

**TASTE, ETHICS, AND THE MARKET IN GUATEMALAN COFFEE.
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY.**

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ABSTRACT

For more than two decades there has been a growing niche for ethically sourced coffees, at the same time as a revitalisation and development of sourcing models focused on indicators of coffee quality and measures of taste. Small independent and multinational buyers and roasters have become progressively interested in sourcing coffee in a way that privileges sustainable and/or high quality indicators, and are increasingly engaged in debates about solidarity versus mainstreaming, quantity versus quality, and provider of caffeine versus taste. Research on one coffee producing country, Guatemala, suggests how these debates have affected the historical evolution of the coffee market. This ethnographic study traces the qualifications of Guatemalan coffee and argues that responses to both the enactment of the technologies, as well as the perceived limitations of sourcing models have produced new articulations of ethics and taste. Producers and small entrepreneurs located in Guatemala reconfigure the practices of cultivation, processing, and selling/buying in relation to circulating market indicators. They create locally situated attachments to the coffee through skill transfer and knowledge exchange and in this way they imitate and also transform international valuations of taste, ethics and quality. This thesis works to make visible the range and diversity of processes and agencies involved in the production of markets for ethical coffee and considers coffee as vital and mobile; an active producer of public effects rather than a passive object moved through a commodity network. This view enables a more open, relational and mobile account of both coffee and of ethics, one which is capable of making clear the important and emerging role of taste. This thesis extends the qualifications of coffee to the daily enactments of cultivation and the skills and techniques that work to reveal taste. On this view, taste mediates the agency of the materials in both high quality and sustainable coffees and this expands and extends ethics to interpersonal, material and bodily relations that link producers and consumers in multiple ways.

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To my sister, Aviva
In life and death she challenges and inspires

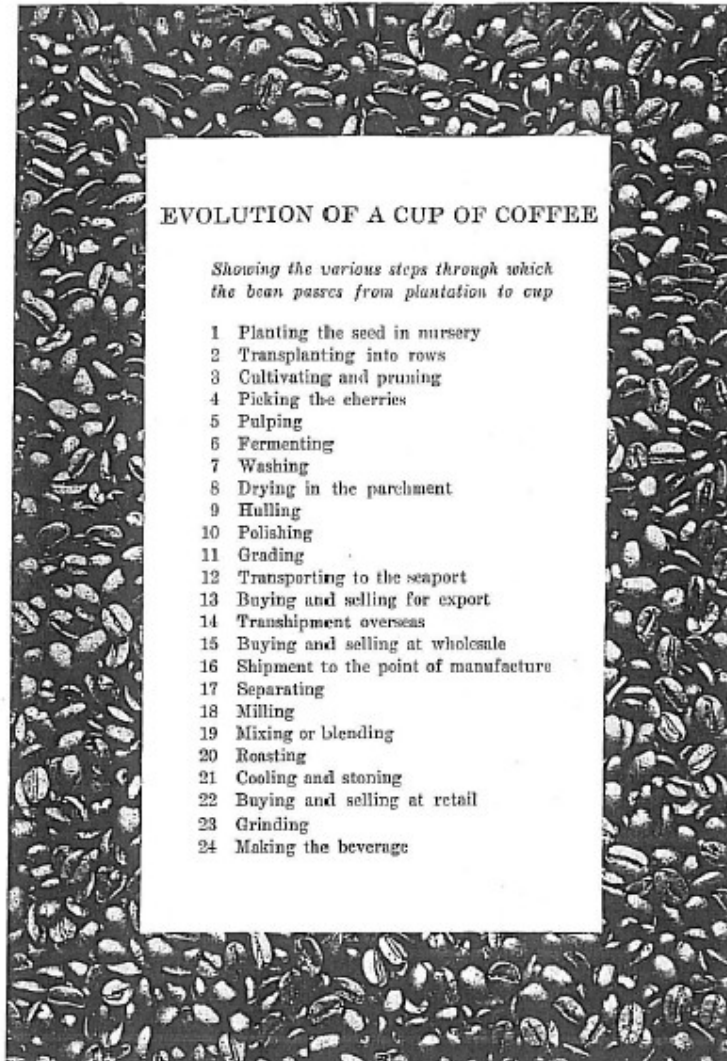
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EVOLUTION OF A CUP OF COFFEE

*Showing the various steps through which
the bean passes from plantation to cup*

- 1 Planting the seed in nursery
- 2 Transplanting into rows
- 3 Cultivating and pruning
- 4 Picking the cherries
- 5 Pulping
- 6 Fermenting
- 7 Washing
- 8 Drying in the parchment
- 9 Hulling
- 10 Polishing
- 11 Grading
- 12 Transporting to the seaport
- 13 Buying and selling for export
- 14 Transshipment overseas
- 15 Buying and selling at wholesale
- 16 Shipment to the point of manufacture
- 17 Separating
- 18 Milling
- 19 Mixing or blending
- 20 Roasting
- 21 Cooling and stoning
- 22 Buying and selling at retail
- 23 Grinding
- 24 Making the beverage

Source: William Ukers, *All about coffee*, 1922

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Coffee is a source of caffeine, a drink shared by friends, a multi-billion dollar industry, and the livelihood of more than 20 million people throughout the world¹. It grows as a cherry-like fruit on small trees in tropical countries. When ripe, producers pick, soak, strip and clean the cherry to access the beans inside, leaving behind its soft fleshy exterior to feed pests, provide mucilage for compost, clog drainage systems and pollute water. Coffee professionals dry, bag, and transport the beans to roasters and retailers that cook, grind, and percolate coffee for consumption by caffeine craving drinkers. Recently there has been a rise in concern about the integrity and sustainability of the set of relations from growing to consuming and a growing group of niche providers that specialise in evaluating the presence of ethical interactions in the techno-economic activities from farm to consumption. With increased focus on the ethical import of coffee production, the intersections of coffee and ethics are the starting point of this thesis that asks how ethics are practiced in the coffee market.

This thesis works to make visible the range and diversity of processes and agencies involved in the production of markets for ethical coffee. To illustrate such diversity, the thesis focuses on the convergence of two areas of small, independent and/or alternative coffee networks that gained popularity in the past two decades: the market for ethically sourced coffees that meet standards of social, environmental and economic sustainability and a revitalisation and development of sourcing networks focused on indicators of coffee quality and measures of taste. I argue that a close examination of the role of ethics, quality and taste in the making of

¹ Some say the number of people involved with coffee is closer to 75 million. There are 15 million people in Ethiopia alone who interact with coffee for their livelihood.

coffee markets reveals a multitude of not-immediately-visible relations that, when brought into view, not only make salient the diverse activities, actors, and processes involved to produce, process, and sell coffee, but also have the political potential to create something new.

Overview

Beans are qualified as ethical when cultivated on farms that meet international standards of social, environmental and economic sustainability. Such standards often take the form of certification systems that include farm-based activities such as better wages for workers, access to education and medical services, controls on environmental outputs, and long term contracts with small landholders to ensure economic sustainability. While there are many popular systems that set standards and certify compliance like Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, Utz Certified and Starbucks' CAFE Practices, certifiable measurements are only *one* way that professionals produce 'ethical' coffee. This thesis considers ethics as situated and relational, formed through daily interactions with the multiple practices of coffee production, economies, politics, administrations and associations specific to and circulating through production and consumption. Understanding ethics in this way is purposely meant to challenge dichotomies like 'producer' and 'consumer', and public theories of 'ethics-as-sustainability', that do not always account for the histories and geographies, trajectories and daily interactions of those located in different parts of market networks.

Although early forms of Fairtrade and other ethical coffees were less concerned with coffee's particular attributes, more recently there has formed a productive tension between operators of ethical coffee networks and those traders and roasters interested in the quality of coffee and how its characteristics contribute to taste. This thesis addresses this tension by claiming that the local and situated mediations of 'ethics' in the coffee market *converge* with local

mediations of indicators of ‘quality’ and ‘taste’. Quality here refers to market indicators that define and schematise the beans according to specific traits. Producers can enhance the characteristics of coffee by paying detailed attention to growing, picking and processing the bean from cherry to ready to roast. Professionals classify coffees into quality grades using visual and taste analyses and sell coffee to buyers and roasters who desire certain qualities to meet preparation styles. Similar to the social premium applied to those coffees classified as ethical, the market rewards attention to detail with a ‘quality’ premium above the market price. Taste, a by-product of the act of producing a quality bean, is now the subject of a growing group of coffee connoisseurs that consider coffee like wine: these coffee buyers and roasters, and many of the producers working with them, seek exceptional taste and complex characteristics in the cup. It is precisely the responses to the circulation of such coffees, as well as the perceived limitations of both conventional and niche sourcing networks, that, I argue, produces a new way to articulate ‘the ethics of coffee’. Taste mediates the agency of the materials in both high quality and ethical coffees and, in this way, expands and extends ethics to interpersonal, material and bodily relations that link producers and consumers in multiple ways. As a result, the set of activities that tend to be qualified as ‘economic’ are extended to incorporate the daily enactments of cultivation and the skills and techniques that work to reveal taste.

Background

This ethnographic study focuses on one area of production: Guatemala. Guatemala is the fifth largest producer of coffee in the world² (Figure 1). In 2007/08 they exported³ roughly 3.82

² The numbers reflect total export of both types of coffee, Arabica and Robusta. Those countries producing Robusta, like Vietnam, obtain low prices per pound. Guatemala produces mostly Arabica and a very small amount of Robusta.

³ Production numbers do not reflect coffee that stays in the country for consumption, although this is a very small percentage of the recorded coffee produced.

million 60 kilogram bags of green (ready to roast)⁴ coffee equalling about 655 million USD in revenue⁵, and the industry enrolled around one third of its registered population of 12 million people⁶. At least as far back as the agricultural ‘coffee revolution’ in 1871 (McCreery, 1976), successive Guatemalan governments have supported the expansion of coffee production in response to the requirements of international trade regulations. Governments have projected liberal, protectionist and neo-liberal ideologies and policies over time. All have struggled with the management and distribution of agricultural land, labour, resources and technologies to grow, process, and export coffee based on the international demands of an agricultural commodity. The way that the Guatemalan coffee economy developed affects its form and function today.

Country	Crop Year 2007/08 (000 - 60kg bags)
Brazil	28 046
Vietnam	15 774
Colombia	11 557
Indonesia	4 418
Guatemala	3 822
Honduras	3 395
Uganda	3 210
India	3 147
Ethiopia	2 806
Peru	2 658

Source: ICO

Figure 1: Top ten coffee producing countries 2007/08⁷

⁴ The various states of coffee as it is processed from cherry to ready to roast are described in chapter five.

⁵ Guatemala exports only slightly more coffee per year than neighbouring Honduras but obtains higher revenue from sales of coffee. This is likely because they grow and market higher quality coffee that achieves a differential on the market. To note, and a subject addressed later in the thesis, first that many claim that about one third of Guatemala’s coffee exports are made up of Honduran coffee brought illegally over the border and second, that much of the coffee sold as Antigua coffee, a type of coffee that achieves higher price premiums, is alleged to be coffee from other regions of Guatemala brought down to Antigua and sold as such. The numbers do not adequately represent such allegations. Numbers obtained from Anacafé website (in discussion with Board members) found online at <http://portal.anacafe.org/portal/Home.aspx?tabid=10>.

⁶ Numbers do not reflect reportedly thousands of Guatemalans that are not officially on state registers.

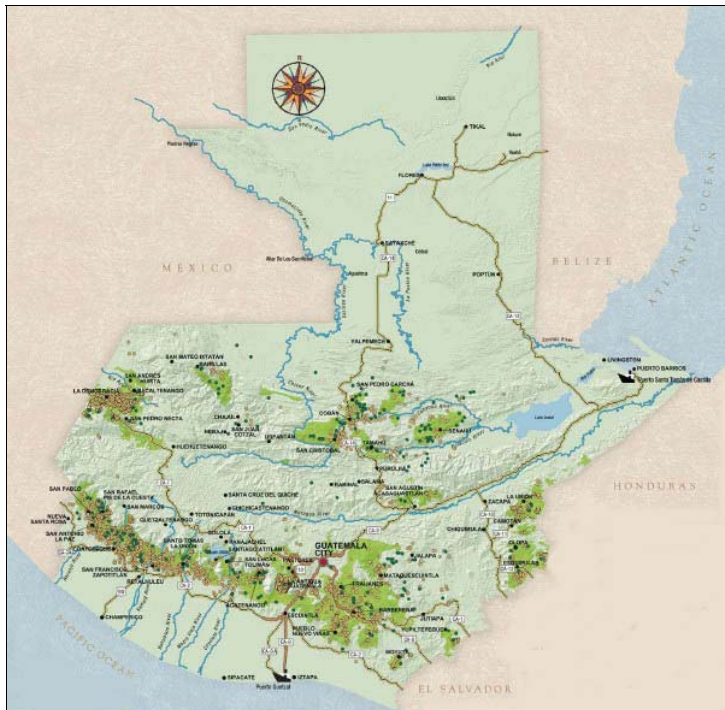
⁷ Total coffee exports for all countries in 2007/08 were 94.3 million bags. There are 55 producing countries in the world growing both Arabica and Robusta coffee.

Low coffee prices in the early 2000s led to abandoned coffee farms, diversification to other agricultural products or tourism, and high rates of poverty among rural populations and small farm holders. In response, the Guatemalan national producer organisation Anacafé focused its attention on training and providing technical assistance to growers to achieve price premiums associated with meeting currently valued indicators of ethics and quality. With a focus on these two value-added sectors, Guatemalan coffee professionals have steadily increased profits each year since 2003. Rather than an increase in total amount of coffee produced, the success in growing the market seems to be about attention to the quality of coffee and compliance with the standards of numerous sustainable coffee models. Guatemala claims to be in a good position to attend to the market qualifications, quality and ethics, as a result of traditional methods of farming, organisation of processing units and technologies for traceability and transparency. In accordance with the current indicators of good taste, Guatemala grows some of the world's finest coffees owing to its climatically diverse regions, high altitudes and enriched volcanic soil. As a result, Guatemalan coffee forms the main focus of study for this research as it provides an excellent site for the study of the productive tension between ethics, quality, and taste.

The introduction situates the chapters that follow in the thesis by detailing the development of coffee production in Guatemala. As Guatemala produces most of its coffee for consumption elsewhere, and is beholden to the structures of international trade that make and influence local activities, the development of its economy is always in relation to international policy and regulatory activities. The prerogatives and apparatus of the international coffee market are deeply entangled with the development of the local economy, its history and politics and the daily lives of Guatemala's people and environments. The organisation of coffee production, processing, export and consumption, and the institutional and administrative

technologies in Guatemala have crucial importance for the way that local producers and professionals interact with indicators of ethics, quality, and taste. Following this history, there is a brief outline of the main arguments of the thesis through an account of the chapters that follow.

1.2 Situating coffee and Guatemala



Source: Guatemalan Coffees marketing material⁸

Figure 2: Map of Guatemala with coffee regions in green

The period between 1830 and 1930 was the ‘coffee century’ in Latin America where national economies consisting of cacao, cotton, cochineal and indigo, transformed into coffee republics. Responding to the dramatic increases in world trade and per capita consumption, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua entered the coffee trade with Guatemala being one of the last economies to fully transform (Roseberry, 1995: 3). Such expansion required three main inputs: transport, land and labour as well as the promotion of

⁸ <http://www.guatemalancoffees.com/GCCContent/GCeng/media/downloadmedia.asp#>

national policy and management in response to a primary commodity with highly fluctuating prices beyond the control of local producers and exporters. While these requirements are similar, each Latin American country underwent radically distinct experiences and transformations (Roseberry, 1995; Sick, 1998). There were and remain today, extreme variations in social, economic and political structures and processes among coffee producing regions in Latin America, distinct administration of property rights and very different resolutions to the seemingly ubiquitous problem of labour, the '*falta de brazos*' (Roseberry, 1995: 5).

The historical evolution of the coffee market in Guatemala is here considered through a lens of what Callon (1998b) calls economization. As Caliskan and Callon (2009) put it,

This term is used to denote the processes that constitute the behaviours, organizations, institutions and, more generally, the objects in a particular society which are tentatively and often controversially qualified [...] as 'economic'. The construction of action (-ization) into the word implies that the economy is an achievement rather than a [...] pre-existing reality that can simply be revealed and acted upon (370).

Establishing and perpetuating a coffee economy in Guatemala is a process of qualifying institutional, discursive, material, technical and administrative assemblages as economic, the heterogeneous elements that shape and format the economy (Foucault, 1980). The circulation of Guatemalan coffee involves continuous (re)qualification and valuation and these processes transform Guatemala, the international market and the coffee itself.

The history of Guatemalan policy concerning land and labour, the displacement of thousands, decades of military rule and civilian resistance are important precursors to today's coffee

production⁹. These histories say a lot about Guatemala's commitment to the current climate of 'democratic transition' and trade liberalisation for the Latin American economies and across the globe. Here I sketch an overview of Guatemala's market reforms and governmental objectives from the mid-1800s through to today. In growing a productive economy based on international markets, the transformations are always both regional and global. Throughout the discussion I note the conditions of the international coffee market at the time and Guatemala's position in relation to the coffee market. This reflects the claim that much of Guatemala's agricultural and economic development – including changing landscapes, ecological marginalisation and unexpected actors– are contingent encounters practiced locally that mediate or subvert the imperatives of global trade.

The formative years

The first plantings of coffee trees in Guatemala were as decoration in the Jesuit gardens in the important colonial town of Antigua¹⁰. By the beginning of the 19th century coffee cultivation was expanding rapidly across Latin America and consumption boomed in Constantinople and Europe, yet Guatemala did not focus on coffee as a cash crop until relatively late, and not before the Spanish colonialists departed in 1821. There were some attempts as early as the 1850s but many of these were experimental plantings of little success. Until that time, Guatemala's main export was cochineal. This natural dye succumbed to artificial equivalents by 1860 bringing production to a halt.

⁹ The example of Costa Rica's development versus Guatemala's is a good comparison. Unlike large land holders who control production and processing in Guatemala, the Costa Rican state supported the growth of small farmer landholdings and the processing units were usually small and independently owned. Although not immune to injustices, small and medium farms form a large and relatively prosperous middle class and share in the wealth created by coffee production. See Sick (1998).

¹⁰ The colonials did seem to be drinking coffee as early as the 1740s but it is unknown whether these beans originated in Guatemala or arrived on European trading ships (Wagner, 2001).

With the declining value of cochineal, the Guatemalan Conservative government pursued coffee production amid the expansion of coffee houses across the world. They issued manuals and information pamphlets to aid planters in best cultivation practices as the perennial takes four to five years to produce its first crops. The existing cochineal plantations in the Antigua and Amatitlán¹¹ regions served as perfect experimental grounds with their readily available land and labour and landowners planted coffee trees among the cochineal cactus. By 1862 there were about seventeen large growers around Antigua with a total of almost 48,000 trees in place and 28,000 seedlings and these numbers most certainly overlooked many small scale plantings (McCreery, 1996: 163). The lessons learned in these early experiments revealed that the *Coffea Arabica* plant preferred particular soils and climates and required large tracts of land and a lot of labour¹². The spread of cultivation followed the locating of spaces that could respond to such requirements.

Planters developed coffee mainly in two areas of Guatemala: the western piedmont, called the Boca Costa, and the Alta Verapaz in the northeast, before spreading to other areas. The extension of cultivation to these two areas goes a long way to describing the decisions made that pertain to land and labour. Stretching towards the west part of the country, *ladinos*, the mixed race elites of Spanish and indigenous populations, worked to gain access to land in the Boca Costa region. It was sparsely populated, but the villages along the adjacent highlands belonged to the rural indigenous populations and they used the land of the piedmont to plant

¹¹ Of these two regions, Antigua flourished and Amatitlán did not. Such was the experimental nature of early plantings.

¹² Two main species of coffee are cultivated today, *Coffea Arabica*, known as Arabica and *Coffea Canephora* known as Robusta. Robusta, accounting for about 20 per cent of the world's production is a more robust plant and survives in less particular soils and climates. Accounting for 75-80 per cent of production, Arabica is of much higher quality and requires more adept planting, particular soil conditions and high altitudes to achieve best results. Nomenclature differentiates Arabica coffee based on the altitudes at which it is grown. Strictly hard bean (SHB) is the highest quality, grown at or above 1,370 metres (4,500 ft) above sea level. Hard bean (HB) grows at 1,066 to 1,370 metres (3,500 - 4,500 ft) and Primes grow between 762 and 1,066 metres (2,500 - 3,500).

seasonal crops for sale and for household consumption. Now under threat, the indigenous sought to protect their land holdings, making claims to the state for protection. Although the Conservative state at the time defended some of their claims, they ultimately confirmed the possession of only a small part of what the indigenous said they owned and declared the rest state-owned and available for sale to planters (McCreery, 2003: 193). Some of the villages then leased land to coffee growers while others resisted such incursions leading to uprisings against planters in 1864 (McCreery, 1996: 165). The government swiftly brought this to an end and the indigenous were soon in full retreat.

Land organisation followed colonial times, the *latifundia-minifundia* system of large underutilized rural estates surrounded by tiny plots used for subsistence agriculture. The *latifundia* estate, known as *fincas*, had a concentration of coffee trees, a large owners' home and basic housing for year round and seasonal workers. Peasant farmers did have access to land, albeit of poorer quality and smaller quantities than the dominant class (Gauster and Isakson, 2007). This partitioning of the land into estates and small subsistence plots, however, changed the autonomous and economically complex basis of indigenous agro-ecosystems. As the rural populations implemented a 'slash and burn' process of land use, those lands lying fallow were prime acquisitions for private interests. The local populations understood that leasing or losing this land to coffee meant the end of their seasonal growing capabilities and their displacement to marginal lands. Gallini (2004) suggests that the process of taking over land for coffee cultivation was one of ecological marginalisation that had begun as early as the 1830s, moving the rural populations to more fragile and less fertile

zones¹³. The populations reacted in different ways. Some indigenous officials acquired land and themselves became coffee growers while the majority of the populations soon became workers on the expanding *fincas* (Gallini, 2004: 48).

Considering the expansion of coffee cultivation as one of ecological marginalisation makes sense of the distribution of land in Guatemala today. The legacy of the *latifundia-minifundia* system with the process of concentration of a few medium and large estates owned by elites with a concentration of coffee trees, a large landowner's house and basic housing for year-round or seasonal workers still exists today as *fincas*, with many smaller plots of agricultural land planted by owners who live nearby. While I go on to recount the factors of the coffee revolution in 1870s and government supported land incursions and forced labour, I emphasise this point in order to highlight how the early *latifundia-minifundia* system underlies the distribution of land and the style of coffee cultivation still present, although slightly less powerful, today.

While the development of coffee in the Boca Costa area speaks to the issues of land and the large estate/small farm holder model, the development of the highlands highlight the institutionalisation of forced labour. Stretching upward to the Verapaz region of the country, the highlands boast of volcanic soil, high altitudes and an abundance of water making it perfect land for cultivation. These areas were unsuitable for cochineal or cacao and were densely populated by indigenous people who lived by a seasonal agro-economic system that

¹³ Gallini (2004) re-examines McCreery's seminal work on the 'coffee revolution' through the lens of the environment and the Maya-Mam community in south-western Guatemala where the 'revolution' first took place. Making a case for assessing the development of the coffee economy as one of ecological marginalization, Gallini argues that rather than a rapid transformative 'revolution', the changing property distribution and rights for rural populations was well underway as early as the 1830s. She suggests that the Latin American coffee historiography while robust, has granted only marginal importance to the environment in shaping the very diverse local histories of coffee production. By shifting the transformative process from the regularly cited revolution in 1871 to the histories of ecological marginalisation since the 1830s means that other dynamics become relevant to forms of resistance and control. See also Topik (2000: 254).

was not incorporated into plantations. There was early communal coffee growing among the indigenous villages in the Cobán region in the 1850s but private interests soon prevailed as *ladinos* and European investors turned their attention to the rich soil (Cambranes, 1985). This area had a number of limitations, not least its isolated geography and lack of access to old colonial routes. At the same time, there seemed to be a lot of available land and, more importantly, an abundance of labour of those considered to be willing and submissive participants in the new economy. Moreover, these “humble, submissive and religious” people, as the elite called the indigenous rural populations, could also, in the near absence of roads, carry the crop to market (McCreery, 1996: 167).

Although Conservative state policy at the time favoured the rights of indigenous, the local government representatives in the region favoured the ‘civilized *ladinos*’ and the attractive possibility of agricultural development and foreign investment (Cambranes, 1985; McCreery, 1996). Unfortunately, the humble indigenous were not as willing to work as the owners would have liked and, despite large populations of able bodies, the Governor of the Verapaz bemoaned the shortage of workers¹⁴. The populations there still worked small tracts of land and were not interested in taking up this kind of back breaking labour for little return. The government generally resisted forced labour schemes (McCreery, 2003: 195). Coffee plantings forged ahead and landowners began to lobby for revised labour conditions. As discussed in the next section, the overthrow of the Conservative government in 1870 and the new Liberal government made this transition work in the favour of coffee planters.

¹⁴ It was often suggested that there was a shortage of labour but as Roseberry (1995) and McCreery (1976, 1996) point out, the problem was not a shortage of human labour but rather a desire for a certain ‘submissive’ population. Moreover, there are indications that the land owners preferred a ‘white’ workforce (rather than the indigenous in the area) but early attempts to draw immigrant labour proved unsuccessful (McCreery, 1976).

The coffee revolution

The slow progress and planting experimentations from the 1850s, alongside the drawing of foreign capital in the Verapaz region for the promise of high quality coffee, established a perfect climate for the ‘coffee revolution’ in Guatemala from 1871 (McCreery, 1996)¹⁵. The revolution coincided with the refashioning of the Conservative state into a Liberal one; the 1870 coup established President Justo Rufino Barrios. His Liberal government was committed to full-scale integration of the national economy into the developing world system as supplier of raw materials, including coffee, and a strong state that would actively intervene to facilitate and promote export production.

The Liberal government consolidated an economic power elite consisting of new coffee growers, merchants and the owners of the few local industries, a new group of bureaucrats, army officers and foreign investors. Those who could establish themselves as economically useful in this new Liberal regime still form the elite of the country today (Williams, 1994). These actors came to be coffee economy actors based on their valued processes and capabilities and decisions to engage with the activities required in this new economy (Callon, 2007). Under the auspices of modernisation and development, the Barrios government effectively abolished all communal lands into private holdings and appropriated and nationalised all church-owned property. Once they settled the issue of land, they turned attention to problem of labour¹⁶.

¹⁵ I use the term ‘revolution’ here, in line with McCreery’s (1996) seminal work, to suggest the transformation of land distribution and human rights in relation to the expansion of coffee production. It further points to the implementation of very different political and economic reforms focused on supporting a new style of economy in Guatemala. Still, I consider this as a process that developed a particular congregation of elements in time rather than a surprise or sudden change.

¹⁶ During the Liberal coffee expansion, President Barrios owned several large coffee plantations including the largest in Guatemala at that time.

The Liberal government instituted a forced labour draft, called *mandamientos*¹⁷. Guatemalan landowners, instrumental to the Liberal Revolution and now holding important posts in the new regime, applied to the *jefe politico*, or departmental governor for a certain number of workers over two weeks to one month. They paid the low wages in advance, along with travel if they were to work in a different department, creating a system of indebted labour. Beyond the poor working conditions, the workers were also away from their families and their own land whenever required by the *mandamientos*¹⁸. Labourers resisted in a number of ways, hiding in the mountains, refusing to work or working poorly, and signing contracts in the export agricultural zones along the Pacific, as this meant they did not have to be indebted to the *fincas*. Forced labour and acts of resistance pushed and pulled populations further from their homes¹⁹. Such systems of enforced labour, and the modes of resistance with which they were associated, lasted until the 1920s (Cambranes, 1985; McCreery, 1996).

By 1880, coffee accounted for about 90 per cent of Guatemala's exports mostly to Europe (Wagner, 2001). Significantly, the Liberal led process of entering the world economy did not extend a notion of education and 'development' to the workers. In fact, it seems that modernisation had a strict caste quality wherein only the elite classes enjoyed Western-style intellectual and cultural development while the indigenous populations had to remain, in the terms of liberal development, 'underdeveloped' workers. The expansion of coffee production, as McCreery (1976) demonstrates, "was the first instance in Guatemala of the penetration of commercial agriculture into the fibre of indigenous society" (460). In his groundbreaking study he concludes, "[...] development for the ruling coffee elite necessitated

¹⁷ Based on the colonial forced labour program of *repartimientos*.

¹⁸ The *mandamiento* system and the overall strategies and struggles between the state to mandate labour and the indigenous populations to resist are crucial elements of the development of the Guatemalan coffee economy and the ongoing struggle between the state, private owners and underpaid workers. See McCreery (1976) for an excellent short account of this system or McCreery (2003) and Cambranes (1985) for more detailed discussions.

¹⁹ Sometimes workers became *colonos*, resident workers living on the coffee plantation for two to six months of a year practically dismantling their family and homes but allowing for some regularity rather than sudden calls to work.

the active underdevelopment of the economic and social position of the indigenous majority” (460). These land incursions and forced labour systems are emphasised here because this style of privatisation of land and purposeful underdevelopment of social life for the indigenous in the Alta Verapaz remain the cornerstone of the coercive, brutal and ethnically divided state (Handy, 1984).

Of course, opportunities arose for well-connected or enterprising people and communities to prosper creating socio-economic differences among the rural populations. It is important to note that today, as in the late 1800s, there was not a simple bi-polar division of elites and state versus a singular indigenous population as many theorists and activists tend to recount. There are more than twenty different indigenous populations in Guatemala and the histories tell of thousands of people struggling in numerous ways to continue to live, work and gain certain forms of power in a changing economic landscape. This caused all manner of contentious divisions among the rural populations (Stoll, 1998). This is a crucially important point.

While there is a broad story of opposition between elite/state and the indigenous, too many activists and historians have simplified the problems, socio-economic divisions and political attachments. This tends to create a victimized underclass. While there is no doubt of the repression, displacement and forced labour of rural populations and widespread poverty, it is important not to singularise an underclass with no agency in the unfolding of their lives. It is precisely to the expressions of agency that I attend in the following chapters.

20th Century

To return to the trajectory of coffee, with the problems of land and labour relatively under the control of the government, there was another issue that affected the landscape of the elites and ownership. Having entered into an already well-established world industry, the coffee produced needed to be of suitably high quality to compete. This required the acquisition of

capital intensive modern processing technologies that meet quality indicators on the market. While the elite classes of Guatemala had access to some funds, the growth of the coffee sector began to attract interests from foreign investors. By 1890, immigrants to Guatemala owned one-fourth of the large coffee farms, including the largest coffee farm in the country (Williams, 1994: 169).

Foreign investment intensified from 1890 to 1930 especially from German import firms. German firms often set up a commercial house in Guatemala importing manufactured goods, lending to growers, and buying and exporting coffee to Germany. The firms gained information about the solvency of the farmers and then purchased indebted farms. In this way, German firms came to own many of the largest plantations in Guatemala by the outbreak of the First World War. During the war, the Guatemalan government seized many German holdings but returned most to original owners after the war, beginning a renewed expansion of German ownership. The descendants of these families today still own large plantations (Wagner, 2001: 154). The largest coffee farms usually acquired the technologies to process the coffee and many of them owned export houses and were involved in banking and crop finance (Williams, 1994: 171), thus increasing the small farm holders reliance on the *beneficios* of the large estates, a model continuing today and discussed in detail in chapter five. Forced labour systems continued by law throughout WWI until at least the 1920s.

Internationally, foreign (consumption country) dominance like that of Germany in Guatemala was a problem for many producing nations. In Brazil, the foremost producing country in the early 20th century, the ten leading European and American brokerage firms controlled 71 per cent of exports out of Brazil and could determine international coffee prices by stockpiling reserves. In response, Brazil established a valorisation scheme that lasted from 1906-1937.

The Brazilian government implemented a series of controls including a programme of stockpiling large quantities of coffee and strict control of export volumes²⁰. Brazil became the first producing country to compete successfully with brokerage firms and emerged as a leading player in the international market able to control prices (Daviron and Ponte, 2005: 84). By maintaining world prices, Brazil protected all other coffee growing nations.

By the 1930s, the global economic crisis of the Depression influenced coffee prices and the *fincas* owners in Guatemala looked to reduce the costs of production. In 1934 the ruling dictator of Guatemala, General Jorge Ubico, re-organised into capitalist labour relations. He ended labour debts and instituted free labour and established banking and loans based on land valuations to keep the economy from sinking further (Wagner, 2001)²¹. Some freer labour conditions may have arrived but activities of the indigenous were still highly policed and systems of worker indebtedness to large *fincas* prevailed. In the late 1930s, world consumption patterns turned even more towards high quality coffee so while Brazil stockpiled its mediocre coffee based on its valorisation scheme, the countries of Latin America were able to grow their trade based on indicators of quality. They could not ignore stockpiling forever and by the late 1930s overproduction drastically reduced the price of coffee.

The political revolution of 1944, the overthrow of President Ubico and the post-war period seemed to promise a new rule of law in Guatemala. Relatively fair and free elections followed and a controversial but extensive agrarian reform distributed unused land of large *fincas* to rural communities (Bethell, 1998). The populist Jacobo Arbenz became President in the 1950 election and set reform into motion calling for a conversion of Guatemala to a

²⁰ To maintain a certain supply-demand balance in the market, each year Brazil planned to export a volume that corresponded to the difference between global imports and the production of its competitors.

²¹ This did not substantially abolish forced labour but did somewhat change the economic landscape; re-establishing some of the populations in the local economies of towns and creating socio-economic differences within the Indigenous communities.

modern capitalist economy with free labour and the lawful right to unionise. Arbenz's principal objective was to transform Guatemala from a country dependent on foreign capital into an independent capitalist nation based on the Keynesian protectionist model (Gauster and Isakson, 2007: 1522). They progressed cautiously, carefully navigating reforms that might affect exports or alienate powerful agricultural elites (McCreery, 2003).

The Arbenz government undertook a massive land redistribution program. Under American pressure during World War II, Guatemala's government expropriated 75 of 139 farms belonging to corporations or persons believed to be of German origin (Williams, 1994: 171). They also seized domestically owned *fincas* and unused land owned by the American exporter United Fruit Company, and began to redistribute it to the country's displaced populations.

During the war, North America was the only buyer of Latin American coffees. To secure the ties, the US established the Inter-American Coffee Agreement in 1940 between the US and all Latin American countries. This placed the reins of the coffee market in the hands of the US²². At the same time, European powers sought to regain control of coffee stocks from the Brazilian valorisation scheme. European importers introduced discriminatory mechanisms like taxes and quotas against non-imperial imports and provided direct financial incentives for the development of production capacity in their colonies (Daviron and Ponte, 2005: 85). This led to the fragmentation of the world market from the late 1930s to the 1960s²³.

²² The US remains today the largest single country buyer of Guatemalan coffee. They purchase 48% of Guatemala's coffee exports. Statistic from: Exportaciones de Café por destino 2008/2009, Anacafé.

²³ For example, France promoted the growth of coffees in Francophone Africa, most notably of Robusta plants. As such, consumers in France were drinking African Robustas (usually as espressos) rather than higher quality Latin American Arabicas thus shifting the balance of types of production and consumption throughout the world.

Civil war

Returning to Guatemala, the activities of mobilisation set in motion by the Arbenz government fuelled civil unrest and resistance. The general culture of reform mobilised rural people causing labour shortages and angering landowners (Brockett, 1988: 104). They further unsettled the daily functioning of the United Fruit Company whose subsidisation of roads, railroads and shipping routes allowed them to control most of the agricultural export economy beyond coffee (Schlesinger and Kinzer, 2005). They had substantial amounts of land, much of it unused, employed a sizeable workforce, and had a powerful grip on the previous Guatemalan government²⁴. According to the United States, mobilisation activities posed a communist threat. No sooner was the threat established than a destabilisation campaign and armed invasion, many considered US-financed, overthrew President Arbenz in 1954. They installed previously exiled Carlos Castillo Armas as the new president. Terror and military control ensued, rolling back land reform, abolishing most labour rights and ushering in thirty-six years of military rule, political repression, brutality, and murder. The new government scaled back all of the agrarian reform and returned the expropriated lands. The government needed to deal with significant numbers of now re-displaced peoples and re-settled them on agrarian land mainly along the Pacific slope (Brockett, 1988; Lovell, 2001).

The civil government that came to power in 1966 gave the military a free hand to conduct a counterinsurgency campaign against a small group of mostly *ladino* guerrillas. The military, and the paramilitary death squads allied with it, eliminated not only the guerrillas but also thousands of innocent rural indigenous hoping to deter others from joining the guerrillas through a widespread systematic terror campaign (Brockett, 1988). This continued unabated

²⁴ *Bitter Fruit*, (Schlesinger and Kinzer, 2005) provides a well researched account of United Fruit and American involvement in the overthrow of Arbenz in 1954.

from the mid-1960s until 1970 in the first instance²⁵. It intensified with the election of General Carlos Arana Osorio in 1970 who instituted further repression in the eastern mountains and Guatemala City. This spread to the western highlands as state terrorism pervaded the country.

Peasant mobilisation against the violent activities of the state grew in the 1970s and likely developed from a number of sources. One of these was the organising and missionary work of Christian groups²⁶. Equally, from the 1960s, foreign governments and private organisations were initiating rural development projects. It seems that President Arana, who ruled from 1970-1974, allowed organisations to continue as long as they did not act as political pressure groups or in any way counter to the governmental agenda; in other words, as long as they did not expound communist sentiment (Brockett, 1988: 112). Cooperatives made up of farmers working under the auspices and funding of the foreign investment and also of the Christian cooperatives grew in size and mutual support throughout the 1970s in areas not directly targeted by counterinsurgency tactics. Agrarian communities did work to establish socio-economic development in various regions (Stoll, 1998). After the earthquake of 1976, taking the lives of over 23,000 people, another 200 private and public foreign organizations initiated activities in the country. Guatemala then had 510 cooperatives, 57 per cent of them in the highlands, with a combined membership of more than 132,000 people and many indigenous were able to take advantage of economic opportunities (Brockett, 1988: 112). Importantly, the presence of non-state actors filled the void of government welfare provisions and established early trust in private sector social services²⁷.

²⁵ The majority of people involved in this initial guerrilla campaign were from the *ladino* populations. They were generally unable to garner support or incite conscription to the cause among the indigenous populations.

²⁶ The group 'Christian Action' was very active in Guatemala at the time.

²⁷ This section also illustrates the shifting considerations of response, resistance, and action among the populations. Religious beliefs, politics, local connections, economic apparatus, relation to land, daily life and labour all shape the collective and individual logic and conversely, institutions, for example, re-shape in accordance.

While the war raged on, the elites of coffee were turning their attention to the international regulatory systems. Anacafé, the *Asociación Nacional del Café*, came into being as the national producer organisation in 1960 with a mandate to protect the national economy related to coffee production and to safeguard the interests of coffee producers (Wagner, 2001: 187). Anacafé is the sole entity authorized to approve export permits subject to meeting the relevant (and often difficult) legal requirements. There are two government representatives on the Board of Directors but otherwise they work independently from the state and impose a levy on coffee exports to finance activities²⁸. An agreement signed in 1966 further defined and institutionalised Anacafé's duties. They also established the Coffee Policy Council, still in existence today, to direct policy, to manage Guatemala's role in the international coffee systems and to review the activities of Anacafé. Arguably, while civil war raged, the coffee economy continued and the formation of Anacafé at this time helped to keep a [clean face] on Guatemala's economy.

Part of Anacafé's mandate was to interact and manage the international coffee systems put in place with the first International Coffee Agreement (ICA), organised by the International Coffee Organisation (ICO) in London in 1962. From 1954-6 there was over-production related to the simultaneous rise in coffee stocks in Brazil, Africa, Latin America and Mexico. The Latin American countries sought to stabilise prices with the signing of the Latin American Agreement²⁹ as a way to curtail exports. These agreements were not going to work with the growth of Africa's production; the world required an international agreement. The signing of the ICA in 1962 was the first time that most producing and consuming countries were signatories to a common undertaking (Daviron and Ponte, 2005: 87). This agreement

²⁸ This is in contrast to other Latin American organizations that are usually state-led and run by a government appointee.

²⁹ This agreement was originally called 'The Mexican Agreement'.

created a target price band for coffee allocating export quotas to the producer. When the indicator price calculated by the ICO rose over the set price, quotas were relaxed; when it fell below the set price, quotas tightened. If coffee prices rose particularly sharply, they abandoned quotas until prices declined to within the band.

The selective pricing system divided coffee into four qualities: Mild Colombians, Other Milds, Unwashed Arabicas, and Robustas. For the most part, Guatemala's coffee is 'other milds', also called Washed Arabica and this indicates a relatively high quality. Under the quota and price band system the prices paid did not necessarily reflect the costs of producing such quality. The benchmark was the average daily market price, using the calculation of primes, the lowest possible quality of the 'other milds' category. Furthermore, the basic quota assigned for the country often left a large portion of the year's harvest unsold. Guatemala had difficulty with the Agreement, and the successive agreements, but there was little response to their resistance (Wagner, 2001) Around this time, Guatemala reduced coffee production and searched for substitute crops as was a common strategy in many Latin American countries. Although problems with the ICA system included free riding, squabbles over quotas and the use of non-member states to move coffee, many political economic analysts have shown that it was successful in raising and stabilising coffee prices (cf. Akiyama and Varangis, 1990; Bates, 1997; Ponte, 2002).

Amongst the development of cooperatives with non-state support, Anacafé encouraged the first Guatemalan small producers cooperatives in 1965 based on the Fundamental Law of Cooperatives of 1949. After more than half a century of unreported small farmers, in 1964, Anacafé undertook a census of small coffee producers and started to work with them to improve yields and production through modern techniques and to promote the advantages of

forming cooperatives. As such, “By the end of 1966, such cooperative producers numbered 12, increasing to 19 in 1967, to 35 in 1971, and to 115 in 1980/81” (Wagner, 2001: 199). One can add to the list the other cooperatives created under the sponsorship of a variety of religious organisations related to peasant mobilisation as discussed earlier.

In 1969, FEDECOCAGUA, the Federation of Coffee Producers’ Cooperatives, formed to centralise support for numerous cooperatives and to act as processor and broker³⁰. This was part of a broader move towards centralization in the processing business when large growers pooled capital and invested in modern processing plants. There is a more detailed account of FEDECOCAGUA in chapter four and of processing in chapter five, but for the most part, grower-owned large centralised *beneficios*³¹ process coffee of various stakeholders who also benefit from processing cherry bought from small and medium-sized producers³². These cooperatives were not necessarily ‘ideological’ in scope, working to support or ensure better returns to small producers. This was instead a way to centralise small farmers and create easier routes to get this coffee to market to meet growing demand. Small farmers remained disconnected from the higher value added sectors of the market. At the same time, from the connections made between farmers and between farmers and NGOs, for example, new organisational patterns or interactions with the mechanisms of production may have led to new social and technical arrangements.

Mobilisation

For many of the indigenous populations the economic situation continued to deteriorate forcing tens of thousands to leave their homes. One analyst suggests that “By 1975, about 60

³⁰ Field notes, Fedecocagua, 17 May 2007.

³¹ A *beneficio* is the set of buildings and machines that process coffee from cherry on the tree to green bean and ready to roast. Detailed description in chapter five.

³² Field notes, Fedecocagua, 17 May 2007; Field notes, Anacafé, 19 June 2006.

per cent of the economically active rural population of the highlands had to migrate to plantations to find work, making this the most migratory labour force in the world” (Brockett 113, from Paige 1975: 361). By the late 1970s rural indigenous were organising into new guerrilla forces. In the early 1980s, insurgency groups numbered around 7500 consisting mainly of indigenous rural populations and likely had the support of about 0.5 million peasants in a great revolutionary struggle (Perera, 1993)³³. Violence intensified in certain areas of the highlands and especially in the north including El Quiché, where many of the guerrillas hid in the mountains. This was an area with many medium and large coffee estates. At this time, guerrillas often staged actions on the large and medium *fincas* making it impossible for the landowners to live there or indeed to manage farms³⁴. Such attacks suggest the visibility of landowners as dominant classes and their relation to the government. Coffee loomed large in the insurgent response.

Urban violence was escalating by the end of the 1970s but with the increasingly bold endeavours of the peasantry, the military re-focused in rural areas. In the early 1980s with the new President Rios Montt, the United States was interested in helping Guatemala build a government more palatable to democratic endeavours. US President Ronald Reagan visited in 1982 and returned saying that Rios Montt was in fact dedicated to democracy as urban violence quelled. Impressions aside, scores of incidents witnessed by human rights watch groups and UN forces reported that Montt instituted a systematic reign of terror through rural Guatemala, a counterinsurgency program against the guerrillas compounded with the murder of non-combatants of any firm, village, or cooperative that seemed to support guerrilla

³³ “Certainly there is a history of oppression in the Ixil area, perpetrated by *ladino* labour contractors and *fincas* owners. But in the 1960s and 1970s Ixils were making slow but steady progress regaining control of town halls and moving into economic niches dominated by *ladinos*. Elsewhere throughout the highlands, *indigenas* were also displacing *ladinos* from local power structures” (Stoll, 1998: 45, n 1). Stoll’s assessment here provides a necessary reminder of the multiple lines of force in and through economic processes; rather than a single narrative of a powerless indigenous subject.

³⁴ Field notes, coffee farm owner, 19 March 2007.

activity or otherwise resisted army directives (Brockett, 1988: 118). It was not an immediate fit between indigenous populations and the activities of insurgents however as the army kidnapped and murdered suspects with abandon, many of the people had no choice but to support the insurgents in an increasingly bi-polar fight (Stoll, 1998: 45). The national economy fared poorly while the state funnelled funds to the counterinsurgency paramilitaries in the midst of worldwide economic decline. It is the violent incursions and Montt's legacy that dominate the Guatemalan consciousness today³⁵.

Amid the international economic crisis of the mid-1980s, Guatemala needed to attend to its economy. Declining prices for Latin American exports meant that Guatemala could no longer ignore its coffee industry in the face of unprecedented levels of unemployment and inflation (Jonas, 2000: 27). At this time, "the GDP declined by almost 5 per cent from 1980 to 1984 and did again the next two years (IDB 1986: 394)" (Brockett, 1988: 122). Poverty deepened alongside of the persistent concentration of wealth in the hands of few elites. Some suggest that the past twenty years witnessed the greatest inequality of resource and income distribution with few measures taken to alleviate the discrepancy (Jonas, 2000). In Latin America, Guatemala ranks worst on a number of social indicators including illiteracy, physical quality of life and infant mortality³⁶. One can track this to the concentrated underdevelopment of those categorised as labourers for the plantation economy and the consistent underdevelopment of any public social services. Latin America more generally had increased international attention and policies of democratic transition and trade liberalisation in the post-Cold War era. Guatemala held out for a long time, eschewing requests to consider

³⁵ Numerous people made this point throughout the field work. Field notes from 19 February 2007; 14 March 2007; 19 March 2007; 8 May, 2007 to name a few.

³⁶ UNDP *Human Development Report*, 2007; Field notes, seminar in Antigua: *Life in Guatemala*, February 2007.

civilian government and outward facing economic neo- liberalisation in favour of maintaining protectionist policies and military rule³⁷ .

The growing poverty and economic crisis, however, led to massive unemployment and congregation of both rural and urban poor in the cities, most notably in shanty towns of Guatemala City³⁸. By the end of the 1980s, the concentration of “those living below the official poverty line was close to 90% of the population; nearly three-fourths of the population lived in extreme poverty, unable to afford a basic minimum diet” (Jonas, 2000: 28). This unification of the poor led to a huge majority of the population mobilising into popular resistance movements³⁹ .

The Guerrillas of the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG), one of the main insurgent group, significantly debilitated by the counterinsurgency but not destroyed, seemed to propose dialogue as a way to gain legitimacy for civilian rule (Jonas, 2000: 220; Vinegrad, 1998). Increasing pressure by the UN and foreign governments, the policies of the Clinton government of the early 1990s and the quelling of communist fears may have also led

³⁷ See Mitchell (2000; 2002) on economic development that should not be told as a singular historical story of the spread of Western modernity and capital, ‘development’ and ‘transition’. By stepping outside of a singular time/space trajectory one sees other things happening in the world, like forced labour, enslavement and lack of social welfare. See also Escobar (1994; 2005) .

³⁸ Numerous people fled the country or were forced to leave leading to a large Guatemalan population in the United States. The Peace Accords helped to re-open the doors to displaced Guatemalans and as they returned they brought with them connections to gangs. The current state of violence in the country is not only the legacy of the civil war inside of the country but the purview of the many displaced who became violent offenders in the US. At the same time, as a politically active Guatemalan woman suggested (Field notes, 19 Feb 2007), her activism on issues of food sovereignty, women’s rights and political freedoms are the result of many years of exile in Los Angeles among a group of similarly minded active students and organisations. Jonas (2000) speaks to some of these issues in her discussion of the ‘transnationalisation’ of Guatemalan citizens, the economic importance of remittances and conditions of emigration and exit strategies (226).

³⁹ These movements had some new characteristics in the late 1980s and early 1990s including the centrality of the indigenous population, the slowly emerging protagonism of women, although their participation was often invisible and the growing role of the Catholic Church within popular movements. Liberation Theology was a major influence throughout the 1970s and 1980s; even after the appearance and rapid growth of evangelical Protestant groups at the same time, the Catholic Church remained a leading force in articulating the demands of the popular movements (Jonas, 2000: 29). A friend and my driver in Antigua suggested that the government’s introduction and promotion of evangelicalism was a way to curb catholic-based popular movements (Field notes, April 2007).

to talks to end state sanctioned brutality compounded with global moves to neo-liberal reforms. Certainly, violence and repression continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s and murders or disappearances only ended in 1998, two years after the signing of the Peace Accords in December of 1996. The civil war left about one million Guatemalans (10 per cent of the population) displaced from their homes and families. There were an estimated 200,000 murders and disappearances between 1954 and 1990 (Sieder, 1998). The URNG and the Guatemalan government signed the Accords entitled 'Firm and Lasting Peace'.

1.3 The coffee crisis

By the early 1990s Guatemala opened its economy to foreign trade and comparative advantage. Thus began the dismantling of Guatemala's long history of protectionism and opening to trade-focused neo-liberal reform. Private enterprises flooded this newly open economy resulting in a significant increase in export of agricultural goods to the United States (Weyland, 2004).

The timing also relates to the end of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989. Many analysts argue that the participation of consuming countries goes a long way to suggest the success of the ICA from 1962 to 1989 in stabilising coffee prices and managing oversupply. It further allowed production countries to have more control over stocks⁴⁰. At the same time, the ICA caused free-riding and squabbling over quotas. Moreover, high volumes of coffee were traded with or through non-member importing countries at lower prices causing problems for roasters who feared that competitors could access cheaper coffee from non-member countries. Based on changing political requirements and desire for more control by

⁴⁰ During the ICA regime, one would find parchment or green coffee for export kept on producer country soil rather than in the warehouses of large firms in consuming countries as they are now. In Guatemala this sometimes made such stocks vulnerable to insurgent actions where they would destroy masses of coffee.

the roasters, the US would not re-sign the agreement when it came up for renewal in 1989 thus ending the ICA regulatory system⁴¹.

The post-ICA coffee market effectively changed the assemblages of control; moving away from the producer/consumer country nexus towards private firms, most of them transnational companies. Amongst economists, political economists and others analysing the coffee market, it is common to hear that large multinational traders and roasters control most of the coffee industry (Daviron and Ponte, 2004; Giovannucci, 2003)⁴². While many attribute the end of the ICA to the fast introduction of the multinational roasters and traders, this did not always signal a vast ‘takeover’ of control but rather the creation of private agreements allowing some countries like Brazil and Colombia to continue to control coffee alongside of and in partnerships with these MNCs. In other words, when it comes to coffee, attributing the control of prices and the extreme and widespread poverty to the mischievous endeavours of wealthy nations and an international trade regime that privileges these nations must also account for their partnerships in producing countries. Moreover, prospects are good for small and specialized companies trading and roasting in the speciality coffee market and the major roasters work with these smaller entities for their speciality provisions⁴³.

Most analysts believe that the disbanding of the ICA quota system led to coffee flooding the market and a sharp decline in prices. Prices have always been subject to volatility, an issue that returns us always to the inability to control climate and weather conditions and the

⁴¹ There continues to be an International Coffee Agreement but it has not contained any regulatory clauses since 1994. The 2007 ICA focused on supporting the development of stable coffee economies in countries that rely heavily on exports.

⁴² This is a common argument among many coffee professionals as well as popular books. See for example: (Ponte, 2002; Weissman, 2008; Wild, 2005).

⁴³ Usually a coffee blend, even those on supermarket shelves aiming for homogenous taste, use just enough higher quality coffee mixed with lower quality to achieve a moderate taste.

protests of trees and beans⁴⁴. Yields are vulnerable to changes in temperature, rainfall and disease. A common indicator of the price potential is the chance of frosts or drought in Brazil as these weather conditions affect supply⁴⁵. In the 1990s, with increased activity in futures markets and investment funds active in commodity markets, speculation about potential yields became common activities among investors and traders. Speculation not always connected to the actual conditions of supply and demand can magnify the usual futures triggers of demand-supply-stock relationships. Taken together, international coffee prices in real terms between 1999 and 2004 reached depths not experienced for a century (Goodman, 2008: 3)⁴⁶. The composite price per pound of coffee⁴⁷ between 1984-8 was US\$1.34, by 2002/3 it averaged at around US\$0.50⁴⁸. It was not until 2004 that there were modest signs of recovery and years since then see an increase, with the composite price reaching US\$1.25 in 2008.

During this time Guatemala dropped in coffee production due to diversification and the inability of landowners to meet their costs of production. Abandoned *fincas* mark the landscape as landowners diversified to rubber trees, ornamentals, nuts, other agricultural products and tourism. The experiences in Guatemala point to the fact that the crisis is not 'global' but rather highly localized and one-sided with the costs of adjustment including impoverisation, out-migration and income losses falling disproportionately on coffee-producing countries (Goodman, 2008: 8). Moreover, it is necessary to consider the crisis in

⁴⁴ See Mitchell's (2002) account of mosquitoes in Egypt. He tracks the interactivity of mosquitoes through an account of the Aswan dam, creation of synthetic chemicals and the spread of malaria and their relation to the changing social life of Egypt. This puts in question accounts of the market as only about human agency.

⁴⁵ See http://www.ico.org/frosts_droughts.asp for a comprehensive list of frosts and droughts in coffee areas of Brazil since 1902.

⁴⁶ There was a significant drop in prices between 1990 and 1993, with record highs 1994-1998. What marks the particularity of the coffee crisis from 1999 is the low price in relation to the costs of production and other market indicators at the time.

⁴⁷ The ICO Composite Indicator Price reflects the prices on the market (USA (NY)) and composed of the four main coffee groups (Colombian Milds, Other Milds, Brazilian Naturals, and Robustas at 15, 30, 20 and 35 per cent respectively). See: <http://dev.ico.org/documents/eb3776r1e.pdf> and http://www.ico.org/about_statistics.asp for detailed explanation of how the ICO arrives at composite prices.

⁴⁸ Averages obtained from <http://www.ico.org/historical/2000+/PDF/HIST-PRICES.pdf> and <http://www.ico.org/historical/1980-89/PDF/HIST-PRICES80-89.pdf>.

prices as one of many crises in Guatemala including civil war and a difficult post-war peace, natural disasters, agricultural diversification, and high costs of production relative to other countries, not to mention the legacies of population displacement, low education rates and high rates of poverty.

As many argue, Guatemala's openness to the world economy has contributed to the transition to democracy post-1996, a common suggestion for the economies of Latin America⁴⁹. Some frame this market-focused transition as "neoliberal peace" or "liberal internationalist peace" where, "the goal is to maintain a minimalist definition of peace (the absence of armed conflict) and to move as quickly as possible to promote a transition to democratic governance and a market economy (Crighton 1998, 76)" (Jonas, 2000: 220). In this understanding, there is a shift to private sector regulation provided through multi-lateral agreements like those of the World Trade Organisation that include democratic governance as a cornerstone of market reform⁵⁰. Many argue that democracy tends to be on minimalist terms, usually procedural or electoral, and always associated with unregulated free markets, trade liberalisation and market-friendly policies⁵¹.

⁴⁹ The notion of 'transition' can be understood as a performative term of economic discourse. See Mitchell (2000).

⁵⁰ In such a consideration, reforms are market-driven. The Peace Accord's agrarian strategy for land redistribution works on the premise that once the government corrects land and credit market distortions, market forces will reallocate land from large owners to more productive small farmers, thereby advancing both efficiency and equity (Gauster and Isakson, 2007). So far the strategy fails to make any real changes or positive impacts. Analysts point out that to date, domestic elites have not fully supported the implementation of the accords nor does the government implement them as written. If these two things were to change, Jonas argues, there would be some incompatibilities between peace and neo-liberalism (Jonas, 2000: 223).

⁵¹ While I am not convinced that this is precisely the economic and political trajectory, Jonas (2000) does make a good point in suggesting that the language of 'reform', mobilisation, and economic development are different now in relation to Guatemala's turning towards global notions of development, "In today's world, the idea of regulating or competing with foreign monopolies (the Arévalo/Arbenz prior to overthrow 1954) has been replaced by a scramble to attract foreign capital (monopolistic or otherwise) and to offer special privileges. It is a world in which 'tax reform' is no longer assumed to mean *progressive* tax reform. It is a world in which the Arbenz government's strategy of raising wages for workers and peasants to create an internal market is dismissed as anathema, while 'low-wage labor' is regarded as Latin America's 'comparative advantage'" (223). See also (Castree, 2006) for a review of issues conceived through economic geography, neo-liberalism, geographical space and nature.

1.4 Rebuilding

The legacy of military control for almost forty years, processes of land distribution and labour practices has created a country of vast poverty, low education rates, daily acts of violence, and comfort with guns. Guatemala is a country where distrust of government and law dominate, and a culture of fear and endemic mistrust pervade the population⁵². The trade imperatives of neoliberal reforms have not yielded the positive change promised. Unstable political regimes, civil unrest, and a country ruled through violence have been the framework for Guatemala's coffee production (Lovell, 2001).

Fairtrade and ethical supply models seek to confront the various configurations of economy, politics, ecology and social life in Guatemala. Relations with and between nature, humans and various processes of political and economic administration both configure and are configured by violence and mistrust (Heynen *et al.*, 2007; Peluso and Watts, 2001b)⁵³.

Although various alternative trade networks started as early as the mid-1990s⁵⁴, it was in the crucially low price points that certifiers and support NGOs established the practices, technologies and material transformations according to notions of 'social, economic and environmental responsibility and sustainability'. A thorough discussion of the histories and implementations of certifications in Guatemala follows in chapter four. It was during the worst years of the global price crisis, late 1990s to 2003, that certifications gained traction in the Guatemalan economy. As described above, there is a long history of private NGO and foreign aid involvement in the country to attend to various crises as well as the active

⁵² See Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) on the violence of everyday life.

⁵³ As Peluso and Watts (2001a) argue, "The specification of actors – peasants, indigenous peoples, workers, the state, transnational capital – in a particular historical moment of violence is made with respect to their positions within precise systems of accumulation and fields of power" (6). Here, actors include humans and non-human nature; ideas, intuitions, administrations and technologies.

⁵⁴ Operators of Alternative Trade Organisations were working to buy and sell goods between artisans and small goods producers in the global south and 'fair trade' shops in the global north from as early as the 1950s. These formalized into certifications in the 1990s.

participation of the church in building cooperatives and other support networks. A lack of trust in the public sector given the histories of repression goes some way to explaining why small and medium sized coffee farmers and displaced workers looked to NGOs or Anacafé as support networks (Bethell, 1998; Eakin *et al.*, 2005). As certifications grew in scope, NGOs sought to build resources and support from the growing market niche of certifications as they were a market-based solution to gaining a premium for coffee. Equally, many of the large *fincas* found it relatively easy to meet the requirements to gain certification. As such, Guatemala has numerous certification systems circulating today.

At the same time, the government and Anacafé are working to re-build the coffee economy and to capitalise on its ability to produce 'high quality' coffee amidst rising prices for coffee that meets these indicators. The resurgence of a focus on 'quality' coffee since the early 1980s (Roseberry, 1996) is a comfortable niche for Guatemala's cultivation practices. There is a burgeoning 'very high quality' niche focused on new measures of taste. Independent buyers and roasters seek exceptional attributes and track the final taste in the cup through the set of relations and material inputs of preparation, roast, transport and storage, processing techniques, growing conditions, soil, climate and altitude. In response, Anacafé offers technical assistance in meeting current indicators of quality (chapter seven). Equally, they offer assistance to gain certifications or in other ways re-organising agricultural and environmental behaviours that suit those seeking both 'ethical' and 'quality' coffee. All of these current circulations and mediations in and through coffee and Guatemala and the tentacles that reach across the networks of production and consumption are the focus of this thesis. They raise questions as to how such indicators obtain and maintain value on the market; the tensions between ethics and taste; the ways in which producers obtain (if they choose) knowledge or techniques to attend to such variables; and what taste reveals. How

might a dynamic and temporal understanding infuse the spaces and times with a more extensive, and involved, overlapping account of relations that come to be through the coffee itself?

In the chapters that follow, I argue that one must consider the production of coffee and its human and non-human constituents (technological, metrological, agricultural, human) as a heterogeneous field of difference that is integrated as a (global) network. 'Markets', 'coffee' and 'ethics' are all better understood as associations between heterogeneous elements whose affect cannot be known before or outside of its types of connections (Latour, 2005b: 5).

Certifications, then, are *one* way that (certain) ethics circulate with coffee. They are performative in that they produce representations and interventions (Callon, 1998b; MacKenzie *et al.*, 2007: 5) and because they transport ideas and things across multiple times and spaces. They are not, however, the only way that 'ethics' circulates. The histories and geographies of coffee, the international market and Guatemala further enhance the multi-temporal and spatial interventions and associations.

1.5 Chapters

The chapters that follow relate in various ways to the qualifications, transformations and circulations of Guatemalan coffee around notions of ethics, quality and taste. Coffee's taste, or indeed any object's materiality and affectivity, can inspire and provoke beyond its current considerations. The chapters render coffee, and those human and nonhuman actors that frame and transform its materiality, crucially important and able to produce something new.

Through the findings of ethnographic research, I propose a relational ontology and suggest that ethics and other market indicators extend through the mediation of materials in ways that are always folding both producers and consumers into acts of production. Producers are not

passive recipients of the potential of certifications, for example. They engage in imitation, negotiation, and contestation alongside and through the affect and mechanics of meeting current market indicators. For Tarde (1890/1903), the seed of invention begins in the act of imitation; engagement with the multiple practices of meeting consumer desires may lead to new inventions at production sites (Barry and Thrift, 2007; Vargas *et al.*, 2008). Producers are re-thinking circulating notions of quality, sustainability, measures of taste and the potential to gain higher prices. Through the lens of assemblage across temporary and global localisations of coffee, and by taking detailed account of one coffee producing country, Guatemala, this dissertation seeks to enliven the spaces of 'coffee' and 'ethics' with multiple practices. It also reasserts the materiality of coffee through a focus on new indications of 'taste' critically connected to the agency of the coffee itself as purveyor of ways of being and becoming in relation and in the world.

Chapter two, *Markets, ethics, politics* begins by situating food markets and neo-liberal relations of trade amongst ongoing public concerns with the locations and productive relations of foodstuffs across disparate geographies. These concerns give way to a host of 'alternative food networks' that seek to connect people, technologies and nature through differently constituted networks and nodes. I begin by describing the contributions and limitations of political economy and commodity chain approaches in economic geography to the study of food production and consumption (Bonanno, 1994; Cook, 1994; Fine and Leopold, 1993; Friedland, 1984; Friedland *et al.*, 1991). Recent trends in alternative food networks suggest that rather than an expansive and totalising discourse of a transnational capitalist economy as some political economists utilise, practices and experiences of economic life are embedded in locally situated ecologies (Arce and Marsden, 1993; Goodman, 1999; Watts and Goodman, 1997). I augment the notion of embeddedness with insights from Actor Network Theory and

recent studies of 'geographical flows' which open up the movement of products and capital to critique by suggesting the market works as a hybrid network of human and non-human actors (Thrift 2005; Whatmore 2002).

Following this, I discuss in detail literature assessing the potentials and challenges of Fairtrade through political economy, ANT and conventions theory (Fridell, 2006; Goodman, 2004; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Levi and Linton, 2003; Linton, 2004; Lyon, 2007b; Murray *et al.*, 2003; Reynolds, 2001; Renard, 2001; Renard, 2005; Tallontire, 2000; Taylor, 2005; Utting-Chamorro, 2005; Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). This body of research, while useful, tends to seek indications that the approaches 'work' by solving the problems that are already defined in their making: so the extent to which they are 'ethical' is always in relation to the potential to make the market ethical in the internationally defined modes of sustainability. These studies do provide insight into the workings of this value-added market, sometimes asking how it reframes the systematic global economy and sometimes considering how it makes the connections salient.

The literature in economic geography on the performativity of markets is instructive in the re-thinking of 'ethics' and coffee as an assemblage. This economic geography and sociology literature imagines the interaction between metrological processes, technologies and human and non-human nature as fluid, allowing for different movements among and between actors in the creation and negotiation of economies (Callon et al, 2005). Through this lens the market is conceived as a play between agents as they perform, shape and format the economy in local and particular situations (Callon 1998b, Ong and Collier 2005, Maurer 2005). These approaches allow one to consider markets as path dependent and made up of multiple heterogeneous elements (Callon, 1991; Callon, 1998b; Callon *et al.*, 2007; MacKenzie *et al.*,

2007; Ong and Collier, 2005), rather than a ‘global value chain’ of bounded events or practices (Daviron and Ponte, 2005; Gibbon and Ponte, 2008; Giovannucci and Ponte, 2005). Ethics, taste and other measures of value circulate and, crucially, meet and transpose meaning through the coffee itself (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Barry, 2005a; Bennett, 2007; Hennion, 2004; Roe, 2006a; Whatmore, 2006). Ethics are not reducible to the dualistic and singular notions of ‘human’ and ‘nature’. Ethics are relational, indicated through interaction, heterogeneous and specific to connections and interruptions, creations and dispersals (Goodman, 2001; McCormack, 2003; Popke, 2008; Whatmore, 2002; Whatmore, 2006).

Chapter three, *Tracing the coffee market*, describes the ethnography of assemblages implemented in this research. The approach is multi-sited although it departs from anthropological versions of multi-sited ethnography that trace cultural formation through related sites and sees ‘the global’ as “an emerging dimension of mapping the connection among sites” (Marcus, 1998: 83). The approach adopted here is not concerned with the ‘social life of things’ (Appadurai, 1986) or the ‘community’ as it emerges through connections and travel. It is concerned with how actors produce, subvert or reorganise themselves and the market as they pass through or interact with the infrastructures, administrations and strategies in and through networks. The definition of ‘actor’ used throughout this work is as human and nonhuman and that which does something, performs actions and produces effects⁵⁵. There are markets, coffee, people, technologies, metrological processes, pests, water and so on. There are regions, networks, locations and more seemingly bounded spaces that overlap and interact with multiple practices, ideas, and objects. These connections produce and re-produce the coffee market in emergent temporal and spatial instances (Ong & Collier, 2005: 12). Objects are qualified and re-qualified (Callon and Law,

⁵⁵ See Latour (1999), Callon (1998b) and Bennett (2004) for this notion of actor.

2005; Callon *et al.*, 2005) through circulation and, when made visible, these processes are moments of political debate and contestation.

I follow the associations that surface through the process of conducting research. The research progressed through numerous transitions: early interviews with traders, roasters and certifiers in the UK, travelling through Latin America on a training program, six-months of in-depth study in Guatemala and returning to the UK. Throughout the process I attend coffee related events and industry conferences as well as tracing connections with bodies and things that traverse various locales.

This chapter describes two related field experiences. The experience of interacting with board members and administration of Anacafé in Guatemala provides an example of the ethical negotiations of the ethnography itself as well as the current desire to respond to the terms of ‘sustainable coffee’ in Guatemala. Anacafé suggested speaking with those intimately involved in negotiating the business of ‘ethics’: the producers, processors, middle men (*coyotes*), certifiers and certified. Yet at the same time, it was their own interaction with these concepts, their struggle to find ways to comply, subvert, re-negotiate or reproduce the certifications in ways that better benefited them and/or small and large coffee producers that provided accounts of the heterogeneous acts of association.

The second field experience discussed in this chapter is the decision to focus on the city of Antigua. This is a seemingly bounded region of local coffee farmers interspersed with international coffee professionals, large *beneficios* (processing plants), agents, buyers, traders and certifiers as well as myths and stories about coffee origins and production. Antigua exists as a site of crossing between desire, ethics, markets and coffee and its multiple people and

practices defy the ready separation between ‘production sites’ and ‘consumption sites’ (Massey, 2005). Taste, desire, technologies and ethics all meet in Antigua and in Anacafé, both providing an excellent entry into Guatemala as a site of coffee production, negotiation, and invention and critically connected to those aspects that seem to be global in this ethnography of the assemblages of coffee.

Chapter four argues that sustainable coffees perform, just not necessarily in the way that operators and consumers assume they do. After a history and comparison of the high profile ethical supply models today, I suggest that sustainability relies on pre-conceived ‘ethical’ relations as defined by the codes and standards of certification systems and a readily available language of sustainability⁵⁶ that already has value on the market. These are always already linked to a market for ethics rather than specifically local determinations and requirements of social and economic situations *and* the needs of the coffee itself. This obscures a multitude of daily negotiations in the coffee world. The everyday human and non-human relations are not part of the ethics of sustainable coffee, and yet they are more persistently part of the exchange and the product itself (Meskell and Pels, 2005). While the choice to obtain ethical certification is a choice to comply with a delimited set of standards comparable across countries, how one engages with these standards is an interaction with the socio-economic conditions, history and politics at the local level of production. As such, this chapter is titled, *Sustainable coffee and the ethics of visibility*.

Drawing on interviews with Anacafé, coffee and certification professionals in Guatemala, this chapter analyses the way professionals negotiate ethical standards in practice. It is in the

⁵⁶ Beyond its earliest understandings in the global development community as ‘social, environmental and economic viability’ and as ensuring the management of resources for future generations, sustainability now seems to mean just about anything involving social justice or environmental ‘management’. See (Bennett and Chaloupka, 1993; Darier, 1999; Hinchliffe, 2007; Hinchliffe *et al.*, 2007; Luke, 1997; Luke, 1999).

negotiations around transparency that the messy mediations in practice become apparent. The ready indicators of 'ethics' are standardised and codified and subject to verifications and audits to ensure full disclosure (Barry and Thrift, 2007; Power, 1997). Here, the relations of Fairtrade in Guatemala are instructive as an example, as Fairtrade professionals engage in decisions about what and how information is or is not made transparent. Certain aspects of the production and circulation process are made "visibly invisible" (Barry, 2005c) to ensure the consistent circulation of ethical coffee. These mediations in practice point to the question of whether sustainable coffees are necessarily about ethics and the question of trust through audit signifying the production of documentation but not necessarily the presence of ethics (O'Neill, 2002; Power, 1997). I illustrate how Anacafé is able to imitate the terms of sustainable coffee and thereby claim ground in the ethical terrain while subverting the need for certifications. This example makes reference to the discussion in chapter three about Anacafé's work to re-negotiate sustainable coffees on their own terms in the publication of their *Green Book* unveiled in 2009. The writers of the *Green Book* chose carefully those aspects of Guatemalan life which were to be made visible. Those qualities and activities that do not make sense on the ethical register of sustainability are not included here. Transparency is not automatically transparent but rather certain things are visible while the silences speak as loudly as the vast amount of documentation (Barry, 2005c; Foucault, 1979). The potential for 'transparent transparency' requires a view of ethics as relational and in process, formed and re-forming through multiple spatio-temporal manifestations. Attention to daily interactions, for example, not limited to pre-defined notions of ethics allows a view of the 'in-between'. In a relational account we can become aware of emerging forms of coffee sourced with an explicit set of ethical goals that are not immediately observable.

Chapter five, *Sites of invention: visions of producer-driven models*, argues that producers are not the passive recipients of sustainable initiatives as consumption country accounts may suggest. Rather the advantages and disadvantages of sustainable coffees are the subject of local debate and opposition. Thus producers are creating new ways to produce and sell coffee through negotiating co-existent market forms. First, efficiency, affectivity, approach, outcomes and potential for change are all part of the debate about the role of certifications and other market differentiations among coffee professionals in Guatemala. Second, there is an informed affective response through which both local contestation and the production of new models become possible at the local level (Barry and Slater, 2005b; Barry and Thrift, 2007; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Latour, 2005b; Latour and Weibel, 2005; Tarde, 1890/1903; Tarde, 2007/1902). As well as attempts to imitate the organisation of sustainable coffees or to control the flow of information so as not to disrupt the smooth transportation of these coffees discussed in chapter four, producers and coffee professionals are finding new ways to interact with the affect of the circulation of ethical ideas. In this way sustainable coffees are performative and not necessarily in the way many coffee professionals might assume.

Detailed discussion of innovative approaches to producing and processing coffee in the Antigua region, illuminate the potential of new and often producer driven models. Ideas arise in response to the perceived limitations of Fairtrade and other sustainable coffees. Drawing on three producers, a family, a cooperative and an association, I reflect on their work to obtain the mechanisms and knowledge necessary to process coffee and to sell it at better prices. These are then linked to one of their buyers, Fernando's Kaffee, who shares a belief that economic viability is about creating opportunities to keep more of the value added aspects of coffee production and transport inside of Guatemala. All of these examples, in different ways, illuminate the repetition and difference among coffee and ethics that deploys all the

materialities of the socio-technical assemblages that constitute the market (MacKenzie *et al.*, 2007: 323). In this manner, producers engaged in the routine practice of growing *and* processing coffee, shift their sense of possibility and become aware of the germ of difference and invention found in the circulation of particular market forms (Barry and Thrift, 2007; Deleuze, 1994; Lepinay, 2007). It is possible to say that producers and other coffee professionals strive to attain ‘sustainability’ but on different and multiple registers as they engage with the affective potential of the coffee itself.

I critically examine the affective potential of coffee in chapter six entitled *Learning to taste: origin stories, profile roasting and the perfect cup*. In this chapter, I reflect on a small section of coffee professionals organising their supply models based on measures of taste and taste competitions in producing countries to allow for encounters between beans, producers, measurements and tasters. This is coffee connoisseurship akin to wine tasting where the conditions of cultivation, modes of processing, decisions about roast colour or blends, grinds and preparation enrol the technologies and metrics, desires and sensibilities of various actors in coffee production and consumption understood through its taste. Coffees traded in this realm relate to the exact origins: the farm, region and country of production. Through taste, seemingly passive ‘objects’ become active agents in constituting the world and are generative of affective energy that will have multiple unintended effects inside and outside of the body (Bennett, 2007). Those focused (in producing and consuming countries) on the way coffee is grown, roasted and served interact with the materiality of coffee in the ways it is constituted through new technologies and tastes (Guthman, 2003; Morton, 2004; Tivadar and Luthar, 2005).

Taste is not pre-established, but rather it is a reflexive activity producing various attachments that transform the objects and the taster (Hennion, 2007; Teil and Hennion, 2004). To make this point salient, I recount the experiences of travelling with a professional coffee trainer who is training producer country professionals on roasting to the profile of the bean (to bring out its best features through roasting) and cupping to assess its attributes. The focus of such training is to allow producer country professionals to imagine consumer desire in their daily cultivations and preparation of coffee so as to better share the material attributes and achieve higher prices in this value added sector. Information and skill development is central to this process as is the encountering of bodies and ideas (Barry, 2005a; Bennett, 2007).

This chapter approaches ethics as sensibility and as relational: produced in interaction and in associations (Goodman, 2001; Latour, 2005b). This mobilises a seemingly passive object, coffee, and argues that taste mediates the agency of the materials, enlivening bodies and things; transforming the object through and with knowledge production as an informed material (Barry, 2005a). Producers become active agents in the direction of their lives *vis-à-vis* the taste of coffee. These circulate along with sustainability and the co-existence of different forms of market organisation. This chapter suggests the progression and potential of taste as one way to reveal ethics: through taste, producers imagine consumers in acts of production. This augments chapter five's exploration of agency and processes of producer country professionals to include the agency and processes of the bean through taste.

In chapter seven attention turns to *The market for taste and ethics* and specifically to the ways that coffee is qualified and re-qualified through taste as a market device (Callon *et al.*, 2005; Callon *et al.*, 2007). While the convergence of ethics, quality and taste is one illustration of the diversity of agency and processes in the production of ethical coffee markets, this chapter makes explicit how quality and taste promote and extend new connections and circulations

across numerous market actors. There is a meeting between those mechanisms that produce taste and those that produce ethics in sourcing models that privilege quality. These meetings create political potentialities. New measures of value and meeting standards of quality are part of re-framing the meaning of sustainability in Guatemala. Producer-driven models as discussed in chapter five intersect with notions of sustainability and current indicators of quality, to define new spaces of desirable coffee.

Producing coffee to these requirements is about establishing how to speak across geographical distance and nurturing a comfort with the language and references of coffee taste and desirability (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Latour and Weibel, 2005). This account builds on Callon *et al's* (2005) notion of the *economy of quality* by suggesting that consumers *and* producers qualify and re-qualify coffee in overlapping and multi-temporal ways, drawing on things happening concurrently in multiple spaces. More than simply the brand or marketing, here the affective potential of taste and other measures of value circulating in the high quality market sector become transformative valuations. Such qualifications move across and through seemingly exclusive producer-consumer divides (Stassart and Whatmore, 2003).

There is a growing group of coffee buyers, roasters and traders who specifically articulate such a concern. They do so by focusing on the conditions of cultivation that are implied by attention to taste and quality, i.e. on the attributes that make a 'good' cup. They augment these with care and responsibility indicated in notions of commonly considered ethics and sustainability. Coupled with detailed roasting and preparation, coffee transports its human and nonhuman enactments. As such, one drinks her ethics in coffee: taste is multiple in its ability to transport a notion of 'good' in both its attributes as a quality product and its attachments to an ethical message (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Bennett, 2007;

Goodman, 2001; Hennion, 2004; 2007; Roe, 2006a; Whatmore, 2006). Quite literally, ethics taste good. In the swirl of such taste-ethics-quality indicators, producer country professionals are finding ways to mediate and manage more aspects of coffee's development and as such, producers and consumers are becoming linked in multiple ways. While an economic endeavour, coffee production is also political in practice if one makes visible the diversity of agency and processes in the networks. This opens up the possibility to act in a different way, to disagree, to learn and exchange knowledge to form new arrangements that move things in different directions.

The concluding chapter folds together three main contentions of this thesis. First, there is a move to consider ethics as produced in relation and through attachments in the continuous processes of performing the market. This ethics-as-attachments is both evident in the production of inventive ways to perform the market and also in the ways to enable ethically sourced coffees, whether certifications or direct trade and quality models, to manage and modify in relation to local requirements. The second contention is that the valuation of certain indicators like taste, ethics and quality are path dependent; tracking the historical evolution of the market as it is particular to Guatemala makes local mediations and contestations with the flows and constitution of market indicators visible in practice. This makes observable imitative and inventive activity over time (Born, 2009) and points to variation and transformation. Third, the focus on the particular variations and transformations point to the presence and possibility of invention wherein imitation and oppositions, even infinitesimal, have the propensity to create something new. Taste mediates the relations between producers and consumers and links them in multiple, and not necessarily immediately observable ways.

CHAPTER TWO: MARKETS, ETHICS, POLITICS

“Reaching one position from another always requires a great deal of work, the intervention of all sorts of ‘bits and pieces’ bits and pieces which are rarely, if ever, well-behaved ‘intermediaries’ transporting faithfully. Much more likely, they are ill-mannered ‘mediators’ ‘defining paths and fates on their own terms’. The product of transformation and not the containers for transmission, spaces and times are outcomes of the combination and recombination of a full world”¹.

2.1 Introduction

Charting the flows of coffee in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Daviron and Ponte (2005) suggest that coffee markets were characterised by a ‘coffee paradox’: a boom in consuming countries towards new styles of coffee consumption and high prices and a crisis in producing countries. Increasing costs of inputs for cultivation and declining market prices made it difficult for some coffee farmers to meet the costs of production. With the end of the price stabilisation mechanisms of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989, coffee flooded the market along with concentration of private ownership among transnational roasters and traders (Goodman, 2008; Petchers and Harris, 2008).

It is common to hear that the global economy is characterised by similarly asymmetrical power relations and profit distribution between retail and supply locales (Whatmore and Clark, 2008). This, among other phenomena, is sometimes associated with the currents and discourses of ‘globalisation’. Social scientists have widely disparate views on what exactly globalisation means both as a theory of global economic order and in the specific practices it entails (Dicken *et al.*, 2001; Ong and Collier, 2005; Storper, 1997). Some

¹ Bingham, N. and Thrift, N. J. (2000). Some new instructions for travellers: the geography of Bruno Latour and Michel Serres. In: Crang, M. and Thrift, N. J. (eds.) *Thinking Space*. London: Routledge, pp.289. The quotes are taken from the work of John Law (Law 1994) and Bruno Latour (Latour 1997a: 175, also Latour 1993).

analysts characterise globalisation by citing a shift in the global economy from capitalist notions of industrialisation and modernisation to transnational macrostructures that order production and consumption patterns across the world according to a similar logic of global capitalist determinants. These authors cite the growth of transnational regulation bodies (WTO), new types of problems for science and technology (GM, etc.) and the monopolisation of prices and transport by (a few) multinational corporations as indicators that regions of the world are connected through a concentrated logic that defines activities in various locales (Sassen, 1991). Some suggest local differences are eradicated in favour of a homogenous economically linked integrated flow congregating spatially as global cultures (Featherstone, 1991). These theories indicate that neo-liberal strategies promoting trade liberalisation bifurcate production and consumption zones according to ‘comparative advantage’ and the associated diminishing relevance of national governments in supporting the social lives of their citizens (Dicken, 2007; Storper, 2000; Wade, 2004). Others question whether in fact there is anything qualitatively new about the economy and argue it is simply the continuation of established trends in internationalisation (Hirst *et al.*, 2009) connected through new or more rapid technologies.

While there are a range of analytical responses to globalisation, here I focus on the global economy as it orders the relations of agro-food production and consumption to situate the study of coffee and ethics amidst economic geographical agro-food considerations. While discourses of transnationalisation tend to invoke de-regulation and economic integration according to a logic of capitalism (Friedland *et al.*, 1991), activists and commentators point to the protectionist measures of many wealthy nations that appear to contradict with the prevalence of neo-liberal ideology (Leclair, 2002; Levi and Linton, 2003; Oxfam,

2002)². For example, producers in the ‘global South’ are able to produce food more cheaply than in the ‘global North’ so food is a common target for the imposition of tariffs and the application of subsidies that restrict the competitiveness of goods from other countries (Whatmore and Clark, 2008: 372). As such, as Whatmore and Clark (2008) contend, “[...] inequalities are embedded in flows of trade in foodstuffs and in the territorial practices of regulating these flows” (373).

The chapter begins by addressing the shift from agrarian political economic approaches that focus on agro-food business and large scale processes to food ‘networks’ as refiguring the spatial orientation of food markets. Political economic accounts privilege the movements and activities of a capitalist logic in the systematic orderings of a global economy rather than the particularities of local practices (Bonanno, 1994; Fine and Leopold, 1993; Friedland, 1984; Friedland *et al.*, 1991). Agro-food systems today tend to be organised in similar ways to other economic sectors where “production chains are increasingly orchestrated across long distances by a few large scale economic actors, usually transnational corporations (Dicken 1998)” (Morgan *et al.*, 2006: 8). In the 1990s, however, some political economists suggested that food is also uniquely tied to local ecologies and social life (Arce and Marsden, 1993; Fitzsimmons and Goodman, 1998; Goodman, 1999; Watts and Goodman, 1997). Operators of alternative food networks like organics or Fairtrade, make central to their circulation the notion that food production is embedded in a web of social and ecological relations for its enactment (Granovetter,

² For example, both the US and EU, the two strongest voices in the WTO, also subsidise agricultural production in their own countries. Oxfam (2002) suggests that total subsidies to domestic farmers in the EU and US amount to more than \$1bn a day. As such they identify a ‘Double Standards Index (DSI)’ to measure the gap between the free-trade principles espoused by rich countries and their actual protectionist practices. In this form, the rules of global trade cannot work in favour of those most in need and yet those in producing countries, and particularly those growing primary commodities like coffee, are both in the process of market liberalisation.

1985). Political economy approaches, although varied, were unable to account for such 'local' trends and 'embeddedness' and have been limited in terms of its conception of both nature and the social agency of humans and nonhumans.

The insights of actor network theory (ANT) associated with the work of Callon (1986; 1991), Latour (Callon and Latour, 1981; Latour, 1993), and Law (1986) point to the full range of entities, activities and strategies required to mobilise production, transport and consumption. As Whatmore and Thorne (1997) suggest, rather than the totalizing discourses of globalisation, the building of markets is a highly contested and contingent process requiring the mobilisation of all manner of natural, social, mechanistic and other actors. Markets are a series of shifting and complex processes that do not form stable spaces but rather spatially distributed currents of activity. Various activities take place as a series of interactions in spaces that might be delimited by specific technological forms, infrastructures, interactions and values (Barry, 2001). Nature, materiality, co-constituted agency and recent trends in consumption practices all inform a horizontal and heterogeneous field of activities that meet to form and re-form food networks.

The growing popularity of Fairtrade networks illustrates how operators contend to make visible the activities of production and consumer demand in food networks to make these networks 'ethical'. I discuss and assess the literature on Fairtrade networks through the currents in geographies of agro-food: political economy and agrarian political economy approaches (Fridell, 2007b; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Goodman, 2004; Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Castree, 2001; Goodman, 2004; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Moberg, 2008), ANT and conventions theory (Raynolds, 2001; Renard, 2003; Whatmore and Thorne, 1997) to provide an overview of the way an alternative ethics reorganises the

mechanisms, infrastructure, interactions and values alongside and inside conventional markets. These studies have made productive inroads into assessing the potential and challenges in managing food networks connected through notions of social, environmental and economic ethics. Those studies that consider producer/consumer links and the material transactions as complex socio-technical mobilisations across distances are more capable of resisting the metanarratives of globalisation because they point to the overlapping and interacting measures of value that connect actors through specific material and ethical interventions.

The work of Callon (1998a), MacKenzie (2007) and others on performativity complement these studies of transactions as material and complex relations. Markets are about bringing producers and consumers together and involve large amounts of efforts to codify and make visible particular values. These values are sometimes ethical and sometimes circulating measures such as the recent resurgence of indicators of quality and taste. Performativity suggests the qualification of products as shifting and multiple and the formations of hybrid associations of calculative and non-calculative actors in the making of economic and social life. Where Fairtrade literature often engages coffee as an example of the material and ethical connectivities of alternative food networks, here privilege is given to the constituents of the coffee itself and the ways these constituents are qualified. The process of qualifying coffee for the market, the necessary acts of retail and supply, modify both the object and the set of social relations through which it travels. As a connector of metabolism, bodies, sensibilities, ecologies, politics and economies, coffee is an object that seeps over edges and crosses borders making multiple and lively associations (Stassart and Whatmore, 2003). The approach developed here pays attention to performativity and relational encounters allowing production and consumption to inform each other. It

mobilises previously invisible actors to invent on their own terms, working to make visible multiple relations.

The chapter begins by detailing the organisation of markets and the agro-food sector envisioned by political economists as part of the unimpeded expansion of a global capitalism disembedded from local practices. This is an entry point to the geographical responses to economic and political economic renderings of the breadth and stretch of capitalism across the globe. This works to situate the proliferation of literature on alternative food networks and analyses. Using Fairtrade networks as an example of an alternative geography of food, I consider agrarian political economic accounts, producer-focused studies, and then literature that applies ANT and conventions theory to suggest the linkages between and through spaces and boundaries usually associated with disparate producers and consumers. I then argue that a performative approach better handles disjunctures and differences in alternative trade networks and points to what might happen, and how it might happen differently, in the tangible and affective encounters between objects, senses and technologies. This opens up spaces not usually considered political or active to acts of invention.

2.2 The political economy of food

Numerous agro-food analysts have long had an interest in tracking the movements of foodstuffs through spaces of production, processing and retailing (Lockie and Kitto, 2000). Much of this literature focuses on processes of globalisation, industrialisation and standardisation, and how companies, regulation bodies, research and development agencies, and state actors combine to push the commoditisation process in the food sector from a political economic stance (Murdoch *et al.*, 2000: 107).

Political economists tend to invoke a discourse of transnationalisation, suggesting a reconfiguration of economic macrostructures as the expansion of integrated regulatory bodies that dictate the practices of regional actors. The view corresponds with other globalisation theories in its suggestion that globalisation is the latest stage in the development of a capitalist economy (Dicken 1998). In this understanding, transnational corporations, regulation bodies and “transectoral production processes” (Morgan *et al.*, 2006: 15) organise the industrialisation and liberalisation of food production through a web of connections disembedded from local or country-specific practices (Bonanno, 1994; Friedland *et al.*, 1991). In these accounts, the local is merely an adjunct to the more important and powerful global as embodied in the rationality of elusive institutional complexes of regulatory bodies and large corporations. States, industry, people and the mechanisation of production are all situated in local contexts but a global set of requirements determines their activities. While there are a variety of forms and emphases broadly organised as political economy, in general analysts employ political economic approaches to think about the consequences of such integration.

Commodity chain analyses are particularly effective in showing how markets establish institutional or regulatory linkages between differing parts of the food industry and how this incorporates widely different spatial configurations (Cook and Crang, 1996; Fine, 2002; Fine and Leopold, 1993). Notably in this area, Friedland’s (1984) commodity chain analysis suggests that transnationalisation for capitalist accumulation disembeds food production from pre-existing economic, social and spatial connections (e.g. local and pre-industrial modes of production). Early work in this area concluded that “within each commodity chain, differing mixtures of technical, natural and economic resources are

integrated so that a number of distinctive industrial structures (of which agriculture is a diminishing part) are evident” (Morgan *et al.*, 2006). Different commodity sectors suggest the complex sets of relationships joined organisationally as a chain where rationalisation of the whole chain configures production relations in locally specific sites. As such, commodity chain analyses tend to focus on the systematic rationality of agricultural mechanisation and its social consequences (Friedland *et al.* 2001: 84) and the institutionalised relations of production.

More recent political economic accounts began to consider that environmental or natural components central to food chain construction processes were distributed spatially in production and consumption locales (Arce and Marsden, 1993). This shifted views away from studies of production and its regulatory patterns to ‘systems’ connecting producers and consumers. The consolidation of capitalist enterprises as transnational in the food sector requires the replacement of potentially limiting biological factors (i.e. perishability) with technological fixes to allow goods to move from sites of production to those of consumption. It appeared that scientific and technological research and development would ‘outflank’ nature through appropriationism and substitution (Goodman *et al.*, 1987) as a way to ensure that the ‘limits’ of biology did not constrain global reach. These industrial techno-fixes to nature pointed to the increasingly complex socio-technical relations necessary to move foodstuffs across long distances and suggested that the commodity chain was in fact global and should be perceived as a complex. While there are political economic renderings that attend to the situatedness of institutions and knowledge in particular times and spaces (Fine, 2002), in general most political economic accounts tend to return to a systematic rationality and order in the ‘globalised’ workings of the market (Raynolds, 2001).

In 1999, Goodman “renounce[ed] the methodological erasure of nature” (18) as a conceptual approach that maintained the modern distinction between nature and society, where nature is passive and malleable to the requirements of the unfolding socioeconomic processes (Goodman, 1999; Murdoch *et al.*, 2000: 112), a dualist ontology shared with “orthodox social science” (Goodman, 1999: 18). This echoes the broader literature in economic geography on the social production of nature (Castree, 2005). Goodman, among others, questioned whether the determinist ‘systems’ view of political economy could adequately attend to both nature and locality without reifying the social/nature dualism and the global/local emerging in the now global commodity chains (Arce and Marsden, 1993). He suggested that,

the metabolic relations of agro-food networks involve a two-step process: *on the land*, where agricultural nature and its harvest are co-produced and co-evolve with social labour, and *at the table*, where these co-productions are metabolized corporeally and symbolically as food (Goodman, 1999: 18).

There is a relational materiality of ecologies and bodies that characterize agro-food networks (Fitzsimmons and Goodman, 1998).

In particular, Goodman (1999) notes a rise in food supply trends that give nature, and its spatial locality, new found significance. He points to the popularity of alternative food networks like organics, as consolidating nature in different ways in sites of production and consumption. Others augmented his analysis by noting that the specific acts of consumption and the materiality of foodstuffs, including attention to food’s specific qualities or pollution controls, ‘embed’ production and consumption in particular spaces (Murdoch *et al.*, 2000). For political economists, the trends of niche production and consumption patterns are too small for serious consideration (Whatmore and Thorne,

1997). Attention is more usefully focused on integrated capitalist logic and corporate/industrial complexes. The extension of GM foods, for example, points to further rounds of technological advances over the 'limitations' of nature and the corporate/industrial development complexes that organise the flows of food. The limits of political economic analyses to attend to growing considerations about nature, locality, materiality and social agency as relational led to theorists re-conceiving commodity 'chains' as networks.

2.3 From systems to networks

Assessing the potential for political economy and commodity chain approaches to account for the 'local ecology' (Goodman, 1990; 2001) Watts and Goodman's (1997) edited collection of essays queried the 'chain' and implied an early space and time reconfiguration from vertically integrated systems to horizontally configured networks. In this configuration, networks are embedded in the web of social and ecological life that sustains the economy. Murdoch, Marsden and Banks (2000) consider that the agential capacity of nature in networks re-embeds food production systems in local ecologies (108). A shift to networks allows for the territorialisation of food production and consumption.

Embeddedness

In the late 1990s, political economists grappled with the notion of embeddedness as a way to territorialise the systematic concerns of food production, distribution and production as an industrial process of quantity, standardisation and price. This period also saw the marked rise of food scares, goods tainted with carcinogens, antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and brain-eating proteins combined with growing reliance on bio-technologies and GMOs. Food anxieties caused by BSE created a lack of trust in food supply networks, putting

pressure on producers and processors to ensure food safety (Murdoch et al 2000, Freidberg, 2004). Murdoch, Mardsen and Banks (2000), drawing on the work of Nygard and Storstad (1998) suggest that such pressures, “have promoted a reembedding of food production processes in local contexts, in part because locally produced food is often assumed to be of higher quality (i.e. safer) than global food” (111). This resulted in a marked rise in food networks that privilege the specificities associated with quality objects as a way to reconvene trust and security in the mobilisation of foodstuffs (Raynolds, 2001; Renard, 2001). The term quality here means increased concern with the conditions of food production resulting in claims that it is locally produced, organically managed or, in the case of foodstuffs grown ‘far away’, it is traceable to sites and knowledges of production.

Ilbery and Kneafsey (1998) note that the “concern with embeddedness necessarily highlights those regions and localities that have not been fully incorporated into the industrial model of production and that have retained the conditions necessary for quality production”. This version of embeddedness tends to invoke a pre-industrial culture brought to the foreground when consumers decide that the standardisation and industrial agro-food business is unreliable. As Goodman (1999) points out via Arce and Marsden’s (1993) similar treatment of social agency, in the political economy approach to considering ‘nature’ and locality, “there is no room for active or collective negotiation between nature and the social world. Nature is merely a cipher for human intentionality and practice [..]” (23).

While notions of embeddedness are popular in studies of food production and consumption, they have a long history. Embeddedness derives in part from Polanyi’s (1944) concept of embedded economic relationships; relations that are rooted in proximate

contact, familiarity and trust. The conceptual shift from political economic systems to one of food networks finds association with Mark Granovetter's (1985) account of embeddedness in a social network analysis (Wilkinson, 1997). For Granovetter, the activities of an agent are not pre-established, the network of economic relations are not a context within which the agent has a capacity to act. Rather, it is the network of exchange that "configures ontologies. The agents, their dimensions, and what they are and do, all depend on the morphology of the relations in which they are involved" (Callon, 1998b: 8). This social network analysis replaces the traditionally separate notions of agent and network by the single agent-network (Callon, 1998b: 9).

Critics have rightly pointed out that the concept of embeddedness still seems to imagine an actor acting within and among a 'social and political' structure; particularly where it comes into contact with other sociological accounts of social capital (cf Bourdieu, 1979/1984), a pitfall of social network analysis more broadly (Callon, 1998a; Goodman, 1999). Others point to the inability of locally embedded practices to address "the internationalization of network forms" like outsourcing and off-shoring of certain service jobs, because it concentrates too closely on the micro-social (Bair, 2008: 340). The idea of embeddedness and its agent-network, however, do point to the need to consider nature and locality in the making of economic life. The terms work to locate interactions in a contingent network in their specificity rather than in the context of a political economic deterministic chain (Arce and Marsden, 1993). Such a shift to networks means that we need not work to 'fit' determined constructs of nature and the local into existing power structures; nor does focus on the local 'reveal' existing relations. Rather, identities emerge in local and specific ways in the process of network building (Goodman, 1999; 2001; Whatmore and Thorne, 1997; Whatmore 2002). Here the work of actor network theory (ANT) and the related

conventions theory are two approaches to the study of food networks that, as Goodman puts it, “conceptualize non-human nature as a relational entity with active properties” (Goodman, 1999: 23) and move significantly from social constructivist accounts into a notion of co-production. ANT provides a way to think about actors as ‘more-than-human’ and as co-constituted network builders (Whatmore, 2006) as outlined below. Following the discussion on ANT, I consider conventions theory amidst claims that it attends to the ‘internationalization of network forms’.

Actor network theory

The embeddedness of production and consumption practices as developed above lead then to consider agro-food relations as a series of sometimes interweaving networks and nodes. The limitation of the social network analysis of Granovetter as a process of human intentionality suggests a need to clarify whom or what is the ‘actor’ in the agent-network. This involves a conceptual shift to the work of ANT and specifically the works of Callon (1986; 1991), Latour (Callon and Latour, 1981; Latour, 1993), and Law (1986). Here the actors are all manner of entities including humans, material objects, non-human nature, statements, technologies, devices, metrological processes and so on. In this consideration, all of the actors have an equal capacity to act given certain configurations; a “coordinated set of heterogeneous actors which interact more or less successfully to develop, produce, distribute and diffuse methods for generating goods and services” (Callon, 1991: 133). ANT, then, does not privilege the activities or choices of humans or reify the ontological separation of nature and society. ANT considers actors as “co-produced, performative identities that emerge in the process of network building (Callon and Latour 1992)” (Goodman, 1999: 26).

An ANT lens re-configures the production, transport and consumption of food over multiple spaces and time as food networks; associations of heterogeneous actors that interact more or less in a range of specific situations. Rather than a metanarrative of global reach substantiating its claims and directives on the world economy in local practices, there is no pre-established global (as site of power) or local (as site of practice). Instead, food networks are a difficult and contested process of ‘acting at a distance’ (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997) that function according to contingent processes of network lengthening. As Whatmore and Thorne (1997) describe it:

A network’s capacities over space-time represent the simultaneous performance of social practices and competencies at different points in the network; a mass of currents rather than a single line of force. In these terms, actor-networks are best understood as by nature neither local nor global, but [only] more or less long and more or less connected (291).

The shift here is important; it points to the mediators that sustain the web of connection over distances, not only people but the technological and ‘natural’ agents and objects that “encode and stabilise particular socio-technological capacities” (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997: 292). Networks then mobilise a multiplicity of social, natural and technological actors and the longer the networks and connections, the greater the mobilisation is likely to be (Morgan *et al.*, 2006: 18). Successive compositions connect in gatherings and create modes of ordering (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). These are a series of repetitive encounters that temporarily stabilise compositions of actors in space and time (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 83). For example, operators concerned with the transportation of a product already know the basic requirements, the set of technologies, metrics, people and devices they need. Still, each act of transport involves a lot of work; work that is contingent and contested. In this way, networks perform “multiple modes of ordering” (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997) that “indicate the way actors are enrolled and how they come to be linked to others” (Morgan *et al.*, 2006).

Understanding networks as heterogeneous gatherings made up of a hybrid of people, devices, technologies, and objects leaves little use for dualistic production/consumption and local/global accounts of agricultural mechanisation and its social consequences. Unlike a determined chain, ANT's actors and networks account for complexity and insecurity in meeting points of agro-food networks and cannot predetermine the territorialisation of 'effects'. Heterogeneous gatherings take place in all manner of spaces. The ecologies of new trends in alternative food networks, as well as notions of quality, for example, are momentary gatherings of actors more or less connected to other actors and other gatherings. Its seeming locality in the practices of producing 'quality' or 'ethical' objects connect in various ways to other actors that are both close by and far away, spatially and temporally. For Morgan, Marsden and Murdoch (2006) however, it is the ordering process that limits ANT's usefulness in studies of food networks. The authors argue that the ordering process is too simple, particularly any connections specific to nature and culture. There are not enough modes of ordering to account for the many different and repetitive gatherings that do seem to direct the movements of food. There are, these authors argue, recurring activities informed and organised by a dispersed and contingent logic.

There are a number of ways to configure the ordering processes of regulation or infrastructure in a complex and contingent global food economy. Examples include Appadurai's notion of 'scapes' (1996), Storper's 'worlds' (Storper, 1993; Storper and Salais, 1997) and Barry's (2001) 'technological zones' where activities take place as a series of interactions in spaces delimited by specific technological forms, material or transport infrastructures, and circuits of interaction and values. Here I describe

conventions theory as one extension of the insights of ANT. Conventions theory organises global forms through mutually constituted agreements of coordination that order the market and locate the sites for the interplay between standards, practices and regulations in building food networks (cf. Allaire and Boyer, 1995; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991; Eymard-Duverney, 1989; Wilkinson, 1997).

Conventions theory

Conventions theory is for some a remedy to the lack of cohesive orderings of ANT and notions of embeddedness. It works to align networks as concentrations of values that coordinate the dispersed activities of food production and consumption. Conventions theory draws on the work of Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) and the French regulation school, and views productive activity as a form of collective action requiring the coordination of various practices in a dispersed infrastructure (Wilkinson, 1997). Food production gives rise to practices, routines and agreements that organise activities across distances, called conventions. For conventions theory and food networks, concerns take the shape of 'qualities', and Thévenot (1995) maintained that the notion of 'quality' (as co-constituted social and natural) is the fundamental concept to analyse economic life. To understand different forms of quality-as-conventions (agreements) in the agro-food network, Sylvander (1995) draws out four modes of coordination as relayed by Renard (2003: 88) : 1) domestic coordination based on face-to-face relations on trust of people, places or brand names; 2) industrial coordination concerns long-term planning and infrastructure; 3) civic coordination involves a group of actors adhering to a set of principles as they structure economic relations; and 4) market coordination, the value of goods and services in a competitive market. More recent additions are 5) inspiration,

meaning evaluations based on emotion or creativity, 6) public knowledge, and 7) environmental justifications (Morgan *et al.*, 2006).

Qualities and conventions are horizontally organised and imply a structural division of the world into different modes of governance through which both humans and nonhuman nature pass and interact (Gibbon and Ponte, 2008; Ponte, 2004; Ponte and Gibbon, 2002). In this sense, and similar to ANT, conventions theory sees a simultaneity of structure and agency in commodity networks (Raynolds, 2001). Conventions, and the way they infuse or form networks are temporal, changing and have a historical trajectory that meet and separate across numerous nodes. The specific way they congeal suggests the times and spaces of their activity; the meeting of particular agreements. That is, conventions theorists “focus[...] on contestations over divergent qualifications and how collective enrolment in particular conventions permits forms of control at a distance” (Raynolds, 2001: 409; Renard, 2005). The particular ‘quality’ here is contested and differentiated; it is valued differently by different markets and at different meeting points in the network.

Useful for acknowledging the distributed spaces of activity that define value in the coffee market this approach still tends towards enacting food merely as a resource or means (Bennett, 2007: 143) through which the human actor can achieve entry points into networks of markets. In a disembodied and structural way, conventions theory, in combination with an updated global value chain (GVC) approach, has proven useful in considering the mechanisms, economics and politics of coffee markets (cf. Daviron and Ponte, 2005; Gereffi *et al.*, 2005). That said, a weakness of this approach is that some use conventions theory with GVC as a way to re-invest the micro-sociological networks of ANT with pre-existing power and knowledge that, these authors argue, should not be left

out of considerations of agro-food (Bair, 2008; Bair, 2009; Gibbon *et al.*, 2008). This is a way to make sense of the power relations and profit distribution between retail hubs and supply hubs that seem to define and delineate food networks. Equally, however, convention theories express discomfort with, and try to concretise, the fluid and mobile associations of ANT. The difficulty of ANT is the sense that nothing rests, that everything is fluid, leaving the question of how to locate activities in any site for any length of time.

As Amin and Thrift (2002) suggest, however,

“smooth displacements require the machinery of placements (instruments, metrics, labourers) [...] an ordering [...] exacted [...] through the design of flows as a set of serial encounters which construct particular times and spaces” (83).

The co-production of actors and networks creates and reiterates the ‘machinery of placements’. Thinking otherwise about power returns us to a network structured by two coherent points: production and consumption and local and global; precisely what conventions theorists want to avoid in considerations of food networks. The benefit of considering global trade as a network rather than an integrated system should be that there is no necessary first point of entry nor obvious beginning and end.

Morgan, Marsden and Murdoch (Morgan *et al.*, 2006) suggest that while conventions theory takes a symmetrical approach to social and natural objects, and is useful in locating nodes that are not necessarily binary in location, in practice it tends not to be able to capture the complexity of the contemporary food sector (21). Conventions theory locates the nodes in ways that are too local and make it difficult to imagine how localised agro-food ecologies might be able to mobilise resources to draw on more-than-local resources. “To become sustainable, such ecologies need to be endorsed by, and draw support from, a multilevel governance system that would allow speciality to defend the local globally” (Morgan *et al.*, 2006: 21). These authors look to Storper’s ‘worlds of production’ (Storper,

1993; Storper and Salais, 1997) to draw ‘foodscapes’ articulated through place, power and provenance.

This chapter has so far sketched the recent theoretical considerations in economic geography and geographical renderings of agro-food relations. It began with the agrarian political economic approaches and considerations of agro-food business, industrialisation and modes of regulation as a systematic integration of producers and consumers across global and local divides. It then moved to a discussion of the unique way that food production is embedded in certain spaces and nonhuman nature. Such considerations reconfigured the spatial and temporal relations of food production from ‘systems’ to food networks that, through ANT and other interventions, understood agro-food markets as contested, contingent and dispersed networks and nodes made up of multiply constituted actors. Finally, it discussed the contributions of conventions theory. While there are other conceptualisations useful for agro-food, conventions theory is a common source of analytical assessment of both coffee and alternative networks, to which this chapter now turns.

2.4 Alternative food networks and the example of Fairtrade

Geographers and others herald Fairtrade networks as providing consumers with, “an unprecedented degree of information about commodity production and presumably producer identities” (Lyon, 2006a: 457). Other ethical trade approaches like those working in the realm of sustainable coffees (e.g. Rainforest Alliance, Utz, CAFE Practices) similarly work to inform consumers about the relations of production with varying degrees of focus on social, environmental or labour-related conditions. These are more generally part of a move referred to as alternative food networks (AFNs) wherein

values such as locality, quality and ethics, for example, reorganise the terms of trade and produce different points of connectivity and flow of foodstuffs, sometimes within a bounded local region (as in eat locally) or across borders (as in Fairtrade). As Whatmore and Stassart (2003) describe AFNs,

What they share in common is their constitution as/of food markets that redistribute value through the network against the logic of bulk commodity production; that reconvene ‘trust’ between food producers and consumers; and that articulate new forms of political association and governance (389).

This section focuses on alternative food networks organised through notions of fair or ethical trade and uses the example of literature on Fairtrade Certified goods to illustrate how commentators evaluate its potential to reorganise what are often seen as unequal terms of trade. It draws attention to the theoretical frameworks adopted by various authors in relation to the discussion of political economy, ANT and conventions theory above.

This thesis goes on to consider sustainable coffees more broadly as well as other measures of quality and taste but this section begins with literature on Fairtrade as it is a well-established and thoroughly analysed response to the perceived problems of the global economy.

Fairtrade

Positioned, “in, as well as against, the market” (Barratt Brown, 1993; Raynolds, 2001), Fairtrade networks are intended to re-balance the distribution of profit and power towards the farmer and to bring the welfare of distant producers and workers into the conscious purchasing choices of consumers (Barnett *et al.*, 2005; Boltanski, 1999; Clarke *et al.*, 2007). For Fairtrade networks, the Fairtrade label indicates to consumers social, environmental and economic practices on the farm that meet the standards set by Fairtrade and verified by independent auditors. These include the payment of a fair trade premium

above a set price that should be higher than the price on the market, democratic decision making and organisation into cooperatives, long term contracts and pre-financing for small farmers, to name a few. The purpose of the label is to allow consumers in the global North to identify the presence of such commitments that are similar for any product. It is a guarantee of information and knowledge exchange wherein the producer and relations of production become more visible, and that ‘guarantees’ better social and environmental conditions for coffee producers than those experienced by producers selling to conventional markets (Lyon, 2007a; Murray *et al.*, 2003).

Early examples of fair trade, usually in the form of alternative trading organisations prior to the 1980s sought a total re-development of the international economic order (Barratt Brown, 1993). From the 1980s onwards, however and with the introduction of a Fairtrade label and regulatory body, the Fairtrade Labelling Organization (FLO), emphasis shifted to market-driven development and voluntarist reforms to the existing rules of global trade; an approach compatible with neoliberal policies. Fridell (2007a) suggests that the development of the Fairtrade network is a result of fair traders’ neo-Smithian analysis of global capitalism wherein the rational, self-interested *homo economicus* of neo-classical economics takes a ‘moral’ turn (101). Fridell argues that fairtraders do not consider the structural imperatives of a capitalist market but rather the attitudes and ethical orientation of its players. Exploitation and inequalities in global trade are the result of morally questionable choices made by “unscrupulous market agents” (15) and not a function of the requirements of capitalism as such (15). Here it is desirable to continue the flows of goods across borders and to continue to use conventional market transactions. In this rendering, trade can create wealth and raise people out of poverty but only if the actors involved use their tools to act ethically. Fairtrade models thus come into close contact with

conventional neoliberal trade models and administrations but mark their 'ethical activity' with a label introduced in 1988.

There is a wealth of political economic commodity chain analyses scrutinising the mobilisation of Fairtrade as embedding the ethical reorganisation of supply and retail. While some of the terms of conventional trade still apply, the implementation of the Fairtrade model indicates the very different social and ecological relations involved in the relationships at various points in the supply chain in contrast to conventional models. Codes and audits inform the direction and monitoring so that each dissociated actor can be shown to be in compliance with the motives of Fairtrade. The logic of an alternative network of trade, and contra the abstractions implied in ideas of transnational capitalist integration, is to embed different social relations that have purchase across borders, in the social lives of the actors involved and their ethically-inflected choices. The label makes these relations known to the consumer. The first set of literature considered here looks to the role of the label in modifying and manifesting the ethical relationships across the supply chain (or network) in neo-Marxist attempts to de-fetishise the commodity. Following an assessment of the moral geographies embedded in notions of Fairtrade, I consider the literature assessing small producer and cooperatives' interactions with Fairtrade usually associated with an agrarian political economy.

De-fetishising commodities

Neo-marxist accounts suggest that Fairtrade labelling, as well as other forms of ethical trade work to 'de-fetishise the commodity' (Fridell, 2007b; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Lyon, 2006a). In *Capital*, Marx (1976/1867) argued that in capitalist societies social relations are treated as relations between things, products of labour, rather than being

valued for their labour inputs. Commodity fetishism obscures the relationship between producer and consumer. As Cook and Crang (1996) put it,

consumed commodities and their valuations are divorced for and by consumers from the social relations of their production and provision through the construction of ignorances about the biographies and geographies of what we consume (135).

Consumers purchase food, for example, without knowing the devices and relations between people required to produce goods or necessarily what part of the world they come from (Harvey, 1990).

Fairtrade networks work to re-connect the producer and consumer by figuratively shortening the distance between disparate sites. They do this by suggesting that they reduce the number of steps and people in their exchange and transportation and that they make these steps and relations visible. By placing the social and environmental activities of production as central to the ability to obtain the certification, these alternative trade models make visible the relations of production thus putting the social and natural back into the production of a good (Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Castree, 2001; Goodman, 2004; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Moberg, 2008). Furthermore, these networks work to make practices transparent and traceable back to the farm rather than the opacity of the many-handed market relations of conventional trade (Freidberg, 2003; Freidberg, 2004).

The label then contains the promise to embody the object with the life and activities of the producer and suggests the “re-appearance of the farmer” in what M. Goodman (2004) calls a ‘moral economy’. For M. Goodman this moral economy is both material and semiotic, written on the surface of the commodity as its travels, and connecting the places it travels through exchange of information. The movement of commodities is also, “the traffic in knowledge about and meanings of fair trade, and its net-worked economic and social

connections” (Goodman, 2004: 893). The label makes this knowledge ‘trafficking’ clear (Jackson, 1999). The act of labelling proposes the possibility of an integration: the consumer and producer engage together in changing global economic connections and it is precisely this personal identification that Fairtrade relies on. The consumers’ relationship is now not just with the object as commodity but it is with *the producer*, but only as Fairtrade constitutes her/him by and through their networks. The idea that the producer engages repetitively in the same way with the material production of the commodity allows the location in space to have meaning to the consumer over time. One problem with the de-fetishising account is its static notion of the social life of the producer; frozen on the ‘surfaces’ of the object of consumption. There is no equally illuminating label for the producer about the social and economic life of the consumer.

A second problem arises when the label subsumes very different relations of production for various commodities. Fairtrade certifies commodities from bananas to footballs and from cotton to coffee. Although the FLO has gone some way to specify separate criteria for goods represented under the same label, these may not go far enough³. The terms of trade and production vary widely for different goods and commodities, and, moreover, for the same object in different regions and countries. Since Fairtrade and other alternative networks act in conjunction with the conventional market, actors often deal with both Fairtrade and conventional movements of foodstuffs (Raynolds, 2001). In terms of coffee, for example, dominant actors like multinational roasters and traders are necessary; operators would have some difficulty processing, contracting and transporting coffee

³ See <http://www.fairtrade.net/product-standards.html>.

without the help of a number of producer-country actors⁴. For some, this is the strength of Fairtrade; working with the existing trade system allows for greater acceptability, access to emerging and larger markets, and, as witnessed, market growth. For others it is this pact with conventional trade that is cause for concern. Fairtrade seeks social justice through and with the mechanisms of markets that generate those injustices (Jaffee, 2007), arguably a tenuous position. Some note this is a distinction between the original ideology of Fairtrade as solidarity and poverty alleviation to ‘mainstreaming’, a common source of tension among Fairtrade operators and activists⁵.

More recent literature rescinds arguments for de-fetishisation through alternative networks and specifically for those that use a code of conduct (like the ETI)⁶ or certification label (Fairtrade). Friedberg (2003) suggests a ‘double fetishism’ where the certifications and labelling initiatives have themselves become fetishised commodities. She argues, “[...] labels and codes of conduct are produced for exchange (by the labour power of consultants, among others) and invested with meanings” (Freidberg, 2003: 29). Hudson and Hudson (2009), early proponents of the de-fetishising capabilities of Fairtrade networks, now echo Freidberg’s view in concluding that recent changes to Fairtrade rules like certifying plantations alongside of small producer cooperatives and the fact that the FLO has gone some way to create criteria specific to goods represented under the same label, may actually *contribute* to commodity-fetishism. “By placing remarkably different conditions of production under the exact same ethical label, fair trade is no longer

⁴ It is common to hear Fairtrade coffee suppliers note that there is ‘no third-party middle person’ in this shortened supply chain. Given the relatively small amounts of Fairtrade coffee that would be contracted by one buyer, it is unlikely that they are able to fill a shipping container on their own. The basic metrics and costs of transportation almost always require a ‘third-party’ who can group together contracted coffee for multiple buyers. This does not have to limit the extent of ‘ethical commitment’ although it does mean that there is payment to the ‘third-party’ that is not getting back to the producer.

⁵ Field notes, Representative of a UK-based Fairtrade trading company, November 2005.

⁶ For a discussion of ethical trading initiatives see, for example Hughes (2000; 2005a; 2005b).

revealing the social and environmental conditions of production, but hiding them” (251). Cook and Crang (1996) make a similar double commodity fetish move but in relation to the imprinting of ‘local’ knowledge on the ‘surfaces’ of commodities as a way to reconstitute the spaces and times of globally sourced foods (135). The first festishing move in the global economy for commodities is the one described above. The second, like Freidberg, is in the writing of ‘locality’ and ‘culture’ onto commodities for consumers to ‘gaze’ at and to enjoy “imaginary gratification” as would a tourist taking in a new location (Cook and Crang, 1996: 136).

Furthermore, the claim to make food supply networks transparent and therefore traceable (to make conditions of production and the farmer reappear in the commodity or label) are themselves subsumed under a similar capitalist logic as they are buffered and guaranteed by systems of audit and assurances that seek to maintain trust (Power, 1997; Strathern, 2000a; Thrift, 2005). While these systems claim to redistribute value against the logic of bulk commodity production and to “reconvene ‘trust’ between food producers and consumers”, the use of transparency and audit become themselves abstract systems of reporting that control those things that can and will become visible (Barry, 2005c; McGoey, 2007; O’Neill, 2002; Power, 1997). Trust becomes a virtue of the ability to know something and this knowledge relies on the production of all sorts of information by those operators licensed to access and organise the details. It is an instrument of government with abstracted points of control raising the question as to what the information made visible actually conceals (Barry, 2005c; Darier, 1999; Foucault, 1977; Luke, 1999; Strathern, 2000b). When Fairtrade and other ethical models worked, or work as they still sometimes do, as small, person-to-person services there is some hope of maintaining networks of trust because of proximate contact. With the growing number of

Fairtrade products and brands, as well as the move into mainstream markets, the scalability and reliability of such systems of transparency might prove difficult. As the networks of Fairtrade get longer (in terms of ANT) the mobilisation of devices, codes, documents, people and nature become more complex (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). Fridell (2007a) argues that Fairtrade does not succeed in creating a sense of solidarity between the consumer and producer in these complex networks; a strange announcement in light of Fairtrade's core ideals, notions of transparency and desires for ethical connectivity.

In terms of the politics of making things visible in the moral economies discussed above, some focus on the role of the consumer. They propose a 'moral turn' in geographical accounts of ethical exchange based on 'caring at a distance' (Boltanski, 1999; Goodman, 2004; Smith, 2000) and 'geographies of responsibility' (Massey, 2004; 2003; Popke, 2007). These notions extend consumer concern to unknown spaces, places and people and rely upon consumer conceptions of the 'distant other'. Critics note that such constructions of the morally reflexive consumer may fix in place the geographies of 'production' and 'consumption' as disparate and bounded spaces (Cook and Crang, 1996; Goodman, 2001; Sheller, 2005). Moreover, an account that narrowly configures the spaces and practices of production rely upon a knowledgeable 'reflexive consumer' (Guthman, 2003), "such that people monitor, reflect upon and adapt their personal conduct in light of its perceived consequences" (46) (see also Barnett *et al.*, 2005; Bryant and Goodman, 2004; De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2003; De Pelsmacker and Janssens, 2005; Fine, 2002; Guthman, 2002; Loureiro and Lotade, 2005; Valentine, 1999a). Barnett and Land (2007) suggest that these caring moral economies reassert normative formations of an active giving from wealthy areas of consumption and passive receiving in less-wealthy producing countries. In response, they propose that it is better to consider 'geographies of generosity' that provoke

practical action through receptive, responsive, and attentive relational encounters that are always partial and situated.

Producers

The critiques raised above could, as some authors suggest (cf. Rice, 2001), point to the need to undertake producer-focused research to assess the impact of Fairtrade networks where the practices, devices and relations of production and certification take place.

Recent studies, usually from political economy, political ecology or anthropological ethnographies assess the effect on small producers and cooperatives in Fairtrade networks (Bacon, 2005; Jaffee, 2007; Lyon, 2007b; Moberg, 2008; Utting-Chamorro, 2005). For example, Jaffee's conclusion, after an extensive study of household income, debt, labor, environmental conditions, food security and emigration among Michiza cooperative members in the Rincón, Mexico is that, "fair trade clearly makes a tangible difference in producer livelihoods [however] these benefits are insufficient to persuade many non-Michiza households in the Rincón to participate" (Jaffee, 2007: 198). He continues,

Participation in fair-trade markets brings many benefits – often significant ones – to members of families; yet [...] it does not currently provide a sufficiently compelling alternative for many households, let alone constitute a solution to rural poverty, economic crisis, or ecological degradation (198).

Sara Lyon's (2007a) extensive study of a producer cooperative in Guatemala returned similar results. Fairtrade offers some benefits to producers like membership in cooperatives that provide some protection to small farmers and reaffirms cultures of mutual aid and service often destabilised by Guatemalan political and economic structures. Fairtrade in Guatemala also has several key limitations such as increasing debt burdens, insufficient compensation, growing inequality, and a lack of cooperative member participation in the Fairtrade movement's international decision-making and agenda setting

(Lyon, 2007b). She notes that producers found irrational a stringent certification system that did not seem to reflexively identify their needs (Lyon, 2006b). Renard and Pérez-Grovas (2007) echo this in their study of small producer cooperatives in Mexico who are experiencing problems associated with the current trend of integration of Fairtrade into conventional markets. While Fairtrade networks contributed to strengthening the cooperatives during the coffee crisis (1999-2004), the benefits are limited as tensions escalate between “two visions”: the ‘global south’ producers and their concern for development strategies and the pressures to increase sales volume in the ‘global north’ (Renard & Pérez-Grovas, 2007). The benefits of Fairtrade networks do not seem to be located in the acts of compliance with the standards, regulations and audit processes. The chapter returns to this point later in considering that while they may not work how they are supposed to, they do produce measures of value that continue to circulate in the market. Renard and Pérez-Grovas are part of a recent edited collection (Raynolds *et al.*, 2007b) that tries to make the producer and consumer-specific details and their interactions and links more obvious. They include essays on the ‘global north’ and essays on the ‘global south’ in separate sections but the juxtaposition of the two in the same collection goes some way to shifting our gaze toward the interactions and transactions across the globe rather than necessarily only ‘producer’ or ‘consumer’ studies. It is to these types of assessments of Fairtrade where where this chapter now turns.

Networks

Drawing on the example of CaféDirect, one of the first Fairtrade coffee companies, Whatmore and Thorne (1997) take the insights and network building of ANT to Fairtrade networks. They contend that, although Fairtrade coincides with traditional infrastructures of market regulation, it is mediated and re-articulated by a different mode of ordering, that

of connectivity so important to the network model. Fairtrade makes this connectivity explicit:

Connectivity as a mode of ordering establishes the performance of 'fairness', rather than charity, in which the farmer gets a 'fair price' and the consumer 'gets excellent coffee'. In order to strengthen the network, fair trade organizations must make concrete the telling and performing of connectivity and fairness in the hybrid network (298).

As discussed above, moving coffee through both conventional networks and the nodes of alterity requires a lot of work; a process of 'acting at a distance'. An ANT theorization connects actors through specific relations made visible and explicit. It is not important that they traverse or meet conventional market infrastructures and technologies but that they make and maintain material and ethical connections in the transactions. One of the limitations is that, in practice, producers and consumers, or even producers and the operators of Fairtrade located in the global north, rarely enjoy proximate contact (Lyon, 2007a). The modes of connectivity are largely made through the label; various interlocutors may not be able to maintain the precise connections through multiple transactions and places.

Raynolds (2001) develops an ANT-inflected analysis of commodity networks to emphasise the "heterogeneous centers, forms, and relations of network power" (419) in which she locates the promise and possibilities of Fairtrade. She suggests that certification and sale of labelled commodities are all arguably conventional trade practices while the guaranteed prices and direct relationships with producers allows the promotion of equality and social and environmental justice. Maintaining this distinction is an important part of Fairtrade initiatives; the pricing and social development premium and applying a set of standards creates a series of repeatable conventions that maintain the commitment. These network actors (values and standards) gain legitimacy in terms of conventions theory by

moving products attached to such qualities through conventional market coordination.

Meeting consumer desire is the final link in a complex chain of events that combine and re-assign social equality and economic viability.

Also applying conventions theory, Renard (2005) suggests that Fairtrade network building is precisely the prototype for 'civic coordination'. The social values of Fairtrade organise the relations of production, transport and consumption through conventions agreed upon by the actors involved, making economic decisions in accordance with the 'qualities' valued in this coordination (Renard, 2001). Unfortunately, she argues, as 'mainstream' food networks integrate social values embedded in the production of foods, Fairtrade actors shift balance from civic coordination to market coordination. While such qualities gain currency on the market, the modes of conventional coordination re-absorb Fairtrade into its market relations.

The conditions of coordination in terms of conventions theory as either more or less defined by 'civic' or 'market' agreements still seems to return to a pre-defined and stable object, a 'good' moving through a set of network relations. As Renard suggests, "Quality is [a] social construct that contributes to coordinate the economic activity of the actors" (Renard, 2003: 88). Institutions, devices and regulations thus define the object, but do not modify the object. Such an analysis that sees an increasing intrusion of market coordination into the sphere of civic coordination suggests that attempts to coordinate markets through 'ethical' values should diminish as they become another 'mainstream' product. It is important to note that such mainstreaming is causing difficulty for producers as the studies discussed above indicate (Fridell, 2007a; Lyon, 2007a; Renard and Pérez-Grovas, 2007). At the same time, sales of ethically sourced coffee continue to increase

year on year although less so in 2009⁷ and retailers like Starbucks are purchasing *more* not less Fairtrade coffee for its continued symbolic value for consumers.

Importantly, there is a growing range of indicators of value gaining currency on the market; ‘qualities’ like markers of high quality coffees and new measures of ‘good taste’. While these indicators have always circulated with coffee, there is a renewed interest in the conditions of cultivation and the artisanal practice of roasting and preparation. These measures circulate along with other forms of sustainable coffees that use the same indicators of Fairtrade but move products more purposely through the market (i.e. do not apply a fixed price)⁸ and inter-personal (Direct Trade) buying models that promote both ‘taste’ and ‘ethics’ in production processes. The proliferation of numerous ‘qualities’ that work to connect the activities of production with those of consumption point to the need to think about the object and its series of qualifications that define values of consumer desire in sites of production. In other words, it is necessary to consider how the object itself (coffee) is both able to sustain the relationships that seem to get ‘absorbed’ by conventional markets *and* create new relations and modes of desirability. I refer here to performative approaches to economic and social life.

2.5 Performativity

In *The Laws of the Markets*, Callon (1998b) argues that economics is performative; economics is a set of instruments and practices that contribute to the construction of economic settings, actors and institutions (MacKenzie *et al.*, 2007). The economy is not the base on which its ideological articulation (economics) rests. Rather, the market is a play between agents as they constantly perform, shape and format the economy in local

⁷ Field notes, Volcafé representative, 2 November 2008.

⁸ E.g. Rainforest Alliance and Utz Certified. A detailed discussion follows in chapter four.

and particular situations (Barry and Slater, 2005b; Callon, 1998b; Callon, 2007; Callon *et al.*, 2007; MacKenzie *et al.*, 2007). Objects are multiple and historical; embedded, or in the terms of Thomas (1991) and Callon (1998a), *entangled* in all manner of temporary attachments.

Transactions in the food market, for example, require that actors (human, nonhuman nature, material objects, words, metrological processes) temporarily disentangle from their attachments to entangle in calculative activity (Callon, 1998a). Objects, the products of multiple entanglements, must be disentangled from their relationships for exchange (Callon *et al.*, 2005). This process proceeds through framing – drawing porous boundaries between the negotiation and the historical and social connectivities of the objects.

Framing is never easy, it is costly, difficult and is always incomplete; particularly where there will likely be extensive overflows. The defining of the frame already must consider the scope and reality of (known or possible) overflows and the process both excludes and externalises them (Callon 1998a: 255), “which is why the heterogeneous elements, that are linked together in order to frame the contract and its performance, in reality take part in its overflowing [..]” (Callon 1997b: 255). Overflows necessitate identification and measurement as externalities to begin again the process of framing.

Rather than privileging the rational *homo economicus* of neo-classical economics or markets as merely practising locally the abstractions of an all-encompassing capitalist logic, “we can relate certain forms of economic activity to the more or less chaotic, regular and general upsurge of calculative agencies formatted and equipped to act on the basis of a logic of accumulation and maximization” (Callon, 2005). The logic is no more stable than

the agencies that frame it in particular times and spaces and this is a difficult and highly contested process (Callon, 2007; Gibson-Graham, 2006).

The work of Mitchell (2002) is instructive here as he suggests that societies may have as many non-calculative agents as calculative ones. Mitchell's historical tracings into the particularities of economic relations in Egypt makes room for, "[...] other forms of social network, powers of desire, technologies of control, and modes of government" (296). As such, framing of economic arrangements is never only organised by the rules of the market and is only one social relationship among others. Each act of framing, each move to control, configure and organise is always a site to locate the movement of market transactions but also to ask what else is taking place, what are the silences, and what exclusions is it creating or maintaining in order to sustain the singularity of modern capitalist logic (Gibson-Graham, 1996). Following Callon's expanded sense of economics, one can argue that economics is also a site for political debate in both the creation of measurement instruments and the negotiations required to frame an economic transaction (Barry and Slater, 2005b). For calculative devices, the silences become noisy interruptions as externalities that require attention, creating new associations not knowable prior to negotiation. As such, economic life is situated and incomplete; forms, devices and logics are shifting, in-formation and at stake; a result of temporary or sometimes repetitive associations rather than pre-arranged logics or conventions (Latour 2005).

Measures of quality and notions of 'good taste' promote an interrelation between what roasters and retailers desire and the way producers engage with their coffee. There is all manner of knowledge exchange that extends through from the earliest moments of the coffee's inception through to the acts of ingestion and integration into the body. A

performative approach creates phenomena, actively participating in shaping the thing it describes (MacKenzie *et al.*, 2007). This is not writing on the surface of an already defined commodity or substance but a transformation of the object, as the following sections describe.

Qualification

Callon *et al* (2005) suggest that economic markets are increasingly reflexive owing to, and a product of, participation of agents not traditionally considered as economic. Actors engage in the reflexive process enabled through ‘hybrid forums’, where the functioning and organization of particular markets are discussed and debated (Ibid.)⁹. Products are in constant motion, being qualified and re-qualified as ideas, metrics, technologies, codes and tools solidify into a good, an object for sale or, in the case of coffee, an object for consumption. Such knowledge-based economies tend to be service industries, but the authors argue that the economy of material goods is equally a service economy always subject to reorganisation. It is tangible and also composed of a temporary set of meanings, technologies, consumers, producers, and others who participate in producing attachments and detachments from particular brands and labels, ideas, emotions and markets. Technosciences and the increased and more rapid flow of information make ‘acting at a distance’ a reflexive calculation (Whatmore and Stassart, 2003). There is a challenge for operators in particular markets to make adjustments between supply and demand around a list of qualities, and these qualities are always shifting, operating, “against a background of substitutability and comparability. The good relates to a certain structuration of

⁹ Callon et al (2005) explain the use of the term “hybrid forums”: “‘Forums’ because they are public spaces [...]. ‘Hybrid’ for two reasons. The first is the variety and heterogeneity of the actors involved. [...] The second reason they are hybrid is because the questions raised concern the economy, politics, ethics, law and, finally, even science” (28). The term is also used in (Callon, 1998a).

competition, which acts both as a constraint and a resource for the collective qualification – requalification of products” (Callon *et al.*, 2005: 34).

The notion of qualification and re-qualification is instructive here in suggesting the complex, contingent and non-institutional way that products transport certain values. It is precisely the qualification of new measures of value indicating ‘exceptional taste’ or ‘high quality’ coffees that seem to circulate along with notions of ‘ethics’ and ‘sustainability’ and requires attention to why and how these types of connections are being made. Callon *et al.*, however, tend to focus too closely on the role of consumers in defining the values of qualification and re-qualification. While the authors indicate that qualification processes enrol agents from spaces of supply, transport, marketing and demand, they tend not to emphasize the farmer or food producer, for example, but rather point to supply actors that fit more easily with the roles of buyer or exporter who are apparently more *responsive to* consumer desire. They do not sufficiently attend to how producers determine the extent or limitations of particular qualities, or how these change the object through relations of cultivation and processing, for example. This project extends qualification processes to clarify the multiple ways that the consumers figure in accounts of coffee production sites not just in terms of what they want to buy, but also in terms of their tastes, desires and judgements of quality. This involves both a focus on the practices of producer country professionals as well as seeing the multiple ways that consumers figure and are mobilised in the practices of production.

Knowledge production is transformative of the object; qualities do not just *transport* across networks they *translate* through and with the coffee. Coffee is hybrid and multiple because it enrolls multiple actors not only in spaces of qualification (at the supermarket, in

the export office) but as the beans travel. Even referring to 'coffee' must emit something more than that name usually evokes (a brown bean, a caffeine boost, mixed with milk, a cherry, a tissue culture in a lab). Here coffee is made up of numerous material and discursive forms, informational accounts, technological and climate interventions, conceptions and human perceptions, just to name a few, that are responsive to and constitute consumer desires. The 'parts', both tangible and intangible of coffee's assemblage come into contact, intervene and collide with notions of ethics or quality, among other things, that are situated and multiple (Barry and Slater, 2005c; Callon *et al.*, 2007; Foucault, 1977; Foucault, 1979). This then opens up questions regarding not only how to understand global networks and flows but, importantly, questions of just what is 'ethical' in constructions of 'alternative geographies' and how one might suggest an affective encounter among and between 'coffee' and 'ethics' and the bodies that make and drink both. The following sections augment the qualification of coffee by suggesting first that considering coffee as an 'informed material' goes some way to re-thinking its materiality and affectivity. It then contemplates the affective relation of coffee and ethics in producing in the first instance, Tarde's (1890/1903; 2007/1902) notion of opposition and invention and in the second, a relational and performative ethics that departs significantly from the meanings inscribed by literature on Fairtrade and sustainable coffee.

2.6 Informed material

The qualification and re-qualification of products become salient in the branding, marketing or product placement on a shelf and this process is fluid and recurring throughout the life of the object. If we think about this for the values of alternative networks, certain values work to augment the coffee package with a label representing that the relations of production conform to a set of standards. Theorisations discussed much

earlier here suggest that the knowledge production that the label implies maintains the necessary material and ethical connectivity through complex and lengthy food networks (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). If, as suggested above, we extend such a notion of qualification to farmers and the conditions of cultivation, then acts of production are constantly mobilising the consumer at the level of production. This does not simply augment the bean in terms of writing information onto its surfaces but such knowledge production transforms the material object.

Enmeshed and encoded in a heterogeneous field of difference (Foucault, 1972), the materiality of coffee and its associative environments become informationally enriched as, what Barry suggests is an ‘informed material’. Barry (2005a) introduces Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and Isabelle Stengers (1996) notion of ‘informed materials’ where he considers pharmaceuticals as the creation of novel entities,

The molecules produced in the contemporary pharmaceutical laboratory certainly are more or less purified as chemicals, but they are also enriched in new ways. They are part of increasingly dense, spatially extended and changing informational and material environments formed not just through laboratory syntheses and tests, but through virtual libraries, computational models and data bases (65).

Drawing on the work of A.N. Whitehead, Barry explains that “a molecule should be considered a historical rather than a physical entity. In his view, a molecule should not be understood as a table or rock, but rather as an event: ‘a molecule is a historic route of actual occasions [...]’ (Whitehead, 1978:80)” (56). This thinking involves a shift to process thinking (Fraser *et al.*, 2006), where the process is the *making* of the entity, never fixed nor absolute but irreversible and its path dependency only makes it richer in information. To put it succinctly, “how an actual entity becomes constitutes what [...] that actual entity is” (Rosengarten, 2009: 63). Thus coffee is a dynamic entity, constituted by all of the bits and

pieces across seemingly 'global' and 'local' spaces including biotech labs, country of origin, decisions and agricultural techniques, processing, transporting, storing, roasting and preparing the coffee (Bingham and Thrift, 2000). It is also the perception of an entity, the informed spaces of location; the immediate environment that relates, suggests or contains its meaning (Barry, 2009b). Perception is important, as "newly configured objects match an appropriately altered social order" (Barry, 2005a).

As discussed above, conventions theory and other economic geographies tracking food networks suggest that performativity approaches are too concerned with the micro and so miss the structures of power and knowledge that create and maintain unjust rules of trade (Bair, 2008; Bair, 2009; Gibbon *et al.*, 2008). This rendering tends to reiterate power discrepancies as pre-established and structurally divided between those who have and those who do not have power. Even while conventions theory works to network the world less dichotomously than the ways suggested by notions of 'caring at a distance', or early commodity chain approaches, it tends to reiterate structural certainties in its understanding of power. A shift to process thinking is useful here, because it examines both materiality and discourse, and might constitute 'power' as multiple sites of formation and negotiation. This opens up various mediations in practice to be acts of contestation where seemingly they are simply daily events. These practices may not appear 'political' in the conventional sense but they may make long distance connections and/or create closer (or farther) affective links (Law and Mol, 2008). To be sure, there are delimitations on the capacity of farmers to access new markets or to achieve profits, amongst other practices. Certification systems and the recent revival of notions of high quality can and do successfully address these limitations. As informed materials, or even 'fluid technology' (de Laet and Mol, 2000), coffee informs or creates imitation and invention among

communities capable of producing new materialities in spaces perceived to be lacking in ‘power’ or ‘knowledge’, like that of areas of coffee production. What the networks and micro-sociological accounts mixed with process thinking do well, then, is to resist a ‘correct’ or singular starting point to consider human and non-human associations (Latour, 2005b).

Coffee as an informed material has important implications for the ethics of Fair or other forms of alternative trade. The bean carries its information but one encounters this only through the mediation of information like the label, transparency and systems of audit. Despite increased attention to the particularities of producing coffee as opposed to other commodities, for Fairtrade, for example, it does not really matter what is the *matter* but only the set of relations dissociated from their sites of production. And this is the risk: looking to whether it is fair, ethical or sustainable in the terms of transnational definitions or the values of the people involved shifts focus away from the matter of the bean and, by extension, the actual terms and conditions of its constitution. Here, coffee is not a thing on which meaning is inscribed, for example the social meanings of ecology, regional identity, local knowledge and solidarity that Renard (1999) sets out in her socially constructed notion of quality defining the ‘values’ of Fairtrade¹⁰. Rather, meaning is constituted by and through its materiality and affectivity, its associations and types of connectivities as always in process. This is an opening to the agency of the constituents of the heterogeneous networks of the coffee itself. Whatmore and Stassart (2003) make this point,

food constantly shifts register between matter and meaning, animal and meat; calories and flavour; stretching and folding the time-spaces of here and now, ‘us’ and ‘them’, producing and consuming, in complex and contested ways. But this fleshy traffic in/through things tends to be

¹⁰ As defined earlier in the chapter.

restricted analytically to their pliant animation by something else, human intention, excluding the affectivity of ‘things’ on their own account that can resist and deflect human designs (449).

Ethics, then, must account for the histories and geographies that do not pass but filter through the present and the future (Serres, 1982). Rather than looking to manifest ethical relations through the macrostructures of pricing and labels that are encoded in institutions and standards or instruments of government, we should look to the people, places and things that live, work, process, measure, account for and name coffee (Bell, 2007; Callon, 1998c; Callon *et al.*, 2005; Foucault, 1977; Gibson-Graham, 1996; MacKenzie *et al.*, 2007; Mitchell, 2002; Whatmore, 2006). In this sense one cannot speak simply of ‘sustainability’ as dealing with the (singular) ‘problem’ of poverty alleviation or environmental degradation over vastly different localities, conditions, spaces or affective encounters of production-country relations. Although people in producing countries consume coffee differently, producing countries are never only producing but also consuming. Here again, looking to the materialities and affective encounters does not dictate the starting point of analysis. One would not necessarily go to a country of production and start with an already defined notion of ‘the coffee producer’ but rather locate where to ‘begin’ in the multiply situated practices and instruments of the technologies of coffee that cross geographic and global economic divisions.

One might also assert that studies of ethics/justice and/in trade as renderings of ‘caring at a distance’ as suggested above concern themselves too much with representation. The marketing of Fairtrade coffee requires public accounts of justice and equality and draws heavily on ‘sustainability’ as social, environmental and economic viability to ensure the management of resources for future generations. Despite its use as an easy referent, the notion of sustainability, tethered to its global development community roots in the

Brundlandt Report, is contested among theorists and lacks a stable definition (Bennett and Chaloupka, 1993; Darier, 1999; Hinchliffe, 2007; Hinchliffe *et al.*, 2007; Luke, 1997; Luke, 1999). This is precisely why its use in reference to particular types of coffee or coffee networks inscribes its meaning *on* the coffee. For example, the practices of certifying, auditing, changing labour relations, building schools, using organic pesticides, and so on, those indicated in sustainable and Fairtrade coffees, come into contact, intervene and collide with the ethics of coffee in producing countries that are not necessarily formed of the same moralising codes (Callon *et al.*, 2007; Foucault, 1977; Foucault, 1979).

Encoding ethics to ensure survival and traceability through numerous negotiations, interactions, and mobilisations of Fairtrade or sustainable coffee networks, can invoke a narrow set of relations. The ANT-inspired notion of symmetry not only in the actors but also in their capacity to act as well as the performative account of the repetitively productive process of framing and overflowing (and framing again) suggest that numerous things are happening at the same time. While “traceability and certification practices work by territorializing, or stabilising particular social and technical arrangements in order to facilitate the movement of products and strengthen the reliability of the ethical claims they embody” (Richardson and Whatmore, 2009), they also privilege certain activities whether or not they ‘make sense’ in the particular spaces where they are practiced. This is with reference to not only the local cultures and knowledges assessed by agrarian political economists discussed above, but also new ways of interacting with coffee through the imitation and opposition of circulating measures of value with and through the coffee market. We might be missing all sorts of other relations, interactions and ideas that, if

considered of equal value or interest, may have more lasting or more valuable affect. The next section considers those currents of new and different ideas.

2.7 Imitation and invention

In light of a proliferation of certification and ethical sourcing models that use some of the terms of Fairtrade in different ways, and of changing forms of desire (through taste and quality) in coffee, producers imitate and sometimes oppose the daily enactments of meeting the requirements of coffee production. One way to approach the issue of what is happening in the interaction between coffee, people, things and ethics is to query the circulation of ideas as repetitive activities that may produce difference or, in Tarde's (1890/1903) terms, the inventive potential in acts of imitation and opposition. This focuses on the micro-activities; the very locally defined and coordinated acts of production. As argued throughout, these are always related and constituted by less 'local' constituents.

In *Laws of Imitation*, Tarde (1890/1903) asserts that the act of invention is a continual process of imitation, opposition and adaptation. As Tarde relates,

Every successful invention actualises one of the thousand possible, or rather, given certain conditions, necessary, inventions, which are carried in the womb of its parent invention, and by its appearance it annihilates the majority of those possibilities and makes possible a host of heretofore impossible inventions. These latter inventions will or will not come into existence according to the extent and direction of the radiation of its imitation through communities which are already illuminated by other lights (45).

The process of imitation, opposition and adaptation is continual and temporal; producing multiple and changing inventions that in turn produce new imitations and inventions. In this sense, producers engaged in the routine practice of growing coffee, may shift their

sense of possibility and become aware of the germ of difference and invention found in the process of imitation of, for example, particular market forms (Barry and Thrift, 2007; Lepinay, 2007).

To account for ‘invention’ of sorts, there is a growing body of literature comparing certification models (Giovannucci and Koekoek, 2003; Giovannucci and Ponte, 2005; Linton, 2005; Linton, 2008; Reynolds *et al.*, 2007a). There is also increased attention to coffee’s quality in terms of its ‘speciality’ status; new models of relationship coffees pass through sometimes different networks. Some consider these speciality coffees in relation to certifications and ethics (Giovannucci and Ponte, 2005; Linton, 2008). These imitative responses to the perceived limitations of each model suggest an ongoing process of invention that may not be limited to only those codes and models that achieve larger market access and approval or gain legitimacy for their connection to conventional trade. Operators in the coffee market have imitated Fairtrade as the initiator of alternative ethical food networks and this is cause for assessment. The coffee market is also the site for the invention of new forms that are critically located amongst the technologies, metrics, and objects at sites of production (Barry and Thrift, 2007; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Latour and Weibel, 2005). These inventions respond to popular indicators of desire, measures of quality and taste.

Here, the circulation of old and new ideas around coffee production, sustainability or particular attributes of coffee (as in speciality coffee desires, high quality and attributes of taste) and the people and things that transport these ideas may interrupt the “ritualized practice or assumption of subjection” and may provide, “a momentary opening for the expression of a different economic subjectivity” (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 32). It is the flow

of passionate response that is of interest; the affective potential of responding to ways of making and marketing coffee rather than whether approaches are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ at destabilising a systematic logic of capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Gibson-Graham, 2008). The circulations of such ideas are “mobile producers of connections” (Deleuze, 1994; May, 2005) creating a modern economy of desire that promotes “*passionate imitation* (Latour and Lepinay 2008)” (Barry and Thrift, 2007: 519). Such understandings illuminate the performativity of coffee *and ethics* and deploys all the materialities of the socio-technical assemblages that constitute the world (MacKenzie et al., 2007: 323). It is possible to say that producers and other coffee professionals strive to attain ‘sustainability’ but this may be on different and multiple registers. Through such a performative encounter, one cannot leave ethics intact as moral codes applied to or embedded in market relations. Instead, ethics is performative, “formed through attachments between life and the world” (McCormack, 2003: 496; Roe, 2006b: 478). It is a discursive and material process of associations and connectivity, sensations and sentiments (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly, 2004). To return to Tarde, it is what he suggests are “*affective* states of mind, which, as such, are verbally intransmissible” (Tarde, 2007/1902: 616).

Tarde suggests that art makes affective states of mind transmissible,

The wonder of art is that it renders transmissible, through the lively expression it gives of them, which is consequently judged to be beautiful, not sensations or sentiments, it is true, but their image. It thereby socialises or tames, as it were, these states of mind which are individual and wild by nature (Tarde, 2007/1902: 616).

Some might go so far as to suggest attention to quality in coffee is a form of art that corresponds to an ‘artisanal reaction’ described by Murdoch and Miele (2004: 156). That is, a move away from standardisation and towards notions of rejuvenated flavour and taste. Even if this takes things too far from the life of the second largest commodity dominated

as it is by very large roasting and trading firms and supplied to massive crowds in homogeneous forms around the world, there is something significant in looking closely at the constituents of coffee. Bennett suggests that, “Food exemplifies becoming over being. Food too reveals materiality’s instability, vagrancy, activeness” (Bennett, 2007: 136). For Bennett, the actors of assemblages are *vital materialities*: producing all manner of rogue associations (Bennett, 2001).

The embedded moralism of Fairtrade or sustainable coffee is simply one representation, albeit a highly integrated and often unquestioned representation. New ways of organising, thinking and feeling are the result of congregations found in and through the socio-technical and vital material assemblages (Bennett in Khan, 2009: 93). A certain intangibility is not incompatible with the ability to act or to produce power effects (Bennett, 2004; Bennett, 2007: 135). Work on the performativity of taste suggests we look to the enacted moment “between-the-two” (Hennion, 2007; Hennion *et al.*, 2005) as a way to make the self sensible to things and things sensible to the self; the practice, the trial, the relation in process (Becker, 1963; Schaffer, 1988; Schaffer, 2005; Teil and Hennion, 2004). Somewhat like Callon’s performativity, social life is processural, full of negotiations, interventions and overflows. People and things disentangle from some formations and entangle in new moments only to disentangle again (Callon, 1998a). All manner of things lurk inside and alongside other things; they are disruptive. It is maybe not a matter of asking whether something works or does not work but rather, if allowed attention and a certain ability to act, what might such interventions and associations produce.

2.8 Conclusion

Food networks (and food itself) are messy and disruptive creating all manner of overflows. The literature considering the materiality and performativity of ‘alternative’ networks, then, refracts the connections, associations and flows of the production and transportation of actual foodstuffs in and among the flows of production-transport-consumption (Whatmore, 2002). Nothing is left intact as pre-established givens but rather are understood only via the multiple and path-dependent framing, overflowing and re-framing practices of the economy as “[...] intricate interweavings of *situated* people, artefacts, codes, and living things and the maintenance of particular tapestries of connection across the world” (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997: 288). Looking to coffee one can suggest that coffee’s networks are unstable global assemblages of human and non-human actors (Ong and Collier, 2005) that overlap and overflow as networks, nodes and mobilisations across geographical distances and whose “global forms” territorialise in particular places. The assemblage of coffee, whether framed as ethical, high quality or conventional and so on, is “the product of multiple determinations that are not reducible to a single logic” (Ibid. 12); not the logic of a systematic global capitalism of political economy or the institutionalised agreements of conventions theory. The next chapter addresses the notion of assemblages as they create the sites and conditions for the ethnographic method for this research.

In the performative approach to economic knowledges and processes, rather than the “individual-human-agent embedded in institutions, conventions, personal relationship and groups sharing identical values”(Callon, 2005), there are numerous actors with the capacity to act. In this rendering,

Agency as a capacity to act and to give meaning to action can neither be contained in a human being nor localized in the institutions, norms, values, and discursive or symbolic systems assumed to produce effects

on individuals. Action, including its reflexive dimension that produces meaning, takes place in hybrid collectives comprising human beings as well as material and technical devices, texts, etc” (4).

Such an approach suggests that there is no meaningful place for the dualistic producer/consumer or global/local binaries of some political economic approaches. In an interview with Callon, Barry and Slater (2005b) argue that, given the broad sense of economics he suggests, it might be useful to call this the production of ‘economic knowledges’ as a way to speak of the breadth of actors and interests involved in shaping and reshaping the economy (5). This opens to the diversity of the markets in action as well as the possibility for political action through and within the economy not separate from the sphere of the political. Rather than a politics of solidarity that work expressly against the conventional market, the values of Fairtrade, among other ethical values, are part of the entanglements that inform and frame economic life. Such economic knowledges are dispersed and micro-sociological; action is “a collective property that naturally overflows” (Callon, 2005) and must be framed to be attributed to a particular agency. If we treat symmetrically calculative and non-calculative agencies we see that forms of agency are multiple and diverse. Producers, consumers, and all of the actors enrolled in creating, transporting, and drinking coffee have the capacity to act along with the coffee transformed by and transforming the spaces through which it travels.

As the model of Fairtrade becomes dispersed and imitated into other sustainable coffee models that explicitly use rather than act against the infrastructures and values of the market, or in light of indications of quality, one sees that these values infuse each other. It is not simply whether any of these models or qualities are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ but rather what they *produce*: objects, humans, nonhuman nature all become part of new relations. This is the focus of the following six chapters.

CHAPTER THREE: TRACING THE COFFEE MARKET

“There are differences in the mode of travelling, the reason for the trip, the point of departure and the destination, in the places through which one will pass, the speed, the means, the vehicle, the obstacles to be overcome, in what space and time. [...] It was always a matter of establishing a relation, constructing it, fine-tuning it. And once established, thousands of relations, here, there, everywhere – after a while, when you step back and look, a picture emerges. Or at least a map. You see a general theory of relations, without any point focalizing the constructions or solidifying it, like a pyramid. The turbulences keep moving; the flames keep dancing”¹.

3.1 Introduction

The farmer gestures to his farmland covered with coffee trees and small buildings dotting the landscape. This is a relatively large farm for Guatemala and he grows organic tea, quinine, macadamia nuts, and ornamental plants, and promotes tourism. Coffee trees are his main source of income. He lives part time in a large landowners’ house at the top of the hill so that he may oversee the daily happenings on the farm. The farm is at the top of a long potholed road making transport difficult so he houses year-long workers on the land. His hand sweeps across the view from the house and he says, “We have an elementary school and newly built secondary school, a medical clinic with the same medic visiting us for more than twenty years, adequate housing, the list goes on”. He points to the extensive worm composting buildings and the water filtration system he designed. The workers are organised into a cooperative, they stock the general store and have a group savings account. They recently purchased a truck. The farm is Utz Certified and holds Preferred Status from Starbucks Café Practices. After the brief introduction, he turns and asks sceptically, “what is it you want to see”?

¹ Serres, M. and Latour, B. (1995). *Conversations on science, culture, and time*. Studies in literature and science. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p. 112.

Looking at the farm from the owners sweeping gestures there are the usual buildings, plants, and people that indicate the activities of coffee farming in Guatemala. The area is clean and beautiful and there are signs to indicate hazardous chemicals or rubbish and other buildings that count as compliance with ethical standards. The structures indicate consideration of the social welfare of workers and the ecological well-being of the land, and compliance with standards that translate easily into marketable attributes. That said, the visit to this farm, as well as all other visits undertaken in this ethnographic project, is not necessarily to find indications that they are implementing the standards of certification. Rather, the research undertaken in this study seeks to see, or to experience, the relations between things and bodies that form and re-form the practices of coffee and ethics². This difference between charting compliance and interrogating relations is similar to what Latour (2005b) calls matters of fact and matters of concern, where objects that appear to have clear boundaries give way to their complicated entanglements and associations in ways that are sometimes ethical.

This research follows recent ethnographies that move away from single-sited anthropological research and look at global phenomena as articulated in specific situations (Cook and Crang, 1996; Latour, 2005b; Ong and Collier, 2005; Thrift, 1999; Tsing, 2005). It stays close to social practices and performance in its ethnography of assemblages. Considerations about sites of fieldwork and the 'objects' of study are important in generating materials about the geographically dispersed coffee market. Classical anthropological ethnographies tend to study the practices of a culture more or less confined to a single site to describe a stable culture. More recently, in anthropology and other social

² Mariam Fraser (2009) suggests that this is 'event thinking' that describes relations between things, bodies, and happenings and their independent reality. While this terminology is not used here, it is a useful concept in terms of temporality and draws on the work of A.N. Whitehead.

science disciplines, ethnographers emphasise the need to consider global economies and politics in the definition of sites and objects of study. These multi-sited ethnographies trace complex phenomena through several parallel sites allowing global associations to emerge (Marcus, 1998). This sometimes results in researchers following several sites of study to track an object that crosses geographically and institutionally disparate spaces. Other times they chart responses to phenomena that traverse a single site³.

Some authors have questioned the work of social science research that renders practices as socially constituted and reducible to the autonomous actions of humans (Bennett, 2004; Mitchell, 2002). The ethnographic study employed here follows recent adaptations to histories and ethnographies that distribute attention from humans to the numerous nonhuman devices. These articulate the work of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Actor Network Theory (ANT) that question knowledge production in scientific conduct (Callon, 1986; Callon and Latour, 1981; Latour, 1988; Mol, 2002). According to this rendering, the social 'performs' several kinds of space where different operations take place and the sites and objects of ethnographic research are temporary gatherings that are in process and multiple (Mol and Law, 1994: 643). Objects are humans, codes, devices, technologies, senses, desires, and bodies that are path-dependent, irreversible and temporary configurations of space and time. Furthermore, there is a concomitant ontological shift from seeking to interpret and describe the world as one finds it, to acts of intervention that ask how the world makes itself known (Massey, 2003; Stassart and

³ Recent studies on Fairtrade among producers in one cooperative or region of a country (see for example, Bacon, 2008; Fridell, 2007a; Jaffee, 2007; Lyon, 2006b; Lyon, Unpublished), define location by the common market relationship of enacting the regulations and compliances of certification. Sarah Lyon undertook ethnographic fieldwork among the participants of a cooperative in Guatemala as the associative node of farmers who comply with and contract sale of (some of) their coffee through Fairtrade networks. Fairtrade relations traverse the cooperative member's lives, agricultural practices and contracts as well as their region or country. She develops an ethnography of the effects of global and market phenomena as it manifests among one particular social group.

Whatmore, 2003; Stengers, 1997; Whatmore, 2003). This shift does place considerable importance on the co-constituted interventions of researcher and human research subjects not as the ‘final’ word of the autonomous self (Haraway, 1991) but as a nexus where belief and desire coexist and “cross-fertilisation of distinct currents of innovation sometimes occur[.]” (Barry, 2009a: 3).

The methodology undertaken here to trace coffee markets is an ethnography of assemblages. It draws on the work of multi-sited and STS-inflected research and studies that take ANT or performative approaches to the study of economic knowledges and processes (see for example Callon, 1998c; Callon *et al.*, 2007; MacKenzie *et al.*, 2007; Mitchell, 2002). This project follows the human and non-human constituents that define and delimit coffee and ethics in various forms and senses. This research considers that coffee is multiple, relational and emergent as it circulates in and through the market (Appadurai, 1986; Barry and Slater, 2005a; Callon *et al.*, 2005). It is through the market that practices and discourses of ethically inflected coffee models and mechanisms make contact with their intended publics and where they manifest and make significant the seeming connections between producers, consumers and ethics. Actors practice or participate in describing, acting or subverting particular ethical commitments to coffee through markets such as price, organisation of purchase and transport, and qualifications as particular origins, beans, codes of conduct, roasts and tastes. As such, this ethnography begins by acknowledging that there is a coffee market made up of socio-technical assemblages that in various ways frame and re-frame the production, exchange, transport and consumption of coffee and suggests that this market is not as stable as it may appear.

Let me briefly describe the ethnography of assemblages and how the market constitutes the fluid and mobile sites of this research. Three theoretical considerations detailed in chapter two motivate this choice of methodology. To summarise, first, coffee markets are unstable global assemblages (Ong and Collier, 2005) that overlap and overflow as networks and nodes across geographical distances⁴. Second, this ethnography considers markets are performative and products exchanged are a sequence of transformations that are subject to qualification and re-qualification within market networks (Callon and Law, 2005; Callon *et al.*, 2005). Primarily, the researcher follows coffee, not as an object in itself, but as an object that exists in different qualified forms; an object in relation (Mol and Law, 1994). Third, such a performative account of coffee extends also to ethics. Ethics are not reducible to the notions of ‘human’ and ‘nature’, or necessarily indicated in pre-established codes and standards in response to the practices of global capitalist markets. These notions tend towards universal indicators of social and environmental well-being that, in their codified form, become abstracted. Rather, ethics are situated and relational. Things produce ethics through interactions with the multiple practices of coffee production, economies, politics, administrations and associations specific to and circulating through the gatherings and assemblages of coffee markets and crucially indicated in the coffee itself (Goodman, 2001; Haraway, 1991; McCormack, 2003; Popke, 2008; Whatmore, 2002; Whatmore, 2006). What is specific about ethics is that these notions form and reform spaces of interaction between producer country actors and consumer desire as mediated by the numerous professionals engaged in the niche market for sustainable coffees.

⁴ There is some concern with the notion of network in its sense of seamless communication devices and other global renderings but it still is a useful way to consider that certain devices congregate, and where they congregate they form a complex set of relations.

These three theoretical considerations inform a methodological approach of paying close attention to the particularities and specificities of practice, and this is what justifies the use of ethnographic methods (Barry, 2009a; Callon, 1998c; Tarde, 1890/1903). Qualifications take place among the daily negotiations, techniques and administrations of coffee. As such, these act as locations for political debates about the organisation of the market. Location here becomes important, not because it captures a stable culture, but because it captures a novel process that effect and are affected by the coffee market and that arise in and through encounters (Fraser, 2006; Strathern, 2004b). Therefore this empirical research tracks spaces of invention, be it in the mind of an individual, in the processing technologies of coffee, or in the land, water or pollutants in the UK or Guatemala.

This research traces the way certain preoccupations both connect and act in all sorts of places (Barry, 2001) using nodes in market relations as *orderings* where encounters happen (Amin and Thrift, 2002)⁵. In some cases field work entailed travel to locations like Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador; at other times there was travel around London, UK to various companies or institutions. In others still, there was travel to a meeting or conference, for example, to Copenhagen for the Speciality Coffee Association of Europe's annual conference. While the most sustained period of field work took place in Guatemala, the site of six months of observation and unstructured interviews from January to June 2007, and particular importance is placed on that country for this research, the research process also included establishing trust at various locations and numerous (re)meetings with some coffee or ethical certification professionals, as well as others interested in coffee and ethics. For example, not only were there repeated returns to one

⁵ Such spatial configurations have been variously referred to as 'scapes' (Appadurai, 1996), 'technological zones' (Barry, 2001), 'worlds' (Storper and Salais, 1997) and 'immutable mobiles' (Latour, 1993) among other conceptualisations denoting a location of practices and instruments made durable across different locations.

independent trading house in London to train, learn, and attend events, I also met various actors there who I later interviewed again, encountered in another location, or met in Latin America. What was significant about these meetings was that each encounter involved coffee in various forms, whether its conceptualisation, tasting, processing, viewing growing conditions, speaking about it or imagining particular aspects. Each meeting was about the site and its associations at that time: the coffee's travels and histories, the attachments and trajectories of devices and codes, or moving through human travel, desires and ideas.

Although the research traced coffee and ethics through a number of spaces, there was focus on one area of production, Guatemala, for a sustained research period. This was because public accounts of sustainable coffees rely heavily on the activities and practices that should take place where people produce coffee. Throughout the ethnography, returns to the UK allowed for engagement with coffee professionals, cafés and attendance at numerous coffee related events. The discussion throughout the thesis is not always intended to express in detail all that has happened. Rather, I worked to make present all of the nodes of the network in every location where coffee passes to every possible extent. In this way, I traced how 'ethics' was formulated and re-formulated in and through the particularities of those times and spaces.

The chapter begins with a short overview of the move from single sited to multi-sited ethnography and suggests that the intervention of ANT and STS is crucial for shifting focus from a human-centred to a non-human-centered approach to the generation of field work materials. Privilege is given to what people say and do, but this is done so in accordance with the circulation of ideas, mechanisms, and materials of coffee production

and consumption. I then consider the theoretical concerns of an ethnography of assemblages that develops a relational account of coffee and ethics through associations. I suggest that producer country professionals are always mobilising the consumer at the level of production and this carries through the life of the coffee. Following this, I detail the activities of the ethnographic fieldwork including interviews in the UK and two periods of fieldwork in Latin America and the methods used for data gathering. In the description of the field work in this chapter, I emphasize the interactions with the main producer organisation of Guatemala, Anacafé, and follow this with discussion of the city of Antigua. Together these reveal a lot about the role of researcher and researched in mutually constituting the sites and objects of research as well as questions of representation and reflexivity⁶.

3.2 Ethnographic methods

Atkinson and Hammersley (1994; 2007) define ethnography as a mode of investigation that emphasises the nature of social phenomena through attention to the complexity, depth, intensity of insight and nature of social relationships. Ethnographers enter a single field of

⁶ Notes on form: The data generated attempted to account for the ‘in-betweens’: routes taken to arrive at an interview including telephone calls, date setting and changes (a process that was never straightforward in Guatemala), and reasons for difficulties. There were detailed accounts of the method of transport, real or conceptual road blocks, companions in travel including driver or translator. Ethnographic method is preferred here precisely because attention to the reflections and reflexivity of the researcher are part of the research itself. This includes the way people responded to the presence of a researcher and the researchers’ experience of conducting social research. Field research includes the act of writing up and this too is a fluid and reflexive process; see Richardson (2003). Sometimes the practices reinforced theoretical concerns and sometimes the data collected raised new concerns. Numerous times I reconnected with informants to clarify issues as required. In the text, Spanish words are italicized and I sometimes move between Spanish and English as in the use of *finca* or farm. Throughout this document I use in-text notes where I quote or draw directly from another source. I use footnotes for more lengthy explanation of activities or concepts or where others explain similar phenomena. I indicate in footnotes personal communications with participants in the field research. Like the research undertaken, writing is a process and an encounter; moderated by continued attention to consuming particular types and forms of coffee. My own evolving tastes always inform the research. Finally, all observations and analysis in the document is reflexive and situated from the perspective of the researcher. I make no claims to a general analysis of coffee markets but rather work to make visible an interconnected and productive account of coffee and ethics in certain qualified forms.

study and collect unstructured data that is open to influence by categories of those who are studied. Through a small number of cases, the ethnographer seeks to analyse the implicit interpretation of the meaning and functions of human actions. Classical ethnographies pay close attention to the daily practices and discourses of the social life of an institution or group usually located in a specific bounded space. Sites for ethnography were traditionally geographically distant from the spaces of academic inquiry where the researcher would return to write up results. Sites of study were sometimes also considered temporally distant, where ethnographers imagine the culture they are studying as not subject to broader social, political or economic processes (Massey, 2003: 76). Few accounted for the way the research affected the locations of study or how those researched influenced the project.

In light of recent concerns on the reflexivity of research practice and the constitution of a single site of study, the ethnographic method has been subject to questions regarding the construction of sites, of what, and where, constitutes the 'doing' of ethnography (Crang and Cook, 1995). Much of this marks a crisis of representation, often termed the 'literary turn' of the late 1980s that resulted in questions about the construction of culture and issues of universalism versus relativism (Abu-Lughod, 2006; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Gordon, 1988; James *et al.*, 1997; Strathern, 2004b). Anthropologists questioned the formations of power and representation in the doing and writing of ethnography. This focus on writing field research relates to the consideration of sites in this chapter, moving from the recollection of data as 'discovered' by the field researcher to reflexive accounts that elude already established power or interpretive positions of researcher/researched relationships. These questions, as well as the extension of ethnography to other social science disciplines, raised doubts about the ontological dichotomies of the modernist

notions of self and other, and by later extension, society and nature (Latour, 2004b; Strathern, 2004b)⁷. As Appadurai (1996) suggests, “Culture thus shifts from being some sort of inert, local substance to being a rather more volatile form of difference” (60). This turn and the dialogues it instigated marked a critical moment for social research more generally in addressing the limits of representation of the ethnographic text and exposed the need to think more critically about the position of the researcher. It also raised a series of responses that have led to the extension of ethnographic methods as a way to rethink its terrain. It is the changing considerations about ‘sites’ of study, from single to multi-sited ethnography and the work of science and technology studies and actor network theory that changed the relation amongst actors that this chapter turns to describe the sites of study for an ethnography of assemblages.

3.3 Multi-site ethnographies

Coining the term ‘multi-site ethnography’, Marcus (1986; 1998) recognised that anthropologists needed to consider the capitalist political economy, or indeed ‘the global’ in the identification of the sites and objects of anthropological inquiry. For some this meant continuing to define a single cultural site, while placing it within the broader ‘context’ of global economic and political systems. For others, accounting for the complexity of global phenomena requires positing an evolving object of study by identifying the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time and space (Marcus, 1998: 81).

Multi-sited across geographically distinct but connected spaces, the researcher is able to follow routes of significance that emerge through the empirical inquiry (Clifford and

⁷ See Lincoln and Denzin (2003) for contributions that attend to notions of the subaltern in ethnographic writing.

Marcus, 1986; Gordon, 1988). This allows for mobility, temporality and contemporality of study, using strategies of following “connections, associations and putative relationships” (Marcus, 1998: 81). The fluidity and open-ended ‘following’ of practices and things is a contingent process. Objects are involved in the negotiation and re-negotiation of global politics and economics and in turn aspects of ‘the global’ inform conditions of social life. Openness to movement also requires the mobility and reflexivity of the ethnographer as s/he too is located in the terrain s/he maps.

A multi-sited ethnographer can ‘follow a thing’⁸; to connect (an) object(s) across several sites of association. The notion of following a thing is common in the study of commodities and markets. In following a thing, one traces the circulation of a material object across disparate but globally connected spaces. The ethnographer only initially conceives of the object as necessarily material; its constitution may change through the process of following (Marcus, 1998)⁹. In this sense, Appadurai’s (1986) account of commodities follows paths of circulation allowing ‘the global’ to emerge in the process. Following paths and threads across several parallel sites is a useful tool in negotiating the methodological promise of ethnography to deliver a holistic account of social and human phenomena as it extends to other social science disciplines and to cultural and economic geographies. The work of STS and ANT complements this tracking of associations across a number of sites.

⁸ See Haraway (1991) for an example of a study that follows both metaphors and things; although arguably many could be considered this way.

⁹ Sidney Mintz’s (1985) highly regarded study of sugar is one such example although he is criticised for holding in place a historical and systematic account of capitalism and colonialism.

3.4 STS and ANT ethnographies

The wide use of ethnographic methods in economic and social geography owes much to the adaptation of ethnography by STS and ANT to the study of scientific conduct (Latour, 1988; Stassart and Whatmore, 2003). These investigations questioned the field of research and objects of study as human-centric. These approaches further questioned the separation of field, laboratory and the presentation of 'results', and queried the gathering of 'data' as a neutral, passive and ahistorical enterprise.

Through an ANT lens, the objects of study are an assembly of human and nonhuman actors. They are temporary crystallisations of microbes, machines, devices, codes, technologies, metrics, humans and nonhuman nature (Latour, 1999). These are not just the objects of market transactions. Latour calls these gatherings "matters of concern"; risky and volatile, they are loose configurations of ideas, issues, and materials that congregate all manner of social, scientific, technological, and political attention (Latour, 2004b; Latour, 2005b). They are not already composed objects that act on 'the social', but rather, "they have no clear boundaries, no well-defined essences, no sharp separation between their own hard kernel and their environment" (Latour, 2004b: 24). They are messy and tangled, human and nonhuman gatherings that stretch their tentacles into networks of association through often ill-mannered mediators that invoke intense debate, visibility and uncertainty. As such, the 'objects' of study for ethnographic research become both the spaces and times of such gatherings as well as the circulation of intermediaries that connect such disputes to other uncertain disputes (Latour, 2004b: 24).

Matters of concern have important implications for ethnographic method. Understood in this way, the spaces and 'objects' for sustained investigation including interviews,

participant observation and detailed accounts are the spaces where there are gatherings of matters of concern¹⁰. That is, the ethnographer follows the “trail of *associations* between heterogeneous elements” where there might be something formed anew (Latour, 2005b: 5). One follows assemblages topologically (rather than cartographically) seeking the places where things gather and how and where they connect to other gatherings. Topology, as Serres describes it, is the science of nearness and rifts; gatherings or folds, as he calls them, are made of “multiple pleats” (Serres and Latour, 1995: 60). They draw from the obsolete, the contemporary, and the imagined future and solidify, even if only momentarily, in repetitive encounters, or orderings (Amin and Thrift, 2002), like built technologies and machinery, administrative centres or a community. As Amin and Thrift (2002) suggest, “smooth displacements require the machinery of placements (instruments, metrics, labourers) [...] [an] ordering [...] exacted [...] through the design of flows as a set of serial encounters which construct particular times and spaces” (83). These orderings stabilise given network arrangements (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). The multiple pleats are formations of histories and geographies, associations and interactions; they are global as much as they are local. The site of research, then, is “a place where something happens and actions unfold because it mobilises distant actors that are both absent and present” (Callon and Law, 2004: 6). Multi-site ethnography and adaptations to ethnographic method inform the methodology of tracing assemblages in this research. Notably, it is the work of economic sociologists that took ANT interventions to the study of economic knowledges and processes that are particularly significant to this study (Callon, 1998c). The next section describes how one might locate specific sites for research in an attempt to follow global connections (Tsing, 2005) as human and nonhuman actors operate in the world. Theorised as assemblages, these mark the orderings wherein the practices of

¹⁰ See McCormack (2008) on matters of concern in which geography as a discipline has an investment.

production, transport, purchase and qualifying coffee congregate and encounter both local and global apparatuses of the market.

3.5 Assemblages

Researchers of market phenomena, economists and social scientists often consider markets as networks. Emphasis on supply networks presuppose highly connected nodes of exchange. The actors in the nodes are constellations of power that inform decision making, value setting and exchange practices and are obvious places one might look to study such mobile phenomena as coffee and ethics¹¹. Some distil the networks of coffee into five parts: grower, importer, roaster, distributor and barista (or retailer). The grower and export/importer tend to work in countries where farmers produce coffee while the roaster, distributor and barista tend to reside in coffee consumption countries¹².

Techniques, measurements, and an array of administrative technologies loosely attached to each node ensure both the movement and the organisation of coffee exchange. Rather than assuming from the start that these nodes constitute bounded and stable spaces where actors buy, sell, transport and consume coffee according to an abstract set of rules, here coffee networks are temporary congregations of global assemblages. They are global in that they are “broadly encompassing, seamless, and mobile” and organise activities across multiple spaces and practices. They are local as they are “heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, partial and situated” (Ong and Collier, 2005: 12). These tensions are important; the production and consumption of coffee enrolls far more actors than the five nodes indicate, not least the lab technicians who research and reorganise its tissue culture (although not subjects of study here), the legacies of corruption and violence in many producing countries, and the roasters and coffee buyers who manage and manipulate its final form, to

¹¹ See for example (Daviron and Ponte, 2005; Gibbon *et al.*, 2008; Giovannucci and Koekoek, 2003).

¹² There is a detailed account in chapter five.

name a few. Importantly, while many of the constituents may reside or congregate in one part of the world, the price negotiations, administrations and actors stretch and travel across and through the networks and move between zones of production and consumption. These constituents ‘assemble’ in specific technical infrastructures, administrative apparatuses or value regimes but they also move and congregate around certain debates or mediations. An assemblage is the complex and contingent meeting of objects in and through shifts of analysis, policy or infrastructure. Some are more durable than others; but where things congregate there is a meeting of various human and nonhuman actors. As Callon (1991) points out, the tools of measurement, devices, codes and conditions of exchange are path dependent; there is a history and geography to how actors use certain devices, where and when (cf. Born, 2009; Callon, 1991).

Field work did take place among the actors in nodes that seemed to have more centralised control or a more defined presence like those working among the five-part coffee network or in national and international coffee organisations. The criterion by which sites were selected, however, was based not on the nodes being more or less important, but on their being more or less *connected*: “The more one point is connected to others the more it is able to create asymmetries and to ‘localise’ those others” (Callon and Law, 2004: 4).

Understanding how intermediaries met, proliferated, circulated, and transformed was about tracing the circulation of ideas, desires, market spaces, people, metrics and places (Stassart and Whatmore, 2003). Moreover, gatherings were always in negotiation with other clusters, regions, networks; the boundaries were never clear; constituents traversed the edges; boundaries came and went, leaked or disappeared (Mol and Law, 1994: 643).

Considering locations of study as assemblages disrupts the singularity of the capitalist market and counts the stability of capitalism, and ethical response, not as universal script but as the product of a series of small repetitions that form a routine base (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Mitchell, 2002; Thrift, 2005). Such nodes, forces, and frames of the coffee market are not fundamental, systematic, or universal but are contingent outcomes of ethical decisions, projects and routinised local practices that are always “pushed and pulled by other determinations” (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxi). As such, this ethnography sought the everyday repetition and imitation of coffee markets and suggests that in the particular and specific events one finds difference and invention (Barry and Thrift, 2007; Tarde, 1890/1903; Tarde, 2007/1902; Vargas *et al.*, 2008).

The multiple sites of this ethnography, then, were the often unexpected places where debate, dispute, uncertainty or risky encounters happened among market negotiations of coffee and ethics. Tsing (2005) refers to these places as “awkward zones of engagement” where social life is, “continually co-produced in the [...] awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (4). This is an ethnography of assemblages as actors filtered, passed or percolated through the coffee market in places that are both global and local, near and far. The next section illustrates in detail the activities undertaken in this ethnography.

3.6 Ethnographic fieldwork

The ethnography includes research undertaken in the UK in autumn 2005 and again in 2007/8 and two periods of sustained fieldwork in Latin America: two months in 2006 and six months in 2007. Materials were gathered using qualitative research methods by establishing trust with contacts in various parts of the coffee business and ethical

certifications in the UK, Europe, America and Latin America. Methods included participant observation and interactions, conversations, dialogue, collection of documents in Guatemala and in the International Coffee Organisation in London, visits to farms and *beneficios*, attendance at professional meetings and conferences and numerous unstructured interviews. Throughout the fieldwork, activities included: collection of documentation, text-based research, field notes, writing and following the coffee industry including prices, changes, markets, blogs, current discussions, sustainability, speciality coffees, changing measures of taste and dialogue among coffee professionals. The people interviewed guided the research process, leading me to further contacts and onto new paths, and the act of interviewing affected the sites of study (Josephides, 1997).

Instigation

The ethnographic research began in the UK in 2005 through interviews with organisations or businesses claiming to use an ethical coffee sourcing model. At this stage the project took ethics to mean the commonly recognised notions of ‘sustainability’ including social, economic and environmental responsibility¹³. Given the popularity of Fairtrade since the 1990s, and that coffee was the first consumable to carry the Fairtrade label, interviews with Fairtrade professionals in the UK formed an obvious starting point. These interviews quickly led to an overview of current debates and concerns for Fairtrade-ers. It was clear that, despite being highly recognisable, Fairtrade was not the only brand of ethical sourcing and that Fairtrade was keenly aware of growing competition in the UK. This observation moved the focus to other instances where organisations and marketing

¹³ One of the earliest uses among the international development community was in the Brundtland Report, entitled *Our Common Future*. The authors defined sustainable development as, “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (1987). It became ‘sustainability’ in subsequent documents. See also (Adams, 2005). <http://www.worldinbalance.net/intagreements/1987-brundtland.php>.

materials invoked similar notions of ethics to address the question of how ethics was performed in the coffee market; if not Fairtrade, how were operators connecting coffee and ethics? This led to interviews with non-governmental organisations, other sustainable coffee certifications like representatives from Utz Certified¹⁴ and Rainforest Alliance, both passing through the UK rather than residing there, and anyone connecting coffee sourcing with the ethics of sustainability in the circulations of the market. This became a counter-position to the Fairtrade monologue; despite its popularity and growing reach, Fairtrade was not the only organisation speaking about ethics and coffee sourcing and, further, there was critical debate and disjuncture between these competing models. Key points of debate included the use of a fixed price by Fairtrade but not by other certification models, disagreement as to how to identify those most in need, and concerns about the proliferation of certifications and labels that might lead to an inability for consumers to distinguish the relative attributes of each as distilled in numerous logos and branding mechanisms.

Interviews took place with representatives from large trading firms, buyers and roasters to address how the coffee market works and how they considered the role and potential of ethical initiatives. Taken together, these interviews led to the discovery of a small subset of the coffee sourcing population interested in quality and high-end quality coffee in combination with an ethics of effective and efficient sourcing practices. Among small independent traders and roasters, measures of taste and indicators of quality became important as a 'new wave' of ethical coffee producers interconnect with current trends in forms of consumption and relationship-based coffee sourcing. Similar notions of ethics to that of certifications, as promoting economic and environmental sustainability, were

¹⁴ At the time of research this organisation was called 'Utz Kapeh'. They changed the name to 'Utz Certified' in 2007 to reflect a changing focus from certifying coffee only to certifying other agricultural products. See chapter four.

recognisable including the sustainability of business relationships with coffee growers, the co-creation of trust embodied in long-term contracts, close attention to the ecological impact of growing and processing practices, and the achievement of higher profits for farmers to invest in their farms, labourers and families.

At the same time, it seemed Fairtrade and other ethical sourcing guidelines and activism were infusing aspects of conventional and speciality coffee trade. Conversely, notions of quality, speciality and taste seemed to be infiltrating certifications in the now common claim by Fairtrade and other sourcing models that their coffee is of high quality¹⁵. The growing importance of ethical sourcing models required a shift from speaking only about Fairtrade to using the umbrella term ‘sustainable coffee’¹⁶ to encompass numerous certifications and any other firms using the language of coffee and ethics. It became clear in 2005 - and later research reinforced this notion - that this was a growing market niche with its own circulating set of market indicators gaining traction in numerous coffee circles. Although the project began with Fairtrade as its main ethical model working in the coffee market, multiple examples and representations of coffee and ethics came into focus and required attention. Recognition of multiple forms forced a shift in concern from Fairtrade to sustainable coffees and other ‘relationship’ models. This was an important moment where, crucial to the study, the coffee itself became the site of research. It was not simply the additional requirements or subversions of ‘capitalism’ that created an ethical bean or substance but also the meanings, desires, and taste that informed a host of movements, bodies, administrations and techniques in the qualification and re-qualification of coffee.

¹⁵ See chapter seven on the qualifications of quality and high quality coffees.

¹⁶ A term now common among coffee professionals and researchers; see literature indicated in footnote 11.

Training

Entering the realm of coffee and ethics required training to understand the common identifiers and measurements of value among variously situated coffee professionals. This was sometimes training as a discrete set of activities but it also was a constant requirement and gradual process beginning in 2005 and continuing throughout the project. I was always learning something new, and over time I became aware of a growing understanding and use of common language of coffee among coffee professionals (Becker, 1963). With the help of professional trainers, I acquired knowledge of the coffee market and of tasting coffee, called ‘cupping’ in the industry. Formal training took place in the UK in a course entitled “Introduction to Cupping”. This complemented the “meet the producer” events, counter-side informal tastings at cafés, and other spaces where I had the opportunity to taste, experience and talk about coffee.

In June 2006 I travelled with a professional throughout Latin America who was training producers on roasting and cupping. There he taught cupping, roasting, identifying trees and beans and knowledge of processing. This also entailed spending time with farmers and others to gain an understanding of the way they grow and process coffee. Experiences in Latin America, as well as further courses and networking on return to the UK from September to December 2006, critically extended knowledge of coffee growing, processing and roasting as well as current indicators of quality, circulation of new desires and definitions of taste and, crucially, how producers engaged with these concepts.

As the field work moved between English and Spanish speaking countries, there were significant issues of translation. I acquired Spanish to mitigate the distance, at least for the majority Spanish speakers but not for the more than twenty indigenous languages of

Guatemala. Intensive language courses taken in the summer of 2006 in Guatemala and continuing courses in the UK from September 2006 built on an initial limited knowledge of Spanish.

Acquiring the language is important, first, in that it allowed for depth and ease of relation. Second, it was often the informal conversations, sometimes amongst a number of farmers or other professionals at once, or in cafés and other meeting places, where it became possible to understand coffee and Guatemala. As tracing coffee markets does not focus on specific people in one place but rather moves between spaces, moving between English and Spanish is part of the process of drawing connections.

Networking

From initial training, interviews and participation in events, field work traced the assemblages of coffee and ethics that cross seemingly global and local, or production and consumption, divides. The qualifications of coffee and measurements of ethical compliance often take place in production areas but are realised in the act of ingesting coffee usually in wealthy consuming countries. In other words, although those in producing countries also consume coffee, most of the qualifications around type, taste and quality of bean, attention to roasting and current ethical supply models and standards are designed for the assessment and experiences of those located in wealthy consuming countries like UK, North America, Europe, Japan and Australia¹⁷. What happens in producing countries always has an eye on the trajectory of the coffee, but their view is

¹⁷ Australia is the one country in this group of wealthy consuming countries that also produces coffee. There are very few coffee farms operating there but it is a growing niche. I met the owner and tasted the coffee from a coffee farm in Australia at one of the first 'meet the producer' events I attended at a London based trading house. The owner of the trading house suggested from the beginning that this was not going to be representative of most of the world's coffee production; the techniques on the farm and the vision of this farmer were more inclined (technologically) to a wealthy country than those I would encounter in Latin America.

partial and limited by the interventions of large corporations or the administrations of certifications. Similarly, the consumption of coffees as brand name, high quality, ethical, or with particular tastes often relies on the interlocutors of such measures of quality and desirability. Professionals on both sides of the apparent divide speak about the need to ‘close the knowledge gap’ or increase information flow¹⁸.

Translating ethical and quality approaches uncovered a need for in-depth research at a production site that, for purposes of looking at the specificities of economic, political, and social practices, could be a site of orderings as described earlier as moments that stabilise network arrangements. Through initial interviews in the United Kingdom, Guatemala seemed to be an excellent site for sustained in-depth field work. With more than 65,000 producers¹⁹ organised into eight growing regions with every form of ethical certification currently in circulation, numerous examples of direct sales, multitudes of non-governmental organisations working on coffee projects, and the ability to market coffee as meeting current high quality standards, Guatemala provided the perfect climate for a comparative analysis. Early meetings with a board member of Anacafé, the main producer organisation, and the chance to travel through Latin America in the summer of 2006 provided initial access to resources and an overview of key issues of coffee in Guatemala. Originally the relationship with the Guatemalan producer organisation Anacafé provided incentive for this production site. The next section discusses in detail the failure of those initial forays, the instrumentality of the researcher, and the contingent process of ethnographic research.

¹⁸ Field notes, Coffee trainer, June 2006.

¹⁹ At the SCAE in 2008 a representative from Anacafé said there were 90,000 coffee producers. This 25,000-person jump from the 65,000 producers suggested in 2005/6 might point to numerous questions about demographics, citizenship and visibility. 65,000 is the number quoted in this text to reflect the information obtained through early field work.

Anacafé

As a non-governmental organisation, Anacafé supports all coffee producers, issues all coffee export licenses and provides resources and training. Anacafé showed particular interest in the research and a key contact on the board of directors, initially interviewed in the UK, allowed excellent access. They were at the same time grappling with the eruption and fast extension of sustainable coffee programs²⁰, over-subscription and disputes with Fairtrade Certifiers and what they saw as unrealised potential in their country to gain the price premiums associated with these programs. Anacafé imagined the field work research as a way to gather objective and independent data to further define their own approach to ethical standards. In exchange, this relationship could provide access to people, resources, internal meetings, and documentation.

Initial meetings in the preliminary fieldwork visit in June 2006 provided information, expert interviews, and insight into farm-to-export relationships. At the time, Anacafé suggested becoming a collaborator on the research. This kind of collaboration is not a simple negotiation. Any perceived connection to Anacafé would have real impacts on discussions between producer and researcher. Coffee professionals in Guatemala have varying opinions about the work of Anacafé. Many say that they provide excellent technical expertise but little other support. Most producers are fearful of Anacafé and know that they must comply with their approach or else they may have difficulty accessing markets. Board members and executives are coffee producers lending a personal interest to the role and reach of Guatemala's coffee. These connections, however, could

²⁰ Guatemala has a long history with certifications. International and local actors started Utz Certified in Guatemala, Rainforest Alliance shipped their first certified coffee from there and also helped Starbucks to develop their Café Practices program. Starbucks is Guatemala's single largest customer so their Café Practices programme certifies a large number of producers. See chapter four for a detailed history and description of sustainable coffee models.

substantiate claims that those who run Anacafé are often the owners of large farms from wealthy families deeply intertwined in the power politics of the country. In response to such claims, Anacafé makes it a stated purpose to work closely with small farmers²¹ but the extent of this commitment continues to be unclear²². For the researcher, there is a balancing act between access to resources and researcher 'objectivity' in ethnographic methods. The flow of knowledge may seem open but there are often invisible struggles, politics and unspoken limitations (Strathern, 2004a). This is one example of the situated and relational ethics that are the purview of this project. As such, these barriers also represented opportunities to further the goals of this study. In addition to concerns about social, environmental and economic sustainability as defined by certification schemes, independent traders and other buyers, there are concerns about the ethics of the daily negotiations of coffee and the trajectories of production and power in Guatemala.

In early meetings with Anacafé they suggested that a research partnership would include a driver to ensure safe transport throughout the country to visit farms, *beneficios*, organisations and any other sites, an important consideration in a volatile area²³. They would not, they assured, choose or manipulate sites of research but rather help to gain access if required. The use of the term 'independent research' seemed as important to them as to the research expectations. In exchange they wanted to know more about the various certifications and, importantly, how farmers *perceived* the practices, negotiations, interventions, similarities and differences of the various certifications.

²¹ Field notes, Anacafé board meeting, 19 June 2006.

²² Field notes, coffee professional working with small land holders in Guatemala, 19 April, 2007.

²³ There is a detailed history of Guatemala and violence in chapter one.

As an aside, many farmers and coffee professionals echoed this request for reciprocity albeit in a much less insistent or formalised way. Not only have farmers and other coffee professionals in Guatemala endured the roaming eye of researchers seeking indicators of ‘ethics’ for a number of years, they have, after opening their doors to these researchers, never heard from them again²⁴. In a country with thousands of farmers unable to meet the costs of production, seeking recognition as provider of high quality coffee and complying with many of the current indicators of ethics, these professionals want to know what exactly the researcher can contribute to achieving higher profits. They seek more information about manners of consumption, detailed information about markets and prices, and how best to come to know and respond to these sometimes disjointed demands²⁵. This raises a series of questions about the role of the researcher. In effect, the researcher is at once an independent researcher and a player in the game of organising the market. S/he participates in the analysis and transformation of economic markets (Callon, 2007).

Through a series of negotiations in the autumn of 2006, it became increasingly clear that the relationship envisioned by Anacafé involved a lot more control than independence. Among other things, they were very concerned about what might emerge about the practices of certifications and the possibility of negative producer response. They expressed anxiety that this might shake the existing ‘good’ relationships with contractors²⁶. This provided an important transformation, one that one could perceive as signifying failure. Instead, it became the beginning of understanding coffee, power and Guatemala

²⁴ Multiple field notes: 19 March 2007; 3 May 2007; 17 May 2007.

²⁵ The research envisioned at the time must have been carried out in a different way as it seems to have resulted in the production of the Guatemalan *Green Book* describing how Guatemalan coffee is ‘good for nature’ unveiled in 2008. For an extensive discussion see chapter four.

²⁶ Field notes, Anacafé board member, 17 February 2007

and helped to avoid becoming merely an instrument in the constitution of the coffee market.

The difficulties of forming a useful relationship made clear that Anacafé was part of a much broader site, that of Guatemala, and part of the process of qualifying coffee more generally. It also raised the question of expertise in the suggestion that the ‘experts’ of Anacafé could somehow describe the representations of coffee, and sustainable coffee in Guatemala, and were the only ones to provide explanation and the rules that mediate meaning (Mitchell, 2002). A project that gave privileged position to Anacafé had the potential to detract from the identification of expert forms as power/knowledge configurations that sustain one particular order of things (Bell, 2007; Foucault *et al.*, 1988; Gibson-Graham, 2006)²⁷. While the research envisioned by Anacafé might have promoted better living and working conditions, fairer relations of production and raise the visibility of farmers throughout the country, the ways that I might affect the sites and objects of research seemed established in advance, despite Anacafe’s initial promise. It was more desirable to resist being instrumental in the Guatemalan coffee market by including Anacafé as a site of research rather than aligning with them closely.

In light of these reflections, upon returning to Guatemala in January 2007 for six months I chose not to work closely with Anacafé although I maintained an informal relationship with the organisation. They are important to coffee and Guatemala and paths often lead to or intersect with their organisational remit. This was not an easy decision. The reflections on the barriers of working with Anacafé, however, constituted forward movement in the project more broadly. Although quite challenging at times, it is fluidity that is important,

²⁷ See Nancy Scheper-Hughes for a beautiful account of ‘everyday violence’ in Brazil where she traces such moments of experience/expertise as sometimes invisible formations of power and knowledge.

tracing the 'in-betweens' in this topological account (Serres and Latour, 1995). The multi-sited ethnography that also crosses spaces, times and objects follows Mitchell (2002) in,

making this issue of power and agency a question, instead of an answer known in advance. It means acknowledging something of the unresolvable tension, the inseparable mixture, the impossible multiplicity, out of which intention and expertise must emerge (53).

It made more sense to the ethnography to study Anacafé amongst the other coffee actors and to interview them when paths led in their direction rather than give privileged position to this relationship. The board of Anacafé allowed access to internal meetings and events, the on-site library and relatively open communications when required although this diminished over time. This resistance led to open-ended possibility and the chance to find debate and contestation in the associations of coffee and ethics in one particular city, Antigua, and in many of the circulations more generally.

Antigua, Guatemala

Separated from Anacafé, the sites of the ethnography were open to consideration and reflexive account, leaving open the question of how to attend to Guatemala and coffee. Anacafé divides Guatemala into eight coffee producing regions used for marketing purposes. The regions produce coffees with particular flavour profiles: Antigua, Acatenango Valley, Atitlán, Rainforest Cobán, Fraijanes Plateau, Highland Huehuetenango, New Oriente, and Volcanic San Marcos (Figure 3). There are more than 17,000 wet mills and numerous dry mills, technologies and buildings for processing coffee from its form as a cherry picked from the tree to green bean and ready to roast²⁸ and, as noted above, over 65,000 producers. Travel across the country would result in a shallow view of many different locations.

²⁸ See chapter five for a description of coffee processing.



Source: Guatemalan Coffees marketing material²⁹

Figure 3: Map indicating the regions of coffee production

Through the process of seeking spaces for investigation, Antigua, Guatemala, a city one hour outside of the capital and the most significant coffee growing region³⁰, became one focus location of the research and place of residence from January to June 2007.

Centralising the relations in Antigua and visiting farms in Antigua, Acatenango Valley and Atitlán, all closely aligned with Antigua coffee, provided more depth of study. It meant that, rather than an unknown researcher travelling across many spaces, I was able to meet and meet again with many interviewees and become part of the sustained dialogue in Antigua about coffee and ethics.

Behind many of the beautifully painted doors in this old colonial town live people intimately connected to coffee. Coffee farms of all sizes line the surrounding volcanoes.

Large and centralised processing units (*beneficios*), numerous brokers, *coyotes*, buying and

²⁹ <http://www.guatemalancoffees.com/GCContent/GCeng/media/downloadmedia.asp#>

³⁰ Significant historically as one of the first areas growing coffee but also significant in terms of marketing as coffee from the Antigua region is the most well known coffee from Guatemala in consuming countries and achieves the highest price premium (above the market price) for its 'quality'. This idea of 'quality' aligns with notions of 'speciality' on the market but more recent definitions of quality among independent traders would not make such a blanket assumption about all Antigua coffee without first tasting the coffee. See chapter seven.

selling coffee, quality-hungry small roasters and many not-for-profit organisations working with coffee swarm the city. Myths and jokes abound about Antigua-type coffee as it achieves the highest price differential as ‘speciality’ on the market. It is therefore subject to obscurities as more coffee sells as ‘Antigua-type’ than can be grown in this region³¹.

In addition, Antigua is a major tourist base and host to many Spanish schools and travellers. Cafés in Antigua, sensing the growing tourist interest in coffee responded with tours and museums and sell ‘local’ coffee by the pound. It is common to hear tourists ask if the coffee is Fairtrade in a meeting between local and global sensibilities. The city appears to run smoothly in a country re-organising after a thirty-six year civil war ending in 1996, a country dominated by a few wealthy families and where the government chooses not to name or make ‘citizens’ thousands of displaced indigenous. Alongside of histories of violence and corruption, it is the co-existence and confluence of producers, traders, regulators, locals and tourists that makes Antigua such a rich source of data. This city, as a major hub of coffee production is both a field of movement and a set of ordered encounters that are continuously developing (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 83). Antigua is a place where knowledge about coffee is both produced and contested, and where different forms of ethical coffee are assessed and developed. Communities form around discussions in local cafés giving rise to connections to producers and other professionals who traversed this space (de Laet and Mol, 2000). International buyers passed through and local producers and owners of large *beneficios* met regularly in upscale restaurants. It is a place

³¹ Myths about ‘Antigua-type’ coffee surface a number of times in the thesis. In particular, with rising populations in this area, producers are selling their land for housing developments making such Antigua obscurities even more necessary to maintain the Antigua myth as it sells coffee and achieves much higher prices.

where there is an intense and informed debate about the production of ethical coffee and a focus location for this ethnography.

3.7 Conclusion, intersection

This ethnography undertakes sustained research in and amongst encounters in one coffee production site in relation to a very large coffee market and very powerful and popular modes of ethical living. Guatemala appears to be one side of the chain, the production side but meanwhile, like all spaces of production, it is criss-crossed by the various agents (conceptual, human and non-human) that make up the global assemblage of coffee and ethics. This approach makes this production site not a passive agent of consumer desire and sustainable coffee initiatives as is sometimes represented in the literature or marketing devices. The approach adopted here renders production as a site of invention; multiple and hybrid and subject to mediations and contestations. This ethnography considers that coffee assemblages are multitemporal, “schematized by a kind of crumpling, a multiple, foldable diversity” (Serres and Latour, 1995: 60). Spaces of study are transient and arise out of encounters and interactions that draw from the past, the present and considerations of the future (Born, 2009; Tsing, 2005). Actors act in relation not only to current indicators of quality, ethics or taste but also work to imagine how the market will continue to evolve. Abstractions thus begin from relation; the relations made in and through the ethnographic study.

To chart the market in Guatemalan coffee through spatial and temporal practices the researcher moved among locations as the study evolved. While multi-sited in the sense that there was more than one location of study, this was not the tracking of the emergence of the global political economy in social life. Rather, it was a tracing of global

connections that evolved throughout the field work. Contingent encounters co-produce global connections and local practice in specific ways. It is difficult to account for such transience, and to be transient, but it is more fruitful than an account that holds in place universal notions of 'ethics' as abstract forms that can move across geographical distances. While the global market seems to create stable nodes through which coffee passes (grower, importer, roaster, distributor, retailer), these nodes are the sites of mediations that contain the local evolution of the coffee market, the organisation of productive relations, changing consumer desire, and forms and functions of quality, ethics or taste.

Tsing's (2005) notion of awkward engagement does well to create an image of heterogeneous and unequal encounters that are both guided by the past and have the propensity to lead to new arrangements (5). Early engagements with Anacafé, for example, were indeed awkward in a way that would have limited the open-ended potential of tracing Guatemalan coffee. These encounters, however, said a lot about the organisation of coffee in Guatemala and, moreover, about the social and political spaces and frictions through which the research travelled. Antigua, on the other hand, is a heated space of production, processing and export that involves continuous flows of people, coffee and technological and metrological devices that both reflect and extend the global market. Associations with potential consumers of coffee, the tourists and the Spanish language learners and their moral sensibilities about consumption also demarcate Antigua. This links producers and consumers in ways that are unexpected.

To return then to the question at the start of the chapter, so what is it you want to see? The question left open allowed for ethics to be relational and situated. This takes seriously the contention that ethnography is a contingent process whose matters of concern are not

always known in advance and that implicate the researcher in a co-fabrication of the world. I tried to put as much emphasis on the ways that farms and professionals understand themselves to comply or subvert certifications and standards as on the reasons a farmer gives for choosing a particular certification, or other economic choices, their view of the country, their histories and so on. The certified farm is one that performs the codified practices indicated in the certification schemes and ensured by annual audits. But it also performs all manner of other relations; some economic, some personal, some deeply political as do other techniques of measurement and actors. I adopted the same approach for the process of research and writing, ensuring that detailed notes indicate responses to the research and the responses of those being researched throughout the process.

The in-depth research in Guatemala is always set in discussion with the UK and the events of the coffee world more generally, as traced through annual conferences, building trust and frequent interviews with coffee professionals in the UK. Many of the European or American professionals first met in Guatemala were later interviewed again as they passed through London or at coffee meetings. Attending producer events, training days, coffee tastings, conversations at cafés, Fairtrade and other sustainable coffee seminars and events all run through the research undertaken in Latin America in the summer of 2006 and Guatemala in 2007. The research trajectory arches from initial interviews in the UK in 2005 to attending Copenhagen 2008 Speciality Coffee conference and World Baristas. The keynote theme was how to promote ‘sustainable sustainability’ and issues of ethics and quality filled the room.

CHAPTER FOUR: SUSTAINABLE COFFEE AND THE ETHICS OF VISIBILITY

*“Please join us. For the people, flora, and birds and other fauna of the coffee growing regions, this effort can help place environmental, social and economic sustainability on the map of the new world order”.*¹

*“Truly Green! Go beyond the cup and discover why when you drink Guatemalan Coffees you help nature as well.”*²

4.1 Introduction

At the keynote address opening the 2008 Speciality Coffee Association of Europe conference, Gabriel Silva, *Gerente General* of the *Federación de Cafeteros de Colombia*³ offered his vision of ‘sustainable sustainability’ to take sustainable coffee “beyond a catchphrase, beyond a trend and beyond certification”⁴. The now common term ‘sustainable coffee’ refers to coffee sourced from farms pursuing social responsibility, economic viability, and protective measures for farmers and the environment. In practice this translates into a series of management techniques made visible through ethical certifications and labels at a market premium. For Mr Silva, the popularity of these certifications did not equate to sustainability for farmers; the costs are high and the benefits are minimal. The standards are too rudimentary and are not able to guarantee the economic success of the farm. Moving through ten unspoken truths about sustainability, he draws one conclusion: the focus should be on the needs and realities of the farmers rather than abstract representations of what consumption countries believe are sustainable

¹ From the first Sustainable Coffee Congress, 1996,

<http://www.ibiblio.org/london/permaculture/mailarchives/sanet1/0189.html>

² www.guatemalancoffees.com, accessed November 2008.

³ Gabriel Silva is the General Manager of the Federation of Coffee Producers of Colombia, a non-governmental organization.

⁴ Field notes, SCAE conference, 19 June 2008

practices. Achieving 'sustainable sustainability' is about the next generation of local and producer-focused management in the highly valued market niche of sustainable coffees. It is difficult to imagine that less than two decades earlier sustainability existed as an ideal primarily in the lounges of social justice and environmental organizations. Sustainable coffee did not just open the conference in 2008, it dominated the debate; demonstrating that this market niche is now a market force.

Sustainable coffee emerged as a response to unequal distribution of profits in producing countries after the most recent coffee crisis in 2000, growing rapidly since that time. It circulates through its branding, usually as a certification, indicating social and environmental considerations are part of the process of growing and transporting coffee from origin country to consumers. Participants transport particular beans imbued with good ethics through alternative pathways subverting the 'unethical' behaviour of the conventional coffee market. Considered academically as a global 'ethic of care' (Smith, 2000), responsibility across geographical distances (Massey, 2004; Popke, 2006), and a way to promote social justice and environmental 'management' through moral geographies (Goodman, 2004; Smith, 2004; Smith, 2000) these ethical models are a niche market of brands that are meant to promote environmentally sustainable practices and guarantee better deals for farmers.

With its extensive marketing strategies and foothold in the not-for-profit sector, Fairtrade Certification first came to represent ethics on the coffee market. The wider coffee market followed Fairtrade's lead and became a site for invention of ethical production models. Rainforest Alliance, Starbucks' CAFE Practices and Utz Certified are all examples of a certified guarantee. As the popularity of certifications grew so too did the modes of

certifying coffee, ranging from publicly governed certification schemes through to private models. These varying sustainable coffee models rapidly proliferated through imitation more than imagination, within the confines of acceptable and popular notions of what counts as ethics on the market. Although certifications look as if they are about making clear a connection between the claim on the package and the actions on the farm, this claim assumes stable references located in producing countries instead of fluctuating capitalist and anti-capitalist ideological markets for 'ethics'. As Mitchell (2000) suggests,

The act of representation, constantly repeated, makes [...] referents [...] appear as an object that exists prior to any representation, as something given, material, fixed in its unique time and space, not fissured by replication, not open to serialization and interlinking, and to the difference, instability, and misrepresentation that endless repetition might introduce (19).

Producing countries are multiple and complicated; one finds at each locality various approaches to comply, subvert, change, and re-negotiate the terms of 'sustainability'.

This research project argues that beyond the claims of what counts as sustainable coffee are human and non-humans entangled with a country's politics, histories and economies. Producers and coffee are often engaged and knowledgeable agents. There is no simple relation between the actors of producing countries and the certifications but rather meeting points, negotiations, and personal approaches; networks of coffee are globally construed assemblages. Guatemala, a coffee producing country, is always already negotiating the demands of this market niche, producing new ways to interact with social and environmental conditions in relation to its conditions of production. In this sense, imitation produces difference. For Tarde, "invention is central to social evolution. [...] Fundamental to invention is imitation and, [...] the modern economy is also a machine for promoting *passionate* imitation" (Thrift and Barry, 2007, 518). Localities effect and are affected by the proliferation of sustainable coffees.

This chapter interrogates the relation between public accounts of ethics as sustainable coffee and the ‘transitions and bifurcations’ (Latour, 1987) of coffee and ethics. Following Latour and Serres (1995), it argues that coffee is part of the historical, economic and political assemblages specific to the mechanisms and locations of production and associated with similar global interventions and flows. In this sense, “Time and space [...] are a multiple foldable diversity. If you think about it for two minutes, this intuition is clearer than one that imposes a constant distance between moving objects, and it explains more” (Serres and Latour, 1995: 59). This account gives more explicit attention to the disjuncture of the public notion of ‘ethics’ and coffee and multiple practices in coffee cultivation sites. It elaborates the argument that sustainable coffees are performative but not necessarily through the imagined ethical register. Transparency is a central tenet of how sustainable coffee operators make their ethical activities ‘visible’ to the public. In this chapter, the notion of transparency provides a metaphor for making visible the bits and pieces of the assemblage, the local negotiations and difference rather than indications of meeting the standards.

The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the elements of sustainable coffee models⁵ including costs, demands, services, and price premiums. To emphasise the relations between the models it points to their imitation and repetition in use of the same language and central tenets to claim space in this market niche. Competition between the models draws attention to their reciprocal imitation and their repetitive and conflicted struggle to operate in relative relation to achieve the resources of the market. In this imitation and repetition, however, is the germ of difference (Barry and Thrift, 2007;

⁵ The term ‘models’ is used here to indicate the set of relations from producing through to retailing coffee.

Lepinay, 2007) and this section elaborates the very different relationships behind each approach.

The second part of the chapter pays detailed attention to the converging spaces and times of coffee in Guatemala where coffee professionals work to make their practices transparent and accountable. Making relations of production transparent through audits operationalises the standards and ethical practice defined in sustainable coffee models and is a key tenet of these ethical initiatives. Local actions, however, do not necessarily comply with the global imperatives. The need to make some things visible elicits the concomitant response to make others invisible when the times and spaces of Guatemala do not fit the global definitions of sustainability and ethics. The example of Fairtrade supply networks in Guatemala precisely illustrates the assemblages of coffee and ethics; making actions visible to meet Fairtrade standards are subject to and subjects of negotiations among the farmers, certifiers, and other operators. Some practices are not made visible to facilitate the consistency of the model. In a second example, the Guatemalan *Green Book* (2008), written by the national producer organisation Anacafé, works to subvert the administrations and costs of certifications towards achieving similar recognition in the global market as employing sustainable and ethical production methods. They mimic sustainable coffee models by carefully choosing to make visible practices that meet current ethical conditions while leaving out many undesirable activities. Entangled in the histories and geographies of coffee in Guatemala, these decisions are strategic but are not necessarily ethical. Both of the examples illustrate that rather than making globally defined ethical practices visible at the local, the emphasis is on numerous mediations and negotiations required to fit with global imperatives. Rather than locating the instances of

sustainable practice through transparency, the production of difference assembles through the circulation of these particular ethical ideas.

4.2 Coffee and sustainability

Coffee markets are typically variable; the price of coffee fluctuates widely. As discussed in chapter one, the supply network tends to favour later stages of coffee processing and development and to pay the lowest price to the farmer. Those concerned about the plight of farmers tend to blame overproduction and unregulated markets, most notably since the mid-1990s, for recurring coffee crises where the price per pound of coffee drops far below the costs of production (Foundation, 2002; Linton, 2004). Farmers, and particularly small farmers⁶, often find it difficult to move beyond a cycle of poverty. In the recent rise of global knowledges and public interest in the connections between producer and consumer (cf Freidberg, 2004), coffee professionals, in connection with NGOs and organisations, incorporate responsibility into their coffee sourcing networks.

Using the term ‘sustainable’ in relation to coffee is relatively new, gaining widespread popularity by 2000 from earlier manifestations in the 1980s. Sustainable coffees are voluntary or privately initiated systems wherein standards give value to interventions in the production processes meeting acceptable versions of social, environmental or economic criteria, usually indicated by a consumer label. These alternative coffee sourcing models act in response to a capitalist economy perceived to be profit-oriented at the expense of humans and nature and work to bring social justice ethics into the economic frame. Although there are different networks, they tend to have similar structures

⁶ Small farmers are often defined as, “those who are not structurally dependent on permanent hired labour, managing their farm mainly with their own and their family’s labour force” <http://www.flocert.net/admin/userfiles/file/Fees/PCFEESYSTEM.pdf>, accessed 4 November 2008.

including social and ‘environmental sustainability’ components and obligations for economic longevity and self-sufficiency through negotiating long-term contracts.

The modes of responsibility indicated in the term sustainable coffee, also called ethical coffee, tend to rely on a discourse of resource management (Darier, 1999; Foucault, 1977; Luke, 1997). The certifications simplify the strategies for social, environmental and economic sustainability into forms that are more easily standardised, codified and capable of obvious practical implementations (for example water filtration systems or meeting minimum wage). As a market device, sustainable coffee professionals imagine certifications perform as an addition to or subversion of unethical and opaque practices in the movements of coffee⁷. These sustainable coffee networks, in their easily recognisable forms, have difficulty accounting for natures and economies as multiple practices that are specific to the particularities of the local (Hinchliffe, 2007: 186)⁸. As this research indicates, certifications perform, but not necessarily the way one assumes they perform. Yet the popularity of sustainable coffees and this market niche continues to grow. This relates to the desire of the international community to believe in sustainability as a useful and practical tool. Moreover, that the particular codes and standards have value on the market that can be readily circulated through a label.

Although academics and organisations trace the genealogy of the concept of sustainability to a number of sources (Adams, 2001), the international development community tends to trace its origins to the publication of the 1987 Brundtland Report *Our Common Future*. Drawing its approach from the Club of Rome document *Limits to Growth* (1972), the

⁷ Field notes, Fairtrade professional, November 2005; Field notes, Oxfam GB representative, December 2005.

⁸ Cf. Goodman (1999; 2001) and the co-production of nature and the social. See also the discussion in chapter two.

concept of sustainability builds a conceptual bridge between environment and economic development. It looks towards “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Focusing its solutions on the global south, the report argued, “the environment should be conserved and our resource base enhanced, by gradually changing the ways in which we develop and use technologies”⁹. The international development community extended this concept at the 1992 UN Rio Earth Summit and the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. The 2005 World Summit further entrenched this human-centred environmental management definition (Luke, 1997; Luke, 1999; Sachs, 1999) by stating cooperation is necessary across the three pillars of sustainability: the social, economic and the environment. This normative understanding of ethics draws its definition from social justice concerning “the distribution of society’s benefits and burdens, and how this comes about” (Smith, 1994: 1) and balancing often disparate social, environmental and economic goals (Adams, 2001).

Organisations use the term ‘sustainability’ in a variety of contexts and indicating a wide variety of material practices. In this chapter, the term is used in three ways. As defined above, it is used as a key element in the discourse of corporations, policy makers and organisations in relation to coffee markets, although in the context of normative eco-managerial dichotomy of ‘humans’ and ‘nature’ (Luke, 1997). The tripartite definition assumes that nonhuman objects (i.e. environment) are subject to human decision-making and control as defined by imperatives of economic growth. In this sense, acting sustainably is limited to human’s use and abuse of a singular ‘nature’ (Castree, 2005; Castree and Braun, 2001; Hinchliffe, 2007; Latour, 1993; Whatmore, 1993). A second use

⁹ Brundtland report, found online at <http://www.worldinbalance.net/intagreements/1987-brundtland.php>.

is in reference to the environment itself; similarly attached to a singular notion of nature as limited, or in crisis. This is particular to the material enactments of environmental change: waste control, water filtration and non-toxic agricultural inputs are just some examples (Myerson and Rydin, 2003). A third use is sustainability as longevity, as in the ability for any project, person, and so on to sustain itself, often focused on the economics of its durability. Both the economy and nature are here assumed to be singular. Sustainable coffee is, in a sense, composed of all three of these meanings to varying degrees based on the requirements of the coffee sourcing networks as discussed below.

There are a number of different sustainable coffee models and programmes, all using the tripartite definition of sustainability. Transparency in the supply network indicates the presence of an ethical commitment to make negotiations and transactions visible and to connect the nodes on the network to indicate different pathways. By framing practices as sustainable and invoking these modes of ‘making visible’, various coffee professionals gain access to this market niche regardless of their ideological commitment to the principles (Callon, 1998c; 2007; Holm, 2007). Those interested can replicate the model across numerous locations with little reference to local specificity. The early 2000s thus witnessed the rapid expansion of this ‘new’ form of market organisation, as is evident in Guatemala, ranging from certifications, private initiatives and multi-stakeholder approaches. The next section describes some of the ways sustainable coffee circulates and provides detailed attention to the various models. The chapter then goes on to interrogate the notion of transparency.

4.3 Sustainable coffee

Coffee professionals and academics consider three main forms of sustainable coffee: public NGO-based certifications like Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance, private programmes internal to a company, and multi-stakeholder public/private initiatives (Daviron and Ponte, 2005; Linton, 2008; Raynolds *et al.*, 2007a). While the distinction between these forms is a helpful starting point, it does not capture the complex multi-dimensional space of coffee certification. The research project details coffee sourcing models in each of these three main categories and draws attention to the main points of difference between the schemes that do not fit neatly into the three categories outlined above. The components are summarised, including costs, demands, the services provided and expected price premiums in Figure 4 as reference for the discussion in section three of this chapter.

The models tend to coordinate themselves in relation to each other, using similar language and noting convergences and departures and thriving on competition to gain market traction. This points to the framing of sustainable coffee as a dynamic but indivisible entity. Despite the existence of distinct categories, the models are more like each other and proliferate through imitation. This growing imitation, however, conceals the production of difference through the performative mediations of these tools in practice. In describing the approaches to coffee and ethics the aim is to demonstrate the very different relationships behind each model as drawn on different lines than the public/private/multi-stakeholder distinctions. Those distinctions matter in international discourse but are not as important to the negotiations in practice at sites of production. This resonates with Tarde's imitation and difference where the elusive site of change identified by Tarde, (the germ), is the seed of thought that is often indistinguishable even to its host and is "a very thin line

bordered by chaos and repetition” (Lepinay, 2007: 545). The imitation and discourse of competition between certifications generates difference and, in Tarde’s view, further invention; to differ is to endure (Lepinay, 2007: 527).

Certifications

NGOs, sometimes partnered with state and corporate entities, initiate and support certification schemes and independent verifiers audit for compliance. These systems tend to be aligned with an alternative trade ideology in which the costs associated with environmental and human inputs are made visible and obtain a premium on the market (Raynolds *et al.*, 2007a; Renard, 2001). As such, making supply networks transparent and thus open to assessment of practices at the production level is a central tenet of all of the models, but raises the question of how one frames such actions. Fairtrade Certified, Rainforest Alliance, Utz Certified, Organic and Smithsonian Bird Friendly are influential examples of certification systems that are widely circulating in coffee growing nations. Certification schemes typically have a set of processes and performance standards (code of conduct) that aim to reorganise farm practices to attend to environmental impact, health and safety and workers rights (International, 2005). Becoming certified is a complicated affair involving checklists and farm-based compliance measures in which the costs fall heavily on the producer. Certification representatives assess a farm’s compliance with these standards, using a numerical checklist, and decide whether to award a label to the farm. Once a farm achieves certification, it gains access to buyers who pay a premium for certified coffee. Often certifications will stipulate pre-financing from the buyers. Most of the certifications include a chain of custody traceability system among the constituents of the supply network. This provides assurance that the certified coffee is separate from non-certified coffees and guarantees packages are traceable directly to a compliant farm. The

farm is subject to annual independent audits to ensure transparency and compliance (Power, 1997; Renard, 2005). A multitude of NGOs provide technical and business assistance to mediate the expectations and purchases of certifiers and buyers respectively (Linton, 2004).

Fairtrade

Arguably the most recognised NGO certification is Fairtrade Certified. Fairtrade is interested in improving the strength of smallholder producers by helping such producers earn a living wage and gain access to affordable credit (Linton, 2004). Fairtrade certified originated with the post-World War II (1950s) creation of Alternative Trading Organizations (ATOs). ATOs began as small groups of people in the global north who had made contact with producers of handicrafts in the global south. These organisations sought to make direct connections between producers and consumers to ensure a better deal for the producer (Leclair, 2002; Littrell and Dickson, 1997; Scrase, 2003). In 1988 the Dutch ATO *Solidaridad* created a label called Max Havelaar when Mexican coffee farmers asked for help to obtain higher prices for their coffee and more direct access to the market¹⁰. The label provides the “guarantee to the consumer that buying this product guarantees a better deal to producers”¹¹. The idea of a label spread quickly to the United Kingdom, Europe and North America. Each organisation launched their own campaigns and certification marks and operated independently as NGO-based standard setting bodies. In 1997, the national Fairtrade initiatives formed the Fairtrade Labelling Organization International (FLO) with offices in Bonn Germany, entrusted to act as, “an umbrella organization whose mission is to set the Fairtrade standards, support, inspect, and certify

¹⁰ http://www.fairtrade.net/about_fairtrade.html , accessed 2 September 2008.

¹¹ www.fairtrade.org.uk, accessed 2 September 2008.

disadvantaged producers and harmonize the Fairtrade message across the movement”¹². In 2002, the FLO centralised its administration and control of the label. Soon after, FLO split into two separate but related entities: FLO develops and reviews standards and supports farmers and FLO-Cert GMBH, an independent international certification company, is responsible for inspection and certification of producer organisations and traders¹³.

At the core of the Fairtrade agenda is a belief in an alternative form of trade (Goodman, 2004; Lyon, 2007b; Murray *et al.*, 2003)¹⁴. This alternative commodity network might be considered, as Whatmore and Thorne (1997) suggest, as a “mode of ordering of connectivity [in which] stories are told of partnership, alliance responsibility and fairness, but performed in very different ways to the neoliberal encoding of these terms” (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997: 295). The system relies upon the achievement of standards including access to education, medical services, and adequate living and working conditions for staff and some attention to environmental sustainability. Democratic principles, no child labour and trade unions for workers are some of the central tenets (Fridell, 2006). Fairtrade is the only certification that limits its remit to small farmers; all of the others will deal with large and small farmers to varying degrees. In addition, Fairtrade is the only certification requiring that smallholder producers organise into democratically run and politically independent cooperatives¹⁵. These demands set Fairtrade apart from other sustainable coffees and allow supporters to claim that this system provides social justice for the small farmer.

¹² http://www.fairtrade.net/about_fairtrade.html, accessed 2 September 2008.

¹³ www.fairtrade.net, accessed 2 September 2008.

¹⁴ There is a description of Fairtrade as an alternative food network in chapter two.

¹⁵ Fairtrade operators in the US and UK indicated recently that they are planning to change the requirement of cooperative organisation and to broaden out to certify farmers on larger farms. Field notes, Certification professional, October 2009.

Overall, Fairtrade is oriented towards “producer empowerment” (Lyon, 2006b; Raynolds *et al.*, 2007a), and environmental standards are narrow and relatively new additions. Fairtrade professionals bring information about the market to the cooperatives and farmers so small farmers will understand both the networks and the prices that may be paid¹⁶. NGOs play a central role in managing relationships between buyers and cooperatives and assist farmers with compliance. Fairtrade certified buyers negotiate contracts with certified producer cooperatives. Buyers must obtain certification and they must offer long-term agreements and pre-financing¹⁷. To carry the certification label, a package of Fairtrade Certified coffee must contain 100% certified coffee. Fairtrade originally certified purchasers committed to selling only Fairtrade coffee but in recent years, companies like Nestlé sell a small amount of Fairtrade certified alongside their conventional coffee. This produced differentiation within the Fairtrade model. It was not only that the coffee had to be 100% certified in the package but also that the company would need to be 100% Fairtrade to adequately enact the ethical connectivity. If, as Fridell (2007a) argues, Fairtrade connectivities are made on the basis that the networks rely on ethical actors to use market relations, then allowing large companies who also deal in conventional coffee dilutes the model considerably. Those dedicated to Fairtrade’s original ideology of political solidarity and poverty alleviation believe that this expansion will undermine the alternative trade agenda¹⁸. On the other hand, this is one way to promote the expansion of the Fairtrade system beyond its limited capabilities as a niche market and attract new consumers. Those consumers who would not normally buy Fairtrade coffee may choose it when identified with a well-known brand name.

¹⁶ Field notes, representative from Fairtrade trading company in the UK, November 2005.

¹⁷ There is some debate as to the meaning of ‘long term’ which seems to be never clearly defined in the documentation. Some say long term is one harvest cycle which provides little advantage to the farmers.

¹⁸ Field notes, April 2006; 3 April 2007. To the extent that Fairtrade can be called a ‘movement’, this decision divided the movement in the UK.

Fairtrade is the only certification scheme that guarantees a set price per pound of green coffee while those associated with other certifications usually receive an unspecified premium. The set price as of June 2008 was US\$1.26 per pound for Arabica coffee¹⁹ processed to green²⁰, and this price has changed little since the 1990s. In addition, Fairtrade Certified buyers pay a differential for organically grown coffee at 20 cents per pound and a social premium of 10 cents per pound, allocated for social investment²¹. Despite vast differences across producing countries in the cost of producing one pound of green coffee, the set price is the same across all countries. For example, to produce one pound of green coffee in Brazil costs roughly \$0.40 while one pound of coffee in Guatemala will cost roughly \$1.20 to produce²². The fluctuations of the market further complicate the set price, particularly in recent years as the conventional market price reached very high levels²³. When the market price is above the set price, certified buyers are expected to add a percentage above the market price, as contractually defined at their discretion. The cooperative receives the payment for coffee, including the social premium, and distributes payment to contributing farmers so farmers must bring their coffee and wait for payment. In 2007, FLO raised the organic differential from 15 cents per pound to 20

¹⁹ Two main species of coffee are cultivated today, *Coffea Arabica*, known as Arabica and *Coffea canephora* known as Robusta. Arabica makes up 75-80% of the world's coffee and robusta the other 20%, although these numbers are shifting now. Speciality coffee is usually composed only of Arabica. Medium to low quality coffees will contain predominantly Arabica with some Robusta. For the most part, Robustas are fillers for instant coffees and are used in some espresso blends as they add a foam (crema) to the espresso. Speciality coffee is concerned with hard bean and strictly hard bean. See note 11 in chapter one.

²⁰ To extract the coffee beans from the outer cherry, Guatemala uses the wet process (washed Arabica), which involves removing the outer cherry mucilage, soaking then drying and finally removing a dry parchment cover from the bean. Beans are sorted and are now 'green', ready for roasting. Green coffee can be stored in burlap sacks in a cool dry environment for at least one year. Once roasted, coffee beans are fresh for about one month. There is a detailed account of processing in chapter five.

²¹ Source: http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/Coffee_SF_January_2008_EN.pdf

²² Field notes, February 2007, as per 2007.

²³ In May 2008, coffee prices reached \$1.71 per pound green Arabica (<http://www.ico.org/prices/pr.htm>). The ICO composite indicator price for 2008 was \$1.24. One can contrast this to the ICO composite indicator price for coffee in 2003 at \$0.52 <http://www.ico.org/historical/2000+/PDF/HIST-PRICES.pdf>. See chapter one.

cents and the social premium from 5 cents to 10 cents while keeping the minimum price the same. The notion of a 'social' premium, however, is both elusive and complex. After all, in Guatemala, there is a price differential in almost every contract as, for example, the Guatemalan quality premium, paid above the market price, usually around 15 cents per pound²⁴. In this sense, rewarding extra attention to growing practices that produce coffee beyond average taste, based on international indicators²⁵, is common practice irrespective of the existence of the 'social premium'. In any case, there is only one example in Guatemala where a cooperative is able to distribute the social premium back to the farmers *as a social premium*²⁶. Located in the North of the country where there is little competition, this cooperative is able to meet their production costs and to invest the premium in farm improvements. Most other cooperatives in Guatemala are struggling to pay the farmers just to cover the costs of production. Given that the distribution of a social premium is already often difficult for many cooperatives, the increased premium may put the cooperative at a disadvantage to non-Fairtrade buyers at a time when the price is high on the conventional market²⁷. As the price on the market slowly increased, conventional coffee buyers (like *coyotes*, the intermediaries) were able to buy coffee at close to or above Fairtrade prices offering \$1.26 and sometimes more to reflect the amount farmers should receive from the cooperative. Farmers, having promised their coffee to the cooperative, instead sell their coffee to the *coyote* that comes directly to their farm with cash in hand. They are able to undermine the contract between the cooperative and the farmer simply by adding an extra \$0.10; an amount that the cooperative has more difficulty in returning to the farmer.

²⁴ ICO, and also Field notes, 3 April 2007

²⁵ See Chapters six and seven.

²⁶ Field notes, NGO representative working with Fairtrade, 21 February 2007.

²⁷ Field notes, coffee trader in Guatemala, 24 March 2007.

Previously, NGOs and Fairtrade initiatives brokering contracts in Guatemala²⁸ mitigated costs associated with certification. In a complex relationship between cooperatives and these NGOs, the NGOs paid themselves back by taking a few cents from each pound of coffee sold to repay a portion of the certification fee. While this still costs the farmers, it spared them from the upfront cost of certification. A recent change in the system, however, requires farmers to pay the price for certification and secure a buyer early in the process²⁹. This change might reflect some of the issues described above; farmers selling the coffee to *coyotes* or other buyers rather than honouring their contracts to the Fairtrade certified cooperatives. Having to pay the fees upfront might go some way to ensuring a sense of responsibility and commitment to Fairtrade buyers. Fees cover three areas: application fee, initial certification fee and annual renewal fee. These fees vary depending on the size of the farmer organisation (cooperative), and a grading system assesses the socio-economic level of the cooperative and its members. As of 2007, the average minimum costs for an application fee was 250 Euros, for initial certification 1400 Euros, and for annual renewal 875 Euros³⁰. These numbers are average minimums and exclusive of additional surcharges applied as and when required. Given the expansion of Fairtrade's popularity and increased attention on sustainable coffees in their documentation, Fairtrade seems to be undergoing a programme of reinvention as a market player and one that can decide with whom it wants to do business³¹.

Organic

Organic certification, by contrast, focuses on the ecological aspects of production by restricting synthetic chemical fertilisers, pesticide and pharmaceutical inputs and

²⁸ TransFair, the American national initiative, handles most of the Fairtrade Certified cooperatives and contracts.

²⁹ <http://www.flo-cert.net/admin/userfiles/file/Fees/PCFEESYSTEM.pdf>, accessed 9 December 2008.

³⁰ Based on an average between sizes and grades: <http://www.flo-cert.net/admin/userfiles/file/Fees/PCFEESYSTEM.pdf>.

³¹ Field notes, coffee trader, 17 March 2007.

upholding strict land clearing, soil and water management systems³². At the same time, voluntary adherence to specific International Labour Organization (ILO) conditions defines the minimal social code³³. Organic certifiers mandate traceability with strict chain of custody management to restrict product co-mingling (Clarke *et al.*, 2008; Reynolds *et al.*, 2007a). The International Federation of Organic Movements (IFOAM) prepared the code of conduct and public and private standard-setting bodies develop specific standards across different countries or regions but there is no centralised administrative body (International, 2005). Unlike other certifications, governments regulate the standards in consultation with non-governmental bodies and subject to annual independent audits. There are a number of organic labels circulating in the market. It is common for organic farms to be Fairtrade as well, usually called ‘double certified’, accounting for seventy-eight per cent of all Fairtrade coffee and propelling both initiatives forward (Giovannucci and Villalobos, 2007; Rice, 2001). Organic certification alone usually achieves a premium but prices are, unlike Fairtrade, not necessarily specified and importers do not need to be registered. When sold through Fairtrade channels, double certified coffee can receive a 20 cent per pound premium above the non-organic certified Fairtrade³⁴.

There is a long transition period for organic coffee as it takes at least three years, and usually five, to clean land of previous chemical inputs. It therefore can take many years before a farmer achieves a premium. Many argue that the reach of organics across environment, economic and social aspects is minimal compared with other certifications and many farmers believe that, while organic is useful on the farm, its effect on the

³² www.ifoam.org, accessed 8 September 2008.

³³ Field notes, 14 March 2007.

³⁴ http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/Coffee_SF_January_2008_EN.pdf

environment “stops at the farm”³⁵. Other sustainable coffee models, particularly those focused on ecological practices, are more oriented towards countrywide issues like polluted water and waste management. Still, when it comes to these interrelated environmental objects, one cannot stop, by demarcating a certified ‘zone’ the affect beyond the bounded sphere of certification³⁶. However limited or imperfect the existing sustainable coffees may be, they flow over conceptual borders and edges. Despite certifications’ attempts to demarcate what fits in and what is outside of the bounded ‘knowable’ spaces inside of certified limits (made transparent, traceable, countable and comparable), their circulation in producing countries changes both people and non-human nature. For example, there are now a number of small organic *beneficios*³⁷ certified to process only organic coffee. In a meeting with a few members of an organic cooperative at their certified processing mill, owned by a group of NGOs, the cooperative members called themselves ‘eco-warriors’³⁸. Their goal is to further the organic agenda and to change the environment. It is relevant to note the interaction between the ideology (as constricted by the farm) and the materialities of environmental ‘management’ in the mediation of organic practices.

Rainforest Alliance

Also ecological in focus, Rainforest Alliance (RA) certifies a number of tropical products, including coffee, and is a common certification choice in Guatemala. In 1996, RA shipped its first certified coffee to the US from Guatemala³⁹. RA started in the US in 1986, where participants organised small workshops on the devastating effects of rapidly disappearing

³⁵ Field notes, 27 February 2007; Field notes, 19 March 2007

³⁶ See Callon (1998a) on identifying the environmental overflows of the chemical factory.

³⁷ A *beneficio* is the group of buildings and technologies used to process coffee from cherry to parchment or green; see chapter five.

³⁸ Field notes, Cooperative member in San Pedro, 14 March 2007.

³⁹ Rainforest Alliance “Highlights from the First 20 Years, 1986-207” found online at http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/about/documents/ra_timeline.pdf.

rainforest, leading to bigger conferences in 1986 focused on the urgent need to protect rainforest from clear-cutting. Rainforest Alliance grew out of these meetings, starting with work on forest management and slowly expanding their remit to other agricultural areas including coffee.

Board chair and founder Daniel Katz notes that when the RA was founded, its ‘parents’ included a ‘masseuse, a toxicologist, a theatre worker, a returned Peace Corps volunteer, and a young China expert. Collectively we had no money, no experience, and no skills at building a business, not even a typewriter – let alone a computer. We became an organization whose sole ingredients included passion and commitment – details like bookkeeping, fundraising and management came later’⁴⁰.

Today RA develops and administers its farm certification standard together with a coalition of nine Latin American conservation groups called the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN)⁴¹. They incorporate shade-growing, efficient agricultural practices and fair treatment of farm workers to “protect ecosystems and the people” (Alliance, 2007). They promote biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods through what they define as three connected points on the supply chain: building sustainable landscapes, working with business and trade, and ensuring good value to the consumer. Most of their work is concentrated in production sites and centred on good agricultural practices⁴². The approach is different from organic certification as it uses a system of integrated pest management that may require some limited use of agro-chemicals. Shade growing, growing coffee trees below larger shade trees, (a more thorough description is detailed in the Bird Friendly certification discussion below), is weaker than the Bird Friendly model. RA’s reach, however, is more extensive as Bird Friendly Shade grown certifies a relative small amount of coffee.

⁴⁰ <http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/about.cfm?id=timeline>

⁴¹ *Rainforest Alliance and Small Coffee Farmers Certification Program Promotes Sustainable Development*, Rainforest Alliance Press Release, obtained from RA representative May 2007.

⁴² Field notes, RA representative, 12 May 2007

Signs noting the presence of a rubbish bin, *basura*⁴³, dot the RA certified coffee farm. Beyond rubbish containers, there are well-tended coffee trees free of tangled weeds and well-tended fruit bearing trees provide canopy shade cover. There are restrictions on stray and pet dogs on the property and the buildings holding agro-chemicals are clearly marked. RA representatives argue their social standards prioritise worker protection better than Fairtrade's worker-related standards and their environmental standards are the broadest of the five certifications outlined here⁴⁴. Of course, this would depend on the precise definition of 'protection' for workers, for example, as well as less subjective accounts of the environmental standards they privilege. RA's premium is market driven rather than guaranteeing a price. They intervene in buyer negotiations only so far as to suggest the payment of a premium at the buyer's discretion which tends to be \$0.10 to \$0.12 per pound of coffee. Product traceability during processing and packaging ensures certified coffee remains separate from other coffee, although buyers do not need to be certified. There is an initial cost to gaining certification and many argue that, although RA has tried to make these amenable to small farmers through various opportunities, it privileges larger or wealthy farm owners⁴⁵. The fee is tiered and on a per hectare basis; costing more for large farmers than small. Small farmers may collaborate with a neighbour to make it easier to pay the fee.

RA emphasis on the importance of integrated farm management contrasts with Fairtrade's focus on how products are traded. RA's standards tend to be flexible, presumably to make it easier for farms to meet the standards. This means that there is less concern for precisely

⁴³ *Basura*, Spanish word indicating that rubbish should go in this bin.

⁴⁴ Field notes, RA representative, April 2007

⁴⁵ Field notes, coffee trader in Guatemala, 12 May 2007

how RA certified coffee moves through the global network and more importance placed on the details of agricultural practice. A package of coffee can carry the RA label if it contains at least 30% certified coffee with the content percentage indicated beside the label. It is not the purview of RA to suggest how or where farmers should sell their coffee but rather to work to manage the impacts of production. Price premiums may be achieved because it is RA or, equally, if a buyer purchases it because it exceeds conventional standards of quality. At the same time, however, this provides leverage by facilitating its use in blended coffee products, thus gaining a wider market⁴⁶. The argument among RA representatives for the 30% model centres on the idea that this allows companies to pay a premium for a small amount of coffee in terms of their overall purchases, buying more than they might if they had to guarantee 100%⁴⁷. It is not difficult, however, to consider such an approach as meeting the needs of companies and corporations rather than those of farmers; one should question an ‘ethical’ approach that focuses on breadth of sale rather than depth of commitment to sustainable requirements. RA is popular among the speciality coffee buyers in Guatemala probably owing to the slickness of marketing and their amenability to corporations⁴⁸. One farmer relates that he chose Rainforest Alliance because he thought the logo was cute; the frog in RA’s logo indicates the care for the environment. This wealthy medium-sized farm holder does not find it difficult to meet the requirements of RA.

Utz Certified

In Guatemala, another certification scheme takes a share of the market for sustainable coffees and works in competition with RA. Over 25 years ago, a man arrived in

⁴⁶ This keeps the overall cost per pound down for large corporations while still allowing them to purchase some coffee at a premium. Somewhat like food adulteration in the 19th century, cutting the cost with additives.

⁴⁷ Field notes, RA representative, 24 April 2007.

⁴⁸ Field notes, June 2008.

Guatemala from Belgium to attend a wedding in Alta Verapaz, the middle highlands of Guatemala. He worked in the European coffee industry and this was his first visit to a coffee producing nation. In his words, he “encountered the poverty, environmental degradation and low quality of living of those in coffee”⁴⁹. He purchased two pieces of coffee farmland, one in Alta Verapaz, the home of some of the most impoverished indigenous people most affected by coffee crises⁵⁰, and one in the Antigua valley. Along with a consortium of Guatemalan coffee growers-exporters and the Dutch roaster Ahold Coffee Company, he opened the office of Utz Kapeh, ‘good coffee’ in the Mayan language QuichU, in Guatemala City in 1999 to respond to poverty, environmental degradation and to better connect the consumer with the producer⁵¹. Initially working only with coffee, in 2007 Utz Kapeh became ‘Utz Certified, good inside’ to reflect the expansion to other sectors of agro-food business. Their newly professional and corporate-focused approach mandates, “Professional coffee growing, traceability and trust”⁵².

Utz Standards are adapted from EurepGap, a system developed to ensure good agricultural practices in Europe⁵³. Utz uses an integrated approach of agricultural practices, worker welfare and access to education and healthcare. Like RA, there are clear indicators for *basura* and the presence of chemicals. Water filtration systems and composting mechanisms are all part of the display of sustainability. They claim to work with all sizes of farm and do not require a joining fee; the buyer pays a fee to the organisation to be able to use the certification on products. Finding a buyer is not an easy task for a disconnected small farmer, making it easier for large farmers to achieve this certification. One certified

⁴⁹ Field notes, coffee farmer and Utz Kapeh founder, 2 May 2007.

⁵⁰ As discussed in chapter one.

⁵¹ Field notes, coffee farmer and Utz Kapeh founder, 2 May 2007.

⁵² Found online at <http://www.utzcertified.org/index.php?pageID=107>

⁵³ Found online at <http://www.utzcertified.org/index.php?pageID=107>

farmer suggests that Utz, while never guaranteeing a buyer, always achieves a little more than the market price and, “even a few cents a pound makes a big difference”. He notes, however, that Utz does not work beyond the certification: one has to find the buyers who take these practices to be value-added which leaves the producer in a position to have to, “know whom to call because the right connections make all the difference”⁵⁴.

Utz technicians ask buyers to ensure products displaying its seal includes 90% sustainable coffee beans and have an extensive internet-based tracking system to follow coffee back to the originating farm. Unlike RA who suggests potential premiums to buyers, Utz does not intervene in price negotiations nor is there a set price like Fairtrade. Through extensive reporting systems, they supply up-to-date marketing information to certified producers to help them negotiate a better price. Premiums hover around 4-6 cents per pound and, given some similarity it is not clear why they achieve premiums far lower than RA.

Like RA, Utz focuses on roasters and retailers more than on consumers. Rather than promoting a ‘niche’ certification label to the recognition of consumers, the trust of consumers must lie with the *brand* of coffee such that consumers come to expect coffee companies to ensure minimal environmental and social standards. This reflects a desire to integrate social and environmental sustainability into the coffee trade more generally, promoting scalability beyond the limitations of a niche scheme like Fairtrade. A man working on sustainability and speciality coffee at one of the biggest trading firms in Europe suggests that Utz would likely change its name to something more corporate given recent internal organisational changes. Their current ‘responsible coffee’ approach is

⁵⁴ Field notes, coffee farmer, 19 Mar 2007

coupled with an ability to be comfortable in the meeting rooms of the biggest roasters⁵⁵.

The originating founder is no longer actively associated with the organisation saying that it is too corporate focused and has lost the original vision⁵⁶. One member of his core group who defined the original Utz vision now works with RA. These two certification schemes are somewhat similar though they do not collaborate and are quite competitive.

Smithsonian Bird Friendly

Smithsonian Bird friendly is the fifth certification using a label and it is a relatively small-scale scheme compared with the other certifications. Developed in the 1990s by ornithologists at the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center (MBC) and members of local Audubon organisations, and based on scientific fieldwork on bird habitats and conservation, bird friendly certification promotes coffee grown under the protection of shade trees (Lyon, 2006b). The certification, established in 1997, incentivises small coffee farmers to preserve migratory bird habitats “through coffee cultivation in forest-like agro-ecosystems in which coffee trees form a lower story shaded by a mixed cover of fruit trees and hardwood species” (Lyon, 2006b: 379). Shade growing moderates the intensity and quality of sunlight allowing beans to mature slowly to improve their taste. Shade trees maintain bird habitats, protect the soil from erosion and sun damage, help with the water table and run-off and provide protection for workers from the sun. Trees can also provide fruits for re-sale or family consumption or they may be fast re-growth trees for firewood to sell at market. Much of the certified shade grown coffee is also Fairtrade or organic certified and this is mainly the way in which shade growing obtains a premium. There is no set price with certification only a “theoretical increased market demand for their coffee

⁵⁵ Field notes, coffee trader at the SCAE, June 2008.

⁵⁶ Field notes, coffee farmer, 3 May 2007.

and subsequently higher prices” (Lyon, 2006b: 379). When bundled with Fairtrade and/or organic the premium reflects the shade growing practices.

While the Smithsonian label is particular to shade growing, RA and Utz both have shade-related stipulations in their standards. These are sometimes ‘bio-corridors’ on large plantations or shade trees for income generation on smaller fields. Shade trees cover a large number of Guatemala’s coffee fields owing to traditional growing practices but these do not necessarily carry a certification. The concept of shade and cover is interesting in light of the notion of transparency so central to the connection between coffee and ethical practices and the tools of certification. While shade trees provide a *visible* indication that something ‘good for the earth’ is happening they also provide cover for what might be happening on the ground⁵⁷. If, as Barry notes, transparency involves a commitment to make actions public (Barry, 2005c: 3), shade trees are both a public indication of actions in line with sustainability and that something else may be happening there. This chapter returns to the notion of transparency to elaborate how certifications perform but not necessarily in the way operators, buyers and consumers may assume they perform.

Private initiatives and direct trade

Considered by many academics to be more susceptible to corporate motives (Raynolds *et al.*, 2007a), private initiatives are growing in number and could easily grow in reach beyond certifications (Giovannucci and Koekoek, 2003: 36). Private companies outline an

⁵⁷ Historians relating the transformation of Guatemala into a coffee-growing economy note the extension of ‘coffee forests’ across the landscape (Gallini, 2004; McCreery, 1996; Roseberry, 1995). The processes of land redistribution, reorganization of administrative practices and new labour laws happened among and under the growing shade of the ‘coffee revolution’, changing the landscape forever. See also Rogoff (2000) on Lefebvre’s negation of the illusion of transparency. Rogoff quotes Lefebvre that comprehension of an object is supposed to conduct what is perceived, “from the shadows to the light” (24) but this imagines a realm of ‘the known’ as though its space is innocent; it does not take on board issues of situatedness or of unmediated positionality.

internal code of conduct of sustainable practices and may use an independent auditor to increase accountability. There are many different approaches internal to private companies (Taylors of Harrogate is one example). In particular, Starbucks' CAFE Practices stands out, because it seems to straddle the line between an independent certification model and private initiative in its approach as well as having wide circulation in Guatemala. Starbucks' CAFE Practices (Coffee and Farmer Equity) evolved from an early Preferred Supplier Program under the rubric of Starbucks' corporate social responsibility (CSR). It developed in a consumer climate where speciality coffee firms were increasingly required to display a commitment to 'ethics', and to respond to growing public outcry concerning the social and economic requirements of the producer⁵⁸. Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) runs the scheme on behalf of Starbucks. At the time of the introduction of CAFE Practices, Starbucks was already purchasing some Fairtrade coffee, albeit with minimal reach. The creation of an internal programme allowed Starbucks to better control decision making (price negotiations) while still meeting current market demand for sustainability⁵⁹. Some also argue Starbucks' demand for coffee defined as 'speciality'⁶⁰ kept them from sourcing all of their supply from Fairtrade farms as Fairtrade tends to be less identified with current quality standards⁶¹. Suppliers meet minimum requirements verified through an independent auditor wherein Starbucks can, "source [...] sustainably grown and processed coffee by evaluating the economic, social and environmental aspects of coffee production against a defined set of criteria"⁶².

⁵⁸ See the role of Global Exchange in making this argument public at <http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/fairtrade/coffee/starbucks.html>.

⁵⁹ Field notes, coffee buyer, 24 March 2007.

⁶⁰ As discussed in chapter five and six.

⁶¹ This is changing now as Fairtrade tries to re-brand itself as ethical, fair and quality sourced coffee. This is discussed in chapter seven but you would have to look no further than signs for CaféDirect coffee that say nothing about ethics but suggests the quality in the cup.

⁶² Found online at www.scs-certified.com/csr/starbucks.html

Based on the Conservation Principles for Coffee Production and written with the help of Rainforest Alliance⁶³, certified suppliers gain access to preferred pricing and contract terms. Farmers, processors and suppliers, the three main aspects of the coffee supply network according to the programme, meet the minimum economic, social and environmental requirements and CAFE Practices demands a vast amount of reporting and documentation. Like Utz and RA, the visible display of agricultural inputs and tree management are evident across CAFE Practices farms. Water filtration systems and composting facilities combine with minimum wage provisions for workers and access to medical services. CAFE Practices places the greatest weight on the constituents of the supply network and in particular on the economic aspect of sustainability. They mandate financial transparency through documentary evidence of how much participants in the coffee supply chain receive for their efforts, and “equity of financial benefit”, produced through traceability of contracts and receipts across the supply chain⁶⁴, a condition difficult not only to achieve but also to verify. Independent auditors, particularly the Guatemalan organisation FEAT, can audit both RA and CAFE Practices at the same time and many farmers have both of these certifications.

Theoretically, farmers with any size of farm are eligible to apply for CAFE Practices, but various factors seem to lead to a concentration on large farms. Representatives adamantly deny this accusation; the system is open to anyone who can achieve the requirements (Linton, 2005). One informant notes that they likely deal with large farms as this is easier and more efficient⁶⁵. One of the first farms in Guatemala to achieve Starbucks’ Preferred Supplier status, the precursor to CAFE Practices certification, now boasts to have the

⁶³ Field notes, RA representative, 12 May 2007.

⁶⁴ www.scs-certified.com/csr/starbucks.html

⁶⁵ Field notes, RA worker in casual conversation, 18 March 2007

Strategic Supplier certification, the highest achievement and an unheard of 98% compliance score. The CEO of Starbucks visited this farm by plane and others from Starbucks have come as well. Camaraderie is not just amongst customers but manifests materially with the company. He describes the relationship with Starbucks as a comfortable combination of “markets, friendship and altruism”⁶⁶. In 2007, this comfortable triumvirate worked in his favour as Starbucks bought his entire crop despite Starbucks’ mandate only to buy strictly hard bean⁶⁷. This farmer’s harvest only includes a small portion of this sought after coffee. Starbucks has become the largest customer of Guatemalan coffee so CAFE Practices is a common certification across the country⁶⁸.

At the other end of the spectrum, within this category of private initiatives are small roasters and trading houses employing direct trade models. They pay above the market price for exceptional coffee, farmer commitment and cooperation towards achieving sustainable livelihoods⁶⁹. These are private systems not usually subject to independent verification nor do they carry a label, a source of criticism by many academics and coffee professionals (Raynolds *et al.*, 2007a)⁷⁰. In these cases, knowledge exchange between coffee professionals in consuming countries and the consumer is the basis for understanding the ‘ethical’ model. Personal relationships with producers are essential to this exchange. These coffee buyers will pay a very high price per pound, far exceeding the market and the certification premiums, which may, in the current economic downturn, prove unsustainable. Direct trade models are discussed in chapters six and seven.

⁶⁶ Field notes, anonymous, 19 Mar 2007

⁶⁷ See note 11 in chapter one.

⁶⁸ SCAE conference, Chairman of Anacafé, 19 June 2008.

⁶⁹ Examples of this approach include small but high profile coffee roasters in the United States (Stumptown Roasters, Coffee Culture and Intelligentsia) and small trading firm Mercanta in the United Kingdom.

⁷⁰ See also (Giovannucci and Koekoek, 2003).

Multi-stakeholder certifications

Multi-stakeholder models like the Common Code for the Coffee Community (4Cs) incorporate industry, state and NGOs in management⁷¹ (Hughes, 2001; Hughes, 2005b). The 4Cs is organised by the German Coffee Association Deutscher Kaffeeverband and GTZ for German sustainable development. It addresses responsibility in the mainstream market among large-scale corporate buyers. Developed in 2003/04, implementation began in 2007⁷². Supporters of this approach hope to form a baseline of sustainability standards achievable by the large trading and roasting firms⁷³, and aim to certify many of the world's largest plantations (in particular in Brazil and Vietnam). The code defines ten unacceptable practices ranging from trafficking and bonded labour through to failure to provide adequate housing and potable water to workers. It then defines more than thirty desirable practices based on social, economic and environmental principles of sustainability, and largely modelled on the Utz code of conduct⁷⁴. These practices are achievable over time, with a traffic light system indicating a farm's current compliance with each standard and allowing the farm to progress from red to yellow to green. In general, there is wide collaboration among large traders to promote the 4Cs. It marks a turning point in sustainable coffees by setting a lowest common denominator for sustainable investment.

It is important to note a point of convergence across all of the models in all of the categories: the stipulation that owners must pay the legal *minimum wage* to their workers. Many of the certifications go as far as to call this a *living wage*. For example, the Fairtrade generic standards for Small Farmers define a living wage as, "Salaries [that] are in line

⁷¹ Found online at www.4c-coffeeassociation.org

⁷² Field notes, coffee trader, SCAE, June 2008

⁷³ Nestlé, Kraft, Sara Lee, Proctor & Gamble and Tchibo are the 'big five' roasters.

⁷⁴ Found online at www.4c-coffeeassociation.org

with or exceeding regional average and official minimum wages for similar occupations”⁷⁵. The promise to pay minimum wage garners a lot of attention in coffee consumption countries as indicating fair and ethical terms of work. The issue is not as straightforward as it appears. In Guatemala, the legal minimum wage is 48.5 Quetzales (Q) per day (equiv. \$6.47US)⁷⁶ and for agricultural workers, the category of most coffee farm workers, it is 47 Q per day (equiv. \$6.27). In one assessment, an organisation calculated the cost of 26 basic food items, sufficient food to feed 5.38 people per day (the average household size in the Antigua Valley). They found the average cost in July 2008 was Q64.72⁷⁷. This equals roughly 12Q per day per person but of course this does not reflect the number of people in the family unable or too young to work. While this is the analysis of one organisation, it provides a comparison between the ability to achieve a living wage given the price of food in relation to the national standard minimum wage. This example suggests globally defined standards do not always make sense in particular situations. Public accounts do not necessarily hold true in the mediation of standards in practice. These issues are part of the debates and internal differentiation that lead to competition between sustainable coffee models, as the next section illustrates.

Figure 4: Sustainable coffee models in comparison

⁷⁵ Found online at: http://www.flo-cert.net/_admin/userfiles/file/Fees/PCFEESYSTEM.pdf

⁷⁶ Found online at: <http://www.mintrabajo.gob.gt/org/informacion-y-estadisticas>

⁷⁷ As Green as it Gets, Position on Fair trade, September 2008, page 2.

	Focus/Mission	History & Development	Requirements for Farmers	Market focus & certification	Price Premium	Verification & Services	
Certification Schemes	Fairtrade Certified	Producer empowerment, equitable trading arrangements, protection of disadvantaged farmers	Built on the ATO model and Max Havelaar in Netherlands. First labelled product traded in 1989, now several national initiatives under FLO umbrella.	Smallholders organised into democratically run cooperatives, fair labour conditions, management of agro-chemical inputs.	Niche markets and promotion to consumer (focus on trade), reliance on a certification on package, must contain 100% certified beans. Buyers must be certified.	Set Price: For washed Arabica: 125c/lb + social premium 10c/lb + organic 20c/lb	Annual independent audits FLO-CERT GMBH manages certifications Relationships between NGOs, cooperatives and national initiatives managing contracts.
	Organic Certified	Production of food in harmony with nature. Based on the principles of health, ecology, fairness and care. Strong ideological focus about human-nature balance.	Began in early 1970s as farming movement with input from across the world. Developed into international system by the 1990s.	Use of non-synthetic, non-toxic nutrients, plant protection methods, soil conservation. Any size of farm but tend to be small farms.	Speciality coffee, certifications vary country to country; numerous labels. Package contains 100% certified beans.	Market driven Can be as high as 20c/lb (with FT) but variable Often double certified with FT	Annual independent audits Provide technical assistance to gain and maintain certification.
	Rainforest Alliance	Promoting biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods through balanced agricultural practices and worker protection.	Since 1986, worked with coalition of Latin American conservation groups (SAN); 1996 shipped first certified coffee from Guatemala.	Integrated pest management, balanced agricultural practices, can be shade grown, fair treatment of farm workers. Farm size variable.	Focus on farm management, Use of certification label on package + % of certified coffee; must be minimum 30% certified beans.	Market driven premium +/- 10-12c/lb, some help with price negotiation.	Annual independent audits Provide technical assistance to gain and maintain certification.
	Utz Certified	Commitment to sustainability with integrated agricultural practices and worker welfare; industry and corporate focus.	Began in 1999 as initiative between producers in Guatemala and Dutch coffee company Ahold. Became independent NGO in 2001.	Must have buyer interested. Clean farms, access to education and health services, good agricultural practices. Any size of farm.	Package must contain 90% certified beans with extensive web-based tracking system back to farm.	Market driven premium +/- 4-6c/lb although most report less. Do not get involved with price negotiations.	Annual independent audits Provide technical assistance to gain and maintain certification; provide market information.

	Focus/Mission	History & Development	Requirements for Farmers	Market focus & certification	Price Premium	Verification & Services
	Smithsonian Bird Friendly	Protection of migratory bird habitats and biodiversity through shade growing practices.	Founded 1997 based on scientific fieldwork on protection of birds and natural habitats. Limited reach	Maintenance of shade growing techniques, meets the organic criteria	Use of a certification usually along with organic.	Usually combined with organic and FT. Annual independent audits
Private	CAFE Practices	Focus on the economic relationship between farmers, processors and suppliers with balanced agricultural practices, waste management and minimum wage for workers.	Based on the Conservation Principles for Coffee Production and following previous CSR strategy.	Monetary exchange closely monitored, social, and environmental approach like RA. Farms must grow particular Arabica beans to be considered .	Internal system of a private company but monitored by Scientific Certification systems. Aim to have 80% coffee sourced from certified farms by 2015.	Based on market price and quality differential in country of origin. Annual independent audits Provide some technical assistance to gain and maintain certification. Focus on documentation.
	Direct Trade & Relationship Coffee	Exceptional coffee requires concern for the needs of the coffee trees, balanced system of cared for workers, efficient and considerate agricultural practices and attention to detail in coffee.	Small sector of the high end specialty coffee industry that developed at least since the 1970s.	Create and maintain a relationship with buyers; care for coffee; knowledge of the market.	System of knowledge transfer between buyers/baristas and their customers. No certification, no definable rules; interpersonal focus.	Based on number of factors, not traded by market prices. Usually paying far above market price. None. Often bring farmers to consuming countries for consumers to 'meet the producer'.
Muti stakeholder	Common Code for the Coffee Community (4Cs)	Minimum level of sustainability and responsibility in the mainstream and conventional market.	Multi-stakeholder initiative, development began 2003/04. Implementation since 2007.	Eliminate ten unacceptable practices. Engage with the system to work towards 'green' lights on 30 desirable practices. Traffic light system allows for transition period.	Certification indicates commitment to principles with no precise amount of coffee in package.	Roasters and/or traders pay premium – depends on size of purchase. Annual audits. Technical assistance to move through traffic light system.

Competition

In sum, certifications, and particularly Fairtrade, have gained visibility as tools communicating ethics on the market. They rely heavily on their branding, usually a label, as a way of assuring the consumer of the integration of ethical practices at the site of production. This circulation of sustainable coffee is due, in part, to the creation of an identifiable frame. For Callon, framing, “allows for the definition of the objects, goods and merchandise which are perfectly identifiable and can be separated [...] from other goods. It is owing to this framing that the market can exist [...] (Callon 1998b: 17)” (Lury, 2004: 154). The brand enables the frame to be made visible. As Lury (2004) points out, it is,

The management of the brand *as a set of relations between [multidimensional] products* simultaneously enables the differentiations and disentanglement of specific products [...] and sustains the emergent objectivity of the integrated brand as a dynamic yet indivisible entity (155).

In a sense, then, the frame of each model is again framed by the larger category of internally differentiated but holistically unified sustainable coffees. Thus certifications exist both in competition with each other and in the mainstream market through accounts of their convergences and differences. They proliferate through imitation as they define themselves in relation to one another and the global market.

Perfectly illustrating this competitive and imitative space, in the past few years, each of the five big roasters, all multi-national companies, signed up for one or more certification models. As long as they are inside of the unified category of sustainable coffee by taking on a certification scheme for a small amount of their overall coffee purchases, they gain resources from this multi-dimensional but crudely defined space. Industry professionals and academics note that the growth of corporate-friendly approaches raises new issues.

They do not seem to stick to the heart of social justice like certifications, especially Fairtrade, and do not always ensure independent verification (Barratt Brown, 1993; Raynolds, 2007). Academic research tends to draw a clear opposition between ‘good’ NGOs and ‘bad’ corporations⁷⁸ rather than assessing the potential of multiple practices beyond the three-tiered categorisation or the relative value of the defined terms and conditions (Levi and Linton, 2003; Murray *et al.*, 2003; Renard, 1999). Rather, the proliferation of similar but slightly different models worries most of these academics and practitioners. Multiple and multi-stakeholder initiatives may cause consumer confusion over what these labels mean and dilute the central concern for farmer and ecosystem wellbeing. It may be signalling ‘greenwashing’ in a consumption culture that is demanding programmes of corporate responsibility; allowing corporate entities to claim ground in this ethical terrain (Crane, 2001; Davies and Crane, 2003; Giovannucci and Koekoek, 2003; Giovannucci and Ponte, 2005; Goodman, 2004). Yet debate takes place between the different categories of sustainable coffees pointing to the existence of the integrated brand as more important than whether they are private or public, and so on. The actual mediations of such approaches in practice, that is on the ground, become here less important than arguing the ideological underpinnings of each model.

For example, the writing and re-writing of the RA Wikipedia entry illustrates precisely this battle. Wiki writers claim RA is ‘Fairtrade lite’, lacking the focus on small farmers most in need while RA re-writes the entry to represent their multi-faceted approach⁷⁹. Similarly, a

⁷⁸ Tarde distinguished between three forms of opposition: signs indicating diametrical opposition, series indicating a process of evolution from one state to another and degree meaning quantitative difference (Barry and Thrift, 2007).

⁷⁹ Wikipedia banned RA from editing their page for ignoring the principles of Wiki conduct raising the questions of exactly what is ethical in relation to framing an approach. They finally reached a settlement on the page. Where it used to introduce RA on the front page as ‘Fairtrade lite’, an unknown editor, most likely in the service of RA, did rearrange this and created a ‘Criticism’ section to include such claims. Field notes, anonymous, February 2007.

representative from Utz presented an overview based on a detailed comparison with RA and Starbucks⁸⁰. Moreover, it is common to find certifications changing their approach in relation to other models in order to ensure they cover the three areas of sustainability.

Organics are extending its social standards and Utz is broadening its remit to other agricultural products. The centralisation of administration and splitting into two organisations (FLO and FLO-Cert) points to a re-positioning and strengthening of Fairtrade visibility and marketing strategies by separating the ‘rule-maker’ from the ‘rule-enforcer’. Their documentation for small producers outlines governance of social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Articulating a commitment to ‘sustainability’ is new to this socially focused alternative ideology.

In Guatemala, a representative from TransFair, the American initiative with a local Guatemalan office, holds a position on the Board of Directors of Anacafé but he “never used to come to the meetings” possibly because they did not need to relate to their competition. Recently, this same source notes, “Fairtrade is coming [to the meetings]”⁸¹. This is significant in light of the common claim that Fairtrade tends not only to insulate farmers from markets but also to isolate them from their communities⁸². When a Fairtrade distributor creates a contract with a cooperative, they need only be concerned with that contract and the movement of certified coffee from origin to Fairtrade importer. They do not necessarily need to be aware of local or national coffee issues. Attending the meetings of the national producer organisation shows a significant shift in focus and indicates that Fairtrade might want to better understand the growing competition for sustainable coffee. In short, Fairtrade operators seem to be aware of a need to relate to the growing field of

⁸⁰ Field notes, Utz representative, 28 February 2007.

⁸¹ Field notes, Anacafé board member, 17 February 2007.

⁸² Field notes, technician working with El Salvador national coffee organisation, June 2006.

‘sustainable coffees’ rather than standing alone in the now less market-friendly conception of ‘alternative trade’. This is an adaptation to an evolving space wherein actors continuously frame and re-frame their position in response to forecasting the direction of the market (Callon, 1998a).

Most coffee professionals draw a clear distinction between Fairtrade and other certifications based on the use of a set price. Proponents of Fairtrade maintain that this protection is necessary for small farmers while opponents argue that it isolates farmers from the market and makes them reliant on Fairtrade contracts rather than becoming knowledgeable business people. According to many, Fairtrade is aid and not trade; charity rather than business. In the refashioning of Fairtrade as part of the milieu of sustainable coffee, we may now see a significant shift. Collaborations are imminent; Starbucks recently announced they plan to source Fairtrade coffee for all of their espresso-based drinks served in the UK⁸³. Apparently, their social reach required more intensive input; a somewhat suspect move when Starbucks is closing outlets across the world. Further, arguments abound that Starbucks engages in greenwashing with their CAFE Practices model, but this distinction between good and bad forms of sustainable coffee is somewhat misleading. As one American green coffee buyer suggests, “For all its problems, the one thing I would say is that CAFE Practices has cleaned up the environment in Guatemala”⁸⁴; owing of course to the large amount of coffee Starbucks purchases in the country. Another American buyer, part of an independent buyer cooperative with its own ethical trade model notes that he tries not to pay attention to Starbucks despite its widespread circulation. He suggests that in relation to sustainable coffee and Fairtrade, “now it’s

⁸³ “All Starbucks’ Coffee to be Fairtrade”, *Independent*, 26 November 2008.

⁸⁴ Field notes, independent coffee buyer, 21 Mar 2007

more, who can meet Starbucks' criteria"⁸⁵. Framing the framed, most likely as a way to catch the inevitable overflows of each model, suggests Lury's assessment may be missing a crucial distinction. Brand management is about the set of relations between multidimensional products as an internally differentiated but indivisible entity. The brand emerges, however, from the presence of a particular brand as much as it does through the overflows and contrasts of multiple brands in its unified form. Acting against Fairtrade or in constant awareness of Starbucks defines the values that allow other sustainable coffees to thrive.

The competition and convergences point to something more important than problems of 'consumer confusion'. Various initiatives grow more and more alike as a unified field of sustainable coffee that does not account for mediations of the tools in practice. Beyond the three-tiered typology, sustainable coffees are a complex, multi-dimensional and heterogeneous field of difference; internally differentiated in a number of ways (Foucault, 1972). It is here where political debate and the seed of difference, in Tarde's language, begin. A more complex and multi-dimensional account of the heterogeneous field of differences between ethical trade models is necessary. Their differences are not only relevant to competition for market recognition but are also subject to political debate. This debate produces difference among the assemblages of coffee networks and points to the trails of association required to hold the form of sustainable coffees in shape (Latour, 2005b). Negotiations with the standards are not straightforwardly 'ethical' on these international registers. The extent to which they are necessarily 'ethical' relates to the framings of the predominant requirement to make relations of production transparent.

⁸⁵ Field notes, independent coffee buyer, 3 April 2007

The first part of this chapter provides an account of the different sustainable coffee initiatives in circulation, detailing the differences in the demands, services, cost to the producers and price premium they can achieve. It explores the proliferation of multiple forms of certifications and how operators frame their relation to sustainability. The accounting systems and codes of conduct, while mandating transparency and traceability, tend to lead the consumer back to transnational reference points of the market for sustainability rather than specificities of producer origins.

Although sustainability appears as though it is about the claim on the package and the relationship on the farm, it is not; it is always already pointing to the existence of the market for sustainability as indicated in the competition between brand and approach and the discourse of comparison and competition. The next section of this chapter suggests that research in Guatemala reveals something more complicated than brands and labels might imply. Interpersonal interactions, government and corporate strategies, technologies, processes, ecosystem and coffee beans are fluid assemblages that coincide and disperse in meeting the criteria of sustainability. This is most notably apparent in attempts to achieve transparency.

4.4 Translations

Transparency

For all of the standards and modes of operation detailed above, making relations of production transparent is the most common way to make practices knowable and transportable to the consumer. The practices and commitments must become visible so they can add value, and sustainable coffees tend to call this visibility ‘transparency’. In what follows, an interrogation of transparency makes visible the representations,

interventions, multi-spatial and temporal renderings of what it means to do business in this 'ethical' space in Guatemala. This locally specific reading is in tension with the need for sustainable coffees to maintain transparency as a way to 'show' the public that standards are in place. Mediations in practice do not cleanly fit the ready identifiers of transparency.

Transparency as used in sustainable coffee models implies trust, predictability and visibility in the supply chain, a 'full disclosure' of the activities from farm to cup (Freidberg, 2003; Freidberg, 2004). Through systems of audit, disparate and geographically separate actors can 'know' something about relations of production thus creating an imagined geography of producer/consumer relations across distant spaces and places (Gregory, 1994; Valentine, 1999b; Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). This openness attempts to achieve a re-balancing of the distribution of profits by accounting for relations on the farm, and making traceable and verifiable the contractual agreements and monetary exchange along an implied vertically integrated supply chain.

Writing on recent practices of audit as governance, Power (1997) argues that invoking transparency replaces any personal promises and eliminates a need for 'trust' between individual parties. For sustainable coffee, claiming transparency acts as a guarantee that certifications actively pursue the promises of the codes of conducts at the faraway origins of coffee. It is an instrument of governance that embeds "alternative instrumental rationalities beyond or beneath the arena of pure market calculation" (Barry and Slater, 2005c; Luke, 1997: 90). Instruments of governance use metrological regimes of accounting and measurement that are comparable across widely different localities to separate their connectivities from the network. The simplicity of the claim to ensure certain activities are separate from other practices is relevant as it both raises questions of

trust in an abstract system of reporting and the issue of what is not made transparent; what is left out in order to ease the movements of documentary evidence and coffee (Barry, 2005c) and to maintain the claim of sustainability's brand of 'ethics'.

Relations are made public, but the silences and elisions may speak louder than the 'facts' provided for verification and audit, particularly in a country like Guatemala with endemic corruption, insecurity and mistrust. As O'Neill (2002) relates, these systematic accountings do not eliminate the need for trust,

Unless there has been prior deception, transparency does nothing to reduce deception; and even if there has been deception, openness is not a sure-fire remedy. Increasing transparency can produce a flood of unsorted information and misinformation that provides little but confusion [...] And unless the individuals and institutions who sort, process and assess information are themselves already trusted, there is little reason to think that transparency and openness are going to increase trust. Transparency can encourage people to be less honest, so increasing deception and reducing reasons for trust: those who know that *everything* they say or write is to be made public may massage the truth (O'Neill, 2002: 70).

In complying with the call to make certain transactions transparent, operators assume and consumers trust that certifications and ethics circulate and perform as prescribed. Actors and actions that do not necessarily fit the ethical ideology may need to be altered in order to maintain the veneer. To what extent, then, are the relations that become transparent "visibly invisible" (Barry, 2005c: 2)? One wonders what is not said in order to ease the movements of documentary evidence and coffee, thereby relegating certain information to the margins (Foucault, 1979). With references originating in transnational ideas of sustainability, what we come to 'see' through transparency, or even in a visit to a farm, we filter through a desire for particular ethics that cannot account for mediations in practice⁸⁶.

⁸⁶ Sustainable coffee buyers and producers will even go further, beyond the level of documentation and directly to the farm. 'Site visits' by importers located in consuming countries that buy and sell on the

What follows illustrates questions of transparency through two examples from Guatemala. The first is the claim to transparency by Fairtrade, who popularised this notion but now finds it difficult to enact it in Guatemala among the experts and non-experts who need to account for their claims and decisions. The second illustrates Anacafé's *Green Book* as an example of the production of new and differentiated sustainable coffee models subverting the dictated regimes of certifications but vying for market traction. This *Green Book*, by imitating the references and conditions of 'sustainability', provides an example of how sustainability performs – it does have affects – but not necessarily those we might assume⁸⁷. Coffee professionals make certain practices transparent to the public while choosing not to expose other relations that may not seem so ethical in a re-fashioning of Guatemala's coffee production to reflect the easily referenced and marketable ethics of sustainability.

Fairtrade in Guatemala

Arguably, Fairtrade introduced the concept of transparency in its alternative trade model for coffee. The alternative mode of connectivity (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997) necessary to the Fairtrade system turns on eliminating extra nodes in the supply network. The

sustainability market are becoming increasingly popular. This raises another issue of transparency in relation to the construction of space and specificity. Transparency, as noted above, relates to the transnational references of the global coffee market whereas the stories told through transparency rely on material enactments at a local level across many different nation states. Visitors come to witness these enactments; but one wonders what they see and how they make sense of these practices. Despite being in the country at the local, this observing eye is part of the transnational references of what sustainability should look like rather than situated within the local specificity. One looks for indications of 'sustainability' and they are filtered by the institutionalised definitions that require straightforward documentation and do not always account for mediations in practice.

⁸⁷ Cf. Bell (2007) on the critique of performativity as preformism wherein, "the real is thought to be the image of, or to resemble, the possible that it realizes" (106). She argues, following Deleuze, that "performativity is *pre*formativity wherever analysis claims to describe the idea(l)-form that the subject is said to imitate or instantiate" (106). She posits an alternative account of difference in which, "life is not passive adaptation to the activity of the external environment but is itself an active response, a differentiation" (108).

guaranteed price relies on the apparatus of transparent product movement; consumer buy-in to this tracking is the connection to the producer through integration of similar ethics and desires. Fairtrade's alternative politics and economies of transparency work to include the excluded practices and people in accounts of the conventional global capitalist market. In this ethical rendering, where the conventional market is obscure and profit-oriented, transparency means visibility and social responsibility. Where the conventional market works on secrecy and making information unknowable so that certain people benefit over others, Fairtrade is expected to make transactions and decisions knowable and the actors accountable. This rests on the ability of the actors involved to act ethically despite the pressures and prerogatives of the conventional market (Fridell, 2007a)

The assumption of transparency, however, belies a belief that what one will find in the country of production are people ready to be ethical and raises two inter-related issues. First, as Barry, drawing on Mitchell, asserts, "although the market economy operates through its demarcation from what it is not [...] [in this case opaque, exploitative, profit-oriented], what is excluded is also internal to the market" (Barry, 2005c: 4). One finds a problem when the information necessary to maintain transparency is undesirable to the construction of an alternative ethical market ideology. Exploitation and profit-oriented business practices circulate across and through the messy assemblages of both the global market and Guatemala and one cannot easily bracket these actions from the ethical market. Second, the processes of ensuring transparency raise the question of what becomes invisible to maintain both the ideology and existing contracts. Maintaining alternative pathways and the storyline of Fairtrade requires some secrecy because the conventional market is never straightforwardly (un)ethical. The independent auditors do not raise the question of what is made public in the service of transparency but, year on year certify that

all actors are in compliance. The examples detailed below illustrate the tenuous relationship between notions of transparency and Fairtrade networks in Guatemala.

Secrecy is necessary to some of the existing circulations of Fairtrade Certified coffee in Guatemala and the example below illustrates this commitment to maintaining the veneer of knowability and the limited potential of trust in local mediations. Consider, for example, Colombian-born Gonzalo Cardona, who is the Veterinarios Sin Fronteras (VSF) Coordinator of operations for Sololá region, Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala. In 2000 at the height of the coffee crisis, VSF provided technical and monetary assistance to eight organisations that provide processing and marketing support for farmers in the Atitlán area. There are 208 producers on roughly 100 hectares of land, with about five *cuadras*⁸⁸ per *finca*⁸⁹. Seven out of the eight organisations are organic and Fairtrade Certified. Organics are not bringing the value added they once were and this is a problem for farmers struggling with the conversion from conventional to organic practices. When farmers switch to organic pesticides and fertilisers their productivity drops by half. It is possible to retrieve on average 25% of production over five years but the trees will never return to their original yield⁹⁰. The farmer may increase profits with more hands on attention to detail and quality improvement but Cardona relates that in recent years there is little to no benefit to the organic certifications with premiums low and falling⁹¹. He suggests that farmers should focus more on Fairtrade and return to conventional (i.e. non-organic) growing conditions.

⁸⁸ One *cuadra* is roughly equal to 80m²

⁸⁹ *Finca*, Spanish for estate, is the common term for a medium or large farm producing coffee. I use it interchangeably with farm in this chapter.

⁹⁰ Field notes, NGO supporting farmers with technical assistance, 21 Feb 2007

⁹¹ See Juliette Jowit, "Shoppers lose their taste for organic foods", *The Guardian*, 29 August 2008.

Despite these suggestions, Cordona indicates there are difficulties with Fairtrade supply networks. With current market prices hovering around the same as the Fairtrade minimum price in 2007, and prices rising to record highs shortly thereafter, *coyotes*, the intermediaries, are offering the same price as Fairtrade outside of the Fairtrade system. *Coyotes* arrive at the farm and offer cash in hand to the farmer for coffee cherry⁹². As discussed above, usually the farmer brings the cherry to the cooperative and the cooperative, along with dedicated organisations, manage the processing of the coffee for sale. Payments eventually flow back to the farmer⁹³. Of course, these farmers have contracts with their cooperatives that, in turn, have contracts with NGO-owned *beneficios* to process the coffee for Fairtrade Certified sale to their contracted buyers. The eight organisations in this example manage two *beneficios*⁹⁴. They have relationships with the cooperatives and negotiate contracts to Fairtrade Certified buyers based on probable harvest from cooperative members. The costs to run the *beneficios* are rising and farmers are not delivering their (Fairtrade) coffee because they sell their coffee directly, leaving the eight organisations unable to fulfil their contracts.

In the absence of certified coffee, Cordona relates that many of the organisations purchase uncertified coffee from informal pickers⁹⁵. These organisations cannot afford the loss of faith and commitment if they fail to meet contracts. The Fairtrade buyers and support organisations appeal to the farmers for commitment and respect; when prices were down in

⁹² Coffee grows as a cherry, also called *maduro* in Guatemala. Farmers who do not have any processing abilities need to rely on a buyer or an organisation to process *maduro* to parchment and then to *oro*, or 'green' coffee for export.

⁹³ As mentioned above, Fairtrade raised the premium to 10 cents, causing more difficulty for the already struggling cooperatives to return that premium to farmers. One informant says that now the cooperative is at a 10 cent disadvantage to the *coyote* instead of 5 cents. Field notes, 3 April 2007.

⁹⁴ *Beneficios* loosely translate as processing mills, meaning the set of buildings and technologies needed to process coffee from *maduro* to *oro*, cherry to green.

⁹⁵ See Renard (2005) and Consumers International *From Bean to Cup* (2005).

the crisis⁹⁶ they paid double the market rate and provided necessary services. Now producers should fulfil the commitment and accommodate Fairtrade. As a response, Cordona suggests the need to return to conventional coffee rather than organic and a re-kindling of belief in the potential of Fairtrade. Fairtrade offers the most protection but also relies on a concept of support and trust between Fairtrade buyers and producers that, Cordona relates “is tenuous at best on all sides of the equation”⁹⁷. Fairtrade professionals walk a fine line in the unsteady balance between acts of deception, and the desire to maintain trust in the model and the process (O'Neill, 2002).

A second example of negotiating transparency happens at the next level of management, the Federation of Cooperatives of Coffee in Guatemala (Fedecocagua) where secrecy limits the potential for visibility but also brings into focus the particularities of Guatemalan history, economies and politics. Fedecocagua supports small producer cooperatives through technical, financial and marketing support, and is the self-proclaimed “voice of the small farmer”. Producer cooperatives, some Fairtrade Certified but also other certified and non-certified cooperatives, use Fedecocagua’s services to process and export coffee⁹⁸. Fairtrade suspended Fedecocagua from the registry after the 2007 harvest forbidding any contract negotiations between Fairtrade certified cooperatives and buyers for six months. A representative at Fedecocagua divulges the problem of transparency; the suspension responds to accusations that they are not making public their coffee suppliers and buyers.

⁹⁶ After the dissolution of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989, coffee flooded the markets and the price dropped far below production costs creating a widespread crisis. Sale of Guatemalan coffee fell significantly, as detailed in chapter one.

⁹⁷ Field notes, 21 Feb 2007

⁹⁸ There is a brief history of Fedecocagua in chapter one. Today, Fedecocagua is the umbrella organisation for almost 20,000 farmers belonging to 40 affiliated organisations. They provide a number of services including access to a credit scheme, technical support, transport, warehousing, and the purchase, processing and export of members’ coffee. Field notes, Representative of Fedecocagua, 17 May 2007. There are only two large umbrella organisations in Guatemala that deal with Fairtrade cooperatives, Fedecocagua and Manos Campesinos.

Fedecocauga argues that this is an issue of privacy in that cooperatives and farmers should be able to maintain their private affairs; remarkable in light of Fairtrade's model of transparency⁹⁹. The six-month suspension hardly seems a significant punishment as it runs after the harvest and delivery of contracts. A representative of Fedecocagua believes that the suspension is a result of competition and jealousy. He says other Fairtrade organisations in Guatemala do not want them to have a monopoly so the certification operators and cooperatives spread rumours that they are not being honest¹⁰⁰.

Frustratingly, with suspensions and squabbling, certifiers and certified haggle over the smallest injustice and farmers do not adequately benefit from the value-added possibilities of certifications¹⁰¹. Within the complicated system of transparency, the methods of audit, accountability and governance become spaces of contestation among administrators. Meanwhile the farmers wait for the squabbling to end so that they might benefit from these relations. Fairtrade operators are entangled in administrative messiness rather than directing efforts towards the 'plight' of the farmer. The focus on the administrative workings threatens the potential of performance. It "endangers itself because it invests too heavily in shallow rituals of verification at the expense of other forms of organisational intelligence. In providing a lens for regulatory thought and action audit *threatens to become a form of learned ignorance*" (Power, 1997: 123, my emphasis).

A Fairtrade green coffee buyer suggests the endemic mistrust in Guatemala as reason for the disagreements¹⁰². The thirty-six year civil war from 1960 to 1996 and endemic

⁹⁹ Field notes, Fedecocagua representative, 17 May 2007.

¹⁰⁰ Field notes, Fedecocagua representative, 17 May 2007.

¹⁰¹ A coffee trader suggests, "No one in coffee in Guatemala likes them [Fedecocagua]. The CEO of Fedecocauga used to work here and was fired for unethical behaviour" Field notes, May 2007.

¹⁰² Field notes, coffee buyer, 24 Mar 2007

corruption leave a mark on interpersonal relations. Many say that farmers think only in the short-term and are not able to conceive of long-term commitments¹⁰³, blaming the pervasive lack of trust in others for the mistrust of Fairtrade. Despite implying the importance of relations between people, audits of transparency have little to do with trust. It is an abstract system of reporting that is not necessarily equal to its operators or key components (O'Neill, 2002; Power, 1997). Rather, transparency is about building a network of trust across various actors and processes as a way to identify a commitment to principles through multiple landscapes (Power, 1997: 123).

The process therefore relies on trust between those who believe in the label and those who sell certified coffee and confidence that certifications perform as market devices (Callon *et al.*, 2007). When actors place blame on the culture of a country where Fairtrade operates, it assumes that those located within the country entrusted with supplying or verifying information are somehow separate from this cultural phenomenon. One would have to imagine that they align themselves with Fairtrade rather than with their country. On the other hand, it could assume that participants in ethically transparent networks would have to significantly distance themselves from Guatemala to be a reliable participant in this network. Therefore, to be a legitimate participant, actors must adapt their behaviour strategically in response to the audit process, thereby running the risk of becoming less trustworthy (whether or not they already were untrustworthy because Guatemalan). In both cases there is a requisition to be separate from the messiness of local negotiations in order for transparency to perform.

¹⁰³ This claim and assessment of Guatemalan culture shows up multiple times across the fieldwork notes from 2006 and 2007.

As in the case of Fedecocagua, making arguments for privacy is tantamount to secrecy in a system based on openness (Barry, 2005c; Power, 1997: 135). In this example, as Barry notes, “transparency did not straightforwardly reduce the importance of secrecy, but heightened it” (Barry, 2005c: 4). Thus, the reliance on auditing transparency in the Fairtrade structure results in obscuring of choices and decisions, hardly living up to its claims of fairness. Blame falls to the farmers, who appear untrustworthy amidst the squabbling cooperatives, organisations, certifications and traders. No one appears accountable to the specific (fair) ethics possibly because they are so disconnected from the mediations in practice. For example, the Guatemalan *Green Book* illustrates how actors seek ways to enter the market for sustainable coffee without needing to consider the administrative and ideological problems of belonging to one or another certification.

The Green Book

For transparency to perform as an indication of ethical practices, operators of sustainable coffee models need to imagine there is a straightforward supply chain through which both coffee and ‘ethical practices’ move in tandem. In this integration certain practices become visible and accountable, meeting the criteria of social responsibility, environmental sustainability and economic viability. The existence of shade trees or efficient agricultural practices, attention to water sources and pollutants or chain of custody traceability all currently garner a price premium on the coffee market. They gain visibility through acts of transparency and audit. Through consistent use of these practices and common language, various agents can define themselves as purveyors of sustainable coffee. These coffees then proliferate as a “dynamic but indivisible entity” (Lury, 2004) based on distinctions within a limited sphere of difference. It is not surprising, then, that coffee professionals might choose to enter this space without needing the certifications; as long as

they make clear their relation to the ready identifiers of sustainability. For example, Anacafé, the national organisation of coffee producers in Guatemala, has recently attempted to define Guatemala as a sustainable and conscientious coffee growing region as a whole, distinct from the operations of certifications that govern production of particular forms. This framing of practices in Guatemala to fit with indicators of sustainability is subject to leakage and overflows (Callon, 1998a).

In 2008 representatives from Guatemala's Anacafé unveiled a *Green Book*, a comprehensive guide to how "drinking Guatemalan coffee is helping nature". It explains,

Guatemalan coffees are 98% shade grown, counting more than thirty-eight million shade and coffee trees. The resulting coffee forest extends approximately 270,000 hectares and makes up 6.4 percent of the national forest cover. As expected, Guatemala's coffee forests bring environmental benefits, like protecting soils, biodiversity, and water resources, and help in diminishing the harming effects of global warming¹⁰⁴.

Through the *Green Book*, coffee professionals inside of Guatemala can use the language and display the practices that comply with sustainability and subvert the costs and procedures of certification systems. They do this by making information readily available to the coffee buying public that displays and highlights what Guatemalan coffee professionals consider environmentally and socially sustainable practices. This translates to a country that is responsible for its natural 'resources' and conscientious of environmental sustainability.

Where they bring these ethical practices to the attention of the reader of the *Green Book*, other conditions remain invisible (Barry, 2005c). Social, economic and political experiences, while significant to the existence of humans and non-human nature and

¹⁰⁴ See www.guatemalancoffees.com.

indeed issues of ethical import (i.e. treatment of indigenous peoples, land displacement and histories of slave labour) are there, but only through their absence (Barry, 2005c; Foucault, 1979). This is a noisy silence because those who write the script of the *Green Book* are aware of the complicated locality of Guatemalan coffee production; they are in fact deeply intertwined with the economies, politics and histories and part of the messy assemblage of coffee. In particular, they focus on shade grown coffee as an attempt to make transparent the actions of coffee growing that are “good for nature”. At the same time, the cover of shade provides a useful metaphor for how the visible enactment of ethical practices is equally shading other less value-added activities.

Unveiling the *Green Book* at the 2008 SCAE conference, Christian Rasch, Chairman of Anacafé appeals to the audience, “We produce something good for the environment. Coffee can and should make a difference and they should reward us”¹⁰⁵. Two years earlier in June 2006, members of the sustainability commission gathered around the table at Anacafé. They were considering the development of a base set of standards, a Guatemalan certification that would identify their coffees as meeting the current requirements of sustainable coffee without third-party certifications¹⁰⁶. One disgruntled man complained about the high costs of becoming a certified farm and the lack of return for producers. Farmers produce far more certified coffee than is sold as such and the growers, with the costs and directives of third-party standards and independent audits, are not capitalising on the high costs of meeting the requirements. With over 17,000 wet mills in the country, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tracking the exact farm origin of coffee and 98% of coffee grown under the protection of shade, Guatemala is in a position to lead the world on transparency, environmental sustainability and social investment in the coffee

¹⁰⁵ Field notes, Anacafé representative at the SCAE conference, 19 June 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Field notes, Anacafé board members, June 2006

industry¹⁰⁷. The high number of wet mills allows for greater chain of custody management, tracking beans from farm to processing mill for maximum visibility and allowing separate packaging to suit buyers' needs. GIS tracking systems, they argued, provide traceability and commercial transparency allowing buyers to trace coffee back to its origin and ensuring that farmers receive premium prices. While certifications and indicators of environmental and social sustainability were growing in popularity many farmers in Guatemala, already in compliance with these standards, remain unable to obtain the premium¹⁰⁸. Anacafé wanted to frame recognisable and popular ethical practices to make them visible to buyers (Callon, 1998b). Intelligent and well organised despite domination by a few very wealthy families, the Guatemalan coffee experts realised the potential of current ethical coffee and sustainable practices.

A brief overview of the *Green Book* is as follows. After setting out the regions and growing conditions of Guatemalan coffee, as well as its recognition as a producer of high quality beans¹⁰⁹, the book then discusses the importance and types of shade growing practices commonly found in Guatemala. Shade growing practices form the basis of the rest of the document; paying particular attention to the coffee forest, meaning the forest created by the shade trees that are shielding the coffee trees below, creating a densely forested landscape wherever coffee is grown. These all contribute to replenishing Guatemala's abundant water supply. More than 85% of coffee farms lie within Guatemala's primary water recharge areas¹¹⁰ and the forests help to clean and manage watersheds. Further, forests maintain biodiversity and create a "symbiotic relationship" of

¹⁰⁷ Field notes, Anacafé board members, 19 June 2006

¹⁰⁸ Field notes, Anacafé board members, 19 June 2006

¹⁰⁹ As discussed in previous chapters, these indicators are based on SCAA point-systems and current notions of quality circulating in the coffee market.

¹¹⁰ Green Book, p. 27

sustainable development¹¹¹ and the book nods to a relatively benign but shade-focused certification by quoting a research scientist at the Smithsonian MBC. Finally, the *Green Book* mentions the role of coffee forests and abundant water supply for Guatemala's potential as a supplier of alternative energy. According to the Guatemala National Institute for Electrical Development (INDE), the country currently has the capacity to generate geothermal and hydroelectric energy up to 1,706 MW, a potential that would relieve the country of its reliance on fossil fuels¹¹² and generate income.

The *Green Book* pays particular attention to shade growing and its benefits. As discussed above, shade growing increases biodiversity and bird life and provides cover for the soil. The leaves act as filters in the rainy season, "intercepting rainfall and slowly releasing it, [...], preventing erosion and maintaining humidity in the soil"¹¹³. It further protects the coffee beans, allowing them to mature slowly and, according to current indicators, improving the taste in the cup. Its canopy serves as a protection for workers and the dense forest covering the daily activities as the coffee bean matures. It provides, then, necessary protection from sunlight and from visibility.

Growing coffee under shade on the slopes and fields of Guatemala did not start from an ethical impulse akin to the social, environmental or economic ideology of sustainability. The driving force was not about conserving the soil, providing and keeping bird habitats or necessarily about balanced agricultural practices and biodiversity. Rather, farmers grew coffee this way because of the climate and economic conditions; coffee trees need protection from the intense ultraviolet light and tropical downpours. Trees that provide

¹¹¹ Green Book, p. 32

¹¹² Green Book, p. 45

¹¹³ Green Book, p. 16

shade for coffee trees also often provide other forms of income through small-scale fruit sales or the sale of firewood from fast regenerating trees¹¹⁴. Coffee farmers are not necessarily natural (i.e. innately) conservationists (Lyon, 2006b); these actions derive from necessity. Framing growing conditions into actions that add value transforms the traditional or conventional material practices, applying systems of measurement and calculation to make these actions quantifiable. Actions are disentangled from necessity and entangled in new configurations that make them visible as ethically construed (Callon, 2007: 339) allowing Guatemala to access this market without certification. Equally, it paves the way for a potential Guatemalan certification better able to address the often transitory constituents of a value added approach¹¹⁵.

Like the visible cover provided by the shade growing practices so central to the *Green Book*, Anacafé makes visible some things and conceals others, and re-aligns data to translate multiple practices into ready indicators of sustainable coffee. Reading the book's treatment of forests and water provides one example. Guatemala's coffee forests cover more than 270,000 hectares of land and make up 6.4% of the national forest¹¹⁶. At the SCAE presentation, Rasch insists that Guatemala is "not just producing coffee, we are also producing a forest"¹¹⁷. This forest supplies a wealth of "goods and services" to the environment and people while supplying close to three billion cubic meters of water yearly to the hydrologic cycle¹¹⁸. This serves in the cleansing and production of "Guatemala's abundant water supply". While this process identifies key environmental inputs it is also,

¹¹⁴ Field notes, 28 Feb 2007. One family interviewed gain an extra income from the produce of shade trees. In an informal conversation with a family who provides a laundry service in Antigua, they revealed that the family have plots of land where they grow coffee. They have had a difficult time meeting their costs and one of the solutions is to plant trees for firewood. These trees have annual regeneration; providing shade to grow coffee and providing firewood after the harvest is complete. It is a very common way to supplement income.

¹¹⁵ Field notes, Anacafé, June 2006.

¹¹⁶ Green Book p. 21

¹¹⁷ SCAE conference, 19 June 2008

¹¹⁸ Green Book p. 26

like the telling of shade growing above, a story that disentangles from the political and historical renderings of the relationship between humans and non-human nature in Guatemala.

Many of the facts in the *Green Book* centre on regions of Guatemala that are traditionally the site of political tensions and inequalities in centuries of unrest between rich landowners and the indigenous populations. The *Green Book*, however, never mentions these histories in its explanation of environmental practice and yet the tense relationships between government, industry and the indigenous populations rumbles beneath the surface in the book as it consistently refers to indigenous-inhabited lands (Peet and Watts, 2004; Peluso and Watts, 2001b). For example, the country's main river basins are located in the mountainous regions of Guatemala where 22 out of 23 indigenous cultures currently reside¹¹⁹ and where 85% of Guatemala's coffee is grown. This is a contentious space of poverty, cruel labour practices and mistreatment of the country's people. Coffee cultivation since the 19th century relied on the seasonal work of indigenous populations to harvest coffee cherry and manage coffee trees. In times of crisis, landowners have been known to abandon their farms leaving their workers without work or payment (Gallini, 2004; Lovell, 2001; McCreery, 1976). In one of these areas in the Alta Verapaz region, landowners abandoned coffee *fincas* leaving thousands of people without income¹²⁰. Disputes persist between the *fincas* owners and the indigenous who are demanding remuneration¹²¹. Thinking in line with irreversibility and path-dependency, these 'past' actions are always part of present formations (Callon, 1991).

¹¹⁹ Perfil Ambiental de Guatemala, conference, 20 Feb 2007; Field notes, 20 Feb 2007

¹²⁰ Field notes, activists in Guatemala, 2 May 2007

¹²¹ Field notes, activist in Guatemala, 3 May 2007

Further, the *Green Book* does not mention large corporations that are proposing new industry, the presence of mining companies, the effects of monoculture agriculture and deforestation for sugar cane plantations that destroy the soil¹²² all of which are now necessary to Guatemala's economy (cf. Heynen *et al.*, 2007). For example, at the SCAE talk, Rasch notes plans to channel the water supply to hydroelectric projects to reduce the country's oil dependence and allow Guatemala to find a niche in the renewable energy sector (cf. UNDP, 2007) as is also noted above in the *Green Book*. Underlying the claim might be the proposed Xalalá Dam, the project of Guatemala's National Institute of Electrification (INDE) to attract foreign investment in renewable energy. Reports indicate potential flooding of the homes of over 2,000 people along 26 miles of the Chixoy River and 10 miles of the Copón, putting over 30 villages under water (McGahan, 2008). Representatives of INDE ignored the active opposition of locals. These types of choices follow on the well-documented history of land reform and indigenous displacement in Guatemala, particularly in relation to growing and exporting coffee (Gallini, 2004; McCreery, 1976; Schlesinger and Kinzer, 2005). There is currently no relocation plan or compensation package proposed. Although "coffee forests cleanse the water, making it drinkable for people in the surrounding areas" (Anacafé, 2008: 26), one can scarcely miss the *SalvaVidas*¹²³ trucks in Guatemala City carrying bottled water to the homes and businesses of the middle and upper classes. Water is a major business and vast engineering programmes are not generally acceptable versions of environmental care.

The messiness of everyday interaction with the bodies and spaces of law, land, histories and geographies are a constant rumble beneath the neat storyline of sustainable coffee. In

¹²² Field notes, Guatemalan food sovereignty activist, 20 Feb 2007

¹²³ *SalvaVidas* is the largest purified water distributor in Guatemala. The powerful Castillo Brothers Corporation owns *SalvaVidas*.

drawing a supply network of coffee and ethics the containment of the complicated mediations of sustainability in practice emerge. For example, ethics in Guatemala could mean attending to the vast inequalities between ethnic identities and the pressures of the export economy on which Guatemala relies. For now, there is a clear relation between current premium-obtaining actions and the items Anacafé focused on in the book. To connect with the recognisable story of sustainable coffee, they place the messy relations in the margins where they become ‘visibly invisible’, leading one to wonder if sustainable coffees are necessarily about ethics.

Many of the sustainable conditions outlined are relevant to certified farms and certifications. Where farms already have certifications, the branding of Guatemala as “good for nature” will draw on the existing practices on certified farms and propel the approach forward. Guatemala’s largest coffee customer is Starbucks, so it seems likely that Anacafé would work in conjunction with CAFE Practices, for example, rather than against certifications. The ultimate goal is for farmers to receive a premium without the administrative costs and problems associated with certifications. Ideally, the *Green Book* will circulate with the multi-dimensional objectivity of the integrated sustainable coffee brand. The board members at Anacafé dislike certifications but at the same time gain advantage from them. In this we begin to see the germ of difference, of invention. As I will discuss in the next chapter, producers and production areas are not simply receivers of sustainable initiatives but also create local debate and contestation about their challenges and potential. They are engaged and making choices. Maybe this will become the locus of invention that Tarde recognises in his consideration of imitation and difference, “[...] for Tarde, imitation was never exact. It always contained a potential surplus which allowed an

event or an action to deviate into invention [...]. Thus every event contained the seed of something else” (Barry and Thrift, 2007: 517).

4.5 Conclusion

Sustainable coffee schemes work through a conceptual connection between the producer and consumer across geographical distances, offering an alternative to markets that do not account for costs to people and nature. Certifications grew in popularity as global events put enhanced market value on ethical consumerism (Barnett *et al.*, 2005) and efforts increased to provide protection and poverty alleviation for farmers most in need. Fairtrade Certified led the way ensuring a better deal for farmers when prices were at an all time low (Goodman, 2004). Others imitated, creating a multiplicity of certifications attending to social and agricultural processes of coffee production. As Tarde (2007/1902) argues, imitation produces differentiation, and in this multi-dimensional space, certification systems grew rapidly, improved visibility as a pertinent solution and found a niche in new modes of connectivity (Freidberg, 2004; Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). Sustainable coffees now mean the inclusion of ethics in the coffee market based on social, environmental and economic standards that should translate into material relations on the farm. Certifiers communicate their approach through labels and a focus on supply network management, and guarantee containment of sustainable coffee beans from seed to cup through audits for transparency. In principle, one expects this simple structure to bridge the disjuncture between consumer lifestyle choices and the realities of agricultural production. The coffee becomes ethical; entangled in information about the conditions of production.

Certifiers use standards, checklists, technical assistance, and systems of audit to process the presence of ethics. This paves the way for market circulation and proliferation, and provokes competition between certification schemes (Callon, 1998c). These market-driven initiatives use certifications as brands to promote consumer recognisability. While these appear to connect to actual material conditions on the farm, there is disjuncture between the labels and standards and the mediation of these material devices in practice. Understanding certifications in this way distils the potential and limitation of their structures and begs the question of what is not being publicised in these bounded spaces in the ethical flow of human and non-human interaction with coffee. As a partial response to that question this research suggests that we must look to the proliferation of multiple forms of engagement with the politics and ethics of production and consumption.

For example, where Fairtrade Certified organisations in Atitlán are unable to meet their contracts due to the interruptions of *coyotes*, Fairtrade seeks to maintain contracts with buyers rather than to rethink the strategy. This raises the problem of how morally questionable choices become decisions to maintain a veneer of ethics and why transparency is not transparent (Barry, 2005c; Freidberg, 2004; O'Neill, 2002; Power, 1997; Strathern, 2000a). Such activities potentially delegitimize transparency, but also undermine the hard work of Fairtrade-ers the world over. Blame falls to the producer's lack of trust and Guatemala's violence and exploitative relations rather than a more pertinent issue: that the Fairtrade system might not be one-size-fits-all. In this case, the system of certification obscures the conduct of the very issues it intended to address. It points to a need for approaches that may be able to incorporate local specificity, or attend to the mediations of practice.

Anacafé's *Green Book* re-frames existing practices as good for nature to allow more coffee to circulate at a premium and to subvert the costs of certification by pointing out where their practices line up with existing notions of sustainability. They are good strategists aware of the demands of the market and the needs of farmers but their choices are not necessarily about ethics as sustainability. Practices are malleable; framing them as sustainability and ethics requires a twist in the story. For example, owing to climatic and soil conditions 98% of Guatemalan coffee is shade grown while nearby Honduras grows coffee in the sun. Honduras is not able to capitalise on shade growing but this does not mean that they do not engage in other sustainable practices¹²⁴. The climate and conditions of growth dictate practices rather than an ethical (sustainable) imperative. Making certain actions visible is relative to classification fit and marketability. While focus shifts to these factors, other needs may fall away. Issues like indigenous communities who have difficulty negotiating the choices of landowners and industrial and governmental agendas, are not a focus of this framing.

There are certainly positive effects of the certifications and sustainable coffee schemes: lifting farmers from poverty, cleaning polluted water, challenging corruption, addressing crucial health and education services. Circulation of these ideas can have a positive impact on the farmer – if they can sell coffee at a premium then they consider coffee a positive part of their lives. Trees grow big and strong, farms are cared for and participant producers pay attention to their product. Access to credit at lower interest rates might follow, maybe the ability to rise out of debt and more knowledge of the product and the market. The crucial aspect, where the gains are highest, is where participants take an active interest in what they produce. Obtaining technical assistance, controlling the state

¹²⁴ Field notes, Honduran coffee technician, June 2006

of the farm, and confidence in the market are challenges for some farmers. Success in these systems often comes down to the commitment of the farmer, buyer or other organisations. We cannot assume that there will be positive outcomes simply with the injection of a particular brand of ethics into communities. It requires commitment and agency from those involved from the seed to the workers to the administration systems. Where these align with the certifications and also the local manifestations of sustainability as in the *Green Book*, new forms of compliance are established and multiple affects of certification might be realised. Agency sometimes converges with the market where it is made visible in an ethical guise.

The rise of sustainable initiatives is not necessarily positive or negative; impacts are multiple and dependent on situation and context. Recent research projects like this one infiltrate and break down the simplistic academic typology separating public from private and multi-stakeholder; providing a more complex, multi-dimensional account of the heterogeneous field of difference between different ethical sourcing models. This reveals a critique of what is left out in the relentless growth of sustainability and questions the assumptions of actions to be made visible in auditing transparency (cf. Giovannucci and Ponte, 2005; Lyon, 2006b). If transparency is not transparent, why obscure other interactions and choices?

This chapter complicates the apparatus of sustainable coffee with detailed interventions of times and spaces in Guatemala (Bingham and Thrift, 2000; Latour, 2005b; Serres and Latour, 1995). The choices made by certifications and others trying to obtain the ethical premium are market-focused. Inevitably, there are spaces and cracks through which the ethical flow is interrupted or lost, and difficulties of accountability arise (Barry, 2005c).

Research at coffee origins brings to life the producer country so it is not simply subject to the whims of the market, exploitation and violence. It is full and overflowing with everyday ethical interaction, populating relations of coffee production with lively debate and activities. Just as Mr Silva seeks “sustainable sustainability” it is possible to consider a more “transparent transparency”; why choices are made is as important as what choices are valued. In this sense, the certifications and circulation of sustainability are performative, interacting with and producing multiple unintended effects and creating local contestation (Barry, 2005b; 1998c; Callon, 2007). Local contestation leads to the proliferation of new ideas (Gibson-Graham, 2006). In this heterogeneous space, programmatic accounts may become redundant and production of new models more widely available. The germ of difference lies between the messiness of actuality and the repetition of practice.

CHAPTER FIVE: SITES OF INVENTION: VISIONS OF PRODUCER DRIVEN MODELS

5.1 Introduction

Initially there was a lot of fear and trepidation. An American burnt them about two years beforehand and this was something that I wasn't aware of. A fellow came in and said, 'grow zucchini, there is lots of money in zucchini, I'll export your zucchini and you'll make a fortune'. So they all grew zucchinis and they brought them to market for export to sell them – and he said oh, I'm sorry, those prices that I promised you were for first grade zucchini and everything that you've brought me is third-grade zucchini and I can't really pay you anything for it. So then they went to the other cooperatives [to sell their zucchini] only to discover that all of the cooperatives were actually owned by one American. They all took a bath in zucchini! All of them lost labour; some of them lost a lot of money¹.

There was a small heap of coffee at the end of the drive of this coffee producer's family home. The head of the household gestured to the coffee and noted that he will sell it to the *coyote*, an intermediary that will come by his house in search of coffee for sale. The coffee is lower grade quality and did not meet his high standards or those of his most important buyer so the producer separated it from the rest. He gestures dismissively to this coffee and says, "for Nescafé" while the family members laugh.

The distinction between the small heap of coffee for 'Nescafé' and the rest of his coffee is part of a new business model for this farmer. He and his wife, both well into their 60s, own a plot of land among the volcanoes of the Antigua Valley. Their eldest son owns a similar plot of land and the family collaborates on inputs and management. The strictly

¹ Field notes, association member, 26 April 2007.

hard bean (SHB)³ *Coffea Arabica* grown at these altitudes currently achieves a high-grade coffee ‘quality’ measurement and usually meets indicators of speciality coffee⁴. To grow SHB to this standard requires attention to detail and care for the coffee plants as well as the good fortune of planting land at high altitudes. In previous years this family would sell all of their coffee as cherry (right from the tree) to either the *coyote* or through contracts to a nearby large mill for processing and export, in the same way that they now will sell this small amount of mediocre coffee. They recently acquired the necessary tools and machinery to mill their coffee from cherry to green, to sort it and make it ready for roasting. This means that they do not need to rely on low prices from intermediaries and can manage and maintain its quality. They created a relationship with a small local buyer who privileges and pays well for coffee that meets his high standards. He works closely with this family in a relationship built on trust, respect and mutual interest in the conditions of cultivation.

This is one example of coffee farmers and coffee professionals located in Guatemala who are developing new and creative ways to grow, transport and sell coffee. There are many forms of coffee market organisation: from large scale mainstream trading and large multinational firms like Nestlé through to small traders and buyers. Many obtain some coffee based on the niche attributes that add value through sustainable practices or attention to the specificities of the coffee beans. This chapter argues that effectivity, efficiency, approach, outcomes, costs and benefits of various models are subject to debate among producer country professionals and create oppositions through which new things

³ Distinctions between bean types detailed in chapter one, note 11.

⁴ Usually speciality coffee is subject to grading based on a 100-point scale developed from the Specialty Coffee of America Association’s guidelines. See chapter seven for detailed discussion.

might arise. In *Laws of Imitation*, Tarde (1890/1903) distinguishes between three forms of opposition: opposition of series, of degree, and of sign. As Born (2009) puts it,

Oppositions of series involve heterogeneous entities and result in evolution or counter-evolution. Those of degree involve homogeneous factors that entail increase or diminution. Oppositions of sign, finally, consist in entities engaged in the negation of each other [..]. Tarde gives as examples phenomena such as affirmation and rejection, desire and repugnance, or the collective conflicts that occasion war (237).

There is a dynamic aspect to this form of relations across numerous material and human assemblages (Barry and Thrift, 2007). Through even infinitesimal moments of opposition, even a hesitation in the daily enactments of production, producers are inventing new coffee networks through informed affective response to co-existent market forms. This chapter argues that accounts of small coffee producers as passive recipients of sustainable initiatives, as discussed in chapter four, ignore the opposition among farmers in Guatemala. Local coffee professionals are engaged and knowledgeable participants in developing and encouraging new ways to grow and sell coffee. They are creating new associations amid the technological assemblages of coffee cultivation.

Tarde (1890/1903) asserts that the act of invention is a continual process of imitation, opposition and adaptation. As Clark introduces the idea,

These imitations spread [..] like the ripples on the surface of a pond, regularly progressing toward the limits of the system until they come into contact with some obstacle. The obstacle, however, is likely to be the imitation of some earlier invention, and when the two collide, from their opposition is likely to emerge a new product – that is, a new invention – which in turn is imitated until it too meets further obstacles, and so on, ad infinitum (Clark, 1969: 21).

In this understanding, adaptation is a process of repetitive meetings that produce superior repetitions in the form of inventions. Thus repetition produces difference, as Deleuze relates, “*difference appears between two kinds of repetition*, and each repetition

presupposes a difference of the same degree as itself” (Deleuze, 1994: 158,n3). To illustrate, as discussed in chapter four, multiple forms of sustainable initiatives are rapidly proliferating. Standardisation of what it means to be ethical via globally defined sustainability measures leads to imitation and then competition for scarce resources in this niche value adding market. Global and local operators respond to the desire for ethical responsibility and write onto the coffee this particular ethical impulse in a self-fulfilling cycle; desire and form as one object.

Moreover, the ways that Guatemalan (and other) actors disassemble the practices that count as sustainability and re-assemble them to meet their own requirements is an imitative process that produces difference. There are very different relations behind the various sustainable coffees that reflect the multiple spaces, times and locations of coffee assemblages and are not limited to certifications. Here, “*Repetition is between two differences*; it is what enables us to pass from one order of difference to another: from external to internal difference” (Deleuze, 1994: 158, n3). Repetition, then, “adds and integrates the small variations, always with a view to discovering the ‘differently different’” (Deleuze, 1994: 158, n3). There is what Deleuze considers,

swarms of difference that actualize themselves into specific forms of identity. Those swarms [...] are of the world, as material as the identities they form, not as identities but as difference. From their place within identities, these swarms of difference assure that the future will be open to novelty, to new identities and new relationships among them (May, 2005: 114).

In the assemblages of coffee in Guatemala, the small variations, interferences and interruptions produce difference and point to the potential for novel creation in their temporal associations.

Interruptions to the repetition of coffee cultivation by, for example, NGOs intervening in the process, a new intermediary, the communication of ideas like sustainability, a (re)valuing of the specificities of particular coffees, changes to the conditions of global exchange or ideas in the mind of the grower all produce difference among the daily actions of coffee production. These momentary openings are “the little inventions and interferences between imitative currents” (Deleuze, 1994: 158, n3). Repetition here integrates the small variations into inventions. Thus difference is creative and novel; actualised in the mobile associations of ideas and techniques, mechanisms and operations, global economy and local histories and geographies. In the economy of coffee, the seed of invention comes from sometimes unrelated prior associations and points towards future potential (Lepinay, 2007: 545) on a horizontal field of difference (Foucault, 1972). Differentiation is positive because it allows for the continuous production of the virtual. Therefore, the potential for invention is possible anywhere and is not subject to the constraints of the commonly considered production-consumption dichotomy in current renderings of the global.

Understanding invention as part of a horizontal field of difference not limited by a conceptual separation between production and consumption thus means we can view those parts of the world considered to be ‘coffee production countries’ as sites of invention. This view involves bringing into the active economic frame the coffee producers (those small farmers and other farmers on whom the ‘problems’ of poverty are written), countries of coffee production (and all of their least desirable attributes like thirty six years of civil war, political and economic inequalities, indigenous exclusions), and, notably, the coffee itself (variable attributes, specific conditions and requiring changing organic inputs and outputs). In Guatemala, producers and other coffee professionals re-assemble the mechanisms of

coffee in their own terms and in response to both personal and country-specific values and situations as well as identification of market spaces. Significantly, producers are gaining the knowledge, technologies and expertise to interact more closely with their coffee in response to sustainability and other valued differentiations. They are a “community of practice” (Amin and Cohendet, 2004), that come together in a self-organised way based on a common interest or passion. They develop a network of human and non-human actors that create and substantiate, even if in a fluid way, the general order where ideas are shared, theories are tested, and materials can be manipulated using new or different technologies (de Laet and Mol, 2000)

This chapter begins with an account of the techniques of coffee cultivation. I first describe the translation of coffee cherry into dry green beans ready for roasting. Although the activities of ‘processing’ or milling coffee are crucial to its sale and consumption, they are not usually included as part of an explanation of the networks of coffee. Here I insist that they need to be so included. I describe these technologies of processing coffee as well as typical networks of exchange that move coffee from seed to export in Guatemala. The description situates what follows in the next section: three new approaches to growing, processing and selling coffee. A family, a cooperative and an association of small farmers are all examples of coffee producers who are changing the relationship to their livelihood. They are inventing new ways to access co-existent markets for ‘ethics’ and quality coffee and are acquiring and sharing the technologies and knowledges of coffee and markets. I relate these producers to one buyer, Fernando’s Kaffee, to describe the market for freshly roasted, local coffee where consumers can trace the relationship to the producer. However inventive a farmer may be, s/he requires a buyer who shares her/his sentiments and commitment to the coffee. The mediations and negotiations of the times and spaces of

Guatemala described in the section entitled ‘mediations’ elaborates some of the risks and difficulties of invention. The final section points to the potential for new economic subjectivities as part of an important re-envisioning towards attaining sustainability on different and multiple registers.

5.2 Process and networks

Coffee production is the movement of people and ideas enacted daily and repeated annually in the growing, harvesting and selling of this desirable object (Callon, 1998a; Callon, 1998c; Latour, 2005b). Daily enactments adhere to the orderings of the market as well as create potential disruptions through the mobile and constant creativity (imitation and adaptation) they can engender. Tarde’s account of the economy, discussed by Barry and Thrift, asserts that, “imitation was never exact. It always contained a potential surplus which allowed an event or an action to deviate into invention (Lepinay, this volume). Thus every event contained the seed of something else. [...]” (Barry and Thrift, 2007: 517). We must look closely at the spaces of coffee production and critically at the technologies of, and producer interaction with, coffee cultivation. Among the historical, economic, political and material complexities is the germ of invention (Lepinay, 2007: 545). Thus, understanding the relations of production and sale in Guatemala, as well as the material manipulations of the coffee itself, is crucial to considering imitation, difference and invention.

Network (5)

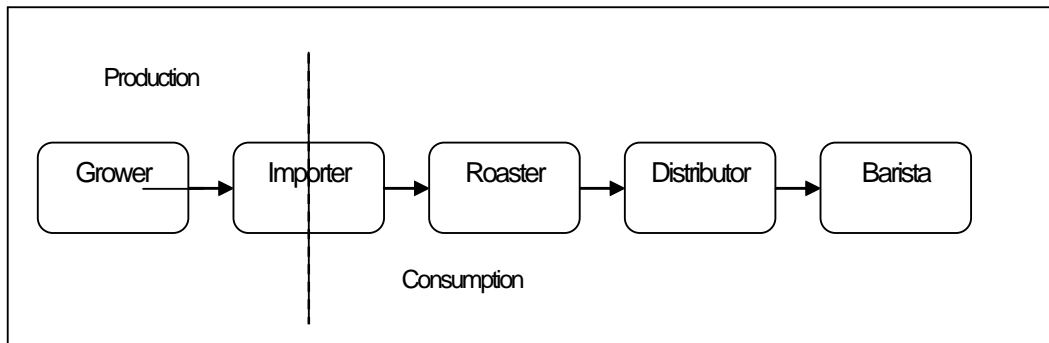
Legends convey the history of coffee and its power to enliven the spirit. They speak of goats and goat herders dancing together under the influence of coffee cherries in 9th Century Yemen, and of monks making a strange sticky ball of coffee cherry and seeds to

keep them studying well into the night (Ukers, 1922; Ukers, 1948; Wild, 2005). It did not take long for people to realise that the energy drug lay deep in the seeds, and they were best accessible if separated from the unpleasant outer cherry. They removed the sticky mucilage and washed and dried the beans. Then cooked the beans, ground them to a fine powder and infused with hot water to enjoy as a drink (Ellis, 2005; Hattox, 1985; Pendergrast, 2000; Ukers, 1922). Thus the development of a routine of mechanized processes was required to make this object into a digestible and desirable form for humans. From hands on modes of processing through to technologically advanced approaches, these manipulations continue today.

Although the material transformations are necessary for consumption, the relations of processing coffee from cherry to green beans and ready to roast are rarely included in accounts of coffee supply networks. One coffee trader visualises the network of coffee as a five-part supply relationship (Figure 5). He indicates the grower, importer, roaster, distributor and barista (or retailer)⁵ as the five key hinges through which coffee moves. In this visualisation, the grower is located in 'production countries' and the importers straddle the borders between production and consumption. Large importers often have an office locally; small importers will sometimes travel to the regions or employ the services of a travelling importer. Roaster, distributor and barista tend to be located in areas of consumption except when the coffee remains in the origin country for local use⁶.

⁵ This coffee trader handles high grade quality coffee. His reference to a barista rather than a retailer indicates his particular customer base. Chapter seven details the market distinction of quality and high grade quality.

⁶ Field notes, Coffee professional in UK, 27 February 2008.



Source: Coffee trader, London UK

Figure 5: Five part coffee supply network (conventional market linear conception)

While a five-part model provides a neat diagram of the major moments of connectivity, there are in fact numerous human and non-human technologies necessary to the transportation of coffee, and it is not linear in practice. Another coffee professional suggests that, “Coffee can have as many as 14 or 15 links in the network depending on how you count them”⁷. This depends not only on how you count them, but also the amount of reliance each ‘link’ has on the others: how much each link can do on its own. Gaining control of particular sections among and between the five hinges can radically change the potential benefits of coffee production and transportation. In particular, this chapter writes back into the model the activities, metrological processes, technologies, materials and humans that inform coffee from cherry to green. Processing always takes place in the country of production and rarely achieves notice by the consuming public. Yet processing is a crucial economic node: usually the importer of coffee owns the processing, or in some way the processor of coffee is the one responsible for the signing and delivering of contracts to coffee importers across the world⁸. Thus processing coffee is an important area of profit potential. The approach here is a re-assembly: by writing back in these associations, the spaces of negotiation become visible. Equally, in this re-

⁷ Field notes, Coffee professional in Guatemala, 26 April 2007.

⁸ Field notes, Coffee professional in the UK, 27 February 2008.

assembly, the coffee becomes visible: changing the relationship to the processing is one way that farmers gain more control over their potential profits and become connected to the attributes of the coffee.

The next section sets out the steps necessary to ‘process’, or mill, coffee cherry (*maduro/ceresa*) to parchment (*pergamino*) and then to green coffee (*oro*)⁹. Following this is a description of the common forms of coffee transactions: how coffee moves from farm to ready to sell, as green or roasted depending on whether it is staying in Guatemala or is leaving, and the economy of this set of relations. This lays the foundation for what follows: an in-depth discussion of three different coffee producer approaches and details of a local buyer of green coffee. All are finding new ways to engage with the market for particular forms of coffee.

Productive units: wet and dry milling

Guatemalans use the wet method to mill Arabica coffee from the tree to ready to roast¹⁰ (Figure 6). Wet milling requires a lot of water which Guatemala has in abundance. From the tree the coffee takes the shape of a red cherry and the coffee beans are the two seeds of the cherry inside¹¹. Once they arrive at the wet mill, the workers drop the cherries into a large tank of water where un-ripe and pest-infested cherries and unwanted organic matter float to the top and the better ripe berries sink to the bottom. These quality beans are then transferred to a *pulpero*, where the beans inside are squeezed from the cherry. Sent to another tank, the seeds, covered with the sticky left-over cherry mucilage soak in water, called fermenting, for two to four days. Fermentation breaks down the mucilage enzymes

⁹ The words in italics denote the names used in Guatemala. I will use cherry to refer to the first stage, *pergamino* for the second and green for the final (prior to roasting).

¹⁰ There are other methods sometimes used in Guatemala and used elsewhere including a method called ‘naturals’ where the coffee is dried in the cherry first before it is removed.

¹¹ Sometimes one finds two coffee beans attached into one called peaberry. Some buyers highly value peaberry while others believe it has no value at all.

and disengages it from the beans. Over-fermentation can happen quickly and can impair the flavour of the coffee; operators of the wet mill must pay close attention and sometimes have to release the beans from the fermentation tank in the early hours of the morning. Once fermented, they empty the beans from the tank again allowing the higher quality beans to pass and the lower quality to siphon into a different section. After washing, workers spread the beans on drying patios, usually a slick concrete surface, to dry in the sun where they are carefully turned and managed to ensure even drying. In some cases they will use a mechanical drying machine to speed the process. Drying takes many days and again, care and attention are necessary to avoid the growth of mould and mildew that will spoil the beans. Although sometimes requiring large units, in general wet mills are not particularly expensive to build. Many refer to all of these stages as washing and the washed and dried beans as *pergamino*.

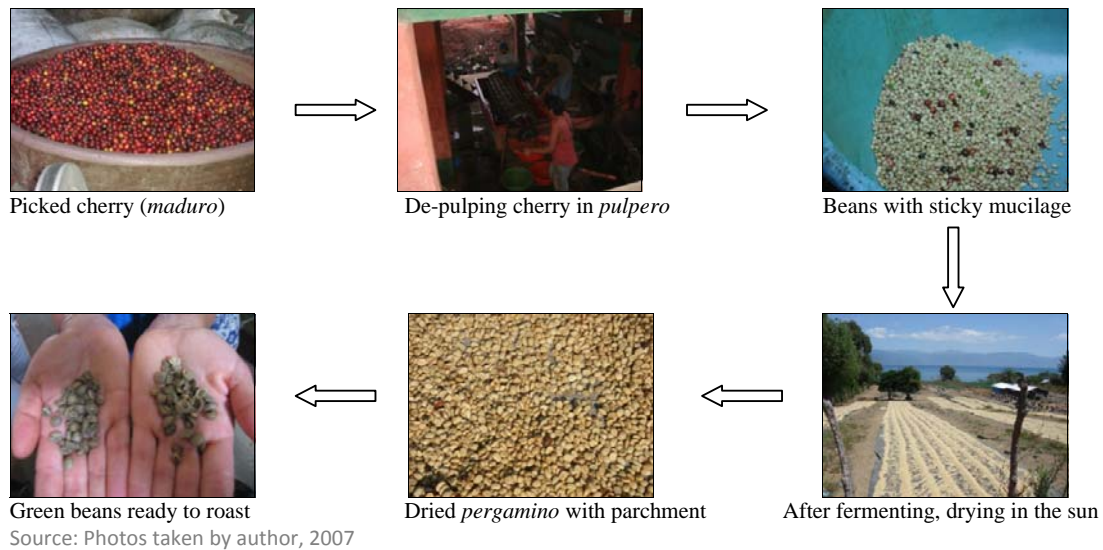


Figure 6: Stages in coffee processing

Pergamino beans have a parchment like cover over the green bean inside. The beans can be stored this way until ready to ship at which point the beans are dry milled in a machine called a *trilladora*. The *trilladora* removes the parchment from the green beans. Large

dry mills are very expensive and few farmers can afford to build them. Because of this, even when a farmer is able to wet mill and dry the coffee they often use the services of a large plantation or third party to remove the parchment. Sometimes this third party will take care of the exportation and contracts while other times the farmer will pay a small fee to the company to dry mill the coffee and the farmer manages his own contract to a buyer¹².

After dry milling, workers sort the coffee according to its size, shape, colour, density and defects and then package it in 100 or 150 pound sacks. Sorting is traditionally a job for women, but it is common among small farmers to engage the entire family. Once green and sorted, coffee can be stored for about a year in dry conditions although many in the industry consider this to be too long; the coffee will lose its particular qualities.

Processing coffee is hands on work oriented towards detail that requires constant supervision and knowledge. The beans can be unruly (cf. Bakker and Bridge, 2006).

Guatemala produces coffee considered to be high-grade according to current quality indicators; 83% of its production is in hard bean (HB) and strictly hard bean (SHB) with only 9% of all production in primes¹³. To access higher prices for coffee differentiated by its quality and type requires increased attention to processing including close monitoring at every stage.

Beneficios, the wet and dry mills, are the loose configuration of buildings or spaces wherein coffee can enter as cherry and leave in a different form. They range in size and

¹² One of the farmers discussed elsewhere is an example of this model. On his *finca* he has a large *beneficio* able to wash and dry the coffee. He uses a third party to remove the parchment and pays a small fee for this service. He manages his own contracts.

¹³ See chapter one note 11. SHB is also called ‘Strictly High Grown’ but tends to be called Strictly hard bean in Guatemala.

capabilities from only wet mills to wet and dry in the same architecture. *Beneficios* can be massive million dollar machines and buildings or small manual machines powered with hand cranks. The *beneficio* is a site for numerous hands, negotiations and mechanics that change, package and sell coffee. Meanwhile, coffee moves through these processes requiring maintenance and close monitoring to manage attributes. Coffee gets its definition here and yet coffee professionals often do not explicitly discuss these relations in the five part description of the coffee network as grower, importer, roaster, distributor and barista.

Seemingly thinking horizontally, Anacafé refers to the configuration of the constituents of people, machinery, technologies, administrative processes, plant nurseries, research, and management of organic outputs as a ‘productive unit’¹⁴. Productive units include all of the things and metrics that manipulate the coffee. Green milled coffee has approximately 20% of the weight of coffee cherry, losing weight at each stage of transformation. It therefore moves through the productive unit leaving behind much organic matter. Water sticky from cherry mucilage requires filtration and waste cherry mucilage becomes fertiliser through monitoring worm composters and parchment paper often used to fuel machinery.

Roasting green coffee is the next step in the process. Green coffee loses about 15% of its weight in its final translation. There are various locations for roasting coffee in Guatemala but only a small percentage remains in country for Guatemalan and tourist consumption in restaurants, airports, and cafés and for local competitions. For the most part, importers transport green coffee to other countries for roasting. Once roasted, large coffee roasters usually grind the coffee and seal it in vacuum packed bags to keep it fresh. Much of the

¹⁴ Field notes, Anacafé professional, January 2007.

mainstream coffee remains in a package for numerous months before it is sold. Those working in the speciality market with attention to taste and achieving the coffee's best attributes argue that the shelf life of roasted coffee is actually less than one month and once ground, only 24 hours.

It is important to understand the activities of productive units and processing in Guatemala as a way to make sense of the economy of coffee. Increased attention to the attributes of coffee and the environmental outputs is already leading to some focus on the role of processing. In turn, small farmers are seeking ways to achieve the knowledge and technologies to pay attention to the process. This allows farmers to gain more control of the prices they can receive for the coffee and provides new spaces of access in the market. A description of the usual networks of exchange below helps to situate these claims in Guatemala as a way to understand local producer-driven inventions.

Beneficios and coyotes

It is common in Guatemala for coffee producers to care for and grow coffee through the annual cycle from flowering to budding to ripe cherry¹⁵. In Guatemala, coffee farms can be a small plot of land, usually 1-5 acres, owned, planted and tended by a family who lives nearby. Farms can be very large, up to 80 acres and the owner employs a number of people annually, who may come from nearby towns or live on site, that take care of the daily running and maintenance of the farm, usually called a *finca*. Even on small farms where the family does much of the maintenance through the year, owners hire temporary workers to *corte*, pick the coffee. To varying degrees of attention to detail in the cherry,

¹⁵ Coffee trees bud in April or May and cherries begin to grow soon after. Harvest happens between November and March depending on the altitude at which the coffee is grown. Higher altitudes ripen slowly and are usually picked in February or March. April is a busy time of dry milling and managing contracts and the transportation of coffee to buyers.

they package the picked coffee as cherry in burlap sacks and sell it immediately to a buyer. Small farmers may be able to wet mill the coffee to dry and then sell the coffee as *pergamino*. Farmers often require some form of pre-financing in order to meet production costs as they are usually only paid once a year on delivery of the coffee either as cherry or *pergamino*.

A *coyote* or *beneficio*, usually attached to or contracted by a large *finca*, will buy coffee from a small farmer who does not have access to a method of processing. The *coyote* is an intermediary who travels from farm to farm offering a price close to the market price. He will pay directly and take the cherry from the farmer. He may also be able to offer a loan for pre-financing, depending on his connections, at high interest rates. The *coyote* will then sell the coffee cherry to a *beneficio* usually with whom he already has contracts. He is also often involved in other aspects, sometimes owning the processing and having his own buyers. The *coyote* is therefore engaged in moving the coffee and negotiating various relationships of the productive unit.

Beneficios, or large *fincas* that have a *beneficio* also buy coffee directly from other producers based on contractual agreements. Farmers and a *beneficio* representative agree contract terms in the autumn for a minimum amount of coffee paid at a close-to market price at the time of signing. They usually require that farmers deliver their coffee to the *beneficio* after harvest in February or March and sometimes later. *Beneficios* are also able to provide pre-financing at high interest rates. If the coffee carries a sustainable certification, the same modes of movement exist but with certified processors or importers who do their best to separate the certified coffee. For Fairtrade cooperatives, NGOs tend to mitigate the relationship from cherry to green and usually deal with contracts to the

Fairtrade importers. In the Antigua region, producing more than half of the total coffee produced in Guatemala in farms varying in size and style, there are about twenty *beneficios* and, of these, four are large *beneficios* that purchase a lot of the coffee grown by small farmers in the region to mix with their own *finca*'s production¹⁶.

Gaining control of processing coffee, from small scale manually operated machines through to small wet mills owned by NGOs or cooperatives that farmers can access seems to point to an intervention in the movements of coffee that creates space for the inventive activity of farmers. The inventive potential is a production of difference, and this difference, I argue, relates to the materiality of the coffee. For example, gaining control of the processing changes the farmer's reliance on the intermediaries and contractual agreements. Attachment to the coffee for longer periods of time and through more of the coffee's material changes creates an associative relationship between the farmer and the coffee. New connectivities become possible from this close connection to the coffee and, "[...] connections arise from within matter; they are not imposed from the outside" (May, 2005: 126). Making the connections of the entire productive unit visible one finds all sorts of potential inventions that can endure. Rather than seeking to shorten the supply network or decrease it down to five main nodes, here I advocate putting back in the many actions and economic agreements that can allow the farmer to gain more control of her/his livelihood. This then allows for a crucial reorganisation of the grower/buyer (local or international) and re-assembles coffee production in new and provocative ways.

¹⁶ There are other intermediaries such as international trading houses and brokers that will negotiate contracts directly with farmers and then handle the processing of the coffee once they receive it from farmers. The main thing is that selling to someone with a contract carries the same meaning as selling to a *beneficio*. The relationship is necessary for the coffee to be sellable and the farmer departs from the coffee while it is still in cherry form.

The models addressed in the sections below are all examples of farmers who have small plots of land and have, until recently, sold their coffee cherry to a *coyote* or *beneficio*. All of these examples, Family Ceresa, Coop OSHI and As Green As it Gets, have acquired the machinery, usually small manual or electric machines, to process coffee and are now able to sell coffee as green. There are, of course, other producer-driven inventions functioning at a slightly larger scale or in relation to an NGO that owns a *beneficio*¹⁷. The examples here provide cases of small-producer driven inventions in response to existing notions of small producer powerlessness. In particular, this analysis of producer-driven models responds to a notion that the farmer reappears through chains of relation like Fairtrade and other sustainable initiatives (cf. M.Goodman, 2004). I address this static notion of the farmer by engaging with the inventive capacities of small producers. I then consider Fernando, a local buyer with an international focus to whom all of the producers in this chapter sell their coffee. Fernando, as the buyer, provides a good informational and material exchange point through which to understand the negotiations of Guatemala.

5.3 Three producer inventions and one café

A coffee professional places his hands together with palms outstretched expectantly and looks up to the sky. He does this to indicate that Fairtrade is tantamount to charity; farmers sit idly by and wait for aid to fall from the sky¹⁸. This is not my first experience of the gesture; many others do the same when asked about Fairtrade certification. Far from

¹⁷ The following discussion focuses on small farmers who have small-scale technologies to process coffee both wet and dry. There are other examples as well. Sometimes a cooperative or an NGO owns a wet mill and farmers are able to use this to bring their coffee to parchment. This allows them to gain more profits by selling coffee as parchment to a dry mill that may then go on to sell to a buyer. Sometimes the dry mill will charge a sum for dry milling but the farmer is able to maintain control of the contracts. In the case of Fairtrade cooperatives or small farmers who are members of the large Fedecocagua cooperative in Guatemala, for example, Fedecocagua provides access to dry mills but usually purchases the coffee from the smaller producer cooperatives and, in turn, manages the contracts with Fairtrade certified buyers. In this model, Fedecocagua owns the coffee once they buy it from the smaller cooperatives. Thus farmers continue to be disconnected from the avenues and contracts of sale.

¹⁸ Field notes, Guatemalan activist and coffee enthusiast, 26 February 2007.

the claims to ‘empower’ small farmers, these critics say that Fairtrade makes coffee producers both complacent and dependent; an almost crippling combination.

Historically the avenues to sell coffee as a commodity work in the favour of buyers and importers rather than farmers. Many coffee farmers planted coffee at the behest of their governments and became subjects of commodity trading schemes that do not consider the materiality or specificity of coffee and its cultivation beyond its undifferentiated exchange value. This fuelled an economy of what many consider to be homogenous brands of ‘mainstream’ and mediocre coffee available through multi-national firms (Daviron and Ponte, 2005; Pendergrast, 2000). In the past twenty years, an unregulated market seems to have created oversupply of coffee, undervaluation of the product and, for Guatemala, a substantial decline in sales.

Sustainable coffee models and Fairtrade, as noted above, try to redress the imbalance of profits and power in a dualistic conception of consumption and production. They relay a picture of coffee farmers as passively subjected to the fluctuations of the market and its outputs. In response to such powerlessness, sustainable coffee initiatives try to rearrange the nodes of the network along differently situated and ‘ethical’ associations¹⁹. These responses precede the actual interaction in the country of origin: solutions to the problems are known or knowable prior to the relations, and in response to broader understandings of the practices of the global market. Operators of coffee and sustainable coffee seem to imagine the subjectivity of farmers through this power/knowledge relation, lines of force that are globally defined and not locally specific (Bell, 2007; Foucault, 1979). One can

¹⁹ See chapter four.

suggest that alternative trade might be a form of bourgeois Marxism that makes capitalism work to eliminate exploitation.

While coffee farmers are subject to a global market for coffee that does not particularly value the object or the labour, they are also subjects of local conditions of life in Guatemala (Gibson-Graham, 2006). How they perceive their own subjectivity is not knowable only through a global consideration of what it might mean to be a 'poor coffee farmer'. There is more than one figure of the 'Guatemalan coffee producer' who is able to align and understand him/herself in relation to the market and the way in which Guatemala mediates this market as outlined above. It is through attention to the times and spaces of Guatemala and of coffee that one can identify opposition and the production of difference among coffee producers in Guatemala and the creative ways they negotiate this seemingly limited terrain, as the examples below suggest.

For Family Ceresa, Coop OSHI and the seven farmers of the association, sustainability is longevity; finding ways to sustain the farm and the family and, ultimately, to invest in further growth. Farmers are economic agents who calculate their interests in relation to the desirable object (Callon, 2007; MacKenzie *et al.*, 2007). A farmer may hope for a brighter future for his children which he locates in access to education. He may also be in debt to a *beneficio* or other large coffee buyer and seeks another pathway through which he can gain more control over his coffee sales. He may have an understanding that his coffee is of desirably high quality and hears that, given the right combination of circumstances, he should be able to achieve higher prices. These choices are relational and situated, and create new connectivities that draw on circulating market niches as well as the exchange of

ideas. Achieving higher profits fuels each farmer's ability to invest socially or responsibly in their livelihood and family.

Before introducing the producers, it is important to understand coffee conversions as they are seldom straightforward. I have converted amounts paid to farmers by *coyotes* and *beneficios* for 100lbs of coffee cherry to per pound of green coffee to make comparisons easy. Further, when speaking of sacks of coffee I used the term quintal (qq) which is equivalent to 100lbs. I have converted prices to USD.

Family Ceresa

Family Ceresa lives in Ciudad Viejo not far from Antigua. They ride back and forth each day to maintain their agricultural land on the side of a volcano. Senor and Senora Ceresa grow coffee across much of their land under shade trees. They also use some of the space to grow carrots, and other vegetables that they will use for personal consumption and sell at the local market. This is a family business; their eldest son also owns a plot of land that he works each day. With their coffee earnings, this son and his wife built a house to rent for an income while they continue to live in a smaller home behind the much larger house. Family Ceresa's middle son recently turned eighteen. He goes to school in the day, learning to be an accountant, and works with his father and brother after school and on the weekends tending to the coffee trees. They maintain their coffee trees to a high standard; large ripe red cherries hang perfectly among glistening green leaves.

The healthy state of the coffee trees is notable in its relation to other plots of land bordering theirs. Despite the fortuitous location on the slopes of the volcano, other trees do not appear, on first look, maintained to such a high standard. Leaves are dusty, the

ground is weedy, and other indicators of a lack of care are evident. This is an important distinguishing factor: in general Arabica coffee trees are robust and, once the trees begin bearing fruit, they will continue annually. The quality of the coffee, however, will vary in relation to the care and attention given and here again aspects of coffee are always interacting with human and non-human desires and practices. Family Ceresa is set apart from their neighbours in their attention to detail. This also means that they are not interested in working with their neighbours in any sort of collaboration. Equally, they are not considering sustainable coffee certifications because, “we cannot afford the cost of certifications and the price is not enough of a differential to support the costs”²⁰

This family used to sell their coffee to a *beneficio* or *coyote*. To sell to the *beneficio*, Family Ceresa had to enter into a contract negotiated and agreed many months prior to harvesting the coffee with the price negotiated subject to a pre-arranged yield. Contract signing usually took place in November for harvest and delivery in March. While most farmers know the average amount of their annual harvest, they cannot wholly know the possible weather conditions, activities of pests or other disobedient climate and environmental factors that may influence yield. Still, agreements made prior to harvest are common throughout the coffee industry. In previous years this family signed contracts with a local *beneficio* to deliver a set amount of coffee at the price of 160Q per one hundred pounds cherry, a sack, called a quintal (qq) in Guatemala and hereafter referred to as such. Since coffee loses weight with processing it takes around five qqs of coffee²¹ to make one qq of processed green. To make comparisons throughout then, it is important here to note that 160Q per qq cherry is roughly equivalent to 800Q per qq green or \$106.67 US. Family Ceresa is therefore achieving the equivalent of \$1.00US per pound of

²⁰ Field notes, Family member, February 28, 2007.

²¹ Some say it take closer to six but for comparison here I will use five as the conversion.

green coffee. If the family is unable to deliver the contracted amount, the price drops by percentages²².

The agreed price is the market price at the time of signing the contract and cannot change in relation to fluctuations in the market over time; sometimes favouring the farmer when the market price drops significantly. When the market price rises, however, there are no changes to the contract, working to the benefit of the *beneficio*. Further, it is also common for *beneficios* to default on their payments, paying in fertiliser rather than cash. The *beneficios* argue that fertiliser is an investment in the quality of coffee. As their relationships to the farmers will likely last over a number of years, particularly if the *beneficio* pre-financed the farmers and they are managing the payment of debt, they have an interest in the forms of inputs to the coffee trees. Providing fertiliser helps to maintain the quality to their standards²³. For the farmers, however, fertiliser while expensive to obtain and consistently increasing in price, cannot make up for the high costs of production nor directly ensure that they are able to feed their families. The coffee they produced beyond that promised to the *beneficio* they sold to a *coyote*. In the past few years the *coyote* offered 140Q per qq cherry with no contract which he offered at farm gate paid in cash. They would therefore get about 700Q per qq green, if they could process it, roughly equivalent at the time to \$88US²⁴ and \$0.88 per pound green.

Looking for new ways to access markets that would privilege their attention to the quality of the coffee, Family Ceresa happened upon Fernando's Kaffee. Fernando agreed to buy 20 qq of green from the family in 2007 with the option of purchasing 15 qq more. He

²² Field notes, Coffee professional Guatemala, February 28, 2007.

²³ Field notes, Visit to a large *finca* and *beneficio*, 4 May, 2007.

²⁴ Field notes, Member of family, February 28, 2007.

assisted the family in accessing the machines, mechanisms, and knowledge necessary to process the coffee: a hand cranked *pulpero* and an electric *trilladora*. Fernando paid for the machines on the agreement that they would repay him in instalments. With each delivery of coffee he deducts part of the price. Achieving \$2US per pound green, the family is now making far more than they were in previous years based on their relationship with Fernando. To do the conversion, \$2.00 per pound green is equivalent to \$200 per qq green. This would also be equivalent to 320Q per qq cherry. Fernando's offer doubles that of the *beneficio*.



Source: Photo taken by author, 2007



Source: Photo taken by author, 2007

Figure 7: Family Ceresa's *pulpero*

Figure 8: Coffee cherries going in to the *pulpero*

Their homes and patios house the machinery of coffee cultivation. Behind Senor and Senora's house there are perfectly lined coffee plants at various stages of early development. It is common to have a nursery where farmers can nurture the growth of new coffee trees as well as test new plants and fertilisers. The small hand-cranked *pulpero*

and electric *trilladora* are on the main veranda (Figure 7 & 8). The roof of their house is a drying patio. They produce about 100 sacks (100lbs each) of green per year and hope to sell all of it to Fernando who has only so far agreed to a portion. Certainly the price Fernando pays is far better than what they might achieve from a *coyote* or *beneficio*. Their hopes, however, amount to more than just that. They now know how to process their own coffee allowing them to be free of an intermediary. Furthermore, they understand that their coffee, its particular qualities achieved by growing and processing with care, actually has a particular market: consumers desire particularities in taste and quality. Attainment of the technologies and market knowledge that differentiates their coffee from other coffee sets them apart from neighbours and allows them to become active participants in their livelihood.

Cooperative OSHI

The second example is a cooperative of small farmers outside of Antigua. There are twenty five members of Cooperative OSHI located in the Acatenango region of Guatemala. Previously considered part of the Antigua region, Acatenango is the newest borderland dividing Guatemala into eight coffee growing regions. The small plots of land of the members are located in the San Juan Alotenango municipality in the Sacatepequez Department and the farmers' land stretches across three volcanoes that mark the Antigua Valley landscape: *Volcans Acatenango, Agua* and *Fuego*. They produce roughly 600 sacks of coffee cherry per year. Although numbering 25 members in 2007, they counted 12 as active and consistently committed to seeking new avenues for sale.

In search of new ideas and strength in numbers, the cooperative formed in 2003. It cost them 10,000Q²⁵ to become a cooperative over two years of compliance measures²⁶. They achieved cooperative status through INA COP, the only government body in Guatemala that certifies and supports cooperatives. They name one of the workers at INA COP the ‘father’ of the cooperative and admire his everlasting commitment and support. He reports there is no cost to becoming certified²⁷. The costs of administrative and technological acquisition together become cooperative expenses.

In the first year as a cooperative, the farmers of Coop OSHI required an advance in order to maintain and harvest coffee trees. They negotiated an advance with a *beneficio* which offered a loan at 2% per month until the coffee delivery is complete. At 24% interest this put the cooperative in a position of debt. From 2003 until 2006, they contracted to deliver their entire harvest to this *beneficio* in order to repay the debt. The market price was roughly 130Q per qq cherry and the *beneficio* offered 105Q per qq equivalent to \$0.66US per pound green. Given their debt to the *beneficio*, the *beneficio* said to “take it or leave it”²⁸. That a *coyote* offered 125Q per qq, or \$0.79 per pound green, underscores how unfair was this relation. They were in debt to the *beneficio* so it was not possible to sell to another buyer. A cycle of debt that spreads over years and multiple harvests is common in Guatemala among coffee producers with all sizes of farms. It constrains the choices and ties the hands of farmers but it is often necessary. Farmers do not have the capital to cover the high costs of production as they are paid once per year upon delivery of coffee. It is precisely the need for pre-financing that many certifications try to address to varying degrees of success (Raynolds *et al.*, 2007a). The lack of positive results and continued

²⁵ Equivalent to \$1250US.

²⁶ Field note, Cooperative OSHI meeting, 22 March 2007.

²⁷ Field notes, INA Cop Representative, 9 May 2007.

²⁸ Field notes, Cooperative, 22 March 2007.

debt to the *beneficio* reverberated through the twenty five members, demoralising the concept and promise of a cooperative approach and likely accounting for the 13 inactive members²⁹.

The twelve committed members researched certifications. They considered selling to Starbucks, but this requires CAFE Practices certification. They would need to work with CafCom³⁰, a third party that could manage contracts with the buyers, again separating the cooperative from their point of sale. One man scoffs over certifications as an option, “certifications are ridiculous, they disallow things like dogs on the property while not actually guaranteeing a more farmer-friendly route of sale or better prices”³¹. In fact, he argues, it seems to this Cooperative that most of the value-added money in the premiums of certifications stays with the *beneficio* that processes the coffee³². For example, after achieving the expensive certification, the cooperative can access certified buyers or buyers wanting to pay the premium or, in the case of CAFE Practices, Starbucks. Rather than selling coffee to the *beneficios* described above, the cooperative would sell their coffee to a *beneficio* that is dealing with the certification (like CAFCom) who would handle the sales contract and export and take a small percentage of the price. In effect, they would still remain at the hands of the *beneficio*, albeit one who is dealing in sustainable coffee, while having to submit to changes in farm practices and audits based on external directives and standards³³. An intermediary still sets the prices and acts as the access point for any value

²⁹ Field notes, Cooperative, 22 March 2007.

³⁰ CafCom is the main coffee exporter (exports the most) in Guatemala. Field notes, 11 May 2007.

³¹ Field notes, Cooperative member, 16 March 2007.

³² Field notes, Cooperative member, 16 March 2007.

³³ Echoed by another coffee professional, “My point is that things like that, the technical day-to-day enforcement and the ways these concepts seem to be evolving in order to be sustainable in their mind [certifications], are causing the people that actually have to do it [the farmers] to question it more and more. [...] Some of the farmers say, this is the way my grandfather told me to grow coffee, this is the way that I grow coffee, and you guys, we are very poor, and you are asking us to spend all of this money for you to fly down to say that what we do is good”. Field notes, Coffee professional from America, 24 March 2007.

added opportunities. In this case, certifications do not increase the chances for farmers to maintain more of the negotiation power³⁴. And, for the added link in the chain, they have the undesirable aspect of having an outside force “telling them what to do with their coffee and land”³⁵. He continues, “It is not that we do not want a set of standards on our farms but rather we do not want other people telling us what those should be”³⁶.

Of course, becoming a cooperative also invokes the structures and approval of an institution, albeit one with a long history in Guatemala³⁷. INA Cop does have certain standards and requirements that cooperative members must uphold including management of stray animals and of rubbish on the farm³⁸. Amongst other government bodies in Guatemala, however, the work of INA Cop raises an anomaly, at least in relation to some of their personnel. The ‘father’ of the cooperative, a man who spent more hours on the road visiting and working closely with farmers than at home over the past years, notes the difficulties involved in the cooperative approach. Both the INA Cop representative and the members of the cooperative have to commit to a long-term vision that may not yield immediate positive results. The process of approval alone requires consistent submission of records to indicate longevity; that the farmers have cooperatively grown and sold coffee for many years³⁹. The administrative red tape is often accessible only through a willing administrator. In a sense, this long term approach in a country often referred to as lacking

³⁴ On the implications as ‘post-colonial’ see (Peluso, 1991; Spivak, 1988; Tsing, 2005).

³⁵ Field notes, Cooperative member, 22 March 2007.

³⁶ Field notes Cooperative member, 22 March 2007.

³⁷ See chapter one on discussion of cooperatives in Guatemala. The first cooperative was established in 1965 based on the Fundamental Law of Cooperatives of 1949.

³⁸ Field notes, Representative from INA Cop, 9 May 2007.

³⁹ Field notes, INA Cop representative, 16 March 2007.

anything but short sighted vision indicates the formation of subjectivity and agency on multiple registers⁴⁰.

The moment that would set this group apart and possibly justify its coming together as a cooperative is in the risk they took when they held back two sacks of coffee in 2006. This is difficult: two 100 pound sacks without sale is a loss and any income is necessary to manage debt and the high costs of production. If the *beneficio* discovers that they held back coffee, the cooperative can fall out of favour and risk the contract. Hoping not to take another advance and still repaying debt to the *beneficio*, they took these sacks of coffee and began searching for a buyer who would offer higher prices for what they understood was good quality coffee. In particular it is “Antigua Type”, well known to achieve higher prices on the market⁴¹. Couple this with good cultivation practices and this group understood that their high altitude SHB has value on the market beyond the limitations of selling cherry to the *beneficio* in an endless relation of debt. In their travels they stopped at Fernando’s Kaffee in Antigua to assess his taste in coffee.

When Fernando saw the quality of the coffee he immediately offered his price, \$2.00 per pound of coffee green. He understood that the members of the cooperative had access to a *pulpero* but not to a *trilladora* so he offered to subsidise the purchase that they could pay back in instalments as he has done with Family Ceresa. The farmers convened a meeting to discuss the offer with the other members of the cooperative. As described above, the twelve active members decided to learn to de-pulp, dry, remove the parchment and sort the

⁴⁰ The president of the cooperative at this time was so eloquent, sensitive and committed; one thinks of Tarde’s consideration of micro-sociology as also about the subconscious and inter-psychological processes and therefore affect (Barry and Thrift 521). Equally, the representative of INA Cop, the ‘father’ of the cooperative has a similar sense of commitment and care.

⁴¹ Antigua type is the best known Guatemalan coffee in countries of consumption and it achieves a higher quality premium (differential) on the market than others in Guatemala.

coffee with the pro-offered machines and to deliver green coffee to Fernando. Thirteen members remained sceptical and considered that there must be a trick: no one offered this kind of money per pound with only a handshake⁴². With issues of necessary pre-financing and powerful *beneficios* seeking debt collection, the first year of any new model is high risk. Together the members of the cooperative made this difficult decision to go ahead with Fernando.

Meanwhile, given such success with processing coffee and working with Fernando, Coop OSHI is seeking other avenues to grow their business. They are working with a technician and researcher to splice together the roots of the *Coffea Robusta* plant with the main tree of the *Coffea Arabica* plant to create a hybrid. The result would be capable of withstanding humidity and variable soil and weather conditions as the Robusta roots are strong while the Arabica provides the high quality coffee bean. They describe this approach on their website as they seek new customers for direct international export,

En la actualidad nos dedicamos a la produccion de almacigos de cafe injertado. El patron es Coffea robusta y la variedad Coffea arabica obteniendo una planta resistente a la sequia y al ataque de los nematodos del suelo. Ademas nos estamos introduciendo al comercio de café en oro que producen nuestros asociados, actualmente buscamos contactos en el extranjero para exportar nuestro producto⁴³.

They use this technical and agricultural change to promote themselves to international importers through their website. They are thinking beyond their relationship to Fernando and, at the same time, the relationship fuels the success of the cooperative.

⁴² Field notes, Fernando, 14 March 2007 & Cooperative representative, 16 March 2007.

⁴³ At present we are dedicated to the production of grafted coffee nurseries. The pattern is the variety *Coffea robusta* and *Coffea arabica* to obtain a plant resistant to drought and attack by soil nematodes [pests]. Also we are introducing the coffee trade in green coffee to our producing partners, and we are currently looking for overseas contacts to export our product. Original Spanish from their website: <http://cooperativaalotenango.es.tl/>; author's translation.

Association of seven farmers

Finally, the third example is an association of seven farmers in the Antigua region called by its American volunteer As Green As it Gets (AGAIG). Timoteo, one of the farmers, owns 1.5 acres of land which he has been able to improve using a loan offered by seven people and organisations in the US, a loan accessed through the association. Timoteo pays the interest in coffee and will pay off the principle with cash at an interest rate of 5%. The rate is far better than the usual 24% charged on Guatemalan loans from *beneficios* or *coyotes*. Like family Ceresa, the members of his family together maintain the coffee trees, process and sort coffee. They hire outside help at harvest season. He works closely with the other farmers in a loosely defined relationship as each farmer will eventually become sole proprietor of their own small business. According to the seven members, being organised as an association rather than choosing to be a cooperative allows them to work together, share some of the technologies and knowledge of processing coffee and managing the market without needing to engage with the cumbersome, expensive and arduous process of becoming a cooperative⁴⁴.

The idea for the association started with a farmer named Felix and an American man named Franklin who was in Guatemala to work in agriculture. Working through the numbers, they found that Felix on average achieved 150Q per qq cherry, roughly \$0.94US per pound of green. After some research, they found that he would be able to gain a higher percentage of the profits if he was able to process the coffee and then find alternative channels for sale. Together they sourced a bicycle powered *pulpero* and a small *trilladora*, processed 100 pounds of Felix's coffee and sold it through a tourist market for roasting and consumption in Guatemala. Felix made more in the one sale of a portion of his total

⁴⁴ Field notes, AGAIG member, 19 April 2007.

production than he previously earned in an entire year's harvest⁴⁵. Felix then collected a group of similar minded farmers to work together. They decided that Franklin would provide unpaid organisational support to connect to potential markets and manage administrative tasks. They have secured \$7,000 in small loans and \$10,000 from one large non-profit grant for pre-financing as a way to disengage from contracts with *beneficios* or other high interest loans. Two office staff members work on a volunteer basis, the farmers share the costs of mechanisms and administration and 100% of the profits go to the producers.

Associated since 2004, they now have two bicycle powered and one hand powered *pulpero* where they can de-pulp 500-800 pounds an hour. The *trilladora* removes the parchment from dried coffee at a rate of one hundred pounds per hour. The seven members of the association share these resources as well as a sorting area. As Franklin notes of the acquisition of these technologies, "It is just small and rustic but for this group it is the jackpot"⁴⁶. One farmer is slowly building a new well-sealed cement drying patio with his profits. Many are now able to send their children to school and the eldest child of one of the families is attending university. When they are home from school they work with their parents to process and sort the coffee. Four of the farmers in this association built concrete houses, one of these has electricity and two have flush toilets and showers. All seven farmers have mobile phones. They achieved all of this through coffee profits in this new model of processing and finding new avenues for sale.

⁴⁵ Field notes, AGAIG member, 22 April 2007.

⁴⁶ Field notes, AGAIG member, 26 April 2007.



Source: Photo taken by author, 2007

Figure 9: AGAIG farmer with *trilladora*



Source: Photo taken by author, 2007

Figure 10: AGAIG bicycle powered *pulpero*

As they now have the ability to process coffee, the farmers will sometimes buy coffee cherry from neighbours to process. Together they maintain a rule that they must pay more than the *beneficios* but they decide the price individually. There is a roaster at the central office that they can use to roast for local sales and they also sell coffee as green for local consumption and for export. Sometimes they blend their coffees and sometimes they each sell individually. Quality indicators connect to American formulations; the Speciality Coffee Association of America (SCAA) uses a point system to indicate the grade of bean and this association follows these measurements⁴⁷. For example, they make an Antigua blend⁴⁸ that consists of a percentage of each farmer's coffee. Each of the contributors has the chance to evaluate the other coffee based on a random sampling. This ensures quality control: in 2007 the group prevented one of the farmer's coffees from inclusion in the blend until it was re-worked: re-washed and sorted. After two days of hard work, the

⁴⁷ More detailed account of this in chapter six and seven.

⁴⁸ Usually when someone says Antigua blend it means 10% Antigua coffee, 90% Brazilian coffee (or Honduran coffee), a well known subversion of Antigua coffee because it achieves a higher price differential on the market. When AGIAG is talking about Antigua blend they mean 30% one farmer, 15% another farmer, and so on. It is all Antigua grown by small farmers.

group accepted the coffee for sale among their high quality coffee. In another instance, the coffee was unacceptable to the group so they sold it as wholesale as mainstream coffee rather than on the gourmet market. The association thus sells coffee both as high-grade, where they place much of their attention, as well as in the wholesale market, where they accept lower grade coffee, much like Family Ceresa's method of internal differentiation.

They sell some of their coffee roasted to café's, restaurants and tourist markets in Guatemala. They are also working to sell green coffee to the United States using the export license of the small legal entity called Asociacion La Esperanza. This is a group of teenage children of the farmers who, with the help of AGAIG became a small legal entity. It is through this association that the farmers will export their coffee as well as other artisanal and textile products made by extended family members. The particular skills of those closest to the farmers serve to push the business model in new directions; the interventions are locally situated. For example, the wife and daughters in one of the families sew bags from the burlap sacks used to store coffee⁴⁹. Others design and sew bags from old *huipils*, the traditional indigenous dress. Scraps from these bags are recycled into hand sewn quilts. There is a multiple unfolding of spaces of creativity that builds market confidence.

Like many coffee supply models in Guatemala, they are often asked by consumers or buyers to justify themselves in relation to Fairtrade. Franklin developed a discussion paper about the variations between the models as well as the strengths of the association⁵⁰. For example, Association Esperanza buys processed coffee from the farmers at around 22Q per

⁴⁹ AGAIG also works on other avenues of sale including cardamom, wood products, protection of trees, financial lending systems and jade. They all arise through initial connections from the farmers.

⁵⁰ As Green as it Gets, *Position on Fair Trade*, September 2008.

pound, equivalent to \$3.05 per pound of green, and sells it to the United States. Fairtrade pays \$1.25 per pound with an optional \$0.10 premium. Beyond the obvious price differential, the strength of this association is, like Coop OSHI and Family Ceresa, the extent of engagement the producers have with the techniques and mechanisms of both making the coffee consumable *and* marketable. It is the gathering of knowledge and re-defining oneself as in control of many parts of coffee that allows these farmers to gain more of the profits as well as to build a viable, independent and sustainable coffee farming practice. The farmers seek multiple routes of sale. Timoteo, for example, is now selling green coffee to Fernando's Kaffee for the same price as Coop OSHI and Family Ceresa, \$2.00 per pound. He came to the café with a small bag of his green coffee. Fernando agreed the purchase based on the good condition of the coffee. Knowing the quality and the market allows for access to many more avenues of sale and to realise the potential of their coffee beyond global commodity valuations.

		<i>Coyote</i>	<i>Beneficio</i>	<i>Fernando</i>
Family Ceresa	cherry	140Q	160Q	320Q
	green	\$0.88	\$.100	\$2.00
Coop OSHI	cherry	125Q	130Q	320Q
	green	\$0.79	\$0.66 ⁵¹	\$2.00
AGAIG	cherry	n/a	150Q	320Q
	green	n/a	\$0.94	\$2.00

Prices for cherry quoted in Guatemalan Q per qq and for green quoted in USD per pound

Figure 11: Comparison of prices paid to farmers

⁵¹ Based on 2003-2006 contract with *beneficio*. Market price in 2003 was approximately \$0.67.

Fernando's Kaffee

Each of the producers above sells some of their coffee to Fernando's Kaffee, a small café located in the north corner of Antigua and a favourite of locals and travellers. Fernando and his SmarTrade™ model provide insight into the relations of trade between Family Ceresa, Coop OSHI and the farmers of AGAIG as well as a Guatemala-inspired local coffee sourcing model that seeks and sells quality and ethics. Fernando at Fernando's Kaffee buys coffee from local farmers, roasts in-house and packages beans by the pound for sale or grinds them for immediate consumption in the café. Response to the perceived limitations of Fairtrade fuelled his coffee sourcing and selling model as well as his informal education in identifying and roasting high-grade coffees. He spends much of his time at the front of his café roasting, packaging and selling coffee and other café treats and speaking with friends and customers.

Many tourists come to his café, pick up a package of coffee beans and ask, "Is this Fairtrade"? His response is always longer than they were hoping, as he launches into a description of his coffee model and how it is fairer and better quality than Fairtrade Certified. He prefers business models that integrate good ethics and good business: prices paid to farmers for their coffee should reflect the high production costs in Guatemala and necessary attention to detail rather than general prices paid across variable and country-specific production costs. Thus his coffee sourcing and selling model is a combination of accessing two market formations; the market for 'ethics' and the market for higher-grade coffee. It is significantly about a desire to re-organise the lines of profit to ensure that Guatemala as a country achieves better economic returns for a highly desirable product.

For Fernando, Guatemala's response to events in the global coffee market has radically undervalued its coffee. He suggests that before commoditisation, Guatemalan coffee was known throughout the world for its excellent quality. Rather than separated into eight regions as they are now⁵², buyers identified Guatemalan coffees by their farm of origin⁵³. When Guatemala began to promote itself by regions, Antigua-type became well-known for its particular taste and profile but this shifted the balance to the region and away from specific farms and producers. As a commodity, bought and sold on the futures market, evaluation of the value of coffee relies on efficient exchange mechanisms and supply and demand rather than the specificities of the coffee. The Guatemalan government, Anacafé and local professionals allowed larger corporations to drive its coffee sales, allowing the futures market to set the price and developing its administrative and productive capacities in relation to the motivations of the global market⁵⁴. This resulted in a wave of change that would de-value their coffee and, by extension, their country (1920s-1970s), allowing large multi-nationals to claim much of the coffee; a system which does not value particular grades, varieties or qualities⁵⁵. With the speciality coffee 'revolution' from the 1970s, as Fernando names it⁵⁶, Guatemala did not take advantage of the increasing attention to the coffee's particular qualities. A return to a focus on the quality of the beans, he argues, will result in proper remuneration for this coffee to Guatemalan farmers. It involves not exchanging coffee on the futures market and to buy and sell coffee through specific contracts based on the attributes of the beans. This is an approach echoed among many

⁵² Anacafé separates Guatemala into eight coffee producing regions as described in chapter three.

⁵³ This echoes a claim by one of the leading historians on Guatemala's coffee 'revolution', McCreery, who notes that, "By the turn of the [20th] century, the country [Guatemala] was the world's fourth largest coffee exporter, but its product was so highly regarded in Europe that much of it was marketed under the names of individual fincas" (McCreery, 2003: 208).

⁵⁴ See chapter one.

⁵⁵ Of course, between 1962 and 1989 with the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) in place, Guatemala fared reasonably well in terms of prices and production as this time allowed producers to control more of the coffee. Guatemala's response to the ICA and how it affected Guatemalan coffee are detailed in chapter one.

⁵⁶ See also Ponte's (2002) notion of "the latte revolution".

speciality coffee enthusiasts and is likely an unrealisable desire⁵⁷. While Fernando's account of the genealogy of Guatemalan coffee may miss some crucial aspects discussed in chapter one, his understanding of the political history of the market fuels his sourcing policies.

Fernando describes what he terms his SmarTrade™ model as such: Fernando pays farmers \$2.00US per pound of green delivered to his door. As explained above, he often helps to subsidise the costs of buying a *pulpero* or *trilladora* to help farmers obtain the necessary machinery. The producers pay him back in instalments usually subtracted from the price of the coffee on delivery until the farmers own the machines and are therefore not beholden to the relationship with Fernando. He has two small roasters in the front of his café and in 2007 he invested in a much larger roaster in the back. After receiving the green coffee, he roasts it in-house in small batches⁵⁸. He will grind some of this coffee as and when it is required for consumption by customers in the café. Much of the other coffee he packages in 16oz (one pound) clear plastic packaging⁵⁹ with his label attached, a job usually done by friends and business associates, as he has a few local partners collaborating in the SmarTrade model⁶⁰.

Fernando has bigger plans than a constant supply of freshly roasted coffee served in his café and selling bags of 'real' and 'local' Guatemalan coffee for tourists to bring home to

⁵⁷ Field notes, coffee trader in the UK, November 2005; Field notes, coffee trainer, June 2006, among others.

⁵⁸ Fernando's methods are not artisanal like many American roasters. Some say he roasts too dark and one American man living in Antigua says that Fernando's coffee makes him feel angry. Further discussion on roasting in chapter six and seven.

⁵⁹ He learned about the need for clear plastic packaging when he attended a technical seminar at Anacafé about the requirements of shipping coffee to the United States. At that seminar, he notes proudly, the *Gerente General* of Anacafé recognised him and mentioned his "excellent" café. There seems always to be a sense of respect and trepidation when dealing with Anacafé.

⁶⁰ This model might be said to have come from a community of practice; the group involved sharing the space at the café, different responsibilities and contributing to discussion and the model's evolution. See Amin and Cohendet (2004) on communities of practice and de Laet and Mol (2000) on fluid technologies.

their families. He plans, with his 2,000 strong mailing list compiled over years of meeting tourists, to export roasted coffee to North America in the first instance and perhaps later to Europe and UK. In this plan, he will export roasted pre-packaged coffee beans, which have a lifespan of not more than one month, for personal use at \$10 per pound including transportation costs⁶¹. He will not export on a wholesale basis as he will not be able to control the quality. This price is commensurate with and usually less expensive than Fairtrade coffee sold in the US and includes the cost of transportation. In the early stages of the development of this model, he recognises that he will incur expensive freight costs but as demand grows and he is shipping more than 1000lbs at a time, he will optimise this expense. His hope was to eventually achieve about \$4.00 gross profit per pound and, minus taxes the net profit he would split evenly between profit and costs and reinvestment into viable and sustainable projects. He hoped that the result would be millions of dollars worth of coffee returns to Guatemalan farmers and projects, far exceeding the current amount of revenue from coffee exports of 655.9 million USD⁶² and, more importantly, achieving better distribution. There are, he acknowledged, very real barriers to achieving these kinds of profits, a point returned to later in this chapter. Notably, possibly due to such barriers or what seems to be a utopian vision, he has not yet in 2009 achieved his goal of extensive international export.

I suggest that his approach circulates around the role of the coffee: its materiality, desirability, changing forms, techniques, and metrological processes; an account of which

⁶¹ This approach defies one of the unwritten conventions of coffee, both conventional and high quality: that roasting coffee should happen at the site of consumption not only to maximise its freshness and lifespan, but also because many believe that each country has particular 'tastes' in coffee roasting. Many coffee professionals say that coffee roasting is the highest value added point in the coffee supply network. Guatemalans are keen to gain access to this value added portion of the chain and Fernando, AGAIG and many other producers are obtaining the tools necessary to sell their coffee roasted. Fernando is keen to keep this value adding step in Guatemala. There is a more detailed discussion on this in chapters six and seven.

⁶² Number retrieved from <http://portal.anacafe.org/Portal/Documents/Documents/2008-11/257/246/GRAFEXPO0120032008.pdf>, November 2009. Coffee used to be Guatemala's biggest profit but now tourism and remittances from Guatemalan in the US top the GDP of 39 billion USD.

I extend in chapter six. Although his genealogy of the coffee trade highlights some events while obscuring others, the idea that commoditisation of coffee eliminated the specificities of coffee and the extensive differentiation between varietals and beans is important. Commodity markets require smooth exchange mechanisms and focus on the minimally differentiated exigencies of supply and demand⁶³. Coffee gained popularity among consumers and, along with this, traders and large roasting firms concentrated on obtaining a mediocre, homogenous taste that would sell coffee to supermarkets and grow brands⁶⁴. Fernando, and the small producers discussed above, would like to shift the focus from mass production to specificity, implying a more direct relationship with all of the materialities and technologies of coffee. Professionals should concentrate on keeping more of the profits of coffee in the country through best agricultural practices and highlight the exacting qualities of Guatemalan coffee to differentiate the market. This accesses existing market niches for differentiated coffees and personal farmer-buyer relationships imagined as ‘ethical’ supplying methods. In his view, greater returns would mean more investment in social goods like education and health at an individual level and then, hopefully, as a country. Attention to detail also requires attention to the outputs; needing clean water, close management of pests without harsh chemicals, and efficient agricultural techniques become part of the practice. Together with the producers like the ones described above, this model forms a response, an active engagement with various materialities and subjectivities of coffee and Guatemala thus producing differentiation and variation (Bell, 2007: 108). While all of the producers described above seek more than just Fernando as a buyer, there is interplay between their search for new markets and Fernando’s offer of a different way to interact with coffee. This approach, however, is

⁶³ A young coffee trader in the UK notes that when looking at a bag of coffee his manager, teaching him the ropes of coffee buying/trading said, “see that coffee, that’s green. As in money”.

⁶⁴ More on this in chapter six.

one example, and one not that common in Guatemala. Moreover, despite best efforts, Fernando has not yet commenced export to North America. While this model may not be largely generalisable, taken together with other approaches like AGAIG who is already exporting out of the country, the focus here has been the production of difference through opposition and invention; the path-dependent spatial and temporal dynamic of social life wherein there is the potential to produce something new.

5.4 Mediations

As described above, farmers selling to Fernando recently learned to process their own coffee and, as they obtain knowledge they gain critical insight into the technologies of coffee and become informed participants in the market. The specificities of coffee and of economic life as a producer become part of the exchange and are necessary to the method of production. So too are the economic, political and agricultural aspects: the entire informational and material environment (Barry, 2005a). Along with development of new inventions are the difficulties of growing a business, relying on suppliers and, significantly, doing this in an atmosphere where trust and long term vision are uncommon. The development of new ways of organising coffee requires that farmers and buyers engage in a relationship based on trust, reliability and long term commitments, all attributes that depart from the generally held stories of war, uneven economies and oppressive politics of Guatemala (Cambranes, 1985; Gallini, 2004; Lovell, 2001; McCreery, 1995; McCreery, 1976; Stoll, 1998). This section details the intersections of the materialities and the multiple subjectivities of creating new coffee inventions (Whatmore, 2006) using some examples of inter-personal interaction with coffee and other objects. In the meeting of people, ideas, and coffee, there are all sorts of situated “stubborn facts”, “actual things, concrete events, enduring entities – given neither in matter nor in

discourse” (Fraser *et al.*, 2006: 4). These interrupt the smooth enactment of new inventions but also, in their repetition they collide to form differentiations and inventions.

Family Ceresa, for example, mentions that they are reserving their entire harvest of 100 sacks for Fernando, save the small amount of low quality coffee set aside for Nescafé⁶⁵. Fernando became nervous at the mention that they expect he will purchase the entire harvest as he has only agreed to 20 sacks with a possible 15 more. He had not yet made the exporting connections necessary for implementing phase one of his program, exporting to North America at regular intervals, and this might be coffee beyond his needs. Fernando’s promise of growth and international exporting provides hope for the family whose lives have changed as they learn to process coffee and, in return, achieve higher prices for their beans. They might become reliant on Fernando and this is the high pressure reality of selling a new business model and the concept of relationship coffee: being able to introduce customers to the producers of their coffee comes with expectations and responsibilities. The ethical commitment is multiple. At the same time, the family is considering new ways to engage with the market, even suggesting that they would like to start a coffee tour of their home and coffee field where they would demonstrate to visitors their small-scale production and processing⁶⁶. It is likely that this idea is borne from spending time among people speaking in Fernando’s Kaffee. Ideas proliferate in relation to a sense of possibility⁶⁷.

At the Annual General Meeting of the Cooperative on 16 March 2007, José Leòn, the President of the cooperative, talked at length about the possibilities of the relationship with

⁶⁵ Field notes, Family member, 28 February 2007.

⁶⁶ Field notes, Family member, 8 May 2007.

⁶⁷ See (Ferguson, 1999; Weskalnys, 2008) on hope and expectation.

Fernando⁶⁸. He described the decision to purchase the *trilladora* and tells the story that it recently required maintenance. They brought the machine to Fernando who had it fixed noting the reliability of the relationship. He spoke about the price per sack, and that Fernando hands him a cheque directly when he delivers his well sorted, high quality green coffee. He talked about getting to know average prices on the market, to understand other forms of direct sale and to imagine the consumer more directly⁶⁹. This relationship is far better, José Leòn noted, than selling to a *beneficio*. The intermediary takes far too much of the profits and in general the price is lower than the market price. A producer, one of the thirteen who were not selling to Fernando, offered his dissent, noting that, “it is very difficult to trust this kind of relationship”⁷⁰. José Leòn responded saying that this was precisely his point, he is illustrating that the commitment is solid and trustworthy and that through this relationship the farmers are gradually building knowledge of the market.

As time went on, more problems with intermediaries led to a change of heart among these sceptical farmers. After the harvest in 2007 and a few months after the AGM, Fernando reported that some of the thirteen Cooperative members not selling to him were coming to see him to ask how they too might benefit from his high prices⁷¹. While this points to a significant success for Fernando, it also caused anxiety. Given the increased interest he seems sure that the twenty *beneficios* in the Antigua area must now know about his program of coffee buying and the high prices he is paying for the coffee. Farmers, he notes, are usually the last to know about the intricacies of buying and selling so if they are

⁶⁸ Field notes, Cooperative AGM, 16 March 2007

⁶⁹ At one point he mentions me, a researcher, who comes to the café because I want to drink quality coffee and that I return to the UK with the knowledge that there is excellent coffee in Guatemala.

⁷⁰ Field notes, Cooperative AGM, 16 March 2007.

⁷¹ Field notes, Fernando, 6 May 2007.

coming to him now, the *coyotes* and the *beneficios* must also know; wealthy owners of large *fincas* wield a tremendous amount of power in Guatemala.

Fernando and his partners have a plan for just such a situation. One of the partners is friends with the owner of one of the four large *beneficios* in the Antigua region. He made a point to speak to him about Fernando's model and to suggest that all *fincas*, large or small, can achieve the \$2 per pound price if they meet Fernando's quality standards. Until now, Fernando deals only with small farmers to appease his customer's general belief that attending to the 'least powerful' small farmers equates to 'ethics'. In fact he does not necessarily believe that he should only deal with small landowners. As his model is about quality, there are certainly many large *fincas* whose coffee meets his standards. Most likely, however, the large *beneficios* are not interested in either the economic or the interpersonal relation that such a model requires. They are too involved in their own cycles of buying and selling through which they maintain a privileged position in Guatemala. Still, the large *fincas* owners will not be happy to find that their competition is raising farmers' expectations⁷². They may perceive Fernando as a threat as he provides opportunities and changes farmer prospects in ways that will make them knowledgeable and may displace entrenched power relations. As Fernando says, the large *fincas* have ways of dealing with instigators of change. He notes, "it only costs 3,000 Quetzales⁷³ to have a man killed"⁷⁴. Here mobile communication devices, the *coyotes*, spread the information from *beneficio* to farmer and back, producing all sorts of unmediated information that can complicate the lives and businesses of producers and local buyers. This is, at the same time, precisely the

⁷² This is commonly heard among small farmers who worry about rumours getting around which may put them in some danger with their neighbours. This is something all farmers must consider when thinking of selling their coffee through new or different channels. Field notes, coffee farmer in Antigua, 26 March 2007; Field notes, coffee farmer in San Pedro, 13 March 2007.

⁷³ Equivalent to approximately \$380US.

⁷⁴ Field notes, Fernando, 6 May 2007.

tenuous, anxiety-provoking place Fernando hopes to maintain; a threat to the established order and his own version of an economic revolution. His website makes clear his Marxist visions, “As coffee brews, so do dreams and ideas, fuelling revolutions--not just industrial--but ideological as well. And what could be more revolutionary along the coffee supply chain than for *everybody* to profit?”⁷⁵ Here, capitalism works to end exploitation by fuelling a non-political overthrow of the coffee market through the ‘quality’ of the beans. Fernando’s grand ideas are, however, limited in scope as he has not yet reorganised the orderings of the Guatemalan coffee. In the mediations of new forms there are numerous and varied hopes, expectations, communities, and anxieties that mesh and move amongst the networks of humans and objects (de Laet and Mol, 2000).

Moreover, the habits of coffee manipulations exist throughout the business and the interpersonal relationships embedded in Fernando’s model have not succeeded in ensuring the compliance of all of the constituents. Not all of Fernando’s coffee suppliers have been as trustworthy or reliable as the ones detailed here. Fernando purchased from a different producer who promised to deliver only high-grade coffee. He did, except the ‘good’ coffee lined the top of each burlap sack, with a mess of various sizes and qualities along with sticks and stones throughout the rest of the sack. The coffee was unsorted indicating a lack of attention and care. It is relatively common in the coffee business to find people packing coffee in this less than honest way. To make use of the coffee already paid for, Fernando bought a de-stoner. He runs the green coffee through the small de-stoner before it is ready to roast thus separating out the unwanted organic matter.

⁷⁵ <http://www.fernandoskaffee.us/>

This type of systematic misrepresentation is not surprising to Fernando or to Franklin from AGAIG. Franklin relates that although each farmer makes his own choices, the association has an informal policy to work with small farmers. They believe, “the smaller the farm, the better the ethics”⁷⁶. The type of ‘ethics’ he is referring to is the honesty and trust in contractual dealings. In his experience, people with more than 50 manzanas (roughly 86 acres)⁷⁷ of coffee planted land try to cheat small organisations. Franklin suggests that farmers with one to five acres of land produce trustworthy and high quality results⁷⁸. Fernando disagrees with this, saying that it does not matter the size of the farm but rather how long they have been processing the coffee. More experience of processing seems to relate to knowing the methods and mechanisms of cheating. Those new to processing, similar to those small farmers both Fernando and Franklin work with, do not seem to engage in such manipulations.

This discussion of the mediations of new inventions in Guatemala suggests that inventions are always constituted as rich in information of their local and temporal conditions. They are “informed materials” (Barry, 2005a) constituted by materialities beyond language and discourse that form the new invention. “Although the route – the path, the tradition the inheritance – that has led to the ‘becoming’ of a fact is contingent [...], it is also irreversible” (Fraser *et al.*, 2006:4). Becoming different economic agents is political and risky and never straightforward. Creating new ways of being through invention is also creative, and usually requires a passionate commitment that allows, if one can negotiate the maze of relations and technologies, the potential for new ways of being.

⁷⁶ Field notes, AGIAG member, 19 April 2007.

⁷⁷ 1 manzana = 1.72 acres; 1 hectare = 2.4 acres

⁷⁸ Field notes, AGAIG member, 19 April 2007.

5.5 Associations

With the smell of roasting coffee, whir of the grinder and shuffling of beans, Fernando's front room of his café provides a physical and affectual meeting space in which disruptions, interventions and exchanges form and re-form. This is an illustration of the situatedness of 'becoming' where disruptions and interventions are more-than-human and create different ethics in relation. Both the Cooperative and Family Ceresa happened upon Fernando's Kaffee "by chance"⁷⁹, stopping by the busy café as they pursued buyers who were willing to pay prices commensurate with the work and grade of the coffee. For them, as well as Timoteo recently bringing a bag of his coffee for Fernando's perusal, they come *with their coffee in hand*. This demonstration is considerably different from the machinations of the global market for coffee where, as a commodity, the attributes of the coffee are not a significant part of the exchange. This encounter led to differently organised networks which in turn required that they learn new things about coffee and the market(s). Tarde may have suggested such a focus on this meeting space as Barry and Thrift mention, "he was preoccupied by the question of the moment, the location, and the mechanism, through which difference or invention are produced (cf Foucault 2000: 226-7)" (Barry and Thrift, 2007: 514). This is just one location of 'becoming' while there are many more moments of intervention.

While Fernando's purchases are important for all three producers, Fernando worked with others before and, over time, Fernando will find other suppliers to augment or change his coffee. At the same time, the producers are seeking other ways to promote and sell their coffee in a continual producing of difference. This is, then, a process, an "active response, a differentiation" (Bell, 2007: 108), a becoming that is located in the combination of ideas

⁷⁹ Field notes, Fernando, 14 May 2007.

and things; producing new connectivities in the daily repetition of coffee production.

Relations between buyer and producer are important but also temporary and productive of more potential associations that collide with other differentiations. As Tarde (1890/1903) relates,

Every successful invention actualises one of the thousand possible, or rather, given certain conditions, necessary, inventions, which are carried in the womb of its parent invention, and by its appearance it annihilates the majority of those possibilities and makes possible a host of heretofore impossible inventions. These latter inventions will or will not come into existence according to the extent and direction of the radiation of its imitation through communities which are already illuminated by other lights (45).

The process is continual and temporal; producing multiple and changing inventions that in turn produce new imitations and inventions. People and things disentangle from some formations and entangle in new economic moments only to disentangle again (Callon, 1998a).

Consequently, in the meeting of minds and things, the potential and possibility of creating new avenues for cultivation and sale creates a swirl of affective potential that is likely to produce variation, creating more and more possible associations. As Massumi (2002) relates,

Reality 'snowballs,' [...]. Perhaps 'productivism' would be better than constructivism because it connotes emergence. 'Inventionism' wouldn't be going too far, for even if you take nature in the narrowest sense, it has to be admitted that it is inventive in its own right. There is a word for that: evolution (13).

This evolution is creative. It is expanding rather than limiting and an active response to the environment (Bell, 2007: 107). This creativity extends, so to speak, to the potential for 'ethical' import and therefore provides some response to the difficulties of sustainability as considered through global definitions. The farmers make things sustainable in relation:

evolving through the temporary entanglements in economic forms and situated in a calculation of interests.

As Bell puts it, subjection is about “how it literally incorporates the lines of force and knowledge that surround it in a process that is ongoing” (Bell, 2007: 17) and is crucially about the subject’s own understanding of him/herself. Tarde’s account of imitation and invention takes as central what happens in the individual (Deleuze, 1994: 158, n3), it is “a communication *from soul to soul*” (Vargas *et al.*, 2008: 766). Importantly, the lines of force and knowledge are not just those written on to the figure of the ‘small farmer’ subject to the fluctuations of the global market. The production and extension of forces and knowledge happen through the daily practices of coffee production among the political and economic systems of Guatemala and also in relation to the global in market forms.

I suggest that the ‘ethics’ of the approach adopted by Fernando, Family Ceresa, Coop OSHI and AGAIG, to varying degrees, evolves through the associations in the milieu of differentiation: each overlapping focus (high grade coffee, attention to detail and outputs, higher prices, engaged farmers for example) helps to produce beans that consistently take on the ‘meaning’ of Guatemala’s sustainability as a coffee producer and a country. Just as the coffee and its processes are now part of the set of relations from grower to buyer, so too are the inputs and outputs, economies and histories and co-existent market niches. All aspects are equally potential connectors in this heterogeneous and horizontal field of difference (Foucault, 1972) and things can change, and will change, adapt, entangle and reassemble. This means that sustainability and ethics are local and situated and identifiable through temporary associations. What propels a farmer to adapt their methods of production or to learn processing can be the desire to access education for their families,

for example, it is personal and situated. This ethical drive is one aspect of the 'bits and pieces' (Bingham and Thrift, 2000; also Serres and Latour, 1995) that come together towards new producer-driven inventions. "[...] ethics is the continual exercising, in the face of the need to decide, of a choice to be/act/think a certain way. Ethics involves the embodied practices that bring principles into action" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxiii). Ethics are not known prior to association but part of the informational and material environment that may or may not collide and produce new inventions.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter argued that producers are not passive recipients of sustainable initiatives or of the fluctuations of the global market as consumption country accounts may suggest.

Rather the advantages and disadvantages of sustainable coffees and other market forms create oppositions that can lead to new inventions. Producers are inventing new ways to produce and sell coffee.

The circulation of such ethical approaches provides a starting point; not least because it is so highly contestable and often evokes an emotional response. In circulation among the assemblages of human and non-human constituents of coffee in Guatemala, these sustainable coffee models are productive of both representations and interventions (Callon 1998, MacKenzie et al. 2007: 5) and are active in transporting ideas and things across multiple times and spaces. Often, new ideas arise in response to the perceived limitations of Fairtrade and other sustainable sourcing initiatives in a circulating exchange between consumers and retailers, producers and buyers and the communities that come together to discuss new ideas. In this way, as Tarde argues in *Laws of Imitation*, the act of invention is a process of imitation, opposition and adaptation producing differentiation and variation.

Tarde notes of inventions that, “all inventions [...] are composed of prior imitations [...] and [...] these composites are themselves imitated and are destined to become, in turn, elements of still more complex combinations [...]” (Tarde, 1890/1903: 45). Swarms of difference produce associations and then disentangle and entangle into other assemblages; temporal and path dependent.

The producer-driven inventions discussed in this chapter are all small farmers who are obtaining the skills and necessary technologies to process their coffee and therefore achieve better prices for green. This is important: more time, more attention to the detail and more knowledge of the events of transformation change the relationship between farmer and coffee. The healthy state of Family Ceresa’s coffee trees displays their commitment to family and income. Attention to detail and good maintenance along with a new *pulpero* and *trilladora* allows them to play with existing market forms. Where previously they would sell all of their coffee as undifferentiated cherry to the *coyote* or *beneficio* to be integrated into mainstream brands, now they laugh at the small amount of coffee that did not meet their expectations of quality and which they will sell through these channels. That transformation takes vision and risk and internal differentiation and is changing the lives of this family. The members of Cooperative OSHI similarly took a risk when they held back some of their coffee and went in search of a new buyer. Learning to process their coffee and obtaining a *trilladora* through Fernando, they are growing their membership through successful and steadfast resolve. It is not easy to communicate and collaborate with many other farmers but this cooperative’s successes are evident in the conversion of previously sceptical members. Finally, the seven members of the association AGAIG have many tentacles of reach across various local artisanal traditions. Attention to the quality standards of the Speciality Coffee Association of America aligns

the members and they share the necessary machinery and administration to access new markets. The skills of those closest to the farmers push the business model in new directions. Interventions are locally situated and happen in the exchange of ideas and materials; left over scraps of cloth from making bags become quilts. They obtain help from a few volunteers and it is the interchange between them that helps the farmer to achieve better profits.

The story of a producer or a group of producers learning the techniques of processing, obtaining the mechanisms and knowledge to build new associations between their coffee trees and their livelihoods needs telling alongside of a buyer with similar interests. Fernando's combination of ethics and quality provide a complement to these three producer models. Based on a vision of proper remuneration for Guatemala's excellent coffee, Fernando's SmarTrade model is a local café with big exporting plans. Fernando is often negotiating the histories and geographies of Guatemala in ways that the producers are not; and helping to change the pathways of sale to work in the favour of producers.

Each producer works towards their vision of success for their families as in sending children to school or providing other opportunities. These values are situated locally in the lives and conditions of the families. Ethics here are relational, produced in and through interaction rather than known or knowable prior to connectivities and associations. All of the examples, in different ways, illuminate the "specific materialities and multiplicities of subjectivity and agency" (Whatmore, 2006: 604) of coffee in Guatemala. Producers engaged in the routine practice of growing coffee may shift their sense of possibility and create the germ of difference and invention. It is possible to say that producers and other coffee professionals strive to attain sustainability on different and multiple registers. This

is a form of ethical invention; specifically linking ethics as invention rather than ethics as moral codes or rules.

Attention to the processes, techniques, administration, economic and cultural renderings of coffee cultivation allows the spaces of production to be “crowded with objects” (Latour, 2005a) that assemble, dis-assemble and re-assemble in multiple and temporal associations (Latour, 2005b). Interruptions to the daily enactments create opportunities for new becomings (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 24), and create “[..]a momentary opening for the expression of a different economic subjectivity” (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 32). Small producers do not become active agents against a passive global rendering; they are active, engaged and creative albeit within delimited lines of force, in conditions possibly not of their own choosing. Here, “Politics is no longer limited to humans and incorporates the many issues to which they are attached” (Latour, 2005a: 43). What is being valued and how becomes a crucial aspect of the producer’s relation to the coffee and to potential buyers and this informs the continual process of formulating producer sustainability in Guatemala. Current measures of value including high quality and desirable taste are the subject of the two chapters that follow.

CHAPTER SIX: LEARNING TO TASTE: PROFILE ROASTING, ORIGIN STORIES AND THE PERFECT CUP

*"To be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday"*¹.

*"Let taste be your guide"*².

6.1 Introduction

The tables are set in long rows extending through the middle of the room. Small porcelain cups line the tables each with a sample of roasted and ground coffee. Cuppers mill around smelling the fresh grinds while awaiting boiled water. Cups are arranged in threes; three of the same samples grouped together to allow for multiple tastings of each coffee. This ensures that a single tainted bean does not affect the taste of the entire coffee. Small trays of green and roasted coffee beans sit close by for inspection. Workers fill each cup with boiled water. The cuppers leave it for four minutes and then break the crust on top and inhale the strong aroma. They remove the crust and let the coffee cool slightly and then begin. The cuppers move around the tables dipping in their tablespoons, slurping the coffee while aerating it in the mouth. They write their experiences on the cupping forms attached to clipboards and return multiple times as the coffees cool.

This was a room in a coffee research centre. Outside of this room is rural Honduras, humid air and +30 degree Celsius temperatures. The room is hot and uncomfortable and not quite the optimal room temperature for cupping between 20 and 25 degrees Celsius nor

¹ Bennett, J. 2001. *The enchantment of modern life : attachments, crossings, and ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, page 4.

² Instaurator, The Espresso Quest. And Field notes, 20 June 2006.

regulated humidity levels of 50 to 70 per cent. In the room were 25 young coffee professionals, mostly men and a few women, who work on medium sized coffee farms. This was a cupping session, one of many over a number of days, where Honduran coffee professionals were learning to taste and differentiate coffee. In this training they would learn about the market for great tasting coffees, profile roasting and how to ‘cup’ coffee to understand its complex flavours. The trainer was a freelance coffee professional from Europe and the training was part of a larger InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB) and TechnoServe³ funded project that extended through Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica with the support of the national producer organisations. The purpose of the training across Latin America was to teach the skills and identifiers currently circulating in the niche differentiated market where coffee’s taste informs purchase and consumption.

The materials, activities, techniques and measurements used in this cupping session are very similar to other cuppings in which I have participated suggesting a standard across the trade. Although the size and shape of the rooms and tables are different, the materials are similar to the room in the London School of Coffee where I first participated in a cupping session at a meet the producer event. It also resembles other cupping experiences: the large room in the Anacafé office building in Guatemala City and a large open air conference centre in San Salvador during the Latin American training; a conference centre in Copenhagen at the SCAE and World Barista Championships; the small cupping lab at the offices of a large exporter in Guatemala City; the cupping room on a *finca* outside of Antigua, and cupping at a roaster/café in London. These cupping experiences take place in

³ TechnoServe is a non-profit organisation that works with people in poor areas of developing areas to build businesses <http://www.technoserve.org/who-we-are/index.html>.

both countries of coffee production and spaces of consumption. Measures of taste are creating new connections and a common language across consumer and producer divides.

Many small and independent traders, roasters and cafés are operating in a taste-specific coffee sector that is growing in popularity all over the world and notably in the UK, North America and Australia. This is an area of coffee connoisseurship akin to wine tasting where tasters relate coffee's attributes to its terroir, its unique expression of taste as indicative of the soil, the bean and the environment in which it grows (Instaurator, 2008). The bean thus carries its productive history: the country of origin, the farm and the activities and mechanisms of grower and growing. Equally, current measurements figure taste in relation to its preparation (espresso, filter, other methods), decisions about roast (precise timing, style for preparation, the profile of the bean), and conditions of cultivation (soil, type, varietal, water, altitude). These relate to broader country-specific taste profiles, invariably leading the taster to consider and emphasise the exact origins including the farm, region, and the country of production. Making the network of coffee cultivation, transportation and preparation visible creates associations in the act of drinking and augments the taste in the cup.

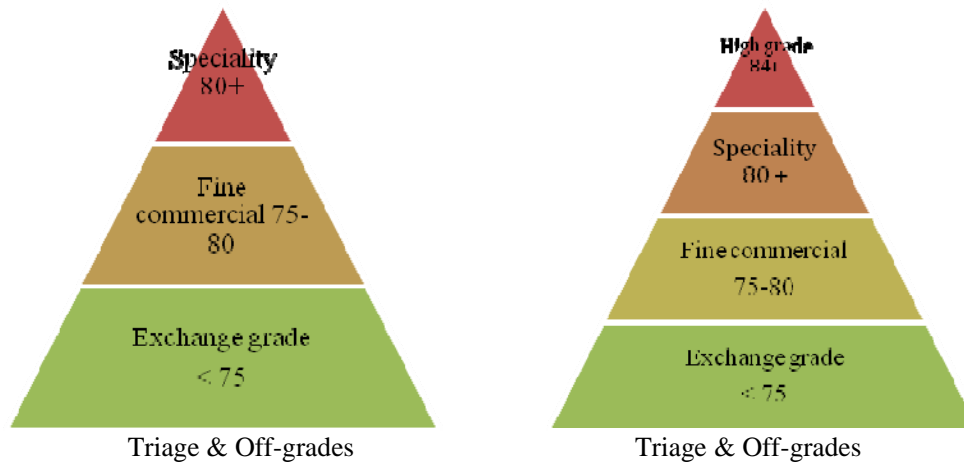
Given the growing focus on taste, this chapter argues that coffee becomes mobile and active, a vital material (Bennett, 2001: 112) that is generative and able to “give back to those who take an interest in them” (Hennion *et al.*, 2005: 670). This responds to commodity chain or global value chain (GVC) approaches discussed in chapter two that cast coffee as a passive object made available to the manipulations of human choice in accounts of the coffee commodity market (Daviron and Ponte, 2005) and theories that posit that the qualities of a bean are written onto the surface of the beans as social

constructs that then coordinate the activity of market actors (Renard, 2003: 88). In this type of constructivist approach, taste is a given and tasters work to manage and manipulate the hidden social variables that will allow them to come to taste, or to believe they can taste the given properties of an object. Here I suggest that the agency of the materials is mediated through taste. This chapter will demonstrate that, as devices of measurement, a common language, tasters and various desirable attributes of coffee increase in popularity and value across the industry, the production of coffee becomes responsive to taste thus changing both the beans and the producers in subtle but important ways. Coffee's taste is an emergent property of all of the human and nonhuman agents of the assemblage of coffee across geographical and historical locations and not contained by market distinctions.

For the purposes of market distinction across geographical locations, operators selling coffee as a carefully roasted and prepared taste experience distinguish themselves as a high-grade speciality sector. The market for coffee tends to be organised as a tiered model, with coffees as exchange grade and the most plentiful, fine commercial, and then speciality with limited supply at the top⁴ (Figure 12). The tiers correspond to quality scores instituted by the Speciality Coffee Association of America (SCAA). Coffees achieve values on a 100-point scale including visual assessment of the beans, a low number of primary and secondary defects⁵ and taste profile in terms of an absence of negative attributes. Coffees differentiated by visual and cupping assessments attain some price premium due to limited supply.

⁴ Field notes, Independent trader in London, 27 February 2008.

⁵ Description of scale in detail in note 21, this chapter



Source: Developed from materials obtained from coffee trader in London

Figure 12: Three tier coffee market distinctions & SCAA cupping points

Figure 13: Four tier coffee market distinctions & SCAA cupping points

More recently operators distinguish a fourth top tier, high-grade speciality (Figure 13)⁶, usually associated with the defining taste values of the Cup of Excellence national competitions taking place annually in production countries. The CoE programme favours exceptional coffees through competition and blind judging. Judges consider coffees using the detailed CoE cupping form that identifies outstanding characteristics based on wine tasting sheets with all kinds of exotic and imaginative flavour descriptions. CoE officials auction winning coffees online for extremely high prices far beyond the price of coffee on the commodity market. Producers submit their coffees if they achieve scores above 84 points on the SCAA cupping form thereby placing them in the high realm of speciality⁷.

The placement of such coffees at the top of this market-focused model is somewhat misleading. The CoE model works less as a market distinguisher and more as a communicator that locates and defines taste. In this sense it is not that the coffee is necessarily 'high quality' or speciality, although they do meet indicators on these scales,

⁶ Field notes, Coffee Professional, April 2009.

⁷ Field notes (email), Coffee Professional, 7 May 2009.

but rather that it is exceptional and exhibits unusual attributes. It is these attributes that achieve high prices and then in response they are considered to be a ‘quality’ product; one given extensive concern in its productive network and requiring attention in its roast and preparation; a dynamic product of qualification and requalification (Callon *et al.*, 2005). The market then indicates it as a speciality item; an item with limited supply but high desire value. The relation between taste, quality and the speciality market is the subject of the next chapter. It is the figuration of excellent and exceptional taste, and the responsiveness of both consumers and producers to figurations of taste to which this chapter turns.

Taste as an emergent property of coffee across both producer or consumer spaces points to, as Bennett (2009) suggests, an assemblage of human and nonhuman participants with agency. This is an “ontologically diverse range of actants of vital materialities of various sorts”, ranging across microbes, metabolism, bodies, senses, cultural artefacts and moral sensibilities (Bennett quoted in Khan, 2009: 92). In such an assemblage, each actor “can express its agentic capacity within a specific configuration of other [actors] each itself an effect of the interactions between the multiple [actors] internal to *it*”⁸ (Bennett, 2007: 134). Coffee becomes active and creative rather than passive recipient of human choice, therefore agency is a “force distributed across multiple, overlapping bodies, disseminated in degrees – rather than the capacity of a unitary subject of consciousness” (Bennett, 2007: 134). Coffee induces and produces effects that are both physical and sensory. The body metabolises and makes use of the incoming caffeine, for example, as well as designating the areas on the tongue that produce certain taste experiences, among other chemical and physical compositions (Latour, 2004a). Coffee exhibits or extends sweetness or acidity,

⁸ Original brackets removed.

the flavours internal to it and the result of conditions of growth, and responds to manipulations (human, climate, and so on) with varying tastes in the cup.

Moreover, bodily responses happen in conjunction with public and social associations. Taste is configured in relation to temporal-spatial location, i.e. that coffee tastes chocolaty is related to the tongue and its sweetness but also assumes everyone knows what chocolate tastes like, as well as in response to the sometimes moral sensibility of what counts as ‘good’ and desirable (Bennett, 2007). Mol (2008) makes this point in noting that eating and appreciating apples, for example, is a physical matter but it is also social and historical. Her geographical location through years of apple enjoyment as well as her political attachments affect both her desire and taste for apples *and* for certain *types* of apples⁹. There is a lot of activity going on across so many different physical and emotional suggestions, materialities and microbes. Coffee ingested and digested supplies a burst of caffeinated energy that decreases over time leaving the body and brain craving more; it literally animates the body with “a certain pleasurable energy or vitality” (Bennett quoted in Khan, 2009: 103) and that vitality is multiplied by the “not-quite materialities of perception, belief, memory, meaning” (Bennett, 2007: 140). Taste is more than the body’s ability to perceive and then to create meaning from the interaction with an object (cf Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2002), it is generative of affective energy that will have multiple unintended effects inside and outside of the body.

⁹ Mol (2008) argues that growing up she did not like green apples. The green apples available to her were grown in Chile during the Pinochet regime. The distaste for the Chilean dictator manifested in disliking the taste of the apple.

Here taste is more than a matter of class and distinction (Bourdieu, 1979/1984); it is not chosen for its value based on a predisposition to objects with pre-established values¹⁰. It is, however, a highly technical activity that must be learned over time thereby establishing a distinction between those who know and those who do not know how to taste. Roseberry (1996) charts the growth of the speciality industry in the United States through a historical trajectory wherein marketers and traders shape a person's ability to taste and the 'freedom' to choose. Marketers created this segment of the market, he argues, by targeting specific sectors of the consuming population along class and generational lines (771). In this rendering it is the agency of humans who guide and shape the industry to attend to specific issues, like declining prices, for example, and humans extend taste. In the assemblage of coffee as experience as I expand it here, taste is not pre-established, although class and social life inform and frame one's choices. While taste may enrol particular agents, its potential does not preclude nor require a particular segment of the market even while, of course, retailers would use this as a market device.

As a reflexive activity, taste here produces various attachments that transform the objects and the taster. It is an interrogative position between oneself and the object of taste.

Hennion and Teil (Hennion, 2007; Teil and Hennion, 2004) make the compelling argument that taste is a situated activity; taste only comes to be in the act of tasting itself,

in the gestures that allow it, in the know-how that accompanies it, in the supports sought (in other people, or in guides and reviews), in the tiny ongoing adjustments that lay it out and favour its felicity and reproducibility – it is on the basis of all these responses that objects return to those who take an interest in them (Hennion, 2007: 101).

¹⁰ For approaches to reading power and class in relation to taste and the travelling of food (cultivation practices and food products) see (Mintz, 1985). In particular relation to coffee and class see (Roseberry, 1996).

The inventive activity of producers discussed in chapter five, then, is about producing 'better' coffee; paying close attention to cultivation and processing focuses on achieving good taste. The producers come to imagine the desires of the consumer in activities of production; multiple acts of tasting among differently situated tasters provide a continuous responsiveness to consumer desire in areas of production. In this way, taste is not the end point, not the achievement, but rather the proliferation and multiplication of possibility; the evolving process of invention.

To talk about things is not to stop them – taste does the opposite, ceaselessly; it revives their tendency to proliferate, to bring new differences to light and, confronting them, new sensibilities. [...] Tastes never cease to be discussed, not to close mouths but to open them: precisely because they pass through a multitude of intermediary devices, supports, surroundings, because they require skills, knowledge, tools, and in the end they depend on responses, effects, the appreciation or the measurement of which cannot simply be presumed (Hennion *et al.*, 2005: 672).

Coffee and its insides come alive in and through the act of tasting as do the tasters' body and sentiments, passions and desires. Tasters produce, reinforce and elaborate what determines taste; not external notions through which one situates desirable attributes onto a passive object (Hennion, 2007: 102). In this understanding, the location of the taster is important only insofar as it situates particular associations, cultural artefacts or other thoughts, symbols, hopes and matter (Bennett, 2007: 140). What one hopes to achieve in entering this world of taste is a fluid sense of possibility, openness to what may come, and new skills, sentiments and experiences.

In accessing this realm one finds taste as an activity with a history and a more-or-less defined set of techniques that one can gradually acquire with practice (Hennion, 2005; Mol, 2008) and that changes with participation. It develops coffee as animated and mobile, an active agent alongside and inside human and nonhuman activity; a performance

framed by devices and communities but open to overflowing and re-formation in its disciplining of the taster (Schaffer, 1988). Elements are temporary and unstable; they translate across times and spaces and change, gain clarification, and re-form through amateurs' trials and experiences (Hennion, 2005; Schaffer, 2005). To communicate this approach as some coffee professionals hope to do, the techniques must be extended to the public. Rather than daily coffee drinkers, consumers become 'amateur tasters'; conscious coffee drinkers with a defined set of skills and techniques, public trials and shared (Schaffer, 1988; 2005). One requires the technique to produce the effects so that their conception can change (Becker, 1963: 47). As this multiplies over time and spaces, more amateurs might become experts, or at least knowledgeable participants as standards develop, a common language evolves, trials form and re-form both measures of taste and the taster across time and space. The issue of taste also raises the problem of how one replicates forms of measurement at a distance and how one might transfer the skills to engage in tasting (Latour, 1993).

In this chapter I argue that there is a movement of bodies and affect across geographical spaces as the frame and boundaries for what counts as 'good' taste evolves and as dedicated professionals extend coffee knowledges. Through this movement, producing country professionals are finding new ways to interact with and find value in their coffee. It is nurturing a growing group of independent traders and roasters searching the world for the finest beans and most interesting tastes and a coffee culture of knowledgeable baristas committed to 'pulling' the best tasting cup. Rather than a passive object transported through the commodity network, coffee becomes a material conveyor of the informational and geographical environments in which it moves. Although coffee continues to be a thing through which people make money and the commodity exchange thrives on the ability for

particular actors to maximise profit sometimes at the peril of the millions of coffee producers in the world, turning our attention to the taste of coffee suggests something appealing and potentially politically and ethically provoking. It renders the space of production open to the machinations of taste more than one might assume and connects seemingly separate producers and consumers through desire, passion, and experience and crucially the coffee itself.

Human and nonhuman actors make up the assemblage of taste. No actor is restricted to any particular geographical space; mediations and influences emerge through and are informed by location and other associations. As Bennett considers the matter of commodities, “If things that we had previously considered to be but the passive context for our activity are themselves mobile, vital matter, then the world becomes so much more interesting” (Bennett, 2001: 112). This chapter delves into the world of taste as a mobile communication device that asserts the importance of vital materials in coffees assemblages to create new congregations of affect and effect across the coffee world, crucially extending the boundaries of ethical activity through taste.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the devices, techniques and measurements of coffee taste. Learning the figurations of taste allow anyone, anywhere (should they be interested) to engage with coffee as a conscious drinker and to find ways to experience coffee beyond its caffeinated requirements. I then move to situated encounters with coffee tasting. I describe my experiences of becoming an amateur taster and how experiences build upon one another even as they are temporary and unstable information. Following this, I detail a training program for producer country professionals in Central America as a way to illustrate how producers come to imagine consumer desire in their daily

cultivations and preparations of coffee. The chapter further argues that as producers enter into this area of 'good' coffee they too become part of the assemblage of taste and their locations and associations inform and change taste. As such, producers extend their ethical commitment through and with good coffee¹¹.

6.2 Taste

At the counter of a coffee roasters and café in London a customer can choose coffees from different countries, read about the farm origin and speak to the barista about the coffee's flavours and roast. Baristas offer samples to inquisitive customers. S/he makes a small filter coffee by the 'pour-over' method using a single filter with an exact amount of burr-ground-for-filter-coffee¹² perched over a small cup and pours boiled water slowly over. Once prepared they pour the steaming coffee into a cup and back again, repeating the process a number of times before finally handing over a small amount of the fresh drink for the customer at a temperature to 'taste'. Even better, they will make two different coffees for comparison. The customer stands and sips, rolls it around in the mouth, swallows, and discusses the specific attributes of the coffee with the attentive barista. This is one informal example of coffee cupping. It is this type of public display of coffee tasting that is creating and expanding interest in measures of taste. This section details tasting specifications; those mechanisms, technologies and procedures that frame the space of coffee taste.

Rather than simply the consistent homogenous 'coffee' taste so many individuals attach to the feeling of waking up, the hope in such ad hoc cupping experiments is that a customer

¹¹ See Osborne (1998).

¹² Coffee professionals promoting the attributes of 'good' coffee preparation prefer burr grinders to less expensive blade grinders. Burr grinders consist of two conical ceramic grinders that grind rather than cut the coffee and produce an even and reproducible grind.

might be able to taste hints of chocolate, berries, bergamot, spices and other distinctive combinations. In this niche sector, coffee tasters relate coffee's attributes to its terroir, its unique expression of taste as indicative of the soil, the bean and the environment in which it grows. For example, in places like Indonesia where tobacco and coffee grow side by side, these coffees convey a 'tobacco-y undertone'. Thus the coffee's attributes are the result of all of the earlier nodes on the network; country of origin, decisions and agricultural techniques, processing, transporting, storing, roasting and preparing the coffee. In recognising its taste, the coffee becomes an association of all of its prior connections. It is "enhanced and enriched" by its informational and material content, its histories and geographies (Barry, 2005a: 59). Through the practice of cupping, coffee becomes "richer and richer in information" (Barry, 2005a: 53), not only the information about origins and farmer, but also in the cup when the taste corresponds to particular understandings of processing or roast, for example. Consumers submit to coffee's complexity and agree to become a 'conscious coffee drinker'¹³. In this rendering there is not a clear dividing line between body and cognition; one imagines that the various nodes in the network are in the cup.

Such a focus on coffee's taste as unique and exceptional suggests that we pay attention to daily activities and objects. The world holds inspiration and affective potential and inspires deep and powerful attachments if one focuses on the everyday and recognises the enchantment found in the simple act of noticing,

You notice new colors, discern details previously ignored, hear extraordinary sounds, as familiar landscapes of sense sharpen and intensify. The world comes alive as a collection of singularities. Enchantment includes, then, a condition of exhilaration or acute sensory activity. To be simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by

¹³ Field notes, coffee professionals (many) at the SCAE conference, June 2008.

sense, to be both caught up and carried away – enchantment is marked by this odd combination of somatic effects (Bennett, 2001: 5).

This swirl of sensory response happens when the drinker sharpens her/his senses to the potential joy in each encounter with things that did not seem to hold affective potential. There is a growing community of professionals seeking just such an enchanted encounter with coffee. They are passionate and motivated by the skill required to craft the perfect cup and seek spaces in which they can share the commitment (Sennett, 2008). They have sometimes achieved the furthest extent of sensory excitement where, as many professional cuppers will suggest, they have ‘seen god in a (coffee/espresso) cup’¹⁴. A ‘god in a cup’ experience can happen even after long established cuppers have tasted thousands of coffees. Suddenly one stands out; one “hits the spot”¹⁵. These cuppers seek to bring a ‘god in a cup’ experience to the average coffee drinker and to guide them to realise that coffee can, “taste great”¹⁶. In this moment coffee becomes more than just a purveyor of caffeine; it becomes smooth, rich, complex, bursting with definitive and nameable flavours; it becomes multiple. It is multiple even if it appears contained as a single thing (a bean, one cup full) as its interiority is co-extensive rather than in opposition to its exteriority; formed of all of the constituents, present, past and imagined future, that combine to become taste. One coffee professional suggests that to acquire these coffees one should, “let taste be your guide”¹⁷. Rather than a focus on the market considerations that indicate a coffee’s position as speciality or high-grade speciality, it is the various acts of cultivation, processing, roasting and preparation that bring out the hidden flavours in the

¹⁴ There is a recent increase in the number of coffee buyers seeking exceptional tastes and willing to travel most of the year to discover hidden treasures (unknown coffees). Of course this purchasing model has its limitations, but it is rather the passionate and committed approach to seeking coffee, working with producers and creating unique experiences for coffee drinkers that suggests something new. One coffee professional suggested to me at an early point in the research that once you enter the world of coffee taste you fall in love and never leave. See Weissman (2008) & Sennett (2008).

¹⁵ Field notes, coffee cupper, October 2006.

¹⁶ Field notes, coffee cupper, October 2006.

¹⁷ Field notes, coffee professional, April 2009.

coffee. These attachments are located in the sensation and affect between the objects and tasters and rely on learning techniques to bring about taste.

The ability to sharpen the tongue and focus the mind on the complexity of taste experiences is a process of learning the specific techniques to ‘cup’ coffees. In countries where roaster and barista cultures are flourishing, like the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, many are holding regular open cupping sessions to teach the public how to taste. Coffee professionals mimic or modify the CoE indicators of taste through cupping forms and cupping sessions and even in informal moments where an expert suggests to a consumer that s/he stop and taste. The change from coffee as supplier of caffeine to one with multiple taste requires simply a pause, a hesitation before the coffee slips down the throat. In this hesitation one becomes an amateur taster; open to an interrogation of both oneself and the coffee (Hennion, 2007), and to the set of devices that negotiate and frame this ritual away from daily coffee consumption to an experience,

It is a framed activity. [...] one drifts lightly away from oneself to ‘enter’ into this activity, which has a past and a space, demarcated by its objects, its other participants, its ways of doing, its locations, its movements, its instructions. This is what at once constrains and produces, obliges attentiveness, involving training and gestures, which makes people, little by little, become *amateurs*, and, [...] which makes [...] a taste to which they become sensitive (Hennion, 2007: 108).

Much relies on disciplining of the body: attention, practice, communication, and commitment all are technologies of taste (Foucault, 1977). More than discipline, whether informal or organised, one shifts from simply drinking coffee to *tasting* coffee and this involves mechanisms, techniques, histories and language that are not always stable.

From industry-specific tastings for market distinctions to small ad-hoc cuppings in roasteries or cafés open to the public, the spaces, activities and techniques of cupping look

similar across both production and consumption-only localities. Cupping requires techniques, exact measurements, style and surroundings and creates a frame to taste, compare, judge and get to know coffee. These establish a community of practice (Amin and Cohendet, 2004; de Laet and Mol, 2000), albeit loose in some instances, that allows the cupper to *experience and communicate* coffee taste. Creating a disciplinary procedure, a how-to of discovering and observing coffee's specific characteristics, allows for similar measurements and consistencies across vastly different localities and subjectivities (Schaffer, 1988: 118). As Becker (1963) notes in his work on becoming a marijuana user, the act of 'getting high' is a series of activities that implicate both the physical bodily response as well as the mental/emotional state and this can only be achieved through the use of proper technique acquired by interaction with other users (47). It is only once one learns the technique, and to understand the language to communicate, that taste can have meaning. Meaning becomes knowable or shareable when coffee professionals deliver such attention and technologies to the public to create a swirl of activity, an interest in the coffee, to develop a set of amateur taster-consumers, who become open to the experience of the complexity in the cup. Thus cupping is a public experiment consisting of "a hybrid world of ritualized performances [...]" (Schaffer, 2005: 307). People learn to desire a 'coffee experience'; the histories and trajectories of the devices used are there but not always obvious.

There is recently a marked rise in collectives of coffee taste recognition: cafés, roasters, programmes, skill development, quality-grader qualifications and competitions to transfer skills and identify exceptional coffees¹⁸. These collectives create communities, framing and imitation that sustain and grow this niche. At the most professional end, for example,

¹⁸ For example, World Cupping Competition held at the World Barista Competition and based on national heats, and the Q-grader qualification, a series of courses and examinations to achieve this distinction.

national barista competitions give way to the World Barista Competition, World Cup Tasting competition and other taste-and-style-specific activities. The skilled barista or taster is a product of practice and imagination but equally the amount of water, its temperature, timing, the precise amount of beans, and the specific grind all contribute to the final taste as do the origins, country flavour profile, blends of coffee and so on. Exceptional or unique coffee does not pre-exist the events that call it into being and name it as such. Taste becomes part of what is done in practice (Mol, 2002); a skill to be learned and an emergent property of its assemblage. A significant section of the coffee trading, buying and consuming public have become passionate supporters of such taste-focused coffee consumption.

In what follows I detail my experience of learning to cup coffees and the transformation from 'regular coffee drinker' to a conscious coffee taster. This illustrates the common set of devices through which a casual drinker becomes an amateur taster and enters into the swirl of activity that is this passionate space of coffee taste (Teil and Hennion, 2004). I then return to the producer training program introduced at the beginning of the chapter. This training session acts as an example of the exchange in knowledge and information about coffee taste and consumer desire among producer country professionals. Tasting skills develop both in consumption and production countries and create new connectivities across geographical divides through the parts that compose coffee's taste.

Amateur taster

The room was quiet, no music or any other sensory distractions except the quiet chatter among the amateur cuppers awaiting setup. There were a number of samples laid out that day. Each sample was a different type, varietal or origin. The samples are a medium

brown and roasting took place within 24 hours of this cupping session. The burr coffee grinder crushes each sample between two ceramic plates to a perfect medium grind. Between grinding different samples they grind a small handful of the new coffee to clean the machine of any coffee from the previous sample. Placing the porcelain cup on the gram scale they measured precisely 12 grams of coffee into each. As the tables are set with the cups of coffee they instruct us to pick up the cups, shake them a little, and deeply smell the ground coffee, usually leaving a dusting on our noses. Once the cuppers have had the chance to smell the fresh grinds, they pour boiled water between 92 and 96 degrees Celsius to the lip of the cup¹⁹. The ratio of coffee to water should be approximately 10 grams to 200ml so someone would have calculated the precise measurements so that when filled to the edge they hold the correct proportion. Cups are organised in groups of three with sample trays above them with green and roasted coffee. Upon filling a tall glass in the centre of the table with the hot water, the cupping begins²⁰.

This is the cupping lab in the London School of Coffee and a course entitled Introduction to Cupping. In our first tasting experience we do a sensory skill test with nine cups of unidentified liquids with low, medium and high intensity mixtures of sweet, sour and salty flavours. We blindly identify each flavour and intensity as a way to sense the distinctions on the tongue: bitter, sweet, sour and salt. They instruct us what we should look for and explain the two flavour wheels (Figure 14), developed by the SCAA, on the wall to guide

¹⁹ Temperature needs to be adjusted to elevation.

²⁰ See detailed account of cupping protocols at: <http://www.scaa.org/PDF/PR%20-%20CUPPING%20PROTOCOLS%20V.21NOV2009A.pdf>

our instincts²¹. We discuss common country profiles and learn about the SCAA cupping form. According to the cupping form, a cupper is looking for a number of things in the cup: fragrance, aroma, the brightness, acidity (sharpness), the flavour (combining acidity, body and aroma) the feel in the mouth, the body and the aftertaste.

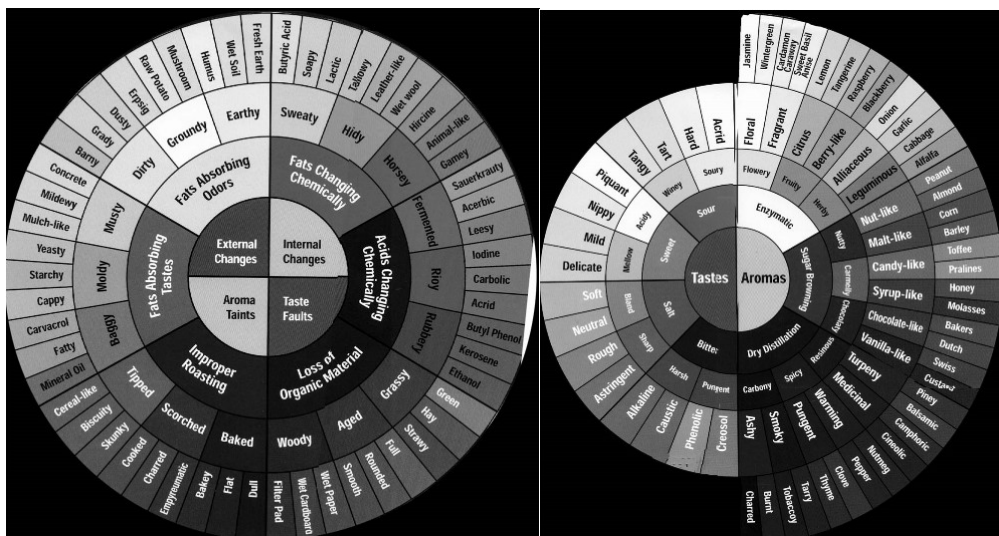


Figure 14: SCAA flavour wheels

Before beginning coffee tasting the instructor takes us through the materials on the table and expected technique. Each aspect of the setup – size of cup, type of grind, temperature of the water and water to coffee ratio in the cup – the instructors prepare with meticulous attention. The coffee steeps in the water for four minutes. A crust, also called the crema, forms at the top of the cup. Using the back of a deeply rounded tablespoon-size cupping

²¹ London School of Cupping, Introduction to Cupping booklet. Cupping protocols are described by SCAA: “The cupping form provides a means of recording important flavour attributes of coffee: fragrance/aroma, flavour, aftertaste, acidity, body, balance, uniformity, clean cup, sweetness, defects [by taste], and overall. The specific flavour attributes are positive scores of quality reflecting a judgement rating by the cupper; Defects are negative scores denoting unpleasant flavour sensations; the overall score is based on the flavour experience of the individual cupper as a personal appraisal. These are rated on a 16-point scale representing levels of quality in quarter point increments between numeric values from 6-9” These add up to 100 points and speciality must score above 80 points.

spoon, we are instructed to break the crust by pushing back from one edge to the other while bending to the cup and inhaling the pungent aroma released by the action. Four stirs are the maximum to bring out the full bouquet keeping the nose close. After breaking the crust the cuppers use two spoons to remove the remaining foam to provide a clean steeping cup.

Now we taste. I dip in the spoon gingerly, slurp the coffee and create the loud sounds associated with bringing air in with the coffee to spray it across the tongue. With a spit into a separate cup, a quick rinse of the spoon in the warm water glass in the middle of the table, I move on to the next sample. Then dip into the next cup and the following one. I return again to those I have already tasted. I look to the wheel to see if I am sensing the right things. I avert my eyes thinking that I should be able to taste it without the guides and I try to clear my mind. I focus closely on the coffee in my mouth, swish it around, try to move it on my tongue to its different 'sections'. Very few of these actions bring about a moment of certainty. I change approach: look for the acidity. Brightness they call it and you feel it on the sides of your tongue. I ask the trainer: "what does it mean, acidity, how do I feel it"? She responds, "it's like tasting something a little sour, it makes you pucker your lips, it is the brightness (or not) of the coffee". I move on. We scribble notes on our cupping forms and, after many tastes of cooling coffee, the cupping ends and we compare notes.

I thought that this Introduction to Cupping course would establish my credentials as an amateur cupper. I am not a total novice when I enter this room, however, and I realise that I have been an amateur taster for some time (Hennion, 2005). I have already participated in coffee cuppings in the UK and Central America. I have become a 'conscious drinker'

long before this and while I find it difficult to recognise particular tastes in the cupping course, I already know the requirements of setting a cupping table, understand much about what I am looking for and have a sense of what I like. I understand the differences of terroir, or country origins and differentiation on the farm.

I once cupped coffee among a group of coffee professionals moving around the table and discussing the particular tastes in the micro-lot-separated coffees from one farm. This was a 'meet the producer' event when an independent coffee trading house in London hosted a producer for buyers to meet and taste his coffee²². I entered the room and the cupping table was already set. The professional cuppers had their spoon in hand ready to cup. They are already talking about what they might find. Take a spoon, they suggest. Take a sip, this is how you do it, this is how you aerate the coffee. I mimicked what the others were doing, down to the loud sounds they made, and concentrated on what was happening in my mouth.

An expert cupper, the world cup tasters champion in 2007 and owner of a very successful roasting company took me through the sensations of the coffee swirling in my mouth. I hear someone say that one coffee tastes like 'bubble gum'. I rush over and dip my spoon in the cup. Yes, I taste bubble gum. I am aware of my status as a novice and I am eager to relate to the others (Becker, 1953). As Hennion (2007) suggests for becoming a taster of wines,

The object also advances, takes its time, unfurls and exhibits itself. If one accepts a casual glass, thinking of other things, then one is not an *amateur*. But if one stops even for a fraction of a second, to observe oneself tasting, the gesture is installed. [...] The instant becomes an

²² This is a common event in independent roasteries and cafés in the UK, North America and Australia. One farmer in Antigua relates the story that he travelled to the US and spoke with a couple who met and fell in love over their mutual admiration of his coffee. Field notes, coffee farmer in Antigua, 26 March 2007.

occasion among others in a course that leans up against past occasions (108).

With each experience my knowledge ‘leans up against’ prior tastings: later I taste in Honduras and El Salvador, many times in Guatemala and again back in London. My tastes change and develop with every experience.

As one coffee professional suggests, through cupping one finds, “[...] the hidden flavours locked mysteriously within the coffee cell walls of a bean just waiting to be teased out by the patient taste hunter” (Instaurator, 2008: 127). The flavours are not so much ‘hidden’ and waiting to be ‘discovered’ but rather come to be in the act of tasting the coffee using the devices associated with this activity. One can learn to taste and to communicate in this niche area by learning the shared language and its frame. Through these mechanisms, the coffee’s taste appears: to experts, to the consuming public, to producers or anyone who takes an interest. Learning to speak and relate the characteristics of coffee creates a point of connection in between; the moment of sensations and the spaces of mediation between the beans and the taster. Thus there is rigorous affective relation between coffee as informed and the cultivated taster, as authorized to verbalise the sensations,

What matters is what happens, what it does, what comes to light, in oneself and in things – and not what one is seeking. It is a question of sensing, of being taken, of feeling. [...] Taste is a making, a ‘making aware of’, and not a simple act of sensing. It is active, but contrary to an action, it is entirely turned towards an availability to what comes. It is an active way of putting oneself in such a state that something may happen to oneself. [...] letting oneself be carried away, overflowing with the surprises that arise through contact with things (Hennion, 2007: 109).

For consumer country coffee professionals and everyday coffee drinkers, this means changing ones relationship to coffee beyond its caffeinated requirements. For producer

country coffee professionals, learning to cup coffee means re-defining their methods of cultivation and processing and to cultivate coffee in relation to consumer desire.

Training

For producer country professionals, learning to cup coffees is somewhat more involved than that suggested by the discussion above. The necessary tools are the same for any cupper, but the set of skills required to support the act of cupping are far more extensive. As discussed, consumer desire and measures of taste are emergent and changing; the result of temporal associations among current devices and communities that shift and change with each interaction. Producers need to understand as many of the parts in the assemblage as possible: the choices made in roasting, for example, or the preparation styles used in different countries. As one coffee professional suggested, “For growers, it is imperative that they learn to taste coffee and have the ability to distinguish between good coffee flavour characteristics and bad ones” (Instaurator, 2008: 78). As growers enter this field of difference they become part of its workings and are transformed by it; an agent among the agentic assemblage.

At the same time, the production of coffee is responsive to taste in multiple and emergent ways. Taste gives back, the object responds, the conditions of cultivation become a science, a craft, and something deeply interconnected with imagining the final cup.

Tasting for producers is generative of various new interactions with the bean. As growers become amateur tasters they create new reflexive attachments and are active in producing new sensations, considerations, language and associations between bean and taster.

Acquiring the skills of tasting therefore acts not as a movement of knowledge, a how-to from taste professionals to unknowing producers but rather the skills and devices, taste and

taster once in the realm of producing countries generate affective energy that has vibrations through the assemblage.

Producers and taste

The IDB and TechnoServe trainings in Central America introduced at the start of the chapter provide one example of producer country professionals developing the skills to experience taste in terms of consumer and buyer desire. Each of the participants works with a farm, cooperative or medium to large *beneficio*. They understand roasting, they know the movements of the commodity market as an abstract set of fluctuating numbers, and they use visual tests and rudimentary cupping to ensure the absence of negative qualities for coffee sold as exchange grade and fine commercial²³. The training programme was explicitly about developing the skills for roasting to bring out a specific taste, the process involved to taste and understanding the market for such coffees. While the market framed the discussion, it was less important than instruction on the tools and techniques of understanding consumer desire and taste. The trainer emphasised the ways in which it was possible to draw the flavour profile from the beans and to communicate this to the buying and consuming public. Through tasting, one puts the productive, mobile and creative history into the cup and brings this material ‘thing’ to life: on the market, on the palette, in the minds and passions of whoever tastes, including producer country professionals. Taste passes through a multitude of mediators and emerges differently with new considerations and associations (Hennion, 2005: 140).

The trainer introduces the programme to the group by making the first important distinction, “We are going to move away from [simply] approving the coffee [as exchange

²³ See chapter seven for a detailed discussion of distinctions between qualities.

grade], to finding the *profile* in the coffee”²⁴. Finding the profile means learning to taste distinctions in the coffee,

The way we [professional tasters and buyers] are looking at coffee is not as mysterious as it seems. It is about the coffee’s taste. [This] is the message you have to send out to people willing to pay for your coffee. I will help you to do that by getting as much information as possible to any buyer. I cannot tell you how important that is. It is simple. This is a cup of coffee from your farm. I am drinking and enjoying it. I want to know who can I call [to find out more about the coffee and get more coffee]? What attention did you give the coffee? What is special about it?²⁵

Differentiating coffees is about getting to know the taste attributes as well as the skills involved to bring these attributes into being; to put them in the cup. This includes the differentiation of beans during the growing process, attention to cultivation inputs, precise processing methods and learning to roast coffee and become open to its sensations. The goal is to get to know the coffee, to become accustomed to the language and to be able to communicate your coffee’s specific desirability to the buyer. The trainer continues,

Because you told me to drink this coffee. I want to know why. I want to know how did you blend this coffee? Is it a single origin [from one country]? Is it single estate [from one farm]? I want to know that. I want attention to detail and I am willing to pay for it. My business is competing against the commercial market. You need to separate your farm into different segments. You have really, really good coffee – me and all of my friends are willing to pay for it. If you don’t tell me that you have it, I can’t buy it²⁶.

This communication suggests both the language required to exchange the immaterial and creates a set of relations within which these attributes obtain meaning.

The training focused on teaching the current measurements of taste and mechanisms of communication,

²⁴ Field notes, Trainer, 26 June 2006.

²⁵ Field notes, Trainer, 26 June 2006.

²⁶ Field notes, Trainer, 27 June 2006.

We are going to specially choose the beans and roast it according to a roasting profile *you* decide. Then we are going to cup taste it and that is how we are going to tell the difference. We are going to learn how to make espresso. [...] We are going to use the SCAA cupping form [...] and the Cup of Excellence form. These are industry standards. We are going to use it for three cupping sessions today and again tomorrow when we are cupping espressos. It is important that you understand the cupping form when we do the cupping today²⁷.

The SCAA cupping form acts as a market distinguisher creating a standard mode of communication in the industry. The CoE form speaks to the unique and exceptional tastes and informs the producers about coffee-like-wine. Learning how to taste feeds back, renders different the relationship to all of the parts of the network including cultivation. In turn, there is better access and knowledge of markets. On the commodity market, as Bennett (2007) suggests, coffee is, “a tool to ‘be taken possession of’, perpetuat[ing] the notion of nonhuman materiality as essentially passive stuff – on one side of an ontological divide between life and matter” (Bennett, 2007: 145). Here, however, the producer comes to ‘know’ coffee through taste and to make choices through this knowledge and acquisition of skills. This is more than the reinvigoration of materials with vital energy as Bennett describes, however, as her vitality sometimes reaches its limits in its circulation as spatial diffusion (cf. Born, 2009). The coffee gains its vitalism *in* the body; both being co-present and immediately observable (or felt). Bennett’s analysis lacks a temporality that requires that the matter becomes more dynamic; not only spatially invigorated by its presence among good tasters, metabolisms or sensibilities, but also constituted temporally by the social histories of the human and nonhuman actors involved. In this sense, the sensibility is not only the momentary encounter and future as a taster but how this both reconvenes and extends attributes of the past. Producers then build a sense of pride in this encounter; affect between the actors (humans, coffee, and so on) are part of the meaningful

²⁷ Field notes, Trainer, 27 June 2006.

exchange²⁸. The extent to which they come to believe this approach to roasting, tasting and selling coffee, relates to conditions of uncertainty, trust and willingness to experiment, all part of the local and historical situatedness of the producers involved.

Consumer desire

In these producer trainings, roasting with attention to the coffee's attributes takes a central role. The trainer suggests, "Before the cupping form can be useful for you, you have to roast the coffee. You taste coffee by the way it was roasted so before the beans can work for you – you must roast them"²⁹. Called 'profile roasting', the method taught in the training requires attention to both the mechanics of the roasting machine and some "experimental spirit" (Instaurator, 2008: 127). Profile or artisanal roasters work the coffee in small batches and with each new batch they taste the coffee, sense its potential, tweak the machine and roast again.

Roasting as an art form is indeed novel. Conventional large roasting facilities use high capacity roasters and a standard temperature/time/drum revolution calculation to create homogenous taste. With little desire to bring out the particular chocolaty notes, spices or subtle flavours, the profile of roasting is quite simple; a mechanical activity. A coffee's readiness is usually suggested by its 'pops' or 'cracks'. In profile roasting, however, the roaster sets the amount of coffee to be roasted, rotation speed of the drum and temperature in relation to the particular flavour profile to accentuate the bean's desirable characteristics. Participants in this training are not profile roasters, as the trainer notes,

²⁸ This reminds me of an interview with a Fairtrade professional in the UK. She mentions how much she enjoyed recent travel to Peru to meet the farmers whose coffee she has been helping to sell in the UK market. She brings with her a package of coffee as it might look on the shelf in the UK for they have no idea what happens to their coffee, what it *looks* like after it leaves their farm. I argue here that taste both creates and extends connectivity.

²⁹ Field notes, Trainer, 26 June 2006.

How many of you turn the roaster on, put the coffee in and go out and have a cigarette? Then you just wait until the first pop comes, sometimes wait until the second pop and empty the roaster. Put on the machine, let it heat up, put the coffee in and go for a walk. After a certain number of minutes, turn it off, doesn't matter what was in it!³⁰

“The most important thing” the trainer continues, “is that you know what you are putting in the roasting machine. The altitude, humidity, varietal, process, all of that affects the roasting profile and the taste”³¹. As tasters and roasters define their skills, they become astute at recognising how the coffee could better achieve sweetness or a clean taste, for example, giving particular attention to knowledge of its conditions of growing and processing. Tasting at this crucial intersection creates opportunities where the coffee itself suggests its requirements and operates as a “joint effort of human and nonhuman elements” (Bennett quoted in Khan, 2009: 94).

Equally a roaster not only considers the best way to draw out the flavours inside of the bean, s/he considers the coffee preparation including blends with other coffees, espresso or filter and other cup values. Preparation is a heterogeneous field with lots of internal differences and differentiation; difficult to grasp from the farms and tasting rooms and open to many interruptions by all sorts of elements between cultivation and consumption. Few growers know how consumers in different countries will buy or prepare their coffees and preparation is different when purchased from a barista or made in one's home. Tastes and preparation styles differ within countries and regions, cause disagreement between baristas who favour particular approaches and machines, and require close and detailed attention. There is usually a distinction made between coffee professionals and espresso

³⁰ Field notes, Trainer, 26 June 2006.

³¹ Field notes, Trainer, 26 June 2006.

professionals; those with knowledge of best practices in relation to their specific area of expertise.

For example, coffees prepared as filter by a trained barista tend to be from a single cooperative, farm or even a specific area on the farm in micro-lots³². Cupping single origin coffees during this training translates relatively simply into what it might taste like after filter preparation, although many would say there is a difference between a trained barista or making coffee at home, type of machine and again all of the considerations internal to the beans. Learning about espresso preparation takes trainees to another level. Espresso shots pulled on a proper machine are subject to nine bars of water pressure rather than a single stream in a filter cup³³. This brings out more flavour of the finely ground beans so requires attention to the deeply situated tastes of the beans. A good barista knows precisely how to grind and pull a perfect espresso in relation to the choice of coffee and the producers need to imagine final preparation while working far away from the final cup. The training, then, only touches on the beginnings of profile roasting, tasting and preparing coffees; there is far more to learn.

On the final day of training the students divide into groups of two to bring together all of the roasting, preparation and taste techniques. The trainer instructs them to choose beans based on varietal, mode of processing, region and relations of cultivation, everything they know about the coffee's origins, to plan a desired roast and then present a final product to the rest of the trainees. He asks that they begin by envisioning a final taste profile and the type of sensation desired: edgy, smooth, chocolaty, bright and so on. Their ultimate

³² When a grower differentiates areas on the farm based on varying tastes or varieties, for example, they can sometimes sell these as micro-lots to independent trading houses or green coffee buyers.

³³ Field notes, SCAE, June 2008

roasted blend will have undergone a series of tastings along the way, resulting in changes to the approach, slight re-calculation of percentages of each bean, more specific roasting as the beans require and a final blend that suits an espresso preparation. They should record their decisions and calculations, mechanisms used on the roaster, and cupping notes. The trainer asks that they choose a name for the blend that reflects personal approach.

Beginning from the final point in espresso making, the group gathers around the espresso machine. The trainer grinds the coffee of one of the groups, fills the porta-filter, tamps the coffee with attention to the perfect amount and pressure. Then attaching it to the machine he pulls the lever, counts exactly 28 seconds³⁴ and the espresso is complete with a final drip to create the perfect crema, the reddish brown cream on top that defines a well pulled espresso³⁵. Unlike single origin coffees, espressos are often a combination of beans and origins³⁶. A perfectly sculpted espresso needs body, some acidity, complexity in the cup and a rich creamy topping. Although many will drink espresso on its own, the coffee blend must remain bold when mixed with hot milk in cappuccinos and lattes in the now common style of espresso consumption³⁷. The trainer asks the group to consider all of these aspects as they taste the espresso. The final drink mediates all of the properties, decisions and activities of the bean throughout the process. Whatever the market conditions, here taste defines a coffee's value.

³⁴ This is a standard extraction time but, as with all of the techniques of coffee, many believe that one decides extraction time based on the roast, blend, and desired output. The techniques described throughout this chapter are even more multiple than I can suggest; they can be scientific, taste based, measured and imagined. Claims to intuition drives many of the precise decisions made and many believe an espresso will never be as good as it could be without the passion of the barista. Of course, accounts of scientific practice recognise that it is not standardised completely but includes a lot of local tacit knowledge (Collins, 1985).

³⁵ For a discussion of the perfect crema see *The Espresso Quest* (2008).

³⁶ This is a matter of great debate in the coffee world. Single origin espressos require more attention to processing meaning that the roaster will visit the producers and work together with them to process the coffee in ways to bring out particular flavour profiles. This is only happening in a few situations. For the most part, roasters pay attention to their blends and roasts but most espresso experts believe this art form is under represented.

³⁷ The popularity of lattes at Starbucks, for example, is a form of preparation considered by some professionals to diminish the potential of espresso's taste.

In concluding the session, the trainer suggests that these professionals might consider a cross-geographical discussion. They could communicate with their buyers by including in the bag of green coffee a piece of paper suggesting desirable roasting profiles, possible blends and the key attributes of the coffee. In this way the roaster in another country can consider the specificities of the producer country professional. The bag of coffee then allows for the movement of beliefs and desires across space and time (Barry, 2009a). In this way, tasting links up times and places (Law and Mol, 2008: 7). The coffee communicates, connects and gives back: one can taste the origins of the coffee and a sense of pride in the cup. The producer's experience, imagination and desires emerge. For producer country professionals, learning the techniques of taste means cultivating and considering coffee in relation to consumer desire. By entering the space of coffee connoisseurship, different actors change the frame and figurations of taste.

6.3 Conclusion

Perhaps the intricate activity of creating espresso provides a useful metaphor for the complicated relations of coffee and its emergent properties. These are not known or knowable prior to its meeting with the taster, the devices of tasting and the associations necessary to build communities of taste both in consumer and producer countries. In the espresso cup, coffee's, "agency is slowly brought to light as the assemblage stabilizes itself through the mutual accommodation of its heterogeneous components" (Bennett, 2007: 138). In particular, an eye on final preparation renders unimportant the market distinctions as noted at the start of the chapter, and to circulate the coffee based on taste; linking up all of the nodes. Circulation relies on the common indicators and ability to communicate across geographical locations and, even more, different senses, cultural artefacts and moral

sensibilities. One coffee professional mentions, “I have had mouldy coffee which when cupped [for market distinction] would be universally rejected but as espresso tastes great”³⁸. He concludes this thought by suggesting, “In the end, it just has to taste great”³⁹.

This is not a simple act of drinking coffee as so much of the world does each morning but rather of learning, training ourselves, to *taste* the coffee. The act of tasting makes the unique activities of cultivation and movement appear in the coffee itself. This derives a certain consciousness of the coffee and, equally, a certain consciousness of ourselves: not only what we like about a specific taste but also what we sense, feel, think, and believe.

We do not just taste it on the bitter, sweet, sour and salty areas of our tongue but we *sense* it in our understandings of its agentic assemblage bringing forth, through ingestion, “the not-quite materialities of perception, belief, memory, meaning” (Bennett, 2007: 140).

Across the many ways in which coffee has agency, always it is the material that explicitly brings out a sense of politics in the times and locations of tasting among communities (Mol, 2002). These communities overflow their frames because they are always emergent properties of human and nonhuman assemblages including microbes, metabolism, bodies and beans. The production of coffee is therefore responsive to taste in subtle but important ways. Coffee’s taste is an emergent property of all of the human and nonhuman agents of the assemblage of coffee across geographical and historical locations.

Becoming a ‘conscious drinker’ opens up to the taste of coffee and the enjoyment of particular tastes. It is more than the action of ingestion, it is a practice. This practice includes a teachable set of skills and devices and a mobile frame where coffee’s taste appears. Such activities cross geographical divides and conventional conditions of

³⁸ Field notes, coffee professional, April 2009.

³⁹ Field notes, coffee professional, April 2009.

possibility: there are multiple connective points in the in-betweens of the coffee network and that are crucially about both the inside and outside of the body and the coffee itself. How one experiences taste is not a belief in its given qualities; that coffee tastes ‘good’ provides an attachment of sensibilities, political and social entanglements and a porous frame through which affective encounters literally enliven the body and mind.

Traders and small roasters will continue to travel the world seeking, speaking about and sharing their understanding of good taste. Producers will continue to engage with these notions and then to wrangle them into new frames that suit locally situated interactions. Follow the bean means to follow the momentary immobilizing encounters where tasting establishes an affective relation between coffee as multiple and tasters as cultivated. In the meetings of devices, tools, ideas, senses, people and beliefs, the process of making coffee’s ‘taste’ appear, “makes real a virtuality, a series of enabling and transforming possibilities” (Grosz, 1995: 134)⁴⁰. One finds in the practices involved in making taste appear the fluid and multiple sense of becoming over being; inviting the notion that taste cannot be known prior to its associations or prior to taking in a big mouthful of hot black coffee.

As standards and techniques of measurement come to reveal taste, they create new valuations, or transform valuations. Taste mediates between the hesitations that might form the seed of invention as discussed in chapter five to infuse the material effects of processing, for example, with a sense of coffee’s possibility. Notions of ‘good’ taste and ways to share that propensity create a market for the distinguishing values of a ‘quality’ product. As such, taste works to mediate body and cognition and extends through the

⁴⁰ More than in the sense of that which is already knowable, or preformed, as Bell (2007) argues.

market by producing new attachments, both tangible and intangible, that come to qualify coffee. Taste comes to be articulated through the attributes of the beans, in the desired blend or the drink a barista will make. Good taste, then, corresponds to and transforms particular qualifications on the coffee on the market. This is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE MARKET FOR TASTE AND ETHICS

*“I was working for a coffee roasting company and I was given a budget to buy coffee and I went down to a few areas: Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama. I had an allowance I could only spend 1.00 or 1.10 a pound. I was tasting some coffees and I was like f*** man these are awesome. And I was meeting these people who are very passionate about growing coffee and wanted to do the right thing to sustain their business and also just to feed their families”¹.*

“Everything in the supply chain is ethical. You can taste ethics in every cup”².

7.1 Introduction

A coffee grower holds a small bag of green coffee he will show to a potential buyer. He describes the varietal and type of coffee and the way he processed and prepared it from inception to green bean. He notes that there are less than 0.1 primary defects and 5-8 secondary defects, an achievement that exceeds the indicators of the Speciality Coffee Association of America (SCAA). The beans are uniform in colour and shape and arranged based on SCAA sorting screen sizes between 15 and 19. Much of this grower’s harvest meets the speciality standards and, with attention to process, sorting, and storage, he can sell his coffee for higher prices than offered on the mainstream commodity market. Here the speciality market pays significantly more than the mainstream so it is worthwhile to “sort out the quality to earn that extra price”³. The aim is to sell the coffee to cafés that privilege high quality beans because they like to serve customers “a good cup of coffee”⁴. The good taste of the coffee in the cup is an obvious, maybe even an obligatory result of the attention afforded in meeting measurements of quality. The hard work of the producer

¹ Field notes, Stumptown representative, 30 April 2007.

² Field notes, Fernando, 14 May 2007.

³ Field notes, AGAIG representative, 26 April 2007.

⁴ Field notes, AGAIG representative, 26 April 2007.

should result in higher profit returns and therefore the ability to invest in mechanisms of production and social requirements like education for their families.

The grower is part of an association of farmers that closely align their quality differentiation with the SCAA's Speciality Coffee indicators. The coffee market is generally organised as a tiered valuation of coffee grades based on the material quality of the beans. In the mainstream industry, visual assessments and basic cupping defines beans suitable for exchange. The absence of negative qualities and that the coffee tastes okay make it exchange grade while rejected coffee is off-grade or triage⁵. With the emergence of the speciality coffee movement over the last twenty years, more emphasis on positive characteristics differentiates coffee from simply exchange grades to fine commercial and speciality. Further distinctions among speciality grade coffees leads to taste profile assessment and high grade specialities like the Cup of Excellence discussed in chapter six. The grade corresponds to achieving a certain number of cupping points on a 100-point scale using visual assessments to find defects, measurement devices like sorting screens and the SCAA's cupping form for taste⁶. It is to the valuation and qualification that allows taste to circulate that this chapter turns and in particular how such qualifications coalesce with ethics as a market device.

⁵ Coffee professionals often keep the low quality coffee in the country of production for local consumption; Field notes, Coffee trainer, June 2006.

⁶ The SCAA sets out a series of protocols for identifying, grading and cupping coffees to determine their speciality status. These protocols include: Green coffee quality; Water for brewing speciality coffee; Cupping protocols; Grading green coffee; and Green coffee colour assessment. Screens are used to sort the beans by size. The screen sizes range between 8 (very small) and 20 (very large). Speciality coffee should be between screens 19 and 15. Defects include deformities caused by pest or other damage. Speciality coffee must have zero primary defects and up to five secondary defects. The distinction depends on the severity of the defect impact on the bean. Graders also consider moisture content, bean size and clean smell of the green coffee before approval.

Operators in the conventional coffee market attend to the basic distinctions of type, cultivar and absence of negative attributes for exchange. With the growth of the speciality coffee movement from the late 1970s in the United States, arguably re-articulating notions of quality that were important before the Second World War, distinctions on the positive taste characteristics of the coffee are becoming increasingly important. Not all of the coffee produced on a grower's land will meet speciality assessment indicators. Variations in bean type (*Arabica* or *Robusta*), cultivar (Bourbon, Pacamara and so on), agricultural and climatic conditions coupled with farm practices and processing produce variable qualities (Daviron and Ponte, 2005). Accessing this niche market requires that the grower and workers differentiate their coffee through focused and deliberate work; a situation different from picking and bagging coffee cherry for sale to the *beneficio* or *coyote* at farm gate⁷.

More recently, the speciality sector is struggling to maintain its privileged position as indicating attention to material quality against brand recognition and mainstreaming in consuming countries. Speciality operators argue that too many mainstream coffees can achieve speciality status thus diluting the original intent. Companies like Starbucks can sell as speciality a particular drink, for example that a latte is a speciality drink in relation to a simple filter cup. Many suggest that these retailers are selling more milk and sweetener than coffee⁸. This creates a misrepresentation in the industry where companies can buy slightly lower grades and call it speciality based on preparation.

⁷*Beneficio* is the productive unit to process coffee and *coyotes* are intermediary buyers. See chapter five for description of types of buying contracts and methods of processing in Guatemala.

⁸ Field notes, coffee trainer, June 2006 and SCAE conference attendants, June 2008.

The tensions created by the mainstreaming of speciality coffee has led to a shift to calling those coffees with exceptional material qualities as quality or high-quality coffees thus allowing them to sell 'quality' rather than necessarily speciality. While the SCAA cupping form and indicators still apply, these coffees circulate by a descriptive analysis and attention to the exact cultivar and origins of the coffee and then equivalent attention to roasting and preparation. Following this move, this chapter uses the term quality to indicate coffees where there is care and attention given to the cultivation practices, processing and other techniques involved in creating beans with positive, or particular, characteristics in the final cup. Traditionally growers could have little understanding of the specifics of taste. How taste might relate to earlier agricultural activities on the farm were not part of this assessment. As chapter six argues in relation to producer trainings, with the emergent quality focus, growers are beginning to understand how farm practices, particular beans, and processing can affect the taste in the cup, allowing them to gain more understanding of consumer desire and to differentiate their coffees to earn higher returns. Thus in this realm of quality there is a move to ensure associations across the network of coffee and more nuanced and rich descriptions as communication devices.

Quality, however, does not just imply one attribute nor can it be assessed in only one way. Daviron and Ponte (2005), using conventions theory, distinguish between three types of quality conventions: material, symbolic and in-person service. They use these distinctions to assess the requirements of actors and techniques at various points in the coffee network. For example, they suggest that the material attributes of beans measured with country or industry specific devices, involve growers more than symbolic quality (reputation, branding, labels) or in-person service (barista, person-to-person taste relation). Analyses like these that entrench separation between those actors and devices labelled producer and

those labelled consumer tend to overlook the more fluid relations and affective accounts in-between and among various nodes in the network (Goodman, 1999).

In the analysis of quality considered here, the taste of the coffee in the cup helps to re-evaluate the activities of coffee cultivation and preparation inducing returns to points in the network to produce different affects. The process is durable and irreversible and also fluid and dispersed in the sense that (re)turns to relations of production lead to new associations moving the beans and intermediaries in always new directions. It is at the moment of tasting, among producer country professionals, prepared for cupping, for café or at home enjoyment that the beans reach temporary stability. Here they stop changing for a moment to produce a taste and affect: responses and reactions in particular times and spaces that mediate the relations across the entire network⁹. This chapter approaches quality in a relational account where the beans give back to those who take an interest in them (Hennion *et al.*, 2005) and as such taste and other measures of value qualify and re-qualify coffee in an economy of qualities across and through seemingly exclusive producer-consumer divides (Callon *et al.*, 2005). Here, taste not only circulates and produces attachments as argued in chapter six; it also gains value on the market, circulates and transforms through the continuous process of (re)qualification (Caliskan and Callon, 2009). Indicators of quality attach to the expectation, and desire for, good taste. In this relation, the material and human assemblages as well as the highly technical activity of tasting inform the object for exchange.

⁹ Preparation for drinking a cup of coffee differs with different locations, methods and actors. Even where conditions of preparation are standardized, the coffee is only ever stable for the moment it enters the cup.

As argued in chapter two, in the economy of qualities consumers participate in the qualification and re-qualification of products as they cooperate in value determination always in relation to the devices of other parts of the assemblage.

In the economy of qualities, competition turns around the attachment of consumers to products whose qualities have progressively been defined with their active participation. The dynamic of reflexive attachment implies consumers who are calculating, that is, capable of perceiving differences and grading them, and who are accompanied and supported in this evaluation and judgement by suppliers and their intermediaries (Callon *et al.*, 2005: 45).

The economy shifts and responds to overflows constituted through taste (by the consumer or by anyone) through innovation and re-calculation (Callon, 1998a; 1998c; 2007). Public cuppings, profile roasting and knowledgeable baristas, as discussed in chapter six, qualify and re-qualify coffees in a relational process between suppliers, intermediaries, consumers and the beans. This points to the interactions of actors and techniques not necessarily only working on one or the other side of the producer-consumer divide but rather across such distinctions (Stassart and Whatmore, 2003). As argued in chapter six, one can find in taste something creative, productive, enchanting, and irreducible to the indicators of quality and grading scales on the market. Along with this affective account, taste is also a market device used by actors across the industry to indicate and communicate measures of quality.

There is another recent move in this area of quality coffee. The focus on the conditions of cultivation, origins, material and grower relations that indicate quality and improve flavour profiles are also consistent with notions of ethics and sustainability¹⁰. Put another way, the mechanisms by which taste is realised are sometimes the same as those that underlie

¹⁰ Murdoch and Marsden (2000) make the argument that the 'quality' turn in food production and consumption is closely linked to nature and the embeddedness of supply chains. In my argument here, the potential for taste to extend ethics through quality means making such linkages explicit through already valued indicators of 'ethics' on the market.

current notions of ethics as social, environmental and economic sustainability. Ethical indicators like attention to the lives of producers and workers, fair pay for dedicated work, consideration of agricultural inputs and environmental outputs, and higher returns for such activities are part of the events that lead to better quality coffee and, as taste is a measure of the coffee's quality, these activities also improve taste¹¹.

The analysis of qualification undertaken here extends Callon *et al*'s (2005) rendering to consider coffee as an informed material (Barry, 2005a). As the coffee moves, it becomes richer and richer in information; its taste and also the numerous material, human, and technical devices that constitute and singularise it as a quality product for exchange. When purchasing coffee, conventional or high quality, the roaster already has some idea of how it will be treated. For example, the large multinational roaster buying a particular quality for its most popular blend would know that the following relations will be mechanic. In the case of purchasing a high quality product, particularly by an independent trader or roaster, there is a more nuanced but equally preconceived idea of its forthcoming transportation, storage, roast and preparation. All of these become extra values circulating in this niche market and are qualified as added value for the quality of the bean. So too are indications of ethical commitment. The notion of taste attaches to ethics to extend the value of the bean. It is not, to be sure, necessarily a conscious decision in the first instance, but the easy conflation cannot be ignored by anyone serious about trading in taste and coffee experience. The bean carries its information and one encounters this through taste rather than through the mediation of information like the label, transparency and systems of audit.

¹¹ In the broader industry these connectivities are already in place in terms of valuation on the market: coffees that achieve special attention as speciality and those that achieve special attention to social, environmental and economic sustainability are all considered 'differentials'. They achieve a premium for a commitment to the beans and communities in whatever form it takes.

There are quality coffee buyers, traders, roasters, and cafés that explicitly make such taste-ethics connections. Variouslly called relationship coffees, Direct Trade¹² or independent trading schemes, these purchasing models necessitate more information and direct knowledge of the originating country, farm, and producer. One trader working in this realm suggests that Fairtrade “helped to put ethics on the map”¹³ but they extend it to new and more developed levels. This is more than the appearance of the grower in Fairtrade tales of origins and ethics (cf. Goodman, 2004), it is a connection to the daily lives and choices that make up the intricacies of the beans. Informational materials are on offer alongside of the display of beans with its origins, name of the farmer, type of roast, and descriptions of the precise taste experience one can expect. Further, these buying models pay attention to the type and profile of the roast to bring out the flavours of the bean and require knowledgeable baristas who not only pull ‘good’ coffee but also communicate its origins. Monmouth Coffee Company in London or Intelligentsia coffee in the US, for example claims to bring a unique taste experience to the coffee consumer in every cup. Equally they consider themselves to be part of a movement that respects the conditions of cultivation and the lives of growers. They consider it ethical to ensure that farmers receive generous returns for their commitment to all of the bits and pieces that go into a quality product. In this sense one might argue that amidst the economization of this industry niche, attaining coffee is increasingly *political* in its approach to expounding the benefits of seeking and creating a quality product (Barry, 2005b). The informational material

¹² Intelligentsia Coffee coined this term but most organizations that create relationships with the producers or producer cooperatives now call this direct trade. Direct trade usually indicates that payment for coffee is wired directly to the producer or cooperative and that exporters and importers play a service role in contracts, transportation and storage but do not dictate the terms of trade. There are coffee professionals who believe that the indicators should become standardised to monitor use of the term. Some suggest these models are too focused on ‘subjective’ notions and a politics of choice. See, for example (Goodman, 2008) and (M. Goodman, 2004).

¹³ Field notes, Coffee trader in London, 2006.

suggesting the desired associations with origins augments the taste in the cup: one drinks their ethics. It is the act of ingesting and sensing the taste of the coffee in the presence of the cultural attachments to fairness and ethics that temporarily crystallises and calls into being the relation of quality, taste and ethics (Bennett, 2007: 144).

This chapter makes the case that through market differentiators, quality, taste and ethics are increasingly associated. Taste and ethics inform and produce each other by sharing the same market indicators that shape a specialised sector of quality coffee. One communicates this economy of qualities in the act of drinking the coffee where tasting good is both a product of the coffee *and* the informational material that often accompanies it; information about the lives of the producers and origins and the way the coffee furthers social, economic and environmental sustainability, referred to here as ethics. The framing of this niche market creates irreversible associations; attachments and directions that producer country professionals can take up and extend in local and specific ways. This is precisely why this argument moves beyond the quality indicator assessments of conventions theory that argue that quality products are linked to nature and the embeddedness of the supply chain. The attributes that constitute a quality product in a growing niche market tend to relay those cultivation activities (small, close attention, considered inputs) of pre-industrial modes of production. As they become valued, the local and situated practices of producers who have not re-aligned production processes with industrialisation become privileged providers in this economy of quality (cf. Murdoch and Marsden, 2000). While the structural underpinnings of the commodity market and the resources and opportunities afforded to growers limit its circulation and potential, the argument proposed here moves beyond the notion that new indications of quality implicate certain producers in material ways that may consider nature and locale as co-produced. I

argue that rather than reinvigorating a previously less valued sector of the economy, producers and professionals in production countries learn about quality and then transform its technologies, devices and meaning to make locally produced attachments have value on the market.

I begin with a short interpretation of the speciality coffee sector, concepts of quality and the trajectory of the mechanisms through which taste, and then ethics, are realised. I then follow with a distinction between entry points to the quality and taste-ethics nexus. Those dealing in ethical or sustainable coffees now seem attuned to situating their product as one achieving quality indicators. At the same time, those seeking quality are keen to suggest that their close relations with growers and attention to detail result in the development of a sustainable bean and improve lives. The chapter then turns to Guatemala to consider the way in which professionals are negotiating, and transforming this space of quality, taste and ethics. Here I extend this to suggest that the relation is not a straightforward flow in response to consumer desire; buyers transport their concern with quality and its techniques, measurements and associations to the practices of cultivation. In doing so, the producers and local buyers, like Fernando, or those discussed in chapter five, transform these associations. Activities in countries of coffee production are constantly mobilising the consumer at the level of production.

7.2 Quality

Although coffee trees look similar across a farmer's field, the actual trees, varietal, soil conditions and access to sunlight or shade cover, among other factors, can differ across even very small areas of agricultural land. Coffee ripens at different speeds affecting the coffee's taste. Despite such differences, when growers sell coffee in the conventional

market as cherry they pick it at the same time to reduce costs, package it into sacks and send it off at farm gate to the *coyote* or the *beneficio*. Thus one bag will have various qualities. Here, the coffee functions as an object for sale, reorganisation in the form of processing, and re-sale with actors paying little attention to the actual coffee or its taste. There is basic quality assessment between *beneficios* and buyers and prices fluctuate in relation to the commodity market.

Chapter five argued that obtaining the tools to process the coffee to green allows growers to gain better control of potential incomes, for example, Family Ceresa's separation of low grade coffee for Nestlé from high-grade coffees for Fernando's Kaffee. This separation leads to higher profit returns. Here I suggest that learning the skills to differentiate coffees from the same farm allows growers to understand both their coffee and the market and to access higher value niches that privilege beans that meet measurements of high quality. The coffee industry tends to refer to the market that prefers *Arabica* beans grown at or above 1,370 metres, Strictly Hard Bean¹⁴, and with attention to agricultural inputs, good processing, sorting and storage as speciality coffee but more recently this is widely referred to as 'quality' coffee.

Differentiation between coffees on the farm and communication between grower, buyer and/or trader is considered critical to achieving higher returns. As the professional coffee trainer suggests during the Central America training program discussed in chapter six, separation of coffee is essential,

Do not blend your good coffees with the bad coffees. [...] If you put gold nuggets in with the bad coffee they are not going to pay more for

¹⁴ See chapter one note 11 for description of nomenclature distinctions between Arabica beans: SHB, HB and Primes.

it. You will get the same price. But if you separate it based on the coffee's merits, then you will achieve a better price¹⁵.

Differentiating requires knowledge of visual and tasting assessments that allow the grower to know the coffee and to relate their processes of cultivation to the final taste profile. They can then sell a particular coffee to a buyer seeking something special. Differentiation based on learning the specialised indicators of quality can be a way out of the conventional commodity market and its often meagre returns. Where the mainstream market stresses visual assessment and basic accept and reject analyses, differentiation requires focus on the taste of the beans.

Cupping coffees to assess quality through taste originally developed as a way to verify that a shipment of coffee met the lowest common denominator of quality acceptability.

Exchange grade (commodity grade) coffees exhibit the absence of negative qualities rather than any outstanding positive qualities; it tastes satisfactory and is free from obvious faults or taints¹⁶. Its main differentiation is from off-grade beans that usually remain in the country of production for local consumption¹⁷. Cupping changed with the creation of the speciality coffee movement in North America. The SCAA led the way in 1982 in response to the post-Second World War decline in the quality of coffee by mainstream roasters (Daviron and Ponte, 2005; Pendergrast, 2000; Roseberry, 1996). With the speciality movement, coffee professionals began to emphasize positive characteristics and to identify attributes that seemed to stand out. Speciality coffees tend to have more acidity, body, flavour and aroma. Over time, flavour wheels and cupping forms became standard modes

¹⁵ Field notes, Coffee trainer, 26 June 2006.

¹⁶ Field notes, Instaurator, June 2008 and 4 April 2009.

¹⁷ Field notes, Coffee professional in the UK, 27 February 2008 also Field notes, Coffee professional in Guatemala June 2006.

of identification and devices of communication¹⁸. Through standards and devices, many developed by the SCAA, taste started to appear and to be named (Hennion *et al.*, 2005: 675). As a market device, taste thus helps to situate the coffee as deserving higher profit returns (Callon *et al.*, 2007).

The SCAA cupping form indicates a 100-point scale for easy comparison and more exact differentiation¹⁹. The cupping form begins with factors pertaining to the bean's type and agriculture including bean size, cultivar, grade and mode of processing as well as the altitude of growth. On the cupping form, a minimum of 70 points indicates exchange grade and 75-80 points is fine commercial grade. Anything below 70 points is triage and off-grades. Those coffees achieving more than 80 points are speciality and, in the basic commodity market they achieve a price differential, a premium for quality, in relation to the NY 'C' market price²⁰. Depending on its constitution, the speciality sector makes up about 15 per cent of coffee exports today.

Distinctions are not simple and with the growing speciality sector and increasing use of the term speciality in the mainstream coffee market, there is some confusion over what constitutes speciality coffee. Roseberry (1996) traces the segmentation of the market to the early 1980s amidst steadily declining rates of consumption since the 1960s. He argues that an advertising agent made the suggestion that coffee professionals, particularly those smaller roasters and buyers who needed to develop new markets to survive, should look to grow the market based on quality, value and image, rather than low price, as these were

¹⁸ Field notes (email), Coffee Professional, 7 May 2009. See figure 14 in chapter six.

¹⁹ Many coffee professionals keen to extend the possibility of coffee taste consider that the SCAA cupping form is fairly rudimentary and prefer to use the Cup of Excellence cupping form. This form is very involved and sometimes confusing. One coffee buyer, Intelligentsia, developed a simple form that draws on the CoE but is easier to use.

²⁰ Detailed description of the SCAA grading and cupping scale in chapter six, note 21.

becoming increasingly important considerations for consumers at that time (ibid. 765).

This view places speciality coffee in positive relation to the post-World War II phenomena in the United States of steadily declining quality and homogenisation of taste sold under multinational brands on supermarket shelves. At the same time, this market also relates to, and draws upon, a much older tradition in the early days of coffee production when buyers traded coffee based on its quality, albeit with different references and in different situations. This was true for Guatemala, as chapter one describes, wherein as early as the late 19th century they had to produce a quality product to compete on the market.

Coffee's quality and its differentiation by beans and particular uses certainly played a role in assessing its worth and its market niches long ago, although many doubted at the time that coffee could trade like wine in terms of locating its exact origins (Roseberry, 1995). Certainly technology and ease of travel now help to make such connections. For example, early coffee houses prided themselves on certain indicators of taste owing in part to smaller amounts of trade and the discerning palate of the colonials and intelligentsia of Europe (Hattox, 1985). The rise of the speciality industry in the 1980s, then, mimics and re-asserts previously valued measures of quality and taste. McCreery (2003), arguably the 'expert' historian on the Guatemalan 'coffee revolution', notes this phenomenon but also gives it little attention. He says, "By the turn of the [20th] century, the country was the world's fourth largest coffee exporter, but its product was so highly regarded in Europe that much of it was marketed under the names of individual fincas" (208)²¹.

²¹ Today, practices like origins stories and terroir are what some consider part of a 'third wave' in coffee. According to this thinking, the first wave spread coffee drinking around the world in its undifferentiated form (cf. Pendergrast, 2000). The second wave brought to light some differentiation in bean type, varietal and altitude marking a distinction in speciality coffee as better than common exchange grade. The third wave focuses on the variability of coffee and its unique taste attributes. Given the history recounted here, those supporting the third wave might want to consider it as a re-wave.

This quality sector was a fast growing market. It had the highest prices and profit margins of the coffee industry throughout the 1980s while at the same time total coffee consumption declined (Roseberry 1996). This congregation of material qualifications does have longstanding value on the market. As such, the quality coffee segment concretised in various performative ways including the formation of the SCAA in 1982 by a group of roasters and retailers to direct and engage with coffee professionals and the market. The SCAA originally developed the speciality sector in North America and other national associations followed much later, like the Speciality Coffee Association in Europe (SCAE). None of the other associations have the organising power of the SCAA who direct much of the speciality and quality industry. Where the development of the early speciality sector in North America tended to be about trust-based mutual exchange, it has suffered in its extension to broader markets (Daviron and Ponte, 2005: 161)²². For example, many think that a retailer selling espresso means that the coffee is speciality, i.e. that preparation as espresso signals a speciality object. Speciality and style of preparation is not the same thing. As one operator suggests, “this might be the result of Starbucks’ focus on an espresso-based menu while promoting their speciality credibility”²³. He continues that Starbucks drowns the coffee “in a bucket of milk” and only 1% of consumers drink straight espresso shots where the attributes of the coffee could be showcased. Speciality then seems more about the consumer-based ideology and attachments to particular drinks and brands than a focus on the cultivation, processing, roast and preparation of high quality beans (cf Bourdieu, 1979/1984). How, then, to create a niche focused on ‘quality’ indicators?

²² Roseberry (1996) notes that the large roasters were not interested in speciality coffee at first until they captured a significant percentage of the market.

²³ Field notes, Instaurator, 4 April 2009.

Attempts to re-focus on the basic components of what makes coffee high quality and then, in this extension, taste great, are leading to producer-country competitions and new sourcing networks that privilege the material qualities of the bean rather than the label of speciality. Even the SCAA is trying to find its way through the mire. One of the original founders of the SCAA who now travels the world teaching producers to cup coffees, suggests that speciality coffee is, “coffee that looks and tastes great”²⁴. This back-to-the-basics return to visual and taste assessments indicates a reassertion of the goals of material quality and, through using taste assessment, a return to areas of production where quality develops.

New approaches in the last decade like relationship coffees and in-country competitions highlight the quality turn and often use the speciality indicators as easy communication devices. The introduction of the Cup of Excellence (CoE) competition in 1999 is an example of another shift in the market. To qualify for the CoE the coffee must first achieve at least 84 points on the SCAA cupping form and then judges award points above this for nuance and complexity in the cup. In chapter six I suggest that in the CoE, the taste of the coffee is more important than its market distinction. Here, where the market re-enters and becomes important to understand the circulation of coffees, the CoE does define a fourth top tier sometimes referred to as the CoE tier²⁵ above that of speciality and creates detailed cupping forms and devices for the specificities of coffee’s quality via its taste to circulate. The winning CoE coffees are auctioned online to competing buyers and can achieve incredibly high prices²⁶.

²⁴ Field notes, Instaurator, 4 April 2009.

²⁵ See figure 12 and 13 in chapter six.

²⁶ In the 2009 Guatemala Cup of Excellence competition, the winning coffee from *Finca El Injerto* sold to the top bidder at \$22.04 per pound. See www.cupofexcellence.org for all results.

The CoE, as well as other national competitions²⁷ and the commitments of small trading houses and roasters who are working in the realm of exceptional taste are forging new price milestones unrelated to the price on the market or the speciality differential. While prices paid on auction for the winning CoE coffees are not sustainable in everyday purchasing habits, buying a CoE coffee creates a certain swirl of expectation and desire as it sits on offer among other excellent coffees in a café. Equally competitions provide a competitive spirit among some of the independent roasters who strive to out bid others at the auction. Often growers of winning coffees gain respect among their neighbours and are proud of their coffee²⁸. Thus these small exceptional lots create new desires with tentacles in all of the spaces through which the coffee travels. One of the exporters in Guatemala notes that there is a recent shift to off-the-market big price contracts in recent years and this is changing coffee, “Higher quality coffees, estate coffees, fancy coffees, and specific varietals. All of those things are garnering big prices. Differentials have always been around but this is new”²⁹. The process of framing and re-framing in this economy of qualities takes the industry and social and technical devices in new directions.

This direction is towards the relation of cultivation and the mechanisms and measurements in countries of production and ensuring origins are part of the distinction of the final cup. A focus on the material attributes of the coffee seems to lead to hands-on relationships between buyer and farmer as they exchange the necessary information to sell and buy differentiated coffees. Water use in irrigation and processing, soil conditions, climate issues, organic waste management, use of pesticides and insecticides and other aspects all

²⁷ Many countries hold internal competitions. They are usually organised by region and then, secondarily, regions compete with each other. This helps to build the quality market as well as to reward producers for attention to cultivation practices towards growing the market for higher value-added products.

²⁸ In Honduras I spent time with the champion of a regional competition. He was proud of his coffee trees and seemed to hold a place of high esteem in his village. A training for producers on methods of cultivation took place on his farm.

²⁹ Field notes, Coffee exporter, 17 May, 2007.

become part of the final bean profile. The activities of workers including their care in maintaining the trees and land, watering and management as well as when and how to pick the coffee are all putting increased focus on worker relationships. For example allowing coffee cherries to achieve full red-purple ripeness before picked from the tree allows the most intense flavour profile and sweetness in the beans. Cherry tends to ripen at intervals even on the same tree; growers less concerned with indicators of taste and measurements of quality will send pickers to one area of the farm one time to strip the trees. Processing takes care of separating the unripe green cherries but does not differentiate further. Achieving maximum bean taste means that the pickers should ideally return multiple times to the tree, removing only those cherries that are perfectly ripe each time. Thus the role of *corteros*, pickers at harvest time, is crucial and results in higher costs of harvest and attention to workers³⁰. All of this coincides with activities considered socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. Thus there is a meeting between those mechanisms that produce taste and those that produce ethics in sourcing models that privilege quality. The next section describes the avenues of combining taste and ethics in sourcing policies by suggesting that the requirements and activities engaged in to produce quality coffee makes farms more sustainable. The close relation between activities that encourage quality and therefore good taste with those that promote the sustainability of farms means that taste extends and expands notions of ethics beyond the codes of sustainable coffees.

7.3 Taste and ethics

Coffee industry operators access the co-existent niches of ethics and taste through quality in a number of ways. Some begin with quality indicators and then bring in the

³⁰ Field notes, coffee trainer, June 2006.

ethics/sustainability while others start from ethics and sustainability and develop quality. For the most part in this section, where I suggest that a model considers quality its meaning is the same as suggesting the coffee tastes good. In what follows I first describe those coffee sourcing models that begin with an ethical impetus and have in recent years extended their message and policies to define quality and taste. Fairtrade products from CaféDirect are an example of such an extension. I further elaborate how commitments to sustainability certifications lend themselves to indicators of quality. Then I invert the direction of these connections to look at Direct Trade and independent speciality coffee models that privilege quality and exceptional taste and then make an argument for a sustainable approach to business. Sustainable coffees make up roughly nine per cent of the total world export while speciality, as mentioned above, accounts for about 15 per cent. To the extent that they overlap, it is difficult to assess which is dominant although sustainability coffees are growing at a relatively high rate, 17 per cent in 2009, still high even though down by half from 2008.

Sustainable coffees taste great

The commodity market considers both speciality coffees and certified coffees as differentials and both achieve a premium above the market price. As there is much overlap between activities that achieve quality and those that achieve sustainable premiums, there has recently been a move to combine sustainability and quality, to varying degrees and with very different goals in mind, to seek even higher profits. Where certified farms, including Utz, RA, CAFE Practices or Fairtrade, are beginning to focus more on quality, one thing seems to be certain, “Familiarity with market demands and the capability to produce a quality product are now *de facto* prerequisites for participation in the

sustainable coffee market (Lyon, 2006b: 379). Thus the skills of quality development discussed in this chapter become necessary for certified farms.

This ethics and quality combination proved a significant challenge for Fairtrade as it has a reputation for not tasting very good³¹. The delivery of a socially conscious product was not initially about great taste and for this reason many accuse Fairtrade of lacking attention to quality³². Certainly Fairtrade's mission is about social responsibility with small farmers and not all small farmers grow, realise that they grow, or can gain access to the resources to attend to quality indicators. As one Fairtrade trader travelling through Guatemala relates, "In general, Fairtrade is a commercial relationship. It has nothing to do with quality. So your quality standards are only as good as your quality control as an importer. Fairtrade, in its formula, has nothing to do with quality"³³. Recently Fairtrade coffee companies changed this focus by adopting the language and common indicators of quality and promoting differentiation on coffee farms. CaféDirect's introduction of an instant coffee named after the altitude at which the coffee grows, indicates attention to its quality as strictly hard bean. More pointedly, a recent advertising campaign slogan reads, "CafeDirect - bringing quality to life". Among certifiers and Fairtraders, the message is to taste the coffee and to realise that coffee can be socially responsible *and* taste great.

One trader, who previously contracted his coffee through Fairtrade channels before becoming dissatisfied with their, "lack of internal ethics"³⁴, is aware of the potential of addressing quality. He helped to form a cooperative of independent coffee traders with

³¹ Multiple field notes and see also Stassart and Whatmore (2003) and Whatmore and Clark (2008).

³² Field notes, Trader in Guatemala 24 March 2007; Trader in UK November 2005; Trader at the SCAE, June 2008.

³³ Field notes, Trader in Guatemala, 24 March 2007.

³⁴ Field notes, Trader in Guatemala, 24 March 2007.

sourcing policies for quality and attention to ethics that are “better than Fairtrade”³⁵. He relates,

The way we do it – with a number of the cooperatives [we buy from] we pay extra money based on the cupping grade on the objective report coming out of the laboratory [..]. Let’s say the standard is a score of 80, if it scores 85 then they get an extra nickel, if it scores 83 they get an extra 3 cents. And that little bit makes a difference. We had one cooperative member say – do you know what one penny means to us? Do you know what that means on a container of coffee? It’s a large amount. So that’s one thing that we do. We put that in for some of the coffee. Here in Guatemala we are paying a minimum of \$1.65. Well, the Fairtrade minimum [including the social premium] when we wrote those contracts was \$1.41. So we are not riding \$1.41 or New York’s price, we are paying more. So they know that they are going to get \$1.65. So that alone gets us a really good crop of coffee³⁶.

Rather than meeting the social and environmental standards that garner a set price and a premium with Fairtrade, these coffee traders allow the quality of the bean to define the price but use as a baseline the Fairtrade market price to take advantage of both market valuations and reputation.

Among commodity traders handling speciality coffee achieving a differential, some use the certifications (Utz Certified or Rainforest Alliance for example) as catalysts for changes to farm management³⁷. One such exporter, head of the gourmet division of a large multinational company with offices in Guatemala, works closely with his producers and believes that the certifications provide a guideline that supports higher quality coffees. He is referring to Utz or Rainforest Alliance rather than Fairtrade as Fairtrade’s fixed price model does not lend itself to the same flexibility as other certifications. The producers he

³⁵ Field notes, Trader in Guatemala, 3 April 2007. For this trader, this means a belief in and commitment to the standards that focus on people and the environment, long term contracts and ensuring and increasing the scope of commitments. He calls himself a ‘fairtrader’ as opposed to an operator of Fairtrade, or in opposition to a form of product sales as a market segment.

³⁶ Field notes, Trader in Guatemala, 24 March 2007.

³⁷ He notes that CAFÉ Practices and Starbucks are different but does not elaborate. As well, he would not consider Fairtrade in this way as it has a fixed price and therefore would not be considered in terms of achieving the market differential.

works with must obtain certification and pay for it themselves so that they will be committed to the work involved. This also allows them to sell to other buyers³⁸.

His relationship with his farmers is extensive. He cups coffees and teaches them to cup, communicates his market knowledge, provides technical assistance to improve agricultural conditions on the farm and works to ensure that they receive a reasonable price differential. He relates,

Producers have an opportunity through certifications to really get things together. Not because they are going to get a premium, but because they are going to work more efficiently and their production costs are going to go down and quality will go up. To me, that is the basic pillar of a certification, for a producer to become efficient and to be able to cope with market differentials because they produce more per hectare. In Guatemala they are not used to having everything organised. They plant here, and then there, they have no order. But if they have order and they have a system from here to 20 years and keeping to that plan, I think that is one of the most important things³⁹.

In this understanding, the long term influence of efficiency rates higher than the insubstantial premium. He suggests that certifications are a fad and farmers, “sell their coffee at only a slightly better price. Slightly”⁴⁰. He notes that the percentage of certified coffee sold as such is far less than that produced indicating, according to many producer country professionals, a substantial lack of consumer desire. This claim reflects the current statistics where there is a substantial difference between the amount of certified coffee that is produced and that which is exported. Production of sustainable coffees in 2009, including Starbucks CAFE Practices, Rainforest Alliance, Utz Certified, Organic, Fairtrade Certified, and 4Cs⁴¹ was 29.5 million 60kg bags⁴². Export of the same

³⁸ He notes that there are certainly many exporters who pay for their farmers to obtain certification so that they will receive the premium. He suggests that, for the most part, these exporters often do not pass on the premium to the farmer.

³⁹ Field notes, Coffee exporter, 17 May, 2007.

⁴⁰ Field notes, Coffee exporter, 17 May 2007.

⁴¹ These are listed in order of the volume exported and all of the certifications noted here are defined in chapter four.

sustainable coffees for 2009 was 9.0 million bags⁴³. One coffee trader ascribes the difference between production and export to certified farmers exporting coffee to customers who are not interested in certification, a point raised in chapter four, as well as some off-grade and triage coffee produced on certified farms but sold as off-grades that do not receive a differential⁴⁴. The farmers that the Guatemalan exporter works with, then, are gambling across the ethics and quality niche markets; relying on each one to infuse and promote the other. This coffee trader believes that if it is a market-inspired fad, it is not the whole concept of certification that is useful but rather taking the thought and value provoking parts. Whether a farm first becomes certified and then begins to distinguish speciality grade from commodity grade or, in reverse, the producer focuses on differentiating lots and then attaches a certification for market appeal, the result is a combination of increased efficiency and effectivity on the farm.

Taste makes sustainable sense

There is a growing group of independent trading houses and roasters who seek exceptional tasting coffee and promote social and environmental ethics through what they consider to be sustainable business models⁴⁵. These are a product of close relationships with the farmers through which a focus on engineering the best taste necessitates good agricultural and working conditions on the farm. One trader in this high-grade sector makes the argument as such,

⁴² This is 22% of the world production average (132.0 million bags).

⁴³ This is 9% of the world exports average.

⁴⁴ All statistics here defined are from Field notes (email), Trader at large firm, 18 December 2009. This trader also suggests that the higher production versus export amounts may also be related to a purposeful drive by Utz Certified to create oversupply to stop farmers from feeling nervous about committing to their label.

⁴⁵ These 'coffee hunters' do often buy from certified farms but they do not seek it out because it is certified. One criticism of the direct trade as ethics model is the lack of an independent auditor to verify that activities are in fact socially or environmentally conscious and that they actually enact the things they say they do.

Our sourcing policy is to reward fairly the grower for production of Speciality Grade coffee with prices substantially above the cost of production and substantially above the internal or external market price for commercial/commodity grade generic or bulk quality coffee. Growers are treated as partners in our venture to bring the finest coffees in the world to the attention of discerning consumers. Mercanta works with growers to ensure that environmental, social, wildlife protection, and water resource conservation issues meet - or exceed - local requirements⁴⁶.

The act of creating sustainable working conditions is, simply, good business.

Many trace the roots of this relationship and taste-focused model to examples like Peet's Coffee originating in California and roasting in-house since 1966 (Daviron and Ponte, 2005). Peet's is an early example of a coffee roaster and retailer that created opportunities for face-to-face encounters based on the taste of the coffee. They were separate from the growth of the definitive 'speciality' sector much later (Roseberry, 1996). Today, there are three un-contested giants of the Direct Trade model all located in the US at the furthest extreme of this approach: Intelligentsia, Counter Culture and Stumptown Coffee Roasters⁴⁷. They travel the world cupping micro-lots and pay far above average speciality prices for exceptional coffees. They profile roast in response to the requirements of the coffee and only allow trained expert baristas to pull coffees for customers in the cafés⁴⁸. They concentrate the same attention to detail at all parts of the coffee network. There are numerous others who mimic the approach, but few who pay such high prices for coffee. Their presence among other actors in this quality market acts as driver for new associative moments; this niche grows and changes as do the actors with variable attention to all of the constituents in the assemblage (Callon and Law, 2005). There is a growing group of

⁴⁶ Field notes, Speciality coffee trader, 4 April 2006.

⁴⁷ These three are known as providing extreme examples of the search for 'good' coffee and working closely with farmers. All have employees who travel extensively in countries of coffee production

⁴⁸ There is a strong and growing barista culture in the US, UK and Australia and it is growing in many other countries, including countries of production.

roasters and traders in the UK like Monmouth Coffee Roasters and Mercanta Coffee Hunters and a strong presence in Australia although these do not meet the same extensive relationships with growers.

Duane Sorenson of Stumptown Coffee only buys what he identifies as exceptional tasting coffees from interested and dedicated producers⁴⁹. This means that they get along, have the common goals of creating excellent coffee and treating everyone and everything involved with care and respect. Stumptown pays far above the average high-grade prices to these producers for such commitment to the beans and in turn they seek ways to invest in the social life of the farmer and her/his community. The question of ethics then is both a business model and a relationship. The needs of producers *and* buyers exchange through the personal interaction. Duane describes one such relation in Rwanda,

In Rwanda right now we are buying coffee from two cooperatives. We are paying a crazy high price. One of the lots we are paying \$4.00 per pound for an 'e-lot' an exceptional micro-lot. We cup through to find it. We are paying on an average about \$2.50 maybe more per pound for their coffee. I was talking to one of the producers – his name is Innocent [...]. He was like, 'man, it would change my life if I had a bicycle'. I said, are you kidding me? He was like 'yeah man, it would change my life if I had a bicycle'. So I went back to Portland with that in mind. And Portland is a really bicycle passionate place [...]. So I threw it up to some of my employees: how can we get bikes out there? So we started a non-profit last year called Bikes to Rwanda. We are sending 400 bicycles to this cooperative and we are raising money to pay for them. We got a loan to pay for them. It is even more work than paying them the best price for their coffee in Rwanda. [...] We bought these brand new bikes. We didn't only do that, they are designed specially – they have a long wheel base and a rack on the back. They can carry 300 pounds of cherry. These bikes are fit to carry coffee cherry so they can get their beans to market⁵⁰.

This is, of course, one example of one cooperative in Rwanda but the broader message of how taste cycles through and returns bicycles is an association of ethics and quality

⁴⁹ Field notes, Stumptown representative, 30 April 2007.

⁵⁰ Field notes, Stumptown representative, 30 April 2007.

derived through a meeting, a collectivity and the energising affect produced, as Tarde imagines this movement, “from soul to soul” (Vargas *et al.*, 2008: 766). Where certifications pre-define the codes of conduct and ethics, some of these quality-seekers respond to a temporary meeting up; possibility found through the connectivity of the coffee itself. This approach seems to be far more locally specific than broad based transnational certification models. At the same time, they still remain within the sometimes limited confines of considerations of ethics according to international definitions and, more importantly, are only available to those producers able to grow coffee that even comes close to current indicators of exceptional quality and good taste.

It is important to note that, along with connecting particular niche areas, these models and the economy of qualities connect mechanisms and people across geographical locations in new ways producing different meanings and attachments (Callon *et al.*, 2005). In general, producer country professionals understand growing, processing and sometimes exporting while those located in consumer countries direct importing, roasting, branding and retail. In the examples detailed above I suggest that where taste and ethics meet is also often the meeting of the human and non-human mechanisms across areas of production and those of consumption (Stassart and Whatmore, 2003). This creates new forms of knowledge and new areas for differently situated actors to re-assemble the constituents of coffee. The process is not only one of qualification in accordance with consumer desire or demand but the ways in which the concern with quality transported to countries of production transforms producers, the coffee, and the technologies of coffee cultivation and sale. The final section of this chapter considers how Guatemalan professionals engage with, imitate and produce new methods of exchange with this current focus on the beans and practices of cultivation. They are gaining an understanding of roasting, branding and tasting and

consumer desire through which they make locally situated choices. For example, roasting and retail are now important considerations and areas of possibility for many coffee professionals located in countries of coffee production, owing to new considerations of quality, taste and ethics.

7.4 Packaged in Guatemala

Guatemala benefits from producing a large percentage of high quality beans and, although coffee professionals do sell some coffee to the mainstream, they often take advantage of the high-quality sector of the network. Building their reputation as growing a quality product is an important part of the Guatemalan coffee industry. Guatemala has an open market for coffee: it does not control price setting and buyer channels, as in the use of national auction systems common to African coffee producing countries⁵¹ and therefore allows entry to all of the differentiating activities and small independent buyers and traders. Guatemala's national producer organisation Anacafé does well to bring attention to its fortunate position as a coffee growing country that can easily meet many of these quality, taste and ethics differentiations. For example, the association between quality, taste and ethics sheds some light on the motivations behind the *Green Book* discussed in chapter four. Where the *Green Book* suggests that Guatemalan coffee is 'good for nature' it is also good for the palate as its micro-climates, high altitude agricultural land and volcanic soil provide the necessary conditions for flavour profile variations across the country. Further the numerous wet mills increase traceability promoting differentiation

⁵¹ Some countries control price setting and sale of coffee through national auctions. Growers bring their coffee to the auction for sale to exporters who then organise a national auction for buyers. Those dealing in speciality coffee tend to argue that auction systems are not generally very good at maintaining separation between lots thus making it very difficult to identify the exact origins of a coffee and then to pay a price commensurate with any added value activities including sustainability measures or attention to high-grade quality and taste indicators. This makes it difficult for a country to gain profits by using these value added sectors but at the same time, this model has been shown to provide better average returns to more coffee farmers thus ensuring better profit distribution.

and close monitoring of beans during processing, sorting and storage. Through the *Green Book* and other market devices, Anacafé markets Guatemalan coffee to those who are seeking good beans and good ethics.

If the favourable growing conditions and (seemingly) accessible market are not enough, many innovative coffee professionals situated in Guatemala are finding different ways to access the economy of qualities. This is most recognisable where they obtain the techniques and mechanisms to roast coffee and package it for sale. Many consider roasting to be a very high value-adding sector of the coffee market; the ability for coffee professionals to obtain roasters and learn this skill keeps more of the profit in Guatemala. Roasting coffee for consumption in faraway spaces encounters a widespread consumer concern that one should roast coffee as close as possible to the time and place of consumption to maximise freshness⁵². This is also a value of profile roasting where many believe that roasting should be in accordance with the desires of particular countries or regions⁵³. Despite such beliefs, obtaining the skills to roast, brand and deliver coffee is growing in popularity as a way to access the more lucrative parts of the supply network.

For many Guatemalan coffee professionals, the excellent taste is an obvious result of conditions of cultivation and attention to increasing quality. They are not necessarily (although they are sometimes) paying attention to the flavours of the bean through profile roasting but they are roasting in smaller batches and with attention to, as the trainer in chapter six suggests, exactly how the coffee is roasted. With smaller quantities than the

⁵² See *The Espresso Quest* (Instaurator, 2008) and *The Coffee Book: Anatomy of an Industry from crop to the last drop* (Luttinger and Dicum, 2006)

⁵³ This is a common consideration and was encountered numerous times throughout field work in both the UK and Latin America and in particular during the training in Latin America and at the SCAE conference in Copenhagen in 2008.

mainstream industry, they can define a local origin story that can be more specific and traceable than those crossing geographical divides like Fairtrade or Direct Trade relationship coffees. In this story almost the entire network of constituents are local to one production country. Operators working on this brand are seeking avenues to sell already roasted coffee inside of the country to restaurants, tourist sites and cafés and in some cases are preparing coffee for export.

Association of seven farmers and Fernando's Kaffee

There are a growing number of producer country professionals finding ways to access taste and ethics in sourcing and selling networks. A producer cooperative focused on ecological processing in San Pedro, a family owned café in Atitlan, and a *finca* owned café in Antigua are all examples of growers who process their own coffee and roast it for sale in their cafés or among the tourist sites and restaurants in Guatemala⁵⁴. Two examples detailed below, the association of farmers As Green as it Gets (AGAIG) and Fernando's Kaffee, both introduced in chapter five, provide good illustrations of these networks. They have extensive knowledge of tourist markets, speciality standards and the dictates of quality that aids them in producing, branding, roasting and selling their coffee in Guatemala and for export.

AGAIG sells some of their coffee as mainstream at break-even prices, but most of their focus is on achieving sales as speciality coffee where profit potential is highest. As introduced at the start of the chapter, the association uses industry-wide speciality standards and learned the tools and language of this niche area in an informed approach to

⁵⁴ Field notes, Beneficio in San Pedro, 14 March 2007; Field notes, Grower/retailer Atitlan, 13 March 2007; Field notes, Colombia Café Antigua, 2 May 2007. All of these are examples of similar models encountered during field work.

accessing this market. A representative reports that coffees for sale in the gourmet market from AGAIG members meet the SCAA size requirements, screens 15-19. Through processing in house the growers control fermentation and manage the coffee's transformation from cherry to green bean. They only allow defect standards of SCAA 0.1 primary and 5-8 secondary defects, significantly above the SCAA speciality qualifications. They roast and taste and, along with visual tests, the members sample cup each other's coffees and they work together to agree quality⁵⁵.

While they will sell much of their coffee as green, AGAIG recently started roasting as a way to improve profits. They have one medium size roaster in the main office site for all of the members to use. Each grower pays a small sum for fuel depending on roasting times. For AGAIG this move from only selling green coffee to including roasted coffee is a form of, "business growth without an increase in the heavy work"⁵⁶. Accessing markets for roasted coffees in Guatemala and to ship overseas is good business sense. Whoever controls the roasting, a representative notes, makes the money, "otherwise you have to convince the world to pay the proper value for your coffee and there has been no indication that this is ever going to happen or really ever has happened"⁵⁷. The proper value of course includes the amount of time, knowledge and expensive inputs required to produce a product that is, for the most part, bought and sold as a commodity with little value. The speciality coffee market and all of the measurements of quality discussed in this chapter provide a way for growers to obtain some reward for extensive and lifelong efforts⁵⁸.

⁵⁵ Field notes, AGAIG representative, 26 April 2007.

⁵⁶ Field notes, AGAIG representative, 26 April 2007.

⁵⁷ Field notes, AGAIG representative, 26 April 2007.

⁵⁸ Field notes, AGAIG farmer, 24 April 2007.

For Fernando of Fernando's Kaffee, the coffee's quality comes first and he is explicit that his is a quality focused business model rather than one that begins from ethics. He understands himself to be working in a niche of the coffee sector that identifies, promotes and pays well for the quality indicators of the coffee. Like the coffee professionals and roasters in chapter six, he considers that each moment of interaction in a coffee's network is crucial to its final form. He obeys strict adherence to his belief in roasting in small batches and within days of serving and keeping coffee in whole beans until the moment of preparation. Unlike those in chapter six devoted to taste profiles, he is less technical, less a subject of the new fancy machines and techniques. He does not believe that through profile roasting one can discover the hidden flavours in the bean. He expects that his sourcing policy, he pays a good price and creates personal relationships with the growers, and his dedication to creating the best product will result in high quality. The good taste of the coffee in the cup is an obvious result of the attention afforded in meeting measurements of quality. The relationships he builds with small farm holders substantiate an ethical supply chain with fair rewards for attention to detail.

Despite only dealing with coffee considered high quality, Fernando has little patience for all of this talk of profile roasting and tasting. He establishes a baseline taste: he roasts in small batches only the beans as established in his buying policies, and he does not consider that the beans would suggest their optimal profile roasting. In fact, he does not usually roast and taste the beans before agreeing to purchase at least a small quantity. He chooses the coffees to buy through a visual assessment. When a grower comes to his café hoping to sell his coffee he should bring a bag of green beans. Fernando will look closely at the sample of green beans in the clear plastic bag offered up by the grower and, as sometimes

happens, will say with certainty, “yes, I can work with this”⁵⁹. No tasting required. If he is happy with the first batches he roasts, he will contract more.

On roasting days Fernando moves about the room with purpose. He roasts the coffee he purchases from local producers in two small roasters in the front of his café. The fire burns below as the drum spins slowly and the coffee crackles inside. The hot air and flecks of coffee parchment not quite cleaned from the green coffee escape the vent filling the air with the sweet smell people often connect to coffee and taking advantage of the sensory marketing device. Equally, Fernando’s style and display of roasting serve his purposes of bringing attention to the entrance to his café.

As the coffee nears finish, he checks the colour by drawing out a sample using the tester spoon in the front of the roaster and then replaces them in through the top, giving it just a little more time before finally releasing the beans into the tray below. His only distinguishing factor is whether the coffee will become medium roast, his signature house blend, or espresso roast, dark and oily⁶⁰ and he bases his timeline on numerous years of roasting and eyeing the finished product⁶¹. He does not step outside in a disinterested way but nor does he believe that profile roasting is an art form. For Fernando, the world of profile roasting, cupping and baristas is an unnecessarily snobby world which is extraneous to the mission of getting high quality locally sourced coffee to bring greater returns to Guatemala (cf. Bourdieu, 1979/1984). Despite his efforts, his customers do not always find his roasting methods impressive. One customer suggests that he burns the

⁵⁹ Field notes, Fernando’s Kaffee, 19 April 2007.

⁶⁰ Coffees for espresso roast for longer, obtaining a dark, oily colour. Fernando uses the same sourced beans for both medium roast and espresso and only differentiates based on the roast and not the different types of coffee required in achieving a perfect espresso (with the perfect crema). See chapter six for more detail.

⁶¹ Fernando first learned to roast his own coffee in a hot air popcorn maker. This experience started his journey into the coffee world. He suggests that I should take home green coffee and roast it myself and in this way I would have this excellent coffee for longer.

coffee and, in using a basic filter coffee machine, he has an incorrect ratio of coffee to water⁶². Another says with a small sneer that, although endlessly searching for well-roasted and prepared great tasting coffee in Antigua, Fernando's is not the place to find such enjoyment. In fact, Fernando's coffee makes him angry⁶³. Moreover, many professionals in the direct trade and high grade quality and taste niche would find his methods unacceptable. Roasting is for trained roasters who highlight the flavour profile of the bean. In this sense, Fernando takes a concern with quality and transforms it to fit his dream of a revolution in Guatemala where more of the profits will remain in the country of origin. He may encounter difficulty when, or if, he succeeds in exporting his coffee to North America. At the same time, many of those on his mailing list may privilege the 'ethics' embedded in his SmarTrade model; what could be more 'ethical', in the sense that Fairtrade has popularised, to buy directly from a Guatemalan who seems to be transparent about where he purchases coffee and his business model? While Fernando has little need for the intricacies of tasting *per se*, his 'quality' coffee tastes good to the ethical consumer.

Even with such affective (dis)orders, the fact that Fernando is able to sell much of his coffee in one pound bags in Antigua as well as his numerous customers sipping a hot cup in his café points to another development. While many of these consumers are tourists or expatriates living in Guatemala and seeking a cup of coffee like they find at home, there is a growing market for higher quality coffees among locals. In Antigua and Guatemala City there is an emerging desire for 'good' coffee. The tourist trade of course fuels the economy of local roasters; airports and tourist cafés are sites of sale and so too are

⁶² I also suggested to him that there are better methods of preparation that would highlight his own special blend. He dismissed the comment.

⁶³ Field notes, American café owner in Antigua, April 2007.

restaurants and cafés catering to young Guatemalan professionals⁶⁴. Beyond this market, Fernando expects to export roasted coffee to consumers in North America and eventually beyond for home consumption. He wants to build his reputation for providing good tasting and ethically sourced products with a strong local flare. Fernando’s model connects all of the parts of the network including his own branding and desire to eventually export his one pound bags. This extends further than most in that it tries to keep so much of the value-added points in the chain inside of Guatemala. Committed to his personal craft and in relation to the expertise required in growing coffee, for him, as for other producer country professionals like the growers of AGAIG, it is this daily commitment to the techniques of coffee that shapes interactions with others (Sennett, 2008). Fernando says this concisely, “Everything in the supply chain is ethical. You can taste ethics in every cup”⁶⁵. AGAIG would not make the argument in the same way; their approach is more practical and considers the growth of knowledge of both quality cultivation and the market will change the lives of growers over the long term. Their focus is always on the market: where the indicators go they will go as it is the only way to achieve a fair price for producing a good product.

7.5 Conclusion

Those located in Guatemala use the circulating notions of ‘quality’ and ‘taste’ to qualify their products amongst other quality or ethical approaches. In Callon *et al’s* (2005) terms they position their coffee to obtain consumer detachment from sustainable certifications to attach to the combined quality-and-ethics indications. For AGAIG, using the current indicators of quality means an intelligent approach to accessing a higher value-added

⁶⁴ In June 2006 I toured a chain of cafés in Guatemala City. Called &café (pronounced ee-café in Spanish) these mimic cafés like Nero or Starbucks which is an unusual but emerging culture in Guatemala. All of the coffee sold in the cafés at the time was Rainforest Alliance certified.

⁶⁵ Field notes, Fernando, 14 May 2007.

sector and obtaining rightful returns for growers. In creating an entirely locally sourced, processed, roasted, prepared or packaged coffee Fernando and AGAIG are using the techniques and devices of this quality sector to extend their own values to achieve greater profits. This is an attempt to attend to the politics of the market and discrepancies in profit distribution although they articulate this message in a non-political way, through notions of quality.

As a representative from AGAIG notes, there is little chance that the market will ever give proper value to the activities of coffee growers. Instead of engaging a fight for the rights of growers, for example, the association finds market ready ways to achieve higher returns and then the members distribute the returns accordingly. This group engages numerous methods to determine and then develop ways to qualify their products. As new opportunities reveal themselves, the members reorganise accordingly. In the other example given in this chapter, Fernando suggests that he might collaborate with any grower willing to do the work required to create a quality product regardless of the size of the farm. His clientele, however, believe that to make the supply network truly ethical he needs to work with small farmers as they are most at risk in the capitalist market. He shapes his brand of ethics with requirements that meet consumer demand drawn from currently circulating notions of fairness even though he explicitly sets his model in opposition to Fairtrade⁶⁶. Expressed as a response to Fairtrade, his model uses many of its terms but does it 'better'; and in particular makes this association by calling it a quality product. In this sense, Fernando works to make explicit the qualification as 'ethical' to create consumer's detachment from Fairtrade and attachment to his coffee (Callon, 1998a;

⁶⁶ Multiple interactions including the first time I spoke to him about what I was doing in Guatemala. Some of this is because he is carving a niche among a tourist based interested in Fairtrade. But equally it is a good marketing approach allowing him to claim space but differentiate against and through this highly visible niche.

Callon *et al.*, 2005) but he does so through notions of 'quality'. In turn, these notions of quality build upon a growing understanding of quality and taste circulating in North America. These are all functional attributes that will provide greater profit returns to stay in Guatemala, his political impetus to the project. His opposition to Fairtrade is a strategic device.

Purveyors of the craft of profile roasting and barista culture located in North America, UK or Australia, the Direct Trade or small independent roasters, for example, may not call what many Guatemalan coffee professionals are doing profile roasting or elaborating exceptional taste. Moreover, academics and operators usually point to the lack of an independent verification system for claims of ethical commitments in the quality-focused sector (Raynolds *et al.*, 2007a). There will always be disagreements, competition and limitations to approaches. Still, the quality-taste-ethics combination currently circulating and evolving from both ethics to taste and from taste to ethics is provoking and important. Rather than the realisation of pre-industrial modes of production now reinvigorated in light of consumer desire for quality products (Murdoch *et al.*, 2000), quality provides an illustration of the fluidity and irreversibility of economic assemblages that, in their material enactments can return higher profits and change traditional relations to the benefit of those often most in need. Read as a process of qualification, the assemblages of these models produce discrepancies and overflows and adjustments make new framings possible (Callon, 1998a). This brings about new attachments and associations and can, and does, move the industry in different directions that are beneficial to many of those involved at various nodes in the massive coffee industry.

Through the devices of traders, roasters, buyers and trainers, quality, taste and ethics are transported to Guatemala and, once there, Guatemalan professionals and producers *transform* the terms for their own sometimes political endeavours. More than appropriating these measures to make them have meaning for producer country actors, as in the struggles around sustainable coffees discussed in chapter four, these professionals infuse the devices enacted here with their own sensibilities, attachments and entrepreneurial spirit. This might be argued to be a political practice articulated in a non-political way where economic knowledges can be a technology of politicisation, “If the objects of economic knowledge are invented, so also they become contested, politicized, transformed” (Barry and Slater, 2005a: 6).

As the identification of taste comes with a message of social and environmental sustainability and other ethical commitments, the meanings are intermingling and co-extensive and brought to consumers in the use of the term quality. This articulates taste and ethics together through the singular defining term of quality, while at the same time operators work to maintain their particular notion of quality against the mainstream term of speciality. The operators of different and intersecting niches implore the drinker to make the associations in the act of first choosing this coffee but then also in its ingestion. The act of drinking (good) coffee comes to have meaning, “by virtue of its operating *in conjunction with other things*” (Bennett, 2004: 354). This conjunction, and how it comes to be, makes the coffee an informed material (Barry, 2005a). More than the qualification of products positioned to obtain consumer attachment at the market place, qualification and re-qualification extend through and with the product itself beyond its purchase, engaging producers and consumers in different and creative ways. The product continues to produce attachments even beyond ingestion as it mingles with the senses and the body’s

metabolism and makes connections not previously expected. One drinks her ethics in every cup: quality coffee is multiple in its ability to transport an ethical message and a particular combination of attributes meaning good taste.

In this formation, one encounters and creates ethical attachments with the coffee itself, its good taste, rather than with the mediations of labels, notions of transparency or systems of audit, or, on the other hand, with mainstream versions of speciality coffee. At the same time, it is the knowledge that such ethical indicators exist that help to frame the experience as 'ethical' for the consumer. The Guatemalan entrepreneurs and the Direct Trade operators demand that both ethics and quality must be experienced through the coffee by extending beyond the brand and label and making meaningful attachments at all orderings through the market. This then links producer and consumer countries (and all of the human and nonhuman actors) in multiple ways; through gifts like bicycles, or coffee produced and packaged in Guatemala and the intricate connectivities that combine to mobilise taste.

Of course, such fluid notions of taste may be difficult to verify and are open to subjective accounts; the growing body of techniques and measurements and travelling trainers go some way to explaining how operators work to standardise the processes and indicators but this may do taste a disservice. Indeed, despite all of the mechanisms engaged to manage certifications, this thesis indicates how difficult it is to truly know or make visible the practices at local and particular sites. At least at the moment, the mechanism of exchange for the quality-taste-ethics nexus connects producers and consumers through sensibility rather than only through institutionalised forms. The ethics slip down the throat as taste and ethics convey together in the material assemblages relayed in the notion of quality.

The scope of action is not necessarily new but tends to reassert, albeit in slightly different ways, the same devices of sustainability-as-ethics-and-politics common to areas of consumption. This is likely why certifications and Fairtrade understand the marketing potential of edging into the realm of quality and taste and the quality purveyors combine ethics in their networks. Becoming a conscious drinker who is aware of taste also means becoming a conscientious drinker; political impetus while enjoying your morning cup.

Chapter eight: Conclusion

The repetitive qualification and re-qualification of products on the market is a reflexive process that involves both cognitive and emotional attachments between consumers and products. These processes infuse the product with different qualifications as values change. In this research, the process of qualification is extended to the daily enactments of cultivation and the skills and techniques that work to reveal taste (Callon, 1998a; Callon *et al.*, 2005; Hennion, 2005). Through an ethnography of assemblages, this thesis traces the orderings of coffee in the practices of cultivation, processing, administration of certifications, characterisation of Guatemalan coffee, and the role of devices to taste. These moments are situated, but they are always mobilising human and nonhuman actors, technologies, mechanisms and ideas that are both local and global and that draw on the past, present and future forecasts.

The earliest motivation for this study was to seek spaces where coffee and ethics meet as a way to make ethical coffee less about its abstractions (labels, widely applicable notions of social and environmental practice) and more about the sensations and feelings, actions and attitudes underlying them (Thrift, 2009). Taste both delimits what constitutes good coffee (including grading, cupping and defect count) and deploys attachments to the coffee that engage sensibilities, metabolisms, beliefs, bodies, politics and economies; those non-representational affective encounters between life and world, material and body (Bennett, 2007). This chapter recalls the main arguments and features of the thesis around three themes: relational ethics, path-dependency and the potential of invention.

I

In recent history, Fairtrade operators have moved from opposition between Fairtrade and non-Fairtrade models towards active engagement with multinational corporations, or ‘less-than-100 percent’ Fairtrade companies, a shift commonly referred to as mainstreaming. Many Fairtrade-ers and academics argue that mainstreaming distances Fairtrade from its foundation in poverty alleviation strategies and politics of solidarity (Raynolds *et al.*, 2007a; Renard, 2003). While the administrations of Fairtrade may be at risk as the prerogatives of the conventional market reorganise ethical connectivities, its empirical trajectory speaks to locally situated modifications as a way to make connectivities endure. This leads to intense competition with other sustainable coffee models.

The research undertaken here is not concerned with assessing whether ethical and sustainable interventions and models are successful in achieving better profits, improving labour or living conditions, or attending to nature in agricultural practice *per se*. This is the subject of a host of other useful studies of Fairtrade and a growing body of literature on forms of sustainable coffees (Bacon, 2005; Fridell, 2007a; Lyon, 2006a; Raynolds *et al.*, 2007b). Rather, this thesis argues that the niche market of ethics, along with a growing focus on quality and taste, circulate, combine and recombine in the transformative processes of qualification. As indicators of ethics or quality come to be valued, they are qualified and able to circulate. Large corporations, institutions, and certifications transform these valuations along with independent coffee buyers and roasters, Guatemalan producers and small entrepreneurs. This research is concerned with tracking what becomes possible in the interventions and interrelations of qualifiers and actors in Guatemala’s coffee as they perform and shape global movements.

One of the difficulties that sustainable coffee models encounter is a tendency to draw upon seemingly ‘universal’ notions or codes of social and environmental well-being. When implemented or practiced in particular situations, these imperatives are abstracted and may have little meaning to the producers. While it is the claim to universality that allows practices to have value on the global market and to endure across producer and consumer spaces, the difficulty of creating meaning poses a challenge to enacting global ideas in local sites. Of course, it is not new that global networks of trade shape and transform social life throughout the world. Power and inequality infuse these connections as well as exploitative relationships and minimal regard for social and natural life (Tsing, 2005). Fairtraders hope that making ethics mainstream will have wider effects on trade in general (making it fair). In doing so, they encounter the difficulty of both universalising to have meaning on the market and needing to localise to have meaning for producers to maintain contracts on both sides of the exchange. This has much to do with the history of the location.

II

Historians of the development of Latin American trade economies suggest that while the demands of creating coffee economies in the late 19th Century were similar – land, labour, and transport – each country employed different methods to attend to these requirements (Roseberry, 1995). The implementation and organisation of the ideas, mechanisms, technologies, administrations and interactions for cultivation as an export commodity is a process of aligning local activities with the circulation of market phenomena. It is through tracking the historical evolution of the coffee market in Guatemala that one finds the local mediations and contestations in relation to the exigencies of the international market. Locations can be the sites of past, present and future and mobilise actors that are both

absent and present, far away and nearby. This view stresses the path dependency of social life as a series of folds that implicate the past in the creation of present and imagined future.

For example, as McCreery (1976) argues, the development of the coffee economy in Guatemala relied upon and created the “under-development” of the rural indigenous populations. It might be better to conceive of under-development as the inability of the indigenous populations to continue as they always had in non-capitalist forms of production and subsistence agriculture. This changed the populations as well as nonhuman nature. Land distribution, economic restructuring, labour relations and so on collide with state sanctioned violence, modes of resistance, religious organising and massive political upheaval (Mitchell, 2000). Small farmers are often disconnected from decision making as large landowners own the means to process coffee and negotiate contracts. Between these actors there are *coyotes* and NGO workers, Fairtrade administrations and cooperatives and travelling coffee roasters and traders seeking exceptional taste. These intermediaries all work to mediate the relations and act as mobile connectors of information, coffee, profits, trust and expectation. Rather than a singular group of small farmers passively affected by low prices in the most recent coffee crisis, one finds multiply situated and variously constituted people and practices.

In a close ethnographic study of Guatemalan coffee, the discontinuities between global renderings and local practices are currents through which inventions form (Barry and Thrift, 2007; Tarde, 1890/1903). Much depends on the creativity and self-organisation of the material world (Bell, 2007; Born, 2009) as well as a figuration of social life that pays attention to the not immediately visible. The approach adopted here follows the

associations and assemblages of coffee as human and nonhuman gatherings not defined by human intention (Latour, 2005b; Ong and Collier, 2005). This type of consideration, as Born (2009) argues, tends to focus too closely on “space, scale and scope” (235). Born suggests tracing associations and aggregations of social life is both spatial and temporal and requires the close attention of both historians and ethnographers. This is found, she continues, in the work of Tarde, who offers a dynamic theory and methodology that allows the temporalities to augment the flat surface of flows, attending to the not immediately observable. Tarde’s concern with the particular, even infinitesimal moments of opposition makes clear the role of history and the need for the detailed attention of the ethnographer to analyse, “not only the elementary structures of process (opposition, imitation, invention and so on), but their cumulative outcome in historical trajectories of variation or transformation [..]” (Ibid., 237). While much of the coffee economy works with a set of compliance standards or regulations for growers and other coffee professional practices and participants meet, mesh and flow in unexpected ways. Creative invention can be heavily dependent on previous ideas.

III

Considered closely, the circulation of ethics, quality and taste as market notions often lead to a politicised, engaged and enthusiastic producer that does not just enact the practices of ethics or quality to achieve a price premium, but engages with them. These emerging forms of coffee cultivation, processing and distribution are only just visible on the margins of the market. This engagement draws on both previous and newly formed attachments and sensibilities. Difficult access to resources or constrained choices related to the power and politics in the country does not always limit the imagination or the ability to access knowledge. Ideas and connectivities come through the processes of framing particular

attributes, and the disentanglement and then entanglement of coffee's arbiters in new and different configurations. These processes change producers but also transform the notions themselves in their meetings with local requirements or sensibilities. Taste, quality and ethics mobilise consumer desire in acts of production and producers affect and change these notions accordingly.

For example, gaining the technologies and knowledge to process coffee from cherry to green allows producers to not only qualify coffee through its economic valuations, but to materially transform the bean. Processing allows the processor more control over the qualities of the coffee and if they are interested, they can experiment, re-try, or do things differently. This flows back through to the conditions of cultivation: when to pick the coffee, how many times to return to the tree for perfect ripeness and so on. All of this has much to do with managing and foreseeing the quality of the bean; its grade, lack of defects, and crucially, the final taste in the cup gains a price premium. The beans become market-ready for high quality buyers but they also manifest the affect, emotion, and beliefs in its taste. In this way, while coffee may be a source of recurring debt and poverty it becomes a lively material and producer of pride, motivation and livelihood. Taste folds the ethical attachments of producers and their histories into the present moment of the coffee. When in the hands of a good taster, taste reveals itself.

IV

As producer country professionals seek entry into the nexus of taste, quality and ethics, the limits of differentiated sectors also come to bear on their potential for achieving higher profits. Just as sustainable coffee certification systems or the ability to produce

exceptional taste profiles are bound by access to resources, location and chance, so too is the easy arrangement that a quality product or taste somehow ensures ethical commitment.

At the same time, although one should not obscure the difficulties involved in methods of profit and wealth distribution, one should equally not take as solid and incontrovertible those things that may be more usefully considered as objects or ideas in relation, subject to repetition and transformation. They may only appear stable because their qualifications have become routine, and have designated some challenges around access, resources and wealth generation. There are always leaky frames and overflows that form the beginning of new exchanges and relations.

The example of Fernando's Kaffee draws together relational ethics, history and inventiveness. Fernando expressed worry that by paying high prices he may become a threat to other coffee actors in the intense coffee-infused environment of Antigua. His anxiety that competitors will want to kill him evokes the histories of violence as well as the importance of emplacement in the Guatemalan economic and political hierarchy. It also infuses his quality-focused 'ethical' model with a revolutionary tone; aware of the dangers he still forges ahead for an economic revolution that echoes previous political revolutions. Fernando politicises the market by working hard to make sure that it is *not done* in a political form. He does not criticise the existing powerful *beneficio* and *finca* owners who encircle Antigua and control much of its coffee sector and he remains gracious to the board members of Anacafé. In fact, he works to make it explicit that as an economic practice, the large *finca* owners can also become involved even though he knows that they will decline such an offer. This revolutionary dream might be just that; it will likely never be fully realised and he will have to scale back his grand visions. Still, it is in

the creation, the invention itself, that one finds relevance and potential. The producers he works with also work with others and they are considering opportunities with different buyers; the notions of quality and ethics transfer and transform.

This is an argument about political possibility; not the re-invention of the entire coffee market, but one that looks to the potentials of performance. It is the producers and small entrepreneurs who are the radicals in this story. As things gain value, circulate and transform they overflow their frames to create new things previously unknown or unexpected. Sustainable coffees and Fairtrade will continue to work to make their implementations have meaning. Quality and high quality traders will seek out exceptional and new tastes. These forms will change and shift, institutionalise or dissolve, but all of these activities will continue to overflow their frames and boundaries when they meet with local practices and attachments.

It is not whether sustainable coffees, quality, direct trade or other models are necessarily 'good' or 'bad', whether they work or not, but what they might produce if allowed to continuously create and re-create. In this sense, capitalism is constantly transforming itself in a non-teleological way; producing new things, engaging different actors, both human and nonhuman in inventive processes. This thesis argued that to consider what is possible, what might become anew, we must look to the micro-political, the local and situated and seek out the not-immediately-observable responses to seemingly disconnected structures of land, labour and capital. Coffee's taste can inspire and provoke beyond its current considerations. It renders the material and those human and nonhuman actors that frame and transform it crucially important and able to produce something new.

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