

## **Futures of the Future: Agriculture Between Business and Culture**

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Thorstein Veblen once argued for a strong separation between the concepts of industry and business. While industry is productivity as such, business practices prey upon that productivity, corralling and controlling it to ensure that only certain players profit. What is the future of vertical farming, given that it is poised to expand into a much larger-scale industry, and thus to invite the predations of big business? Will vertical farming continue to offer viable alternative methods for small-scale growers, or will these practices become heavily centralized until they are saddled with corporate control to the same extent as, say Monsanto currently exercises in farming? To open this question, I briefly contextualize vertical farming practices within a range of broader discussions. I compare the use of advanced data analytics in vertical farming with Monsanto's use of big data (for instance, in the remote spectral analysis of crops). Under what circumstances are such technologies used in service of extending corporate control, as opposed to optimizing yields? I examine vertical farming with respect to geopolitical questions about the prevalence of food deserts (large areas in which it is impossible to find cheap, healthy food) across the U.S. and elsewhere. In what corporate climates could vertical farming aid in the equitable distribution of good food? Finally, I look to small-scale farming practices that promote education and social justice, such as the urban farm at the now closed Catherine Ferguson Academy, a high school for pregnant girls and teen mothers in Detroit. Under what circumstances could vertical farming contribute to such social justice efforts? In order to maintain good future prospects for vertical farming in these directions, I argue, it is imperative to view agriculture at a distance from business practices, to view it, instead, as part of cultural practices more broadly - as deeply linked to the arts, education and embodied experience.

More information on the conference can be found here: <http://verticalfuture.tumblr.com/>

Full recordings of all lectures can be found here: <https://soundcloud.com/vertical-futures>