
Guest editorial

Ethical foodscapes?: premises, promises, and possibilities

That food is good to ‘think’ as much as eat, is most certainly true. Yet, it is even more true that ‘good’ food is *even better* to both think and feel *with* (and sometimes eat) at the moment, particularly in an era of food scares, continuing poverty, a supposed ‘obesity crisis’, debates concerning food (in)security and food sovereignty, and environmental degradation. In short, the good food ‘revolution’—from foods defined variously as healthy, low-carbon, fairly traded, local, organic, free-range, cruelty-free, natural and/or slow—has no doubt come to a supermarket shelf, farm shop, TV set, book store, magazine rack, or even a kitchen table near you. In this, especially given the rise of celebrity chefs and their desire to help us cook everything from haute cuisine to something simply quick and tasty, good food has *also* become good to watch, read about, and sometimes even perform in one’s own kitchen. Watching what we eat (Collins, 2009) is no longer simply about dieting, but is a full-time spectator sport that is as much about ‘eater-tainment’ and increasing the fortunes of branded celebrity chefs as it is about cooking a meal and bringing good food to the masses.

But then again, ‘*bad*’ food is also good to think about and watch. Indeed, bad food has spawned a growing media industry that is much beyond the relatively tame investigative journalist-type exposés of the industrial food systems which make up part of Freidberg’s (2004) ‘ethical complex of food’. Here, the success of ‘non-eater-tainment’—in the form of movies such as *Fast Food Nation* (Linklater, 2006), *Super Size Me* (Spurlock, 2004) and the Academy Award® nominated *Food, Inc.* (Kenner, 2008), television programmes such as *The Biggest Loser* and *You Are What You Eat* (Channel 4), and books such as *Bad Food Britain* (Blythman, 2006), *The End of Food* (Roberts, 2008), *Stuffed and Starved* (Patel, 2007), *Animal Factory* (Kirby, 2010), and *Eating Animals* (Safran Foer, 2010)—suggests a desire to be scared and perplexed by seeing what others eat, what we are eating, and the conditions under which food is currently produced. And, there is little doubt that ‘bad’ food can also still be ‘good’ to eat, if the success of the ‘Double Down’ sandwich from KFC is any indication. It is now one of the most popular launches of a new item ever for the company and, needless to say, is quite dubious in terms of its health effects (AP, 2010). Consisting of slices of bacon and cheese nestled between two pieces of boneless fried chicken, and held together with a mayo-like sauce, KFC expects sales to surpass 10 million by May 2010 and will continue to offer it on its menu into the foreseeable future.

Much like the so-called ‘ordinary ethics’ of consumption (Barnett et al, 2005), the ‘goodness’ and ‘badness’ of the various foods described above hints at the ordinarily and inescapably ethical/moral character of *all* foods. Yet this recognition provides very little traction empirically, theoretically, or practically. Rather, food is entangled in discourses and practices which necessarily have and indeed always will have ethical implications for the humans and nonhumans, societies and environments, involved in its production–consumption relations. What is of interest, then, are those questions about what we should and should not eat, what becomes regarded as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ food, and how these constructions are intimately situated and contextualised, what sets of criteria define the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ meanings embedded in particular foods, who decides on how these criteria are defined and how food production–consumption networks are (or are not) regulated. And, very importantly, these differential, shifting,

and contextualised ethicalities of food work to make and remake the place(s) and space(s) of food—the processes of which have picked up a considerable head of steam since the first dirt-speckled and sad-looking organic lettuce went on sale in the mid-1970s (Guthman, 2004a). It is here, then, that we suggest the idea of an ‘ethical foodscape’ as a way of conceptualising and engaging critically with the processes, politics, spaces, and places of the praxis of ethical relationalities embedded and produced in and through the provisioning of food.⁽¹⁾

Thus, for us and the authors in this theme issue, morality is a key and growing currency in the provisioning of food in much of the postindustrial North and beyond. Furthermore, while all food has ethical implications and import, *some* food has taken on the connotation of being, in particular ways, more ethical in its specific location in the foodscape. Constructed as ‘good’, ‘better’, and/or ‘alternative’—most often through the materialities and vocabularies of ‘organic’, ‘local’, or ‘fair trade’—many have seen these foods as working against the social, ecological, and economic excesses of conventional food systems. Yet, given this, we have to recognise an important caution in our understanding of the ethical foodscape: many so-called more ethical foods have become now equally a part of more conventional food systems: for example, one of the largest purveyors of organic foods is now Wal-Mart/Asda, which is also pursuing the sale of a number of fair trade items in the US and UK. And, as argued above, foods labelled as ‘conventional’ and perhaps ‘ordinary’ have their own implicit moralities and ethical relationships and meanings embedded in them. The ethics of ethical foodscapes can thus be ambiguous, slippery, and consist of a number of interwoven layers.

What this means is that, not only do we need to begin to break down the dualistic characterisations of ‘alternative’ foods as somehow uniquely ethical and conventional foods as nonethical (Holloway et al, 2007), but also that greater specificity is required when engaging in discussions of ethical food and ethical consumption more broadly (Barnett et al, 2005; Clarke et al, 2007). This is something begun in earnest through Guthman’s (2003, page 45) take down of what she calls the “facile dichotomies between fast and slow, reflexive and compulsive, fat and thin, and, hence, good and bad eaters, to show where there is slippage and instability in these categories, in addition to a troubling politics of class and gender.” More particularly here, we see these and other new indications, discourses, materialities, and—importantly—politics of ‘goodness’ and ‘badness’ in the foodscape as beginning to denote particular and quickly calcifying sets of socioecological relationships very worthy of investigation, exploration, and critique.

As such, this introduction, and the papers and commentaries in this theme issue, engage with the governance of ethical food and ethical foodscapes more broadly. In building on and working to extend the moral turn in geography (eg Lee and Smith, 2004; McEwan and Goodman, 2010; Popke, 2009; Whatmore, 1997) and the social sciences more broadly (eg Held, 2006), the material presented here explores the premises, promises, and possibilities—as well as praxis and problematic à la Guthman (2003)—of ethical foods and ethical foodscapes. Below, we divide up what we are calling the ethical foodscape into the three analytical (but practically inseparable) categories of *food ethics*, *ethical/moral foods*, and *ethical food networks* in order to flesh out some of the arguments we have made above but also set the scene for the papers in this issue. In this, we are selective and illustrative rather than comprehensive and general. We then introduce the papers in the theme issue, articulating how they link to our interpretations of the ethical foodscape. We close by offering up several key areas

⁽¹⁾ For a slightly different take on ‘foodscape’ see Johnston et al (2009).

in need of investigation as a way of sketching an outline of the beginnings of what might be an agenda for further research into ethical foodscapes and contemporary societies.

Food ethics

Food ethics are about the performances— affective, moral, material— of when “bodies meet” (Greenhough and Roe, 2010, page 44) foods. But, as Whatmore (1997) and others (eg Haraway, 1991) have it, these are relational ethics, the experiences of which are of a very intimate kind given the metabolisations inherent in the processes of ingestion (FitzSimmons and Goodman, 1998). Food and food ethics are thus *relationally performative* as they involve the linking up of the material and constructed self with Others and Other natures in moral webs of meanings through the performances of producing, shopping, making, serving, eating, and ultimately, ‘wasting’. These relational performativities of food ethics are fundamentally situated within psychological, cultural, political, social, economic, and ecological contexts, each with their own powerful moral webs of meanings and materialities created by but also shaping food ethics. In the context of the neoliberal, market-based capitalism that governs so much of what we do and how we do it, it can be argued that the fundamental forces shaping contemporary food ethics are profit, taste, choice, and consumer-focused ‘cheapness’. Here, the more conventional understandings of good food are those edible goods that generate economic value (most likely for the multinationals that produced or sold them), appeal to consumers’ taste buds and wallets, and offer up a range of choices in the retail environment. And, as many have highlighted (eg Patel, 2007; Roberts, 2008), these food ethics have seriously important, and very often negative, consequences for much of the globe.

Given this current political economic context, even in alternative food networks and their bid to become what defines the new ‘good’ food, the ethics of profit, taste, choice, and cheapness work to heavily structure how alternative foods get done and/or are consumed. Yet, it is the fact that alternative foods are relationally performative *by design* to be ‘more’ ethical that they attempt to work in and on the ethical foodscape in different ways to conventional food systems that ‘don’t cost the Earth’ and/or don’t cost the lives of Others (eg animals or peasants). Thus, ‘goodness’ in alternative food networks articulates that the generation of economic value is, very often, to maintain the livelihoods of farmers at a suitably ‘fair’ level; that food should taste ‘fresh’ and ‘better’ by being in season, local, and more healthful; and that choice is crucial so that consumers are able to choose foods *outside* the conventional food system (eg Patel, 2007). The ‘cheap’ food debate in alternative networks positions those who urge that cheaper and more accessible alternative foods are better— although, under the current auspices of neoliberal capitalism, this line of thinking has been shown to be ecologically and socially problematic (eg Allen, 2004; Guthman, 2004a)— against those who have made the case that paying the ‘real cost’ of food production in alternative networks means that we should pay, and be prepared to pay, more for these good foods.⁽²⁾

⁽²⁾ A recently published biopic in *The Independent* (2009) on the ‘travels of the Fairtrade queen’, Harriet Lamb illustrates this latter position very well:

“She energetically mimes out British supermarket shoppers, whizzing round in a hurry, loading up their trolleys at breakneck speed. ‘Imagine this is a shop’, she says. ‘And I’m going shopping. Shopping, shopping [she wails like a baby] and I’m quickly taking tea, coffee, sugar from the shelves. Quick, quick, quick. Then I’m looking for cheap tea, cheap coffee. If I’m only buying cheap coffee then the price for you is also low.’ Suddenly she raises a hand, and her voice, and addresses—in absentia—the great British shopper. ‘STOP!’ she exclaims. ‘STOP! Don’t buy cheap coffee! If you buy cheap coffee then it is bad for the workers. Look for Fairtrade “Ah, Fairtrade. From Rwanda”.’”

Given the circulation of this last argument, in some ways, the relationally performative ethics of alternative foods reproduce an overt and rather disturbing inequality that is greatly in need of exposure and, perhaps, dismantling.⁽³⁾

The good food revolution, as we have called it above, and its bid to remake the places and spaces of the current foodscape, is predicated on much more than just these ethical concerns. Here the ethically driven material performativities of alternative foods are about collapsing and/or ‘directing’ the spatial and ecological scales of food production, the recognition of the material and social relationships of food provisioning, and the constitution of knowledges about this food for consumers.⁽⁴⁾ Indeed, the relational performativities of, for example, organic and fair trade goods, can be very neatly defined by the information and knowledge they give to consumers about themselves to not only inform consumers about their provenance but to also fundamentally encourage and facilitate their purchase by shoppers (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002). In a very real sense, an “ethical complex of ‘good’ food”—from the discourses and labels on various alternative foods, to scholarly publications, to the rise of coverage of good foods in various media—is very much in the making in the ethical foodscape.

Indeed, one of the most contentious academic debates surrounding good food and ‘good’ consumption more broadly, is that around the role of these alternative commodities in responsabilising consumers in solving the health, ecological, and social problems facing contemporary societies. This is what Shamir (2008, page 14) calls the culturally inflected growth of a “market-embedded morality” that “entails a set of practices that contribute to a constantly evolving and adapting neo-liberal imagination ... the further economization of the political ... and [a dissolving of] the distinction between market and society [by] encod[ing] the ‘social’ as a specific instance of the ‘economy.’” On the one hand, consumers are given responsibility in their (neoliberalised) choices as a way to shift blame and let the bad guys off the hook (ie Guthman, 2007) while on the other, responsabilisation through ethical and politicised consumption choices gives consumers a voice complementary to the democratic process (Barnett et al, 2010; see also Barnett, 2010). While the effects of this growing ethic of responsabilisation being played out in both conventional and alternative food networks are worthy of much further investigation, the fact that much of this rests and depends on specific material and geographic contexts—in other words, the situated relational performativities of responsabilisation and their embedded contradictions—is a point that must be engaged with more fully in academic work (Goodman, 2010).

(The troubles with) ethical/moral foods

The cultural and material politics surrounding ethical foodscapes—and the so-called alternative foods embedded with more ethical/moral relationships and meanings—are not only unsettled, shifting, entangled, and continually ‘emerging’ (Williams, 1977), but rightly contentious in academic and popular debates (eg DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Freidberg, 2003a; Guthman and DuPuis, 2006; Johnston et al, 2009). Part of this stems from the fact that, in food networks most broadly, issues surrounding the care of the self, care of the family, and the care of Others seemingly circulate wildly, are entangled fully, and can work to contradict themselves across the

⁽³⁾ See Guthman’s (2008a; 2008b) latest work on “bringing good food to others” and its troubling and uncomfortable byline of ‘if they only knew’ that often circulates in alternative food networks and movements.

⁽⁴⁾ This is, in other words, what David Goodman (2003) has termed the ‘turn’ to quality in food networks and their desire to (re)embed food production and consumption in ‘place’ as well as the material systems within which they operate.

terrains of production/consumption.⁽⁵⁾ Thus, as explored in Probyn's (2000) excellent treatise on *Carnal Appetites*, getting food from McDonald's can be about care of the family not only in providing the children with a 'Happy Meal' but also in providing a familial space of conviviality during the meal time; at the same time, it can also provide a space of 'un-care' for the environment and the people involved in making the meal. As she puts it, "'Two worlds collide' in terms of a vision of care, when, on the one hand, McDonald's stitches us all together through our stomachs, and on the other, a politics that directly equates the desire for burgers with the destruction of the rain forest, and the exploitation of workers and children" (page 36).

For Guthman, it is not only conventional foods but also the more ethical alternative types that throw up numerous complications with respect to their 'care-full' nature. In particular, she finds them overtly morally troubling, if not completely distasteful, in form and function as embodied in the organic salad mix affectionately christened 'yuppie chow' by those who grow it in California. In a passage worth quoting at length (2003, pages 55–56), she puts it thus about the entrenched, growing, and unreflexive binaries of slow versus fast foods:

"At the very least, a binary framing should highlight the way in which privileged eating is intrinsically tied to impoverished eating; that what allows an aesthetic of food is disparity. The fact that many of those who eat organic food came into their wealth from some of the very processes that enabled the fast food industry's growth surely tightens the relationship between yuppie eaters and their fast food counterparts. ... Surely there are those who will eat a Jack N the Box hamburger one day and a salad of mesclun the next. Fast food is often pitched to healthy eaters (eg Subway®'s advertising campaign suggesting you can lose weight and cut fat by eating fast food) and slow food is often made tasty by slavish uses of salt and butter. ... Most importantly, to posit one assemblage as unwaveringly good and the other as altogether bad de-politicizes a potentially powerful politics of consumption. Little is it considered that organic production depends on the same systems of marginalized labour as does fast food. Or that organic salad mix led the way in convenience packaging, and is often grown out of place and out of season. Or that fast food serves women who work outside the home who are then blamed for depending on it to manage family and work. Or that slow food presumes a tremendous amount of unpaid feminized labour. Restaurants serve up their own contradictions. How else to explain the haute restaurant that serves organic mesclun and *foie gras*? The well-paid artisan cook working in tandem with the illegal immigrant bus boy? If the political importance of organic food/slow food is attention to the labour processes and ecologies by which food is produced, it is imperative to make sure that these valorized alternatives reflect alternative values."

Two other sorts of moral complications are worthy of brief engagement here in the specific context of more ethical/moral alternative foods. First, as many have pointed out in many different academic and practical contexts (eg Goodman et al, forthcoming; Low and Davenport, 2006; Reynolds, 2009), alternative foods have hit the mainstream and done so with a vengeance. Organic, fair trade and local foods are now regular, and even own-label-brand, fare at most supermarkets, farmers' markets are popping up everywhere, organic food delivery companies are expanding rapidly as massive businesses

⁽⁵⁾ The point here is that, as illustrated in work from, for example, Kneafsey et al (2008), Miele (2010), and Puig de la Bellacasa (2010), care as an ethical/moral driver in food networks is not left simply to the moment of consumption/shopping nor only to consumers (cf Barnett et al, 2005; Clarke et al, 2007; Miller, 2001), nor is it only cultivated and experienced in so-called alternative food networks.

with regional (and not just local) coverage, and fair trade goods are now sold by one of the most boycotted companies in the world as Nestlé's Partners' Blend® coffee and its massively popular KitKat® bar. In parts of these moves, a shift to a more 'consequentialist ethics' in alternative foods, that the ends of more and expanded organic/fair trade networks justify the means of cooperating with the 'old enemies' of supermarkets and multinationals, has fully taken hold with many. For cynics this consequentialism has tamed the more radical critiques and spaces/places of the socioecological logics of capitalism and instead enshrined—or at least paved the way for—its continuing internal logic of expansionism as played out through the different routes and embedded meanings of 'fairness' and 'environmental-friendliness'.

Some of the consequences of the mainstreaming and consequentialism of alternative foods have been explored in discussions of the 'conventionalisation' of organic production systems (Buck et al, 1997; Guthman, 2004b; Lockie and Halpin, 2005) and is being detailed in recent ethnographic work on fair trade production (Lyon, 2007; Luetchford, 2008; see also *Geoforum* 2010). Yet, given fair trade's popular and continuing characterisation of working 'in and against' the market, exactly how, where, and in what circumstances this is occurring in light of these recent political economic trends need to be (re)assessed. And, the concern here should not only be the impacts of mainstreaming and consequentialism on the shifting material logics of production/consumption of alternatives—a crucial area of exploration missing from recent work on ethical consumption—but attention needs to be on the broader cultural logics of alternative foods.⁽⁶⁾ In short, are we witnessing the conventionalisation of alternative foods tout court—and indeed the conventionalisation of ethics/morality at the scale of (food) cultures much more broadly—and what does all this mean in terms of how we perform biopolitics now in ethical foodscapes?

The second 'complication' on offer here is encapsulated in a quote from Harriet Lamb, the former head of the Fairtrade Foundation in the UK about how fair trade 'works' (*Observer Food Monthly* 2006):

"What works so well is that, although we are putting a spotlight on the negative, there is a positive solution to hand which everybody can be a part of. You don't have to wait for Government to move; you don't even have to wait for companies, because you can push them into acting by buying these products. So you've got all these NGOs, the church groups, and the community-based organisations—but the really fantastic thing about Fairtrade is that you can then go shopping!"

In this, shopping for, purchasing, and consuming ethical foods—or indeed acts of ethical consumption more broadly—are politicised acts of connection between distant places and across spaces (Barnett et al, 2005; Clarke, 2008; Clarke et al, 2007; see also Whatmore and Clark, 2006). Here, 'ethical consumption singularities' (eg Clarke et al, 2007) are 'collectivised' to "enlist ordinary people into a broader project of social change" (Barnett et al, 2005, page 23).⁽⁷⁾ Making these claims more explicit, Seyfang (2005; 2006) argues that more sustainable consumption (ie local food production/consumption) is about the possible creation of new forms of "ecological citizenship". Thus there is a growing suggestion that 'voting with one's money' through the purchase of more ethical/moral alternative foods goes far beyond an economic vote to encompass an act that produces new political subjectivities, new forms of political representation, and new politics more broadly. In these novel consumer/citizen "hybrids"

⁽⁶⁾ A small ray of light here might be the new *State of the World* report (Worldwatch Institute, 2010) on "transforming cultures from consumerism to sustainability"; Soper's (2007; 2008) work on 'alternative hedonism' is also interesting in this regard.

⁽⁷⁾ As Trentmann (2007; 2010) points out, consumer politics have a much longer history than we often given them credit for.

(Johnston, 2008), the care of the self articulates and is articulated through the care of Others through ethical shopping/consumption; in short, buying organic arugula and/or fair trade chocolate never tasted so politically nor subjectively good!

But, as some have pointed out, these are particularised pathways to the ‘new citizenship’ through ethical consumption: they are available and attainable for some and not all, at both the production and consumption ends of things (eg Goodman, 2010). In a sense, it is really choice—or rather the opportunities to *have* a choice—that is paving the way to these new politics and citizenly outcomes through consumption. Furthermore, if we subscribe to Miller’s (1995) polemic that it is women as household shoppers who really matter the most with respect to consumption, does it not follow that this is also the case here with alternative foods? Thus, if ethical food consumers are mostly women, are they the ones having their votes counted the most and, further, becoming a powerful force to be reckoned with in the new ‘society of the ethical (food) consumer’? Moreover, why is ethical food *consumption* being touted as the seemingly preferred pathway to ‘citizenship’ in the spaces of a globalised ‘democratic deficit’? Why are poor peasants in Guatemala not more citizenly for *growing* fair trade coffee? What about organic farmers in Lincolnshire or Ohio or Sardinia? Indeed, where are those who populate ethical provisioning networks—those who bring goods to ethical consumers—on the maps of politicised and ethical consumption? And, moreover, where does nonconsumption in the form, say, of veganism or vegetarianism (Morris and Kirwan, 2006) fit into the conceptualisations of ecological citizenship let alone ethical consumption? Finally here, ethnographic work with consumers seems to contradict or at least muddle some of the more overarching claims about ethical consumption and consumers. As Freidberg highlights in her commentary (2010), the consumers Miller (2001) spoke to in his study seemed to put ‘care of family’ above any other criteria when making purchasing decisions; what took precedent was the purchase of things that family members liked or would potentially like and the purchase of cheap goods in order to save money for the family. A more contemporary study by Adams and Raisborough (2010, pages 270–271) seems to confirm what Miller was getting at: that there are a multiplicity of circulating ethical concerns in the context of consumption. Here, they urge us to “approach definitions of ‘ethical consumption’ and the consumer with caution”. As they highlight:

“Barnett et al’s definition is encouragingly broad: ethical consumption is ‘any practice of consumption in which explicitly registering commitment to distant or absent others is an important dimension of the meaning of activity of the actors involved’ (2005, 29). There are two points that our discussion allows us to unpack; the notion of ‘commitment’ and the detailing of specific others. Our findings did demonstrate that many consumers did have a commitment to, in their own words, ‘being good’ and making a difference through their shopping decisions. Yet, ... [o]ur data suggests that ‘commitment’ cannot be read as equivalent to uncritical views of ethical consumption, nor an idealist view that ‘good’ is being done. [Moreover, t]hat the correspondents also referred to the ‘ethical’ in terms of the ‘local’ works to disrupt any formulation linking the ‘good choices’ here with the livelihood of a producer ‘over there’—‘distant or absent others’.... A number of respondents negotiated the dilemmas of ‘doing good’ by shopping ‘closer to home’ and ‘doing good’ by buying labelled Fairtrade goods, usually produced, in part at least, at some distance from the point of consumption. Thus once the activity of consuming ethically becomes a heuristic, qualified by scepticism, jostling amongst competing demands such as ‘the local’, its level of importance as a ‘dimension of meaningful activity’ takes on a protean relativity to the psycho-social context in which consumption takes place.”

Ethical food networks

In our conceptualisation of ethical foodscapes, ‘ethical food networks’ articulate how the relational performativities of food *become* relational *and* performative and how these come to more or less stick in time and space/place. As highlighted above, one of the increasingly important sticking forces in the ethical foodscape is the media and, in particular, the growth of celebrity chefs (Hansen, 2008) and more prescriptive healthy eating/lifestyle shows. From glittering dishes to more ordinary fare, consumers are intended to be disgusted by factory (animal) farming and overweight eaters—who are sniffed at with not a little bit of foodie ‘snobbery’—drool with delight for the winners of competitive chef programmes and either shake or nod our heads while watching investigative documentaries telling us the truth behind industrial or fair trade foods. Food networks and our moral quandaries and ambiguities about them are providing a growing and captive audience for journalists, nutritionists/dieticians, and food/media corporations alike. Food, thus, is ‘telling us stories’ and/or having stories told about it (Cook et al, 2006; Freidberg, 2003b) with respect to the networked ethical/moral and material relations that provide us with ‘worlds on a plate’ (Cook and Crang, 1996).

The business of ‘following’ and ‘mixing’ with food networks in academic practice (ie Cook et al, 2006; 2008) has quickly taken on moral quandaries of its own and opened up interesting debates about the work of bringing (ethical) food networks to life. For some, ‘following the (food) thing’ (Cook et al, 2004)—or better yet, following the relational performativities that *create* and are *created by* the things—is ‘defunct’ and can work to dislodge people’s everyday moral responsibilities and ‘generosities’ (Barnett and Land, 2007) or, at its worst, merely provide a sop for ‘foodies’ who need to keep an academic job and avoid the ‘hard’ work that political economic theorising requires (Goss, 2004; 2006). Ian Cook and his growing coterie of coauthors have been in the middle of these debates and they have worked to redirect the ire of these critiques. For them the value of ‘following’ and ‘mixing’ work is that it is steeped in ethnographies of sociomaterial worlds; can challenge us in building new, postdisciplinary theories; and develop relations of care and responsibilities for us and our audiences for the people, places, and foods we do research with. As he argues,

“If we want to make a difference, these radical postdisciplinary food studies need to be less disciplined and less finished in order, as Rich Heyman ... puts it, to ‘Keep... open the problematics of knowing beyond the end of writing’.... We could make our writing much more widely accessible, leave things open to interpretation, give our readers (and other audiences) some sense-making to do, so they can get more involved, put more of themselves into the picture, draw upon their existing knowledges, ethical frameworks, and so on. And they might get sucked into our stories, the lives of the people (and other) we set out to meet, and the connections we set out to gain a better feel for” (in Cook et al, 2006, page 662).

Recent research has begun this postdisciplinary work by telling us supply-chain stories about food and its indelibly moral economic and material geographies. Indeed, for Jackson et al (2009; 2010) in their work on UK chicken and globalised sugar chains, it is the circulations of the ‘moral dimensions of economic life’ in these chains, and not their supposed opposition, that not only ‘manufacture meanings’ and ‘responsibilities’ throughout these chains but work to cement them together in particularly historicised and spatially contingent ways. As they put it in discussing the connections among ethics, space, and food,

“Moral distinctions relating to food are expressed at a variety of scales and... very local concerns for the health and well-being of the family may run counter to larger-scale concerns for distant strangers. [In this,] apparently rational decisions about the production and consumption of food are susceptible to ethical and moral concerns because of the emotional investment that is made in decisions about ‘feeding the family’... and how these ‘local’ concerns may conflict with our wider responsibilities for the environment or the needs of distant strangers” (Jackson et al, 2009, page 21).

Going a bit further, ‘feeding the family’ has more recently taken on even *more* ethical/moral meanings and salience for the growing ‘radical homemaking’ parts of alternative food and lifestyle movements (Hayes, 2010a; 2010b; see also Kingsolver, 2007). In a sort of nostalgic reinvention of the place of the kitchen and home garden as spaces of a new revolution against consumer culture as much as the convenient and unhealthy industrial food system, ecological citizenship is seemingly only one home-made meal or outside-air-dried-laundry-hanging away.⁽⁸⁾ ‘Growing one’s own’—now in the form of organic arugula—and ‘cooking one’s own’—now in the form of easy to prepare haute cuisine—have been (re)invested with an activist politics that, among other things, have interesting ties to ‘aspirational’ food and gardening TV programmes, a fascinating mix of ‘old’ and ‘new’ knowledge about food production and preparation, and a growing online presence in the form of websites, chat rooms, and blogs about food and homemaking. The (good) food revolution might not only be televised but also ‘virtual’. Besides the obvious class-based issues surrounding these forms of activism (ie who has the time for and is able to do all of this so-called ‘slowing down’?), they present a kind of further ‘micro-isation’ of food politics but also worrying gender politics that most firmly put the responsibilities for socio-ecological change at the doorstep of women and their household labour, much like the activist shopping mentioned above. Here, good foods and, now, good households are seemingly very quickly going hand in hand with ‘good’ mums in potentially troublesome ways that now not only elide the labour of who is growing this good food, either at home or elsewhere, but also in terms of who is preparing this all for the ‘good’ family. Thus, this blurring of producer and consumer into the radical homemaker, indeed much like the blurring of ‘consumer’ and ‘citizen’ in sustainable and ethical consumption, further entrenches the ambiguities and contradictions of both empowerment and responsabilisation in ethical foodscapes. Here then, the (re)placement of households, kitchens, and home gardens in ethical food networks—and as networks in their own right—provides ample space for postdisciplinary work into the governance of ethical foodscapes.

The papers

Initiated as a series of sessions at the 2007 annual meeting of the RGS-IBG in London, the papers and commentaries here all ‘work up’ and rework different aspects of ethical foodscapes. Here, Little, Maye, and Ilbery (2010) explore the (re)invention of what might be called the ‘massification of the private ethics of care’ through the techniques of collectivised ethical consumption in the form of the consumer cooperative. Seen through the lens of Gibson-Graham’s (2008) philosophical and practical concept of ‘diverse economies’, Little et al have more ethical/moral food purchasing cooperatives as animated by needs outside the (alternative) mainstream whether that be the conventional food system or, in some cases, a dissatisfaction with access to affordable

⁽⁸⁾As Hayes (2010a), the new guru of radical homemaking puts it—and puts it from a very American perspective—“every time a person sticks a clothespin on a pair of undies, he or she is saying ‘I want a better world. And I am willing to do what it takes.’”

organic foods. Constructed around the notions of doing ‘better’ food ‘better’, collectivised food consumption in these coops is about developing and institutionalising a communitarian ethic *from the outset* as a conscious project that stands in interesting contradistinction to the kind of ethical consumption ‘singularities’ others have populating ethical food- and consumption-scapes. It remains to be seen, however, what sorts of wider effects these collective consumer projects will have as they continue to make their bids for more diverse economies and, hopefully, diverse politics.

Lang (2010) takes a slightly different tack to ethical foodscapes by working through the challenges that more ethical/moral foods present to current and future European food policy. For him, the switch to ‘*values for money*’, not only seems to confront the trend of consumerist capitalism, but—partially because of the multiplicity of ethical meanings present in foods like organic and fair trade—policy and policy makers have not kept up with the ethical concerns of civil society through changing food choices. His suggestion, in efforts to build a more holistically viable sustainable food system, is the potential creation of an ‘omnistandard’ that internalises and expresses all the justice and ecological concerns embedded in the range of more ethical/moral foods being gobbled up by Europeans. Thus, the concerns of civil society for ‘good’ and even ‘better’ food might be translatable into food policy and, in this process, work not only to create but to enshrine ethical/moral foods as one key aspect of the more sustainable food system he and others are working towards.

In pursuing a more place-based, geographical ethnography of fair trade and ethical tea producers in India, Neilson and Pritchard (2010) explore how scale matters not only for the livelihoods of tea producers in and out of fair trade/ethical networks but for how we go about understanding the impacts of ethical food networks more broadly. Through what they call a ‘horizontal analysis’ they ask timely yet complex questions not only about the effects of ethical consumption networks on tea producers but, more importantly, if it is indeed the case that ethical consumption on its own is able to confront the socioeconomic and development inequalities that characterise much of the globe. And, while they feel that these food/trade networks do provide some openings with respect to improving livelihoods, ultimately they are rather pessimistic of the ‘dull implements’ of fair and ethical trade to slice through the sharp experiences and structural conditions of global political economies as they have ‘touched down’ in the places of poverty like Southern India.

Finally, in his paper, Morgan (2010) explores and critiques the ways that dealing with climate change through carbon labelling on food commodities creates numerous ethical and moral complications not only for alternative food movements and consumers but for the actual ethical/moral foods which make up much of the ethical foodscape. He works to cut through the seemingly (false) debate of ‘local’ versus ‘fair’ foods to instead offer us a glimpse into a more sturdy and perhaps workable form of food sustainability in the pursuit of the homegarden-to-school food programmes being developed in some of the poorest parts of the world. In the end, Morgan finds that, in the context of the monstrous potentialities of climate change, ethical consumption does not do, nor has the potential to do, enough given its ‘voluntaristic’ nature; he instead points us to more institutionally- and justice-focused pathways to planning and structuring for care-through-food sovereignty movements like Via Campesina and the wider development of what he terms a ‘public’ ethic of care.

In addition to the papers here, on offer are a set of ‘commentaries’ by three leading figures, all of whom are engaged in the problematising of various aspects of ethical foodscapes in their research and writing. These commentaries not only provide a useful capstone to the sets of ideas presented here by contextualising them within wider debates, but, through reflection on the substance of the four papers introduced above,

they develop a healthy and expansive set of ideas, reflections, and critiques of ethical foodscapes in their own right. Thus, Freidberg (2010) argues that, not only can science studies have the potential to give insight into the ‘technologies’ of the construction of ethical foodscapes, but an exploration of foodscapes through the staid concept of ‘landscape’ provides crucial insights into the governance of good foods. Buller (2010), in his dissatisfaction with ethical consumption as a political strategy—especially given the realities of hunger and malnutrition for so many—explores the ambiguities and contradictions of ‘eating well’ through what he calls “virtuous food”. Similar to some of the sentiments expressed in Morgan’s paper, Buller argues for new forms and articulations of “re-distributive food justice” much over and above the calls for more ethical/moral food networks which have become accoutrements for the ‘worried well’. And finally, Barnett (2010) offers up a (thankfully) much less dismal account of the processes, effects, and potential outcomes of ethical food consumption and its networks. Here he centres on the positive and progressive material and mobilisation outcomes of consumer ethics as a force to propel ethical and moral agency much beyond the individualised consumer/consumption act; this begins through the simple yet undeniable recognition that consumers are fully and unavoidably enmeshed in social and material networks right from the start of things. Thus, the practice of ethics—either those of the habitual or reasoned kind—in the ‘mundane governance’ of everyday life holds important possibilities, albeit somewhat ambivalent and continually renegotiated, for the making of ‘other’ food worlds that not only respect individuals as complicated and complex *people* but also consider the multiple and often contradictory networks they find themselves in.

Thinking in the ethical foodscape: towards a (brief) research agenda

As Freidberg argues in this issue, we have lots of work to do with respect to engaging with ethical foodscapes. We could not agree more and so, in addition to the points raised above, we wish to highlight, from our perspective, a few possible areas of interest in the study of ethical foodscapes. First, in parallel with Guthman’s (2008c, page 1181) suggestion that we need to “analyze and engage with neoliberalism’s strengths”, we need to understand the moral and ethical logics of neoliberalism in the context of food but also more generally. Here the ‘conventionalisation of ethics’—and not just in food—is worthy of investigation, critique, and redirection if we stake the claim that ethics really do matter in how we organise new worlds and relational performativities. Second, as this paper and those in this issue have started to do, the ever-present but often invisible issues of power in ethical foodscapes need a serious airing. From the continuing crude power of retailing multinationals to their more subtle, rapid entry into alternative foods networks, to the ability of foodies to direct the ethical food agenda, to the potential empowerment of food movements through the use of old and new media forms, how and where power touches down and does work on ethical foodscapes are crucial. The power and politics of taste and its visceral qualities are also fundamentally important here, especially given the potentially progressive possibilities (but also problematics) for food movements (see Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008). Third, again drawing on Guthman (2008c), where are those projects that are outside of neoliberal subjectivities and the commodifications of ethics/morality? Or are we in what we might characterise as a ‘postalternative’ era that has as success Walmart/Asda selling organic and fair trade goods? Is a broader spectrum ‘collective food entrepreneurialism’ something that might stand against the corporatisation of the alternative yet also operate within the confines of the political and cultural economies it finds itself in? Where, in short, is even ‘better’ food, what are the food ethics, ethical foods, and ethical food networks that work to create this better food and how might we support and engage these projects? And how do we temper

our support with critiques in ways to make *even better* foods *even better*? Finally, how are the expansion and contraction, shallowing and deepening, of the ethical foodscape working spatially? Where does it create as well as ameliorate socioecological inequalities in a still hungry and functionally poor world? If anything, it is this last question that should get us going.

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