

Ethical Consumption

A critical introduction

Edited by

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6 Placing alternative consumption

Commodity fetishism in Borough Fine Foods Market, London

Benjamin Coles and Philip Crang

Setting out stalls

It's 6:30am on Saturday morning in Borough Market. Vans and lorries containing the day's foods compete with each other for parking along the streets adjacent to the market halls. They are anxious to have their goods off-loaded before Southwark Council's parking wardens begin writing tickets. Other market vendors are wheeling out display cabinets and unpacking meat lockers that are stored on site. While game animals are on the floor waiting to be hung, one of the workers at Furness, a fishmonger and game seller, is building the stall's display of fish and seafood, propping open a shark's mouth, wrapping an octopus around a piece of driftwood and attaching salmon heads to the sides of the cage. Some vendors are pulling tarps off the wooden boxes and wine casks that make up the 'architecture' of their pitches, while others assemble prefabricated wooden stalls. One vegetable seller is wheeling an old wooden wheelbarrow with wobbly wheels and peeling green paint down the passageway while chatting to traders who write out chalk signs that describe what they are selling and something about where it comes from.

(Field Notes: 16 June 2007)

Ethical consumption does not exist in the abstract. It may invoke ideas of overarching principles in order to challenge the predominant mores of consumer culture, but since it is a form of consumption itself it is, of course, also thoroughly culturally implicated. In this chapter our focus is on a specific facet of this ethical consumer culture: how ethical consumption takes and makes place. This 'cultural geographic' approach emphasizes where ethical consumption happens and the geographical imaginations that it fosters. Here, we illustrate that approach by drawing upon a 'topography' – a piece of place writing – focused on Borough Market in London, England, and based on ethnographic research in the market by one of us, Ben, spread over a little more than two years (Coles 2010). Borough Market is a self-styled 'good' food market located in and among the railway arches near London Bridge Station, next to the South Bank of the River Thames. Energized by the belief that 'everyone has the right to eat well' (see www.boroughmarket.org.uk), Borough Market sells foodstuffs that are positioned as better quality, more ethical, and otherwise 'alternative' to those which are

available from more mainstream retailers such as supermarkets. As a result, Borough Market is prominent within, and in many ways iconic of, a wider trend of contemporary consumer culture marked by the emergence of 'alternative' consumption spaces, and in particular, alternative forms of food consumption. These spaces present themselves as somehow different to, and better than, mainstream retailers and by extension, mainstream systems of commodity provision. Specifically, Borough Market places particular emphasis on matters of provenance, and is thereby positioned within various 'alternative food systems and initiatives' (AFIs) that individually stress specific types of food production/consumption practices and ethics: organic, Fair Trade, local and farm-sourced, among others (Murdoch and Miele 2004; Maye *et al.* 2007).

Our general argument is that the dynamics of place and place-making play a central role in these 'alternative' forms of consumption. More particularly, three concerns animate our approach to ethical consumption. First, we are interested in consumption as a placed activity. Geographers have long argued that place-making is a fundamental human activity, akin to the use of language, and hence central to human endeavours and our relations with each other and non-humans (Sack 2003). More specifically, a welter of writings on retail spaces – from shopping malls and centres, to department stores, supermarkets, and home shopping – has made the case that consumption is both undertaken within and fashioned by distinctive settings (Goss 1993; Falk and Campbell 1997; Miller *et al.* 1998). In turn, consumption has been understood as something more than the purchase of a commodity, involving a range of other relationships with goods (such as browsing, gazing, appraising) and with the other things and people that make up retail space (such as the sociality generated by proximity with these others) (Shields 1992). What is true for consumption in general is true for ethical consumption more particularly.

Second, because consumption operates as a genre of cultural practice manifested through places, it is not a purified activity. It has been widely noted how oppositions between 'alternative' and 'mainstream' consumption are being broken down as alternative consumption discourses are appropriated more widely (Jackson *et al.* 2007), but our argument here is a broader one. Ethical consumption operates in real world settings, outside of sealed realms of both ethical reasoning and economic calculation. The ethics of ethical consumption are thereby entangled with a range of other impulses, and the 'ethical' qualities that such commodities are seen as possessing operate within wider spaces of 'qualification' (Callon *et al.* 2002; Harvey *et al.* 2004). Conceptually, a range of work has framed ethical consumption through the lens of lifestyle in order to explore how concerns with, for example, the well-being of the planet can be conjoined with concerns for the self in alternative consumption discourses (Binkley 2003). More prosaic clues exist as to this entanglement, too. Take, for example, the semantic leakiness around the notion of 'good food'. Food can be made and judged 'good', or 'better' than the industrialized norm, in a number of ways: as ethically good, as enacting improved relations between consumers and other people, living beings and environments; but also as having some premium value, as being 'special'; as

tasting good, as more pleasurable, with better material qualities and sensory affects; and as healthy, as good for us in its effects upon our bodies and minds. Specific manifestations of 'goodness' tend to shuttle across and knit together these meanings. So, for example, organic foods are defined and regulated according to their relations to the land, but in consumption are also encountered through their ingestion, both in claims for organic fresh produce as tasting different and/or better than non-organic equivalents and in evaluations of healthy diets. It is for this reason that we frame this chapter in relation to 'alternative' rather than specifically 'ethical' consumption. To put it somewhat crudely, we are sceptical that a purely ethical consumption operates in cultures and sites of consumption, but instead see it as operating through the production of various kinds of 'alternative' and 'better' spaces and qualities. It is for this reason too that Borough Market intrigues: as a place that represents a different kind of food consumption from that provided by the UK's contemporary norm, the supermarket; or, as one leading market trader expressed the ethos of the market, as a place that is defined as better than 'that supermarket shite'.

Third, this chapter frames ethical consumption in relation to the politics of the commodity form, and specifically in relation to a 'double commodity fetish' (Cook and Crang 1996). A common conception of ethical consumption is as critique of commodity fetishism. Here, the magical, fetishistic qualities of commodities are attributed to their masking of their own origins (Jhally 1990). It is this that produces the commodity form's ability to be seen as the source rather than the outcome of the social production of value. As consumers we usually know little about where the goods we consume come from, of exactly what they are composed, under what conditions they came to be, and how they reached us. This disconnection of consumers from commodity production and provision, it is argued, opens up the space for commodity enchantment through the mythical imaginations of advertising and branding operations. In turn, that enchantment is both opposed to, and troubled by, realistic knowledge of provenance. Thus, famously, Nike's expensive and carefully engineered associations of its brand and products with forces of empowerment and self-realization are punctured in the 'sign wars' and 'culture jamming' that see Nike associated with production conditions in 'The Third World' (Goldman and Papson 1998; Stabile 2000; Peretti with Micheletti 2004).

A reconnection of consumers to commodity origins – framed variously in terms of tracing, discovering, provenance – thus becomes a *leitmotiv* of ethical consumption (Kneafsey *et al.* 2008). Often related to a particular conception of an ethical life as based upon responsibility for the consequences of our actions, such reconnection depends upon knowledge, and more specifically upon geographical knowledge (Sack 1992; see also Chopra and Kundu 2008; Cook *et al.* 2007; Miller 2003). We need to know where commodities come from, and of what and how they are composed, in order to take ethical responsibility for and through our consumption of them. Such a framing of ethical consumption has prompted various critical responses. One has been to question the role of knowledge, at least in terms of informed evaluation by consumers, in ethical action more

generally and ethical consumption in particular. A focus on what consumers know can overlook the importance of other factors in shaping ethical consumption practices, notably individual biographies and wider identifications with ethical values and causes forged outside of consumer cultures (Barnett *et al.* 2005). It also runs the risk of a fixation on individual consumers and their choices rather than collective action or infrastructures of commodity provision and consumption habits (Littler *et al.* 2005; Clarke *et al.* 2007). Another line of critique has been to consider critically what, somewhat inelegantly, might be termed the fetishistic character of the de-fetishization of commodities (Binkley 2008). Here emphasis is put on the rhetorical nature of any unveiling of commodity origins, and the role of ethical marketing discourses in producing material and symbolic use values for ethical commodities (Goodman 2004; Wright 2004; Zick Varul 2008). Mediating such critiques is recognition that geographical knowledge of commodities is always re-presentational. It may be experienced as revelatory, as something previously unknown or unconsidered, but in fact such knowledge is never simply an unveiling, rather a creative performance of reconnection (Cook *et al.* 2000).

Set in Borough Market, London, this chapter explores the role of this particular place in performing an ethics of connected consumption. It does so through two interrelated discussions. First, we focus on the ‘placing’ of consumption in Borough Market. It may seem unremarkable to claim that the things bought and consumed at Borough Market are experienced as coming from Borough Market, but like all retail spaces that location performs a distinctive material semiotic and sensescape, in this case one that ‘places’ alternative foods within distinctive geographical discourses and imaginaries which are not tied to their specific origins and travels. Second, we focus more on the ‘displacements’ of Borough Market. Here our emphasis is less topographic and more topological, as we explore how other places are folded into Borough Market through processes of discovery, material transformation and translation. Together these two themes emphasize the mutual constitution of alternative foods and their geographies.

Placing

The good foods found in Borough Market are encountered not in isolation, but in place. The market itself, constituted by distinctive material textures and sensory experiences, plays an important role in the appreciation of the goods within it. Its location, between and under the railway lines; its architecture; its assortment of material displays, as old wheelbarrows, push carts and tables are used to display produce; the crowds, noise and sense of activity; all of these are vital to the feel and meanings of the market. That sense of place translates into a particular sort of packaging of the goods for sale, a packaging that presents a sense of where these goods are from and hence what qualities they have; a distinctive visual material culture that produces an alternative commodity fetish.

In illustration, let us consider some of Borough Market's bread. Bread at Borough Market is usually sold with some information about its origins: through the deployment of both regulated and unregulated product descriptors (for instance organic, artisanal); and through the provision of more specific information (for instance about flour suppliers or the biography and ethics of a particular baker). However, the appreciation of bread's qualities is recognized to be a more corporeal, less purely cognitive practice. In part this is about the qualities that are there in the consumption of the bread itself: how it looks, smells, tastes. Certainly, getting customers to engage with the bread itself is crucial, as baker Johnny emphasizes:

Samples are important because they show that we're different and better than anyone else. The difference between our products and another's is in the taste. That's where all of those production things we were talking about come through. You can tell a customer about better cropping, organic fertilizer, all of that, but at the end of the day, it's taste that matters to them. That's why they'll spend the extra money and if the taste isn't there, and the quality, then they won't come back. Taste is what this market's all about.

(Personal Interview,
Johnny: 10 February 2007)

But it also involves a wider material array, as the following field note suggests:

I'm with Matt Jones, one of the owners, and head baker, of Flour Power City Bakery. We are in an office above his Bakery near Deptford, in industrial south-east London. Matt produces (in his words) 'good bread . . . rustic, down-to-earth bread using only organic flour, salt, yeast and water. You don't need anything else.' While waiting for Matt to arrive, a receptionist, explaining that I was at a commercial food production site, asked me to sign a form authored by the public health department stating that I didn't have any communicable diseases and hadn't been on a farm. After the interview, we don protective clothing, white jackets and hairnets, and wash our hands before entering Matt's bakery downstairs. A big room with large, commercial ovens, steel work-surfaces, and storage areas for 50kg sacks of flour and other ingredients, the bakery is accessed through a steel door and is separated from the ancillary rooms by interlocking plastic strips. The bakery is very clean (flour not withstanding), and workers, dressed like us, handle finished goods with latex gloves. Finished products are stored in stackable plastic crates, in which they are delivered to various retail spaces. Once reaching Borough market the goods are unloaded and stacked in wicker baskets placed on wooden tables. Handwritten signs label each type of product. The tables stand next to a demonstration bakery, made of reclaimed brick – 'in order to match the buildings across the street' I am told – that houses a bread oven, work surface, mixers, and is topped by windows and countertops through which bakers interact with customers. One of the employees tells me it's a 'demonstration bakery made up to look like an artisan bakery'. A vinyl

laminated sign carries the company's logo and includes an image of a hand-painted chalkboard sign. This sign jars: a sign of a sign, marking a site at which an artisan bakery represents itself as an artisan bakery.

(Field Notes: 20 February 2007)

Wicker, not plastic; wooden tables, not stainless steel; and, to Ben's notable surprise, chalkboard *and* vinyl. The materials staging this display of bread are designed to contribute to its artisanal, rustic quality, and contrast notably with the materials of its safe, hygienic production. Returning to the quotation included in the preceding field note, whilst Matt Jones accurately presents his bread's ingredients as only 'organic flour, salt, yeast and water' it seems that in order to present 'good bread . . . rustic, down-to-earth bread' you do in fact need something else, something more, a 'material practice' (Thrift 2008) that differentiates Borough Market's foods from the industrialized mainstream of the supermarkets.

This material differentiation from supermarkets is not limited to the immediate display of Borough Market's foods. The wider feel of the place matters. Consider, for example, the role of the market's 'climate'. Largely undercover, but not closed off from the elements and the wider environment, the market stages a very different architectural event compared with the British supermarket. In consequence, the rustic product displays of wicker, wood, chalk and board (and so on) constitute not just a themed pastiche but interventions in a distinctively hybrid urban nature.

Drips and puddles abound at Borough Market because its passages, and the stalls themselves, are hosed down with water at the end of each day. Rainwater also collects in the arches and seeps through, a creeping damp from above. Water collects easily in the gutters and near the drains, where it mixes with whatever else is on the floor and nearby streets. These types of organic mixings are as much a part of Borough Market as the goods it sells, and they provide a valuable component to the material culture that brackets their sale. The puddle and small rivulet of what one might call 'water' is disconcerting, especially as it escapes its own space and mixes with mine – I remember a drip that fell into my coffee. The lines between outside and inside, as well as between production and consumption, are blurry at Borough Market. Its surfaces are anything but sterile. Unlike other retail places, there is little attempt at Borough Market to keep these front and back spaces rigidly separate. Rubbish is removed to the back, and outside, but it still manages to seep through to the front, especially if the weather is right. The physical structure of the market is open to these possible encounters. A bread seller tells me that Borough Market is kept scruffy around the edges. The market is designed to feel lived in, real; here, drips happen.

(Field Notes: October 2006)

The market is not, then, a hermetic packaging of its products. It is a theatre within which affects can be produced. This is partly about rhythm and kinaesthetics:

'Borough Market is about movement and activity', according to a bread seller, 'it's real, organic'. The market is also a place that actively engages the senses, as the following field note reflects:

It's lunchtime on a warm Friday in the spring. I'm in the thick of it, trying to shuffle through the throng, getting bashed, bashing, annoying everyone around me as I stick out my elbows to make room for a photo. The air is thick with food smells, filled with the sounds of people, sticky with sweat as bodies collide. I can almost taste the market and feel its excitement.

(Field Notes: 18 May 2007)

In the official narrative of Borough Market, the market is explicitly presented in theatrical terms. As opera singer Kevin Loe elaborates:

There are a number of people who sing at Turnips [one of the market's green grocers]. Most are friends of mine who started after I did. Borough Market is like a theatre. The stallholders are the performers, the customers the audience. People like to come and be part of the show. You'd never get the same kind of exchange in the aisles of a supermarket . . . I have a large voice, it carries far . . . London is a bit of a drab city, but the market brings it to life.

(Kevin Loe, cited in Dean *et al.* 2006: 45)

Borough Market is also a place of touches. These textures and sensations are experienced closer to the body than the other senses, and as a mode of active sensing touching helps to shape the market's economy. Whilst in some instances touching can impinge upon the flow of capital within the market, as when one feels that there are too many people close to you and so you need to leave, or when one judges that a fish is too squishy to be fresh, most of these haptic sensations reproduce the market as a space of alternative consumption. Staging encounters, prompting events, mediating various kinds of touch between subjects and objects, are necessarily imprecise, however. These material, affective practices provide forces that energize this space of consumption, but the results are not pre-determined, and are sometimes elusive. In one of his favourite anecdotes, illustrating his wider sense that the market has become too much of 'an experience' and too little about sales, wine and French rural food merchant Christoph remarks that:

This place has gotten out of hand. We used to have samples out because that's how we sold our products . . . We let customers taste the difference, you know taste before they buy. But now, tourists come here just to eat. They don't buy, just walk around eating free samples . . . and they expect it. I was talking to a customer once, and had my sandwich sort of behind the till. I turned around and found someone eating it, telling me how good it was, my lunch!

(Personal Interview,
Christoph: 27 September 2007)

More enigmatically, sometimes something is happening, some sort of 'ordinary affect' is being relayed (Stewart 2007), but it is not certain what:

I'm watching a family. Their child, a toddler, reaches out to touch the fur of a dead rabbit hanging from one of the cages. Mom rushes over to stop him and says something I can't hear. She turns back to dad. The toddler runs back, this time going after a deer dripping blood from where the head used to be. Mom rushes over again to stop him, dragging the boy off by the arm. Again says something I can't hear. They all walk away, Mom has her child by the arm, the boy keeps looking back towards the dead animals.

(Field Notes: January 2007)

In conclusion, the ethical consumption done at Borough Market does not operate within 'an intellectualized and abstract system of knowledge', but is 'a practical-moral and contextually specific activity' (Miller *et al.* 1998: 6). Goods are encountered and appreciated in place. Place is central to the aesthetics of alternative consumption (Murdoch and Miele 2004). In this particular place, that involves in part an extended geography of 'packaging', where the material fabric of the market – constituted across scales ranging from signage, to stalls, to architecture, to forms of sociality, to location – is experienced as surrounding commodities, adding layers to them, framing how we view them, providing additional 'knowledge' about them. Indeed, in this sense Borough Market could be seen as akin to a themed environment, a place that participates in the sign-economy of the alternative and ethical, helping to constitute the senses of heritage, rurality, urbanity and so forth that matter to alternative cultures of consumption. However, as we've gestured towards, the market could also be viewed in more theatrical, performative terms, as a geography of encounter and mediation of subject-object relations. In the market people and things touch each other. In that vein, it is the character of the mediation between people and things that is crucial to the experienced 'alternative' qualities of market consumption. Borough Market, for example, performs its foods as more 'authentic' and 'real', as having simpler, more natural qualities, through the sense of their more direct, less distanced presence. If Borough Market 'packages' its foods, this is not the supermarket's material culture of product packaging, but an environmental staging, a performing of product through the scenography and direction of a theatrical place.

Displacing

Using the case of Borough Market we have argued, then, that alternative consumption involves a differentiation from mainstream consumption, and that retail places play an important role in such differentiation. At Borough Market, the ethical qualities of its foods are entangled with, and somewhat swamped by, a wider staging of the market's qualities, a broader sense of place. Borough

Market is not therefore simply a mask, veiling the true origins of the foods sold within it by confining consumers' geographical imaginations to this bounded place, for the market's qualities include a sense of connection to wider worlds of food production. Borough Market presents itself, and consumption within it, as having a more 'extroverted sense of place' (Massey 1991), in which its own distinctiveness as a place of consumption emerges from its relations with other places, especially of food production. Thus other places are folded into Borough Market. Consumption in Borough Market is constituted in the here and now through senses of the there and then. Its assembled quality, its 'intersection of numerous actor-networks' (Miller *et al.* 1998: 6), is not simply hidden, but creatively presented. In that sense, the market not only places ethical consumption in a particular setting, but also helps to constitute its 'displaced' quality, by which we mean its reach beyond the parochial, its sense of the movements of things and people that bring it into being (Crang 1996). We now turn more directly to what we might call these 'aesthetics of displacement'.

We have already alluded to a number of ways and material forms through which other places are folded into this particular site on London's South Bank. First, Borough Market's foods are often cast as not just from but of various other places, their distinctive qualities related to their geographical origins and 'terroirs', whether these are legally recognized as 'geographical indications' or not (for wider considerations see Berard and Marchenay 2006; Coombe 2005; Moran 1993). Second, the material presentation of foods through predominantly artisanal and rustic aesthetics displaces contemporary London. Third, marketing materials, in the form of visual displays and information leaflets, that emphasize the provenance of foods bring other landscapes and their agricultural practices into the heart of the city. And fourth, vendors themselves perform identities from elsewhere and/or enact convincing connections between here and there. Thus, the presence of Cumbrian meat in Borough is described in a field note as follows:

Farmer Sharp's stall provides Cumbrian meat. This is laid out according to type – lamb, mutton, beef, veal – and it is all displayed, under glass, in a refrigeration case. Rams' horns rest on top of the glass-case, along with a set of cards that offer preparation and cooking tips as well as different recipe ideas for the Farmer Sharp's products. Behind the counter, employees, wearing peaked caps, woollen shirts and braces, work at cutting meat, serving customers and keeping the stall tidy. The entire stall is set up below a giant poster advertisement for Farmer Sharp's Herdwick Lamb and Mutton, its claims for the distinctive taste and eating quality of Herdwick sheep maturing on the heather and grasses of the Lake District Fells accompanied with a visage of Farmer Sharp gazing down on his stall and the market.

(Field Notes: 23 August 2007)

Borough Market's principal coffee retailer, Monmouth Coffee, further illustrates these geographies of displacement, in this case with respect to transnational

and global networks of provision. Monmouth Coffee roasts and retails quality, speciality coffees. The company's mission statement illustrates something of its quality conventions and their basis in networks of provision:

We roast coffee from single farms, estates and cooperatives around the coffee growing world. We travel to coffee producing countries looking for coffees that reflect the flavour profile that each area is known for, as well as unique coffees that challenge our expectations. When we taste a coffee that we like, we want to know where it comes from and who grows, picks and processes it. We then look to establish a relationship with the grower and exporter of that coffee. We believe that where such a relationship exists, quality, quantity and price requirements can be discussed in an open and equal way. We see this as sustainable, fair and equal trade.

This mission statement is published in Monmouth's 'Coffee Lists' newsletter, available in store and online. A range of other news items and features present the provision of Monmouth coffees to consumers, and further illustrate how the global reach of Borough Market is framed. To take just one example, headed as a 'visit to origin' the following is an account of a trip to Colombia, published in the July 2008 issue of Coffee Lists:

Looking out of the window on the flight from Bogota to Neiva we could see that the rainy season had arrived in Colombia. The waters of the Magdalena River were overflowing with muddy water from the rain in the hills above. Arriving in Neiva from Bogota is like getting out of a fridge and into a frying pan. It is hot and humid and it is always a relief to get onto the road for the three and a half hour drive to Pitalito. This was a brief but intense and positive visit to see the farmers of Quebradon. We met with the board members on the first day and discussed the previous crop and the upcoming mitaca crop. The next day we drove up into the hills of Palestina for a meeting at the local school with all of the farmers in the group. The group has established its own cupping (tasting) laboratory and with the help of Rodrigo Junior (son of board member Rodrigo Sanchez Valderrama) and Claudia (daughter of board member Felix Samboni) the farmers are learning about their own coffees and how changes in the picking and processing can affect the flavour of the final cup. This is incredibly important for the development of the coffee quality. It is difficult for farmers to improve the quality of their coffee if they do not understand how changes in processing can impact on the final cup. We are sending Quebradon a sample of Octavio Rueda's micro-lot so that Rodrigo Junior and Claudia can roast and sample the coffee with the members of the group. For some farmers this will be the first time they will be able to taste their own coffee.

(Monmouth Coffee,
Coffee Lists Newsletter: July 2008)

In this account, Monmouth's Quebradon coffee is cast as relating consumers and producers through Monmouth's careful mediation. In part, this mediation separates and distances, as Colombia and the UK are differentiated through the familiar discourses of exoticized travel. On the other hand, the narrative also explicitly promotes the knitting together and refashioning of these places, as consumers in London learn something about producers in Colombia, and producers in Colombia learn to see and taste coffee like roasters and consumers in London. Of course, this mediation operates at various levels of intensity, and beyond the newsletter Monmouth customers at Borough Market are more likely to experience just a glancing touch upon these highly charged networks of connection. The following field note recounts the presence of Quebradon in Monmouth's market stall, on one July morning:

When it is my turn in the queue, I tell the sales assistant that 'I would like to buy some coffee, but that I don't know what I want or even where to begin . . . but the last time I really bought coffee and thought about it was when I purchased some Wild Ethiopian . . . or something like that; I quite liked that.' She responds by telling me 'No problem [with not knowing where to begin] but unfortunately we've sold out of that Ethiopian. What do you like and how do you make coffee?' I tell her that I like 'that full coffee flavour, if that makes sense, oh and I use a cafeteria [often called a *French Press* or *Press Pot*].' She smiles and says, 'All right, I suggest this one', before pointing out a coffee from Colombia called 'Cooperativa Quebradon, Huila,' with a 'medium roast'. The assistant tells me that 'It is citrusy, with flavours of lemon, and it is bright. In fact, it's one of my favourites and works very well with the press pot. Sometimes the others get sort of lost in them, but this one is good. Nice fruit and lemons.' She then points me to the tasting notes where I can read more about Quebradon and tells me to 'Come back soon and tell me what you think'.

(Field Notes: 24 July 2008)

Thus in both marketing materials and retail encounter the origins of a Monmouth coffee are presented. Together, these accounts say something about the presence of other places, in this case the municipality of Palestina, near Huila, Colombia, in Borough Market. For us, it illustrates various 'aesthetics of displacement', different senses of how Borough Market's culture of consumption is made through the presence of other places and people. Most obviously, this involves an *opening up* of place through consumption. Borough Market presents a world of flavours. Its good foods are made both through its connection to other places and through concerns for what goes on there and for how those foods come to be here, in Borough Market. The Monmouth coffee drinker is positioned as connected to, and with interests in, elsewhere. Such concerns are, as we discussed in the early part of this chapter, central to the geographies of ethical consumption and its commodity forms. They are also, clearly, implicated in other consuming desires: for difference; for tastes that 'work' and please; for the self-satisfactions

of knowledgeable discrimination. The consumer is understood to care about coffee growing in Palestina for many reasons. Monmouth Coffee offers to negotiate those multiple concerns.

However, at the same time as this place of consumption is fashioned as open, as not closed off to other places, it also *localizes* and bounds. This is true in two senses. First, the global flavours available in Monmouth are placed, framed in relation to areally defined flavour profiles. The cosmopolitan consumer is positioned as selecting from a diverse range of localities (the Ethiopian or the Colombian?) (see Hannerz 1996). The world is fashioned as a diverse range of placed goods, to be consumed in order to make the consumer's own place in the world richer, more textured, more diverse and complex. Secondly, Borough Market also localizes alternative consumption within its own boundaries. Here is where 'good' food resides, outside are the mainstream wastelands of 'bad' food. Thus is the somewhat rigid dichotomization of good and bad consumption (Guthman 2003) enacted through the place marketing of alternative retail spaces like Borough Market. Thus too is goodness located within wider urban geographies and sociologies of consumption, a location that can displace in other ways, as Sharon Zukin's narrations of New York and its gentrifications have shown. For alternative consumption's performance of difference from mainstream consumer culture feeds into wider dynamics of urban redevelopment and its symbolic economies, such that the diversity performed within the market can operate as a safe, pleasurable engagement with difference that pushes aside more awkward complexities, encounters and places within the city (Zukin 2008; 2010).

The narratives of Monmouth Coffee speak, then, to the fashioning of Borough Market as both an open and bounded place. They also represent the mobilities through which other places come to be there. Distinct emphases on this movement coexist. On the one hand, there is the sense of Borough Market as a place of *discovery*. The consumer can discover new or diverse tastes and products because the Market and its retailers have discovered new or diverse producers. In both cases, this facilitates a heroic subject-position, one in which a world of difference exists, invites exploration and rewards skilled navigation and a successfully channelled spirit of adventure. On the other hand, there is also an explicit recognition that products at Borough Market do not simply await discovery, but emerge from interactions between producers, providers and consumers. Thus, for Monmouth, their coffees are *emergent*, not just sold. This is true materially and in terms of taste, through Monmouth's role as both a roaster and a buyer discussing 'quality' and 'requirements' with coffee growers. Chiming with wider discourses of ethical consumption governance, Monmouth presents this as a 'relationship' in which negotiations are 'open and equal'. Nonetheless, it is clear that it is this governance, these interactions, which regulate quality, that produce the 'good(s)'. Moreover, at stake here is the articulation of, and translation between, different notions of 'goodness'. The relationships that produce Monmouth's Quebradon coffee are cast in terms of fairness, sustainability and equality; but the character of those relationships is also seen as enabling the

successful delivery of tastes that work for Monmouth's customers, so that this Colombian coffee becomes 'good in the press pot'.

In summary, then, in Borough Market we see the associations between alternative consumption and a cosmopolitan sensibility. We also get an insight into how these associations are produced through the 'displaced' character of this place, its presencing of other places. In part this presence involves a geographical imagination in which other different places are discovered, their distinctive products collected, and that array of difference then made available for consumption. But important too is a sense of geographical entanglement, of implication with and in other places, rather than simply a distanced consumption. This includes the kinds of responsibility emphasized by those who frame ethical consumption as a fundamentally geographical practice (Sack 1992). Perhaps more prominent, though, is a sense of governance, of a concern for the successful organization of displacement, and in particular the articulation of the varying good qualities of the market's good foods.

Conclusion

This chapter has reflected on the relations between ethical consumption and place, through a case study of Borough Market in London. Our general argument has been that ethical consumption is enacted through place and that, in consequence, the ethics of consumption are a matter not just of the relations between consumers and commodities but of the places where they come together. By way of conclusion, we outline briefly three more specific aspects to this argument, each of which forms part of an agenda for better understanding the placing of ethical consumption.

First, Borough Market illustrates how place is central to the enmeshing of the ethics of consumption with other cultural economies of quality, including senses of the good other than the ethical. Borough Market is concerned with 'good food' in the broadest sense. Ethical and political sentiments are bound up with identity constructions, culturally coded experiences of urban space and eating, corporeal pleasures, and affecting moments. Retail spaces are crucial sites for this location of the ethical within such wider formations of alternative consumption. They shape how ethical consumption is entangled with other commercial and consumer impulses. Such entanglements, and the places that stage them, cannot just be dismissed as a corruption or co-option of a pure, ideal ethical consumption, but need to be taken seriously in order to consider critically ethical consumption's actually existent forms.

Second, place is a prime means through which the de-fetishization of commodities occurs. As we set out in the opening part of the chapter, many accounts of ethical consumption have emphasized the critique of the commodity fetish through greater awareness about the origins of the goods we consume. Places foster geographical imaginations, and different places of consumption can be seen as making these geographical imaginations in better or worse forms. The geographer Robert Sack has set out a wider argument for a 'geographical

guide to the good and the real', arguing that 'it is good to create places that increase our awareness of reality and increase the variety and complexity of that reality' (Sack 2003: ix). For Sack, many places of consumer culture – he attends in particular malls and advertising sign-economies – are profoundly problematic in these terms, as their fantastic, imaginary geographies mask the reality of commodity biographies and flatten cultural and geographical difference into ersatz simulations and familiar stereotypes and motifs (1992). Likewise, for Sack, places of alternative consumption can be considered as 'good places', or at least better places, if they increase awareness, variety and complexity. Borough Market certainly enacts its goodness in relation to these criteria, with its privileging of provenance emphasizing both the making of diverse commodity worlds and consumer awareness of how these diverse things come to be. Borough Market illustrates, then, how claims to the good are enacted through the very fabric of retail space and the social theatre it stages.

Third, however, Borough Market also exemplifies the fetishistic character of this de-fetishization. Alternative consumption spaces represent and perform commodity geographies. Clearly this performance involves something more (and less) than the unveiling of commodities, something more (and less) than the revelation of their social and geographical reality. Building on a body of work considering the representation of commodity origins within ethical consumption, we have argued that Borough Market illustrates the role of retail places in this fetish of de-fetishization. Concerns have included the necessary deployment of commodity aesthetics including forms of advertising, branding and retail display and theatre; how a distinctive fashioning of such forms is central to the making of alternative consumption; and the relations between ethical concerns and other interests in commodity origins, that is with other cultural investments in provenance, such as tastes for authenticity. More particularly, through an interrelated analysis of Borough Market's processes of 'placing' (the performance of place-specific encounters of objects and subjects) and 'displacing' (the folding in of 'other' places to 'this' place) we have sought both to draw out the complex representations of commodity origins within alternative consumer cultures, and to suggest the need for a wider interest in the places within which ethical consumption is done.

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