck siding that was lost during shipping and a delayed start date and his truck is not even on the road yet! Once he is on the road I will ride along with Robbins and film the inevitable first day mishaps and how he solves them as a first-time food truck owner.

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79 Ibid.
To supplement the storyline, I will incorporate a number of visual methods to keep the viewer interested and entertained. I am currently searching for found footage, which I will use to illustrate the history of food trucks throughout the nation. Shelly Drumm did not have much knowledge of the food truck movement before it hit Denver, so I will write a script regarding the history and incorporate old photos to illustrate the food truck evolution. I have found numerous photographs I am interested in using both on the Internet and through the Library of Congress. I am currently researching the royalty policies on these images. The found footage shots I am currently seeking will showcase old ice cream trucks, Mexican loncheras, New York City hot dog carts and the Oscar Mayer wiener mobile. Visualizing these trucks will trigger nostalgia from previous street food encounters. My Denver street food ‘expert’ will be introduced at this point and she will relay the knowledge she has of more traditional trucks transitioning to the food trucks of present-day Denver.

To contrast the traditional, cookie-cutter mobile food vendor and demonstrate the newness of Denver’s latest food trucks, I will cross dissolve from the grainy, vintage aesthetic of the old film and the familiar ice cream truck jingle to the shiny mobile kitchens of the present day food truck. To further the comparison, I will also incorporate editorial methods such as fast-paced music and quicker cuts to reinforce how different a 21st century food truck can actually be.

For the complete food truck experience, I will showcase the trucks inside and out utilizing static shots, pans, tilts, tracking shots and possibly the GlideCam to give a spatial perspective of the trucks’ interiors. Riding along with different food trucks and capturing not only the food preparation and delivery process but also the atmosphere
outside of each truck will help the viewer understand the Denver street food ambience. Gathering the customer perspective before and after a food truck meal will also be crucial to illustrate the sense of community and culture that these trucks provide.

I will be shooting the majority of the film in HD. I believe that this is the most practical method both financially (digitally recorded material does not need to be developed or digitized) and visually (due to the vibrant colors on the outside of the trucks, the mouth-watering visuals of the food involved and the ability to record the unique features within each truck). Originally I was interested in incorporating Super8 footage along with these images, however due to economic and logistical restraints, I will instead manipulate the footage using filters in FinalCut to look like it was shot on Super8. This technique will be useful during the beginning of the film when the manipulated footage will at first appear similar to the found footage but will be cross dissolved with the HD footage to show that both were shot in the present day. The incorporation of this footage will blend the old footage with the new, as well as exhibit the comparison between the old and new trucks. I also think that presenting the Super8-looking footage will be an interesting way to introduce each section or segment of the film and create a visual link from the past to the present.

A strong film needs well-developed characters and I believe that each of the individuals portrayed will add dimension and diversity to the film. The ‘characters’ I chose not only vend diverse food, but they also have varying levels of food truck experience and vastly different stories for how they became involved in the scene. I have already created strong relationships with each of these individuals. These connections will help each subject feel comfortable with me as the producer and director of the film as

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well as keep them at ease while in front of the camera. My interest in the project coupled with my respect for each subject will allow for a passionate film showcasing the culture and community formed by Denver’s street food scene.
INTENDED AUDIENCE: Foodies and Fanatics.

Today, film, television and the Internet are racing to cover the topic of food. From films featuring chefs such as *Julie and Julia* to reality television shows such as *Top Chef, Street Eats* and *Hell’s Kitchen*, producers throughout the country are eager to fulfill the foodie demand for food-based shows. Whether these films and shows depict making food or simply eating it, there is obviously a market for this type of programming.

The target audience for my film is made up of foodies—not just foodies in Denver but foodies all over the nation and possibly the world. Personally, I would include myself in this ‘foodie’ category as I truly do find myself with a passion for food and spend a lot of time thinking about restaurants I would like to experience and pondering new recipes to try. Today’s interactive culinary experiences also demonstrate the popularity of this market.

I recently have become involved in the interactive ‘foodie’ community. This past spring I created a blog ([www.marieleats.blogspot.com](http://www.marieleats.blogspot.com)) that records many of my favorite meals both in Denver and other cities I have visited. I joined Twitter under the same username (@marieleats) to suggest quick tips about new food trucks or restaurants that I have tried in my daily travels. Another popular food fan resource is Yelp.com. On this site, users can find information on restaurants and other establishments in addition to posting reviews of their own. After joining this community (marielrm.yelp.com), I found
myself visiting the site almost daily (easy to do with the Yelp application on my cell phone) and reinforcing my interest in this digital, food-obsessed world. The fact that these virtual communities exist and are thriving demonstrates that foodies enjoy eating good food as much as discussing it in an open forum.

As mentioned in my methodology section, I have confirmed there are numerous food enthusiasts residing in Denver. This group, along with the die-hard food truck followers, makes up the main target audience for my film. Self-proclaimed “food freak,” Shelly Drumm shares this notion when she says, “I will finish a meal and start asking you what you want for dinner. I am immediately thinking about the next thing I get to cook or eat.”

The growth of the Internet has changed the way we critique food. Consumers have moved from relying on award-winning food critics to reading reviews from their peers. The power has been redistributed to the general public. With the introduction of web sites like Yelp.com, personal blogs and video bloggers, what used to be a role for a recognized chef or someone with a trained pallet has become much more accessible and often a hobby for passionate diners everywhere. Chefs today not only care about the reaction from food critics, but they are interested in receiving feedback from the general public as well. These interactions have helped foodies move from passive observers to shaping the food movement in their own city.

The foodie movement has expanded and gained an interest in the latest food fad: food trucks. Daniel Delaney, who I mentioned earlier in the methodology section, created a series of “webisodes” featuring his travels throughout the United States and the world.

as he tastes and discusses street food in front of the camera. The number of followers on his website, Twitter and Facebook pages demonstrates the remarkable interest in street food throughout the nation. When asked for his website demographics, he shared that his site receives 300,000 new views for each “webisode” release. Shelly Drumm’s site DenverStreetFood.com also has an impressive following receiving 300-400 hits per day.

As a self-described foodie, I am personally interested in the street food movement infiltrating the Denver dining scene. Some of my new favorite foods in Denver are prepared on trucks, and at the rate these trucks are succeeding and growing it appears that street food will only gain popularity. Participating in the scene by creating a film furthers my interest in the movement.

I would like my film to not only document the current state of food trucks in Denver but also influence its growth. Chuck Courter of Team20LLC and I have discussed premiere options such as showing the film at his workshop in Parker accompanied by a bonfire. A friend of mine who owns a gallery in the art district on Santa Fe has offered to premier the film and to provide food truck parking as well. It would be great to present the film at the first Justice League and Renegades food truck events next spring. I met with Doug Price, the president at Rocky Mountain PBS, about my film and we discussed the possibility of airing Food Trucks: Feasting on Four Wheels once it is complete. I will also be distributing copies of my film to food truck owners and other interested individuals throughout the Denver Metro area. Hopefully this film will continue to expose the strength and uniqueness of the Denver street food movement and in turn give food trucks more business and expand this growing community.
During the distribution process I will advertise the availability of the film via my Facebook page. I currently have an audience of 51 followers and my clips and trailer have been reposted on the Facebook walls of friends and food truck owners in Denver. I will also offer the film for a discount price to the food trucks featured so they can sell the film on their trucks for a higher price to their customers and make a slight profit.

Additionally, I would like to submit this film to film festivals so that the film will be able to reach a larger audience. During the film festival submission process I will first target festivals in other regions where food trucks are quite popular such as Los Angeles, New York City, Portland, Seattle and Austin. I will then look into festivals featuring food-themed films in addition to those encouraging student submissions. Narrowing my festival search to these niches will hopefully give me a leg up in the selection process as well as target a demographic that is interested in the subject matter.

I believe that this film will be a great starting off point for my career. I hope to be able to submit this film as a supplement to my resume so that I can highlight my skills as a producer, director, cinematographer and editor to future employers.
**Timeline.**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>June 28, 2011</td>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>DU - Pick up equipment</td>
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<td>June 29, 2011</td>
<td>Team 20 LLC</td>
<td>Parker, CO</td>
</tr>
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<td>June 30, 2011</td>
<td>Civic Center Eats</td>
<td>Civic Center Park</td>
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<td>July 9, 2011</td>
<td>Stick It/Justice League</td>
<td>Little Raven</td>
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<td>July 14, 2011</td>
<td>Team 20 LLC</td>
<td>Parker, CO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 23, 2011</td>
<td>Shelly/DenverStFood</td>
<td>Civic Center Park</td>
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<td>July 23, 2011</td>
<td>Renegades</td>
<td>22nd and Walnut St.</td>
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<td>July 24, 2011</td>
<td>Cupcake Truck</td>
<td>Cake Crumbs Bakery/</td>
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<td>City Park Jazz</td>
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<td>Transcribe Shelly Interview</td>
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<td>Team 20 Time Lapse</td>
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<td>Team 20 Time Lapse</td>
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<td>Justice League</td>
<td>Taxi, Denver, CO</td>
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<td>City Park, Denver, CO</td>
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<td>August 24, 2011</td>
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<td>Quiero Arepas Interview</td>
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<td>January, 2012</td>
<td>Pick-up Shots, Ben Robbins first voyage.</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
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<td>February 7, 2012</td>
<td>Proposal Defense</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
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<td>March 15, 2012</td>
<td>Arepas Interview</td>
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<td>Film La Villa Real #2</td>
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<td>April 26, 2012</td>
<td>Final Cut of Film</td>
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Budget.

Luckily, I will be borrowing cameras, tripods, sound equipment and lights from the University of Denver to complete this film. However, I have found that there are many other costs associated with the completion of the film. Below, I outline where my money will be spent as I strive to finish this film.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production Gear</th>
<th>DU Rentals</th>
<th>Half-day Rental (1-4 hours)</th>
<th>Day Rental (5-8 Hours)</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Actual</th>
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<tr>
<td>Panasonic HVX 200 Camera Kit (Included Accessories: Battery (2), Charger/Supply AC Cable, Lens Cap, Mounting Plate, Audio Pig Tail, Cleaning Cassette, CB-50 Case, 4-Pin Power Cable/Manuel) FS-100 digital recording device.</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$350</td>
<td>30 x $350 = $10,500</td>
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<td>Tripod Vinton Vision 6</td>
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<td>$25</td>
<td>30 x $25 = $750</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lowell Omni Light Kit (Included Accessories: Two broad lights, two spot lights, standard gel pack, spare bulbs (2), various grip materials)</td>
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<td>$100</td>
<td>15 x $100 = $1500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rifa Lightbox (Included Accessories: Lightstand, AC power cable)</td>
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<td>$40</td>
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<td>Sony Lavaliere (Included Accessories:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Estimated</td>
<td>Actual</td>
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<td><strong>Gas</strong> ($3.50/Gallon)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Film</strong></td>
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<td>$1,594.92</td>
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* If I had to pay for the use of equipment, the actual total would have been $23,400.00

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Battery (2), Tie Clip, one XLR to XLR Cable) | $100 | $150 | 15 x $150 = $450 | 20 x $150 = $0.00

Wireless Lavaliere  
*(Included Accessories: Battery (2), Tie Clip, one XLR to XLR cable, Receiver, Transmitter)* | $15 | $25 | 30 x $25 = $750 | 40 x $25 = $0.00

Shotgun Rycote  
*(Included Accessories: one XLR to XLR cable, Runs on phantom power from the camera)* | $15 | $25 | 30 x $25 = $750 | 40 x $25 = $0.00

Fishpole (Boom) | $30 | 15 x $30 = $450 | 20 x $25 = $0.00

Grip Bag | $20 | 30 x $20 = $600 | 40 x $20 = $0.00

TOTAL | $17,250 | $0.00*

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TOTAL | $1,464.98 | $1,594.92
CONCLUSION: Here We Go.

With the combination of a great topic and the inclusion of five trucks, a local expert and the guy building trucks on the Denver scene, I believe that this thesis project has the potential to be an entertaining, educational and influential film. My personal interest in the topic will help to focus the film’s message. I intend to convey the unique community created by these food trucks and the culture expanding throughout the young city of Denver by this movement. I want to show the unique people behind these food trucks and really illustrate that gourmet food trucks are not just a fad but where food is headed. I am excited to take you along on this culinary journey and tempt you with the mouth-watering treats presented along the way.
THE FILM: *Feasting On Four Wheels*.

Please see the supplemental DVD to view the film *Feasting On Four Wheels*. The total running time of the film is 00:28:06.
REFLECTION: Sixteen Months Later.

The film *Feasting On Four Wheels* has played a major role in my life for the past sixteen months. Throughout this process, I have experienced some of the most challenging and gratifying moments of my academic and filmmaking career. It has been a long journey, but alas, my master’s thesis film is finally complete. As I reflect on the filmmaking process, I will break my experience into three sections: pre-production, production and post-production. Each of these portions of the filmmaking process had their own challenges and successes, all of which have taught me important lessons not only about filmmaking, but also about myself as a filmmaker.

*Pre-Production January – June 2011*

January of 2011 was a very exciting time for me. I finally chose a topic for my thesis film that not only held my interest but also seemed like a plausible idea that fit within my timeline. As I mentioned in my proposal, I discovered the Justice League of Street Food events in an article in the Denver periodical, *Westword*. At first I found the Justice League interesting because I really wanted to attend one of these events. I had tried fancy street food the summer before while visiting Austin, Texas and I found the idea fascinating. I had seen the Denver Cupcake Truck around the University of Denver
numerous times, but I had yet to experience a “new age,” “gourmet” food truck featuring food cooked to order in Denver—and finding out that they existed excited me. After arriving at the topic of food trucks in the city of Denver, I set out to meet some of the key individuals within the Denver street food scene. While I won’t go into details as I have outlined my original meetings with the key personas of my film in “The People: Bakers, Builders, Chefs and Enthusiasts” section of my proposal, I will say that meeting these individuals helped to solidify my decision to pursue a film highlighting Denver’s blossoming street food culture. One of the key lessons to which I constantly refer when discussing my education in documentary filmmaking is that an important ingredient in successfully creating a film of this nature is access. If it were not for the kindness, flexibility and openness of each and every individual highlighted in the film, I would never have been able to give an accurate portrayal of Denver’s gourmet food truck movement. All of the truck owners allowed the camera and me to infringe upon the limited space within their mobile kitchens. Though I constantly told the owners to push me out of the way if my camera and I were taking up too much space or if we got too close to the food, no one ever told me to back off. This constant access was amazing and really helped me to appreciate this newer wave of street food as a whole. Chuck Courter, the fabricator of many of the trucks in the Denver area, gave me constant access to his workshop, allowing me to be a staple in his truck building process at least once a week. Chuck also offered up outlets and extension cords for my continuously creative lighting schemes, in addition to asking me to join him and his crew for pizza. If I had not had the opportunity to meet these amazing food truck lovers, *Feasting On Four Wheels* would never have been possible.
Although I found it tedious and difficult at the time, writing the thesis proposal was actually an excellent preparation for working on the film. Reading up on the historical aspects of the food truck scene as well as the advances in food truck-ing being made across the nation was absolutely fascinating. Learning about other food trucks, their unique styles and menus helped me decide what to look for in the Denver-based trucks. This research also helped me to prepare for the production process by allowing me to outline which shots I needed and what types of questions to ask during my sit-down interviews. Additionally, reviewing the different documentary modes and methods helped solidify in my mind the type of film that I wanted to create. Observing television shows and documentary films relating to the food and foodie genres also allowed me to decide which methods and styles interested me—what I wanted to emulate and what I wished I had never seen. I did not defend my proposal until February 2012; however, much of the research regarding the historical aspects of the film and documentary modes was complete before I commenced filming. I began researching the project in January 2011 and continued the research process while conducting pre-interviews with the subjects of the film. Speaking with these local experts about street food helped me to know what to look for in the way of research and having the historical context of the movement helped me formulate the questions I needed to ask regarding the recession, fabrication and the truck owners’ influences. Writing the proposal also helped me to organize the film and decide which elements of the Denver street food scene to include and which were not necessary. Although working on a 53 page thesis proposal was daunting and required a lot of hard work, I am happy the proposal paper is still a part of the master’s thesis.
requirement as it really ensures that all of the pre-production research and organization is set before the filming begins.

While the research on food trucks and documentary modes definitely helped form the ideas for what I wanted to portray in the film, I do think that working with my thesis chair more closely during the pre-production and production process of the film would have helped a great deal. While discussing the pre-production phase of my film, I must touch base on the fact that halfway through the process I changed my thesis chair. When starting the thesis process, Professor Tony Gault offered to be my thesis chair for what, at the time, was a project set to highlight three of my close friends pursuing their passions, all filmed on a Super8 camera. This project was more experimental in tone than the more traditional film that Feasting On Four Wheels soon became. The change in topic and genre, partnered with Tony and me differing in our methods of constructive criticism and work-shopping styles lead me to seek out a different advisor for the master’s thesis project. I turned to Professor Sheila E. Schroeder, who has really been my mentor throughout my time at the University of Denver. Switching to Sheila was a seamless transition as I had discussed almost every aspect of my filmmaking process with Sheila leading up to the change in thesis chair; in fact she was more in the loop on the progress of my film than Tony partly because I serve as her assistant on her documentary film project. The switch, which occurred after most of the documentary was filmed but before the proposal defense process was the catalyst for moving the film forward, and this is why I am discussing this change during the pre-production stage of the process. In retrospect, I feel that changing my thesis advisor earlier would have helped to make the film more successful. I was not able to benefit from footage reviews or a deep discussion
of the project and its themes during the process. Though I am embarrassed to admit it, I think fear was one of the elements that prevented me from reaching out to Tony given his comments on the previous thesis proposal I had submitted to him in the summer of 2010. I wanted to have something concrete, solid and impressive to show him so that he would take me seriously about the project. Instead, I think that keeping him out of the loop until I had a complete food truck proposal to send him hindered the process. I also did not want to admit that these feelings were keeping me from moving forward with the project and my proposal definitely took a place on the backburner in my mind when I became absorbed with filming the project. I think that having a thesis chair presence during this stage of the film would have been beneficial. While I still respect Tony as a professor and a filmmaker, I believe my decision to work with Sheila as my thesis chair was the right one and really helped to make the film what it is today.

Production June 2011 – March 2012

Production was one of the most fun portions of working on the film. Being behind the camera is such an enjoyable experience—especially when capturing something as colorful and exciting as a food truck party!

I started the filming season at the end of June 2011 with a trip down to Team 20 LLC in Parker, Colorado. Each of my shoots down in Parker were solo shoots and were a great way to get back in to the flow of shooting on the Panasonic HVX. The first trip out I took my time getting acquainted with the workshop, with Chuck and with Chuck’s employees. I walked around playing with rack focuses and zooms and scouted out the lighting situation within the shop. I was quick to realize that this workshop, while lit well to the naked eye, was much too dark on camera. The necessity of bringing a lighting kit
with me on these shoots was very apparent and with each trip down to Parker, I became more adept at how to light the trucks, the workshop and each individual working on their own portion of the food truck constructing process.

It was while planning my first interview shoot with Shelly Drumm in July that I realized I could not do the entire project on my own. The necessity for a crew became more than apparent when I realized that it would be impossible to conduct a sit-down interview with only myself. There was no way that I could be behind the camera monitoring the framing of the shot, the levels of the sound and make the interview subject feel comfortable while holding a friendly conversation about the Denver food truck scene. While I was able to shoot a lot of this film on my own, there were times, such as during interviews, when having a crew was absolutely necessary. Will Gardner, another M.A. student in the school of Media, Film and Journalism Studies at DU was an invaluable resource during this film. Having worked with Will numerous times during class projects, I trusted Will’s skills behind the camera and felt comfortable working with him on shoots. He was the main cinematographer for my interview footage and his work can be seen in interviews featuring Chuck Courter, Sean Moore, Nate Barnett and Ezra Malmuth and Beckie and Igor Panasewicz. My good friend Chad Saxton was also on hand to help me out with numerous shoots as well. He shot the Shelly Drumm interview footage featured in the film and was also on hand to accompany me on some of the more challenging shoots such as the Justice League of Street Food and Food Truck Renegades parties. It was great to have a second person with me at these events, as they were so crowded. Having Chad at these events was helpful when I decided to speak with different individuals—he was able to stay behind the camera while I asked questions. He also
followed me around with the boom pole so that I was able to have some quality
background noise to help capture these events to the fullest extent. There were some
times when it was difficult to be the only one working on this project. Without a
permanent crew, there were occasions when I was unable to find another person to come
along with me on a shoot. One time when this occurred was my first interview shoot with
Sean Moore. I was somewhat flustered during this shoot as I had recruited my friend
Nicole to run the camera, but she had to back out the morning of the shoot. Not wanting
to cancel on my subject I showed up somewhat flustered at 7:30 AM to set up my
equipment for a guerilla style interview. Of course as I ran through my checklist I forgot
to double check the settings on the FireStore and shot the entire interview as a time-lapse!
It was moments like this that made it obvious how difficult it is to create a whole film on
my own.

Of course there are two edges to this sword. As the sole producer and director of
the film, I was able to make all of the decisions regarding when and where to shoot, how
I would like interviews framed and who I would like to feature in the film. Being the
producer, director and main cinematographer for this project was an amazing experience.
Being the main point person on this project proved to be one of the greatest learning
experiences I’ve had while at DU. As far as producing and directing go, I really had to
step out of my skin and speak with people both in the film and others just interested in the
filmmaking process. One of the biggest challenges for me was going to these food truck
parties and trying to interact with people just there to enjoy the food and have a good
time. I consider myself a bit shy and walking up to a stranger and asking him or her to be
on camera and share his or her thoughts on street food was out of my comfort level. I feel
that this experience definitely made me more confident as not only a filmmaker, but as a producer. I also became more confident in my ability to describe what I would like to see in a shot, in addition to knowing which questions to ask strangers so that they do not simply give a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer on camera, but instead are able to describe their experiences. My ability as a camerawoman, I feel, improved immensely as well.

I am much more familiar with the Panasonic HVX and HPX after spending ten months behind the camera. And speaking of the HVX and HPX, I am very happy with my decision to shoot in digital high definition. Although I still have an obsession with Super8 and with my Super8 camera, shooting in HD was the right decision not only for my wallet but also for capturing the brilliance of the food rolling out of the mobile kitchens. Shooting in digital was also an advantage in the fact that I was able to review footage immediately after each event. In my thesis proposal I mentioned trying to incorporate a Super8 feeling by using different effects within FinalCutPro; however once in the edit room, I felt that this aesthetic did not work well with the young, new and fresh point of view I wanted to portray throughout the film. I will save my love of Super8 for a later project!

Another item missing from my project that was highlighted in the proposal is the inclusion of Ben Robbins and his PomFreet food truck. Ben has fallen off the map regarding both my production and the food truck scene in the last couple of months. The PomFreet truck is not currently out on the road as Ben ran out of funding during the fabrication process. Obviously, since the truck is not out serving French fries, Ben was unable to play the role of the new guy on the scene. I do have interview footage of Ben from last summer; however, his interview provided his projections on what he thought
the food truck scene would be like once his truck was completed. Though the interview is interesting, these thoughts did not seem to fit within the structure of the film, and I believe the film was tighter without the inclusion of this interview.

When beginning this project in January of 2011, I never thought this film would take so long to complete. I tried to film as much as I could during the summer of 2011; however, I did have issues filming all of my interviews in a timely manner. I had some trouble pinning down the couple from Quiero Arepas for an interview. Beckie and Igor are great, but I don’t think they completely understood my need for a sit-down interview. When I first started trying to book a date for a sit-down with the two, they kept suggesting that I show up at one of their planned stops and ask them questions in between customers. We finally planned a date, time and location for a sit-down interview in November and the couple cancelled at the last minute! I was able to reschedule our interview in the beginning of March, and I headed to their commissary early one Thursday morning nervous they might cancel once again. Instead, Beckie and Igor welcomed me with open arms and thanked me for making the effort to film them and the food truck scene! We had a great sit-down interview and speaking with the couple about my project (at this point I had already begun to edit the film) was great encouragement to move forward with the documentary.

I was also delayed in my pursuit of filming La Villa Real. I believe that including La Villa Real in the film was very important not only to illustrate Denver’s history of street food, but also to include the vast diversity of the street food available within the city. I wanted to make sure that when visiting La Villa Real with a camera I had a second person with me in case we ended up conducting an impromptu interview. I also wanted to
make sure that I had approval to film the food truck before showing up with a camera. In many cases I felt more comfortable shooting the gourmet food trucks, because I was able to contact the truck owners via a phone call or e-mail to give them a heads-up on my decision to film for the day. I was also able to ask permission ahead of time. About three weeks before the completion of the project I was able to recruit a friend to head over to La Villa Real with me. On the three separate occasions I showed up to film at La Villa Real Maria, my main contact, was not present. I ended up meeting Idalia Carrera instead and on my first visit I left a note with her for Maria. On the two follow up visits Idalia was working in the truck again and after some deliberation she allowed me to film the truck, however, to my disappointment she was not comfortable being on film. I experienced the same thing with many of the customers at La Villa Real. While one man assured me that he did not speak English, another kept telling me how this truck was his favorite and even made suggestions on what I should order, but informed me that he was too shy to appear on camera. I was disappointed that no one wanted to appear on film, so I made my way back to La Villa Real the following day with some of my friends. They had never tried the food before, which was actually pretty great because they were able to try the tacos and gorditas for the first time and I was able to capture these reactions on film. In fact, my own first reaction to the food at La Villa Real was captured on film as well, and I must admit, this food was incredible! I ate lunch there two days in a row. While it was unfortunate that no one at La Villa Real would speak with me on camera, I am grateful that they allowed me to film the exterior and that I was able to deliver the history of the truck by utilizing a voice over for their story. I will discuss my voice over
decisions and dig deeper into my La Villa Real shoot during the post-production portion of the paper.

I loved every minute of the production process—from shooting in 100-plus degree weather to baby-sitting the HVX at Civic Center Park for four hours while I shot a time-lapse of a full day of Civic Center Eats. Bob Yablans, the man in charge of all the camera equipment at the school of Media, Film and Journalism studies, was very flexible with me, letting me keep most of the needed equipment at my apartment for months at a time. It was incredible to have the freedom to head out on a shoot at a moment’s notice. But as much as I loved shooting the film, there was definitely a sense of satisfaction when I was able to say, “That’s a wrap!” on the final day of production.

Post-Production February – April 2012

On numerous occasions I have heard editors quoted stating that editing is like playing God. I must admit that one of my favorite parts of the filmmaking process is experiencing the magic that happens in the editing suite when the film really starts to come together.

After going over the paper edit for the film, Sheila and I discussed taking a different direction with the historical introductory section of Feasting On Four Wheels. Together we came up with an idea to slowly introduce the history of American street food throughout the film with a series of vignettes. These vignettes are placed between the different sections of the film as a way to organize the film and give viewers a break between sections. The vignettes are short, around a minute each and utilize archival photographs to illustrate different eras of American street food. I ended up using archival photos over archival footage because I was able to find numerous unrestricted
photographs from the Library of Congress and the National Archives, but the footage I found was out of the price range for my budget.

I knew I wanted to utilize voiceover for the historical sections, but I did not decide to do the voiceovers myself until choosing to incorporate the participatory method into the film. Including the participatory method in this film is how the film’s introduction was created in which I discuss my interest in food and give a slide show introduction into the world of street food. It was strange to me at first to really include myself and a verbal narration of my point of view, but I now feel this participatory angle demonstrates my perspective and makes the film much more personal. I also think that it is appropriate to include my commentary because after spending so much time involved with the Denver street food movement over the past year, I feel that I, too, am a part of this community. I attended numerous street food events during food truck season both with and without the camera and intend to continue to attend these events in the future. I seek out many of these trucks for meals and I am excited to see them out on the street. It is important for the viewer of this film to understand that I am enthusiastic about the subject, and that I am a participant in the scene as well. I am not just trying to show a glimpse into the world of Denver street food; I am also experiencing the tastes, the sounds and the people involved in the movement.

Another decision made during post-production was to include the lonchera experience as a vignette instead of a through-line in the film. As described in the production process, I had difficulty gaining an on camera interview with Maria or Idalia. I decided, instead, to include La Villa Real as a vignette that not only highlighted this thirteen-year-old Denver business but also incorporated the history of the lonchera within 77
the city. These food trucks have been a staple both across the nation and here in Denver for years, so adding a historical perspective on loncheras while combining them with the current day existence of the trucks was a way to incorporate these trucks into the current day scene. I really like the way this vignette turned out and feel that it fits well into the structure of the film without interrupting the flow of the story.

I have tried throughout the film to keep up the energy so the audience remains engaged and interested in the story. Keeping the film moving was a bit of a struggle as there were so many pieces of each of the interviews I really wanted to include. For instance, there was so much more information on the fabrication of food trucks from my interview with Chuck Courter, but it did not fit in with the flow of the film. I had to do a lot of editing to decide what to cut to make the film tighter, and I think that chopping out portions of the film or excess descriptions helped to create the story I have now formed. It is interesting to think that multiple films could be created with all of the footage I have. The story I have created reflects my interests and my perspective to the best of my ability.

I also made numerous editing choices that are unconventional in a sense. I wanted to keep the film light and fun—basically playing off the mood of the Denver street food scene. Experimenting with different audio and visual effects was actually quite fun, especially since I had never really used techniques like these in a film before. One of the video techniques I employed was slicing an interview segment into multiple parts and creating flip-flopped jump cuts of the same interviewee. This method was originally created to play with Shelly’s interview segment when she uses the word truck about five times within a 5 second time span. The technique, which seemed a bit silly at first
actually worked when cut and put the sequence together. I used this approach again with Sean Moore when he discusses all of the different jobs from which he was laid off before starting The Denver Cupcake Truck. The method kept the interview flowing and added an element of fun to the sequence. There are also two instances during Sean’s interviews when I use a freeze frame coupled with a graphic. The use of these effects help to highlight what it is that Sean is saying. The first time, Sean mentions that his was one of the first trucks on the streets of Denver and a number one within a star-burst graphic pops up coupled with a sound effect and a freeze frame of Sean. This playful moment on the film not only extenuates the fun nature of the food truck community but also draws from Sean’s own explanation that The Denver Cupcake Truck is all about having a good time.

Sound effects are also used throughout the film. Short music beds are used under montages to show instead of tell important pieces of the food truck community such as a twenty-second description of Chuck Courter’s fabrication process. In the case of the Team 20 montage, I felt that this quick-paced package quickly demonstrate who Chuck is and what he does at Team 20 LLC without getting too wordy into the details of food truck fabrication. Sound effects were also used during a transition from an interview to Sean’s description of his early mornings at the bakery. I coupled an alarm clock sound with a garage door sound effect to back up the visual of light spilling onto The Denver Cupcake Truck as the garage doors open. These visual and audio cues are meant to alert the viewer to the fact that it is early in the morning and the start of the day, without using the visual of a clock.

Another audio and visual method I used was partnering a slide wipe with an old-fashioned car horn to transition from the core sections of the film to the historical
vignettes. Sheila and I discussed the importance of employing some sort of audio and visual method to alert the viewers they were being transported out of the main storyline and into a food truck history lesson. The old-fashioned horn sound effect transported me in time to the early to mid-nineteen hundreds. I felt that a sound effect of that nature was appropriate for transporting the viewer back in time as well. The slide wipe also gives the viewer a visual cue that they are leaving the main path of the documentary and coupled with the sound effect I believe this transition is quite effective.

Sheila brought to my attention the lack of diversity in my film and I think that this is an important issue to discuss. After showing a rough cut to my boss Julie Speer, a director and producer at Rocky Mountain PBS, one of her first comments was also that there was a lack of diversity in the film. We began to discuss some of the issues surrounding language and diversity throughout Denver as she experienced similar issues while working on one of her own documentaries a few years ago. When walking around the “downtown” areas of Denver such as the Central Business District, Uptown, Capitol Hill, the Golden Triangle, LODO, the Highlands, etc., Denver appears to be one of the whitest cities in the country. Denver has a lot of segregation and while there are pockets of diversity such as Mexican and Vietnamese communities, it seems at times that you have to seek these neighborhoods out. The Denver “gourmet” food truck culture is mainly based in the downtown areas, which I listed above, and this may be a main reason for the lack of diversity in my film. While the Denver street food scene is becoming diverse in the availability of different cuisines, it is unfortunate that there is a lack of diversity in the people preparing and presenting the food. I think it’s an area Denver really needs to work on—one of the first things I noticed about Denver when arriving
from the North East is that there is a lack of diversity in the city as a whole. In the North East, there may be a lack of diversity in areas such as Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, but when you head into the main cities like Boston, Philadelphia and New York, there is diversity everywhere. Another thing Julie mentioned from her experience working on her own film is that sometimes it is difficult to convince individuals to be on camera because they may be undocumented. I can understand how in this situation one would be weary of their likeness appearing in a public forum. Although when capturing this movement it does stand true that there is a lack of diversity, it is possible that this apparent lack of diversity throughout the film may act as a form of awareness to the viewer, and influences the viewer’s perspective on Denver’s cultural layout.

As a filmmaker, I also have to take responsibility for the lack of diversity in my film. When finding subjects for the film, a lot of my information came from word of mouth. Sean became a part of my film because he was both one of the first “new age” trucks on the street of Denver and one of the most popular. After meeting Shelly, the other subjects of the film seemed to fall into place. Shelly had recommend I meet Chuck, who I was already keen on interviewing after I read the article about him on her blog. Chuck could not say enough nice things about Nate and Ezra, and when we met, he was in the process of finishing the Quiero Arepas truck. These connections were amazing to help me get to know members of the food truck scene; however, in retrospect, maybe I should have been more considerate of the picture I was painting by choosing these individuals. As a producer and editor, I control what the audience sees and the picture painted in this film, which I did not realize until recently, is that the “gourmet” food truck scene is made up of white males. When thinking about the food trucks that make up the
Justice League or are present at Civic Center Eats, the majority of the trucks are run by
white males. Only three internationally diverse truck owners come to mind and those are
Igor of Quiero Arepas, Rich of Street Eats 5280 (which was a cart, not a truck at the time
of filming) and the woman behind Manna From Heaven. To change the diversity
landscape of the film it would have been beneficial to feature the owner of Manna From
Heaven as she is both a woman and Vietnamese. My hope by including Quiero Arepas
was to show that there is diversity present in this scene because Igor is sharing his
favorite food from his home country of Venezuela with the people of Denver.

At the same time, I feel that I chose the three trucks that I personally believe serve
my favorite street food (although I must say La Villa Real is up there as well). Whenever
I visit food truck events I always order from Stick It To Me or I head to Renegade
Brewing on Friday nights because I am craving La Original arepa. When my friends
celebrate their birthdays I head to Cake Crumbs Bakery if The Denver Cupcake Truck is
at a private function because Sean Moore makes the best cupcakes around. My love of
the food on these trucks as well as my interest in the truck owners lead me to make my
final decision on who to feature. Each of these truck owners, while perhaps not so diverse
ethnically, are very diverse in their backgrounds, their personalities and their food.

While I love being behind the camera and creating something concrete from hours
and hours of footage, it is really the subjects of the film that make documentary
filmmaking so amazing. What I love most about being a documentary filmmaker is the
ability to meet so many amazing people and not just to hear their story but have the
opportunity to share their story with others. The bond that is formed and the trust that is
exchanged are truly incredible. Everyone in the Denver street food community welcomed
me with open arms and honestly, very few people shied away from the camera. I spent an amazing sixteen months meeting some fantastic individuals, eating delicious food and creating one of the most incredible accomplishments of my career thus far. The only question remaining is… what do I do next?!
Bibliography.


