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The Ethical Consumer:

Narratives of Social and Environmental Change in Contemporary American Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for
the degree Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

Amanda Evelyn Waldo

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Ethical Consumer:

Narratives of Social and Environmental Change in Contemporary American Literature

By

Amanda Evelyn Waldo

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles

Professor Allison B. Carruth, Chair

ABSTRACT: Consumers in the U.S. have increasingly (and often paradoxically) turned to their consumption as a space from which to address social and environmental problems that range from sweatshop labor to global warming; the diverse consumption strategies that they have embraced –boycotts, local and organic food, fair trade, downshifting and more – are all a part of a larger movement and discourse called ethical consumption. A flood of recent novels, memoirs and nonfiction books make this activist, productive, expressive kind of consumption their central theme (and in the case of several of the memoirs, their organizing conceit). The authors of these works have suggested interesting expansions of the ethical role not just of commodity consumption but of media consumption as well: the imaginative literature of ethical consumption models ethical consumption for its readers, and it sees itself shaping attitudes about consumption that will in turn shape economic, social and environmental realities in the world. The

ambition of that project (and the enthusiasm with which readers have taken it up) lends a sense of urgency to my own. My dissertation looks at representations of ethical consumption in this growing body of imaginative literature in order to understand how and on what terms it intervenes in consumption. I argue that the language and forms that these texts use to imagine ethical consumption matter: that they privilege particular perspectives, communicate ideological investments, and shape the interpretation of events in ways that inflect their interpretation of both the practice of ethical consumption and the real-world problems that ethical consumption responds to. I frame the contribution of literary criticism in terms of its interrogation of those forms.

The dissertation of Amanda Evelyn Waldo is approved.

Elizabeth DeLoughrey

Susanna B. Hecht

Richard A. Yarborough

Allison B. Carruth, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation with love and gratitude to my father Steven Wheelock Waldo, who would have been “just tickled.”

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I have been supported over the past year by a departmental dissertation fellowship from the UCLA department of English, funding which enabled me to complete the

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I first became interested in representations of ethical consumption at Cornell University where I benefited from a summer research grant from the College Scholar Program and additional funding from Jonathan Culler, which allowed me to travel to Julia Alvarez's coffee farm Alta Gracia in the Dominican Republic. Mary Pat Brady was an invaluable mentor both for that project and in general, and has become a dear friend.

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When I met with Allison Carruth to discuss this project she was the first person I had spoken with who had read and been interested in many of these books. I have found

each of our conversations since then both useful and invigorating. She has challenged me intellectually and has supported me personally, and I cannot imagine having completed this project without her help and support.

Finally, I want to thank my son Jonah. I finished the first complete draft on your due date. You thoughtfully arrived late, and here I am completing final revisions as you nap on my chest. I won't say you've always been exactly cooperative, but your grandfather always said that perfection is a moving target. You have given me the sense of perspective I needed to let this project be finished even as it is not perfect.

Vita

Amanda Waldo graduated from Cornell University in 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts in English (summa cum laude) and Gender and Global Studies (magna cum laude). She presented an early version of Chapter One of this dissertation as a paper at the American Comparative Literature Association conference on Collapse / Catastrophe / Change, and also chaired a panel on Radical Homemaking at the American Studies Association conference in 2014. As a graduate student at UCLA she helped to coordinate the 2009 Mellon Lecture Series “A Cultural Pre-History of Environmentalism” as well as the 2013 conference “Global Ecologies: Nature, Narrative, Neoliberalism.” She has also worked as an instructional technology consultant to facilitate the use of technology for teaching and research through UCLA’s Center for Digital Humanities.

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction to Ethical Consumption

In the early twenty-first century, American consumers increasingly experience their own consumption as the locus of social and environmental problems. Climate change, sweatshop labor, food contamination scares, resource depletion and a constellation of social and health problems related to over-consumption have gained national media attention and contributed to a growing unease about the personal, societal and ecological effects of mass consumerism in the United States over the past century. This anxiety is augmented by the concern that American patterns of consumption serve as a model for consumer aspirations in developing economies: it has become commonplace to express this perceived dire crisis by reference to the impacts that will accrue as consumers in other countries (especially China) approach U.S. levels of energy use, car ownership, and meat consumption.¹ Philosopher Kate Soper, for instance, describes affluent Euro-American consumption as “the model of the ‘good life’ for so many other societies today” to underline the potential impact of a move toward more sustainable consumption practices in Europe and the United States.² In this context, everyday acts of consumption

¹ An article in the New York Times credits aspirations to “a more Western standard of living” for Chinese consumers’ increasing demand “more and bigger cars, for electricity-dependent home appliances and for more creature comforts like air-conditioned shopping malls.” Keith Bradsher, “China Fears Consumer Impact on Global Warming.”

² Kate Soper, “The Mainstreaming of Counter-Consumerist Concern,” 3-4.

appear ethically charged³ and choices—such as where and how to shop for food—that once seemed quotidian and private are increasingly politicized.⁴ Metaphors like the “carbon footprint” or the “food mile” emphasize the effects of individual consumption on the environment and on the lives of all people—including future generations—who depend on it. Descriptions of consumer goods as “stained” by sweatshop labor and the use of terms like “blood diamond” or “conflict diamond” similarly foreground the sense in which the consumer who buys an item impacts the welfare of others through her complicity in the conditions under which it was produced. The metrics we use to measure risk are also oriented increasingly toward consumption. The concept of embodied toxicity (which describes the toxicity released by a product throughout its lifecycle), for instance, has meant that risks once considered mainly in terms of occupational hazard (such as health risks to workers in a plastics factory) can now be tied directly to the product itself and conceived as a cost of consumption.

Consumers in the U.S. and elsewhere have responded to these ethical, environmental and health concerns through a range of practices that fall under the heading of ethical consumption.⁵ In its most familiar forms (fair trade, organic and local

³ Dan Goleman, *Ecological Intelligence: The Hidden Impacts of What We Buy*, 63-64. For Goleman, concepts like embodied toxicity that help render the “hidden impacts” of consumer goods visible are key to helping consumers and producers make more ecologically sound decisions. In his view, “radical transparency,” enabled by new technologies that make these hidden impacts visible, will help consumers make more informed decisions and in turn improve the ecological practices of companies as they compete with one another to offer ever more sustainable products.

⁴ See Michele Micheletti on the politicization of private consumer choice traditionally viewed as private: Michele Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping: Individuals, Consumerism, and Collective Action*, 1-3, 15-4. See also Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gemshem on self-politics and state politics: Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gemshem, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, 44-46.

⁵ Other names include political consumption, conscious consumption and green consumption. For a discussion of these different terms and their origins see Jo Littler, *Radical Consumption: Shopping for change in contemporary culture*, 6-7. For a definition of political consumerism see: Michele Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping: Individuals, Consumerism, and Collective Action*, ix, x, 2.

food, sweatshop-free clothing) ethical consumption works within the logic of capitalism, positioning ethical criteria and values (for instance, sustainable production practices) as commodities that can be sold in the market for a profit. Although ethical consumption schemes vary in emphasis and in how radically they depart from mainstream consumption, most schemes view the consumer as the driver of production systems. Accordingly, they seek to leverage consumer purchases to influence the way goods are produced and distributed. By spending money and often paying a premium for goods produced according to a particular standard⁶—for example, of social and environmental sustainability—the consumer supports market demand for desirable production practices.

Although many ethical consumption schemes focus on mitigating environmental and social harms attributable to consumerist lifestyles, explicitly consumption-related problems like pollution, resource depletion and labor exploitation by no means exhaust the issues that consumers seek to address through their purchases. The diversity of these projects⁷ suggests that the growing popularity of ethical consumption frameworks does

⁶ These standards vary widely in both focus and scope. Recent debate over certified-organic labels provides an illustrative example: USDA standards have made organic certification accessible to the growing “industrial organic” sector, but critics argue that the USDA standards don’t fully reflect an organic ideal in which “produce . . . is not only free of chemicals and pesticides but also grown locally on small farms in a way that protects the environment.” Elisabeth Rosenthal, “Organic Agriculture May Be Outgrowing Its Ideals.”

⁷ A few examples should indicate the diversity of ethical consumption schemes. The Timothy Plan family of mutual funds invests in companies that it considers consistent with conservative Christian values. It excludes (for example) Bayer AG for its manufacture of abortifacients, Thunderbird Resorts for its involvement in gambling, and Viacom for objections related to ‘lifestyle.’ Meanwhile another mutual fund, Citizens Value, invests in companies that it determines are gay-friendly and the Gay Financial Network maintains a list of gay-friendly Fortune 500 companies for investors who want their money to support gay-friendly businesses. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, travel to New Orleans was discussed as a way of supporting the local economy and assisting with the area’s recovery in the context of signal failures by state and federal government agencies. Appeals to consumers as patriotic shoppers after the September 11 attacks seemed to mobilize consumption in defense of American consumerism itself. For the Timothy Plan, see <http://www.timothyplan.com/>. For Citizens Value, see Mark Helm, “Money: Investing in Gay-Friendly Mutual Funds,” http://www.metroweekly.com/domestic_partner/money/?ak=674. For criticism of appeals to patriotic shoppers, see Benjamin R. Barber, “Shrunken Sovereign: Consumerism, Globalization, and American Emptiness.”

more than respond to an increasing sense that accustomed modes of consumption have become problematic; it points instead to a fundamental shift in the way consumers think about consumption from something passive and largely private to something that is more productive and expressive and that can activate a space for civic engagement.⁸ The theories of consumer behavior that prove most useful in explaining ethical consumption also define consumption as expressive and productive; recent work in this area has explored how consumption plays a role in identity formation, in the creation and maintenance of community, and in the performance of class distinction. My project takes up these theoretical and activist ideas of consumption as productive, expressive, and politicized by investigating a growing body of nonfiction and fictional literature that imagines how consumers might act on the world (and on their own identities and relationships) through their choices as consumers.

A playful scene from the HBO television show *True Blood* (2008-2015) suggests that ethical consumption has become central to the contemporary zeitgeist in that the series enacts while also highlighting the contradictory aspects of the discourse surrounding ethical consumption. The character Talbot, pouring human blood from a crystal decanter for fellow vampire Bill, intones: “Chilled carbonated blood. It’s cruelty-free, all willingly donated. Note the citrusy finish. This one ate only tangerines for weeks.”⁹ Invoking the organic and local food movements, Talbot’s claims about the ethical status of the blood (“cruelty-free, all willingly donated”) rest on detailed knowledge of its origins and means of production (or extraction), down to the diet of the donor. This concern with product origins defines many ethical consumption schemes,

⁸ Michele Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, 16.

⁹ *True Blood*, Season 3, episode 2.

which hinge on the consumer's felt intimate knowledge about production methods and impacts embodied in, for example, the auditing activities of a certification service, ethical claims added to product labels, or face-to-face interactions and direct consumer-producer relationships through farmer's markets and community-supported agriculture. These forms of knowledge about the conditions of production for a given commodity are normally obscured in the marketplace; by foregrounding them instead, ethical consumption attempts to make the social and environmental dynamics of production and exchange visible. This promise to educate consumers and to connect them to producers enhances the economic value of ethically-marked¹⁰ goods.

In promising increased knowledge of production processes and the cultivation of actual or felt relationships between producers and consumers, ethical labeling schemes work to defetishize commodities and reassert social relations between consumers and producers.¹¹ Media studies scholar Tania Lewis describes this kind of defetishization in a fair trade advertisement: "Consumers are asked to imaginatively reconnect their shopping practices to the lives and production practices of farmers and workers . . . Through making the often hidden parts of the commodity chain visible, we see a degree of defetishization occurring here in relation to commodities (to borrow Marx's notion of a commodity fetishism and his emphasis on the alienation from production that he argue accompanies capitalist labour processes)." But the scene from *True Blood* points to a different role for this kind of social project: in this scene, detailed knowledge about the

¹⁰ By "ethically-marked" I mean products with ethical labeling (e.g., fair trade and certified organic) but also goods that are marked by the contexts in which they are purchased (for example, food from a farmer's market or CSA or any goods purchased in an attempt to follow a particular ethical consumption scheme).

¹¹ Tania Lewis, "The Ethical Turn in Commodity Culture: Consumption, Care and the Other." For a discussion of fair trade and commodity fetishism, see Ian Hudson, "Removing the Veil? Commodity Fetishism, Fair Trade, and the Environment," 413-430.

blood's source heightens its aesthetic appeal. Drawing on the language we use to describe wine, Talbot's comment suggests that his guests will better appreciate the blood's "citrusy taste" if they imagine in detail how that flavor arose.¹² The "cruelty-free" quality of the blood also serves an aesthetic function: the willingness of the blood's donor appears alongside its chilling, carbonation and "citrusy finish."

What happens when the same information that promises to establish social relations between consumers and producers also functions to aestheticize the specific form of that labor as a part of the product's *gout de terroir*?¹³ In embedding this kind of knowledge into commodities, ethical consumption schemes often offer aesthetic value while also capturing enhanced monetary value, ironically fostering a new type of commodity fetishization. Ian Cook and Philip Crang have argued that a marketing focus on provenance and the invocation of distant others can actually produce a double commodity fetishism by casting the other as a passive and exoticized commodity.¹⁴ The scene from *True Blood* enacts this possibility: specific knowledge about the blood's production makes it a synecdoche for its human donor as the object of consumption when Talbot comments, "This one ate only tangerines for weeks."¹⁵ Susanne Freidberg sees fetishism in the way that supermarket chains view ethical standards as having

¹² This is another familiar move in representations of ethical consumption, which may alternately present 'bad' products as tainted by their conditions of production (blood diamonds) or 'good' products as enhanced by theirs (shade-grown coffee that ripens to the sound of birdsong).

¹³ Literally, "taste of the earth." In *The Dirty Life* Kristin Kimball borrows this term from wine writers to describe the pleasant variations in the taste of her farm-made butter, which she traces to seasonal changes and to the daily variations in the diet of her jersey cow. I borrow the same term here out of deference to the wine/blood connection in this scene, and also to emphasize the aestheticization of this knowledge about labor.

¹⁴ See I. Cook and P. Crang, "The World on a Plate: Culinary Culture, Displacement and Geographical Knowledges," 131-153. James G. Carrier describes three forms of fetishization in ethical consumption: "fetishism of objects, fetishism of the purchase and consumption of objects, and fetishism of nature." See James G. Carrier, "Protecting the Environment the Natural Way: Ethical Consumption and Commodity Fetishism," 672-689.

¹⁵ *True Blood*. Season 3, episode 2. 2010.

“protective” and “cleansing” effects on their brand as well as in companies hoping that ethical codes “will bring good fortune.” Consumers also seek protection “not just from unsafe food, but also from inadvertent participation in unethical food supply chain practices.”¹⁶ Like the commodity fetishism described by Marx, this fetishism of ethical standards can work to obscure the social relations of production. Participation in ethical trading labels can come with high expectations on producers to comply with ethical standards, and requirements for things like worker housing or better wages may not be properly funded. When this happens the pressure of meeting these standards falls on producers and then workers—in this context, the ethical standards themselves can become a kind of ‘fetish’ that obscures the social relations of their emergence.

The re-conception of consumption as an expression of values and even a form of activism presents interesting challenges for the recent outpouring of literary works that deal with this kind of consumption. Of special interest to this project are the challenges that emerge when authors imagine—and often work to inspire—consumer desires for ethically-marked products and forms of consumption. I place this body of imaginative literature in conversation with recent work in philosophy and political theory that has attended to pleasure and desire as crucial to the pursuit of social justice and environmental sustainability. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett observes, “there will be no greening of the economy, no redistribution of wealth, no enforcement or extension of rights without human dispositions, moods, and cultural ensembles hospitable to those effects.”¹⁷ In *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, Soper observes that,

¹⁶ See Susanne Freidberg, “Cleaning up down South: super-markets, ethical trade and African horticulture,” 27-43.

¹⁷ See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xii.

despite environmentalist rhetoric about the limits to capitalism, predictions of environmental catastrophe have not reversed consumption rates in the U.S. and Europe. She calls for the development and communication of a “new erotics of consumption or hedonist ‘imaginary’” that would attend to the self-interested motives¹⁸ for choosing sustainable lifestyles. For Soper, attention to the pleasures of sustainable consumption has the potential to inspire concrete changes in consumer behavior where predictions of catastrophe have so far failed to do so. This dissertation investigates the questions of how imaginative literature articulates a “new erotics of consumption” and how particular writers imagine what Bennett terms the “human dispositions, moods, and cultural ensembles” so as to support the political goals of various ethical consumption projects, from fair trade to local food. Although reader responses suggest that some of these texts have helped spur consumer interest in ethical consumption, I argue that the rhetorical strategies their authors employ and the forms of desire that they imagine are often in tension with the progressive political goals of the ethical consumption projects they aim to promote. In other words, in their attempt to generate desire for ethical consumption, some of these texts reinforce “human dispositions, moods, and cultural ensembles” that

¹⁸ Kate Soper, *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, 4.

A persistent concern for students of ethical consumption has been to come to terms with the way in which ethical consumption can be at once both selfish and altruistic. Searching for a framework to deal with ethical consumption in moral philosophy, Rob Harrison, Terry Newholm and Deirdre Shaw observe that ethical consumption campaigns most frequently employ consequentialist (emphasizing outcomes) or deontological (emphasizing what is right to do in the abstract) reasoning in appeals to consumers. They suggest that a virtue ethics approach might be more useful. Virtue ethics is concerned with “personal excellence and societal flourishing” and how best to achieve them. Whereas consequentialism and deontology position self-interest as an obstacle to altruism, “virtue ethicists try to awaken us to our enlightened self-interest in caring for others.” Virtue ethicists seek to identify the virtues - justice, compassion, tolerance, courage, patience, persistence, intelligence, imagination, creativity - that promote human flourishing. The authors identify the main question facing a virtue ethicist as “What is the good life and how can we go about living it?” Rob Harrison, Terry Newholm and Deirdre Shaw, *The Ethical Consumer*, 17.

undermine (rather than support) lasting commitments to social justice and environmental sustainability.

Ethical Consumption in Contemporary American Literature

In the U.S., a recent body of novels, memoirs and nonfiction books make activist and expressive modes of ethical consumption a central theme (and in the case of several of the memoirs, their organizing conceit).¹⁹ These texts explore consumption variously as an appealing way to mitigate the social and ecological impact of consumerist lifestyles; a tool for imagining and articulating a new ethics and aesthetics of consumption; a potential means by which to address problems that seem beyond the capacity of the state to redress; a part of a profound shift in the way people relate to one another and the

¹⁹ These include novels, nonfiction books and memoirs: *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (2008) and *Prodigal Summer* (2011) by Barbara Kingsolver; *The Dirty Life: A Memoir of Farming, Food, and Love* (2011) by Kristin Kimball; *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (2007), *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual* (2009) and *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (2009) by Michael Pollan; *Folks, This Ain't Normal* (2011) by Joel Salatin; *What to Eat* (2007) by Marion Nestle; *The Quarter-Acre Farm: How I Kept the Patio, Lost the Lawn, and Fed My Family for a Year* (2011) by Spring Warren; *The Feast Nearby: How I lost my job, buried a marriage, and found my way by keeping chickens, foraging, preserving, bartering and eating locally (all on \$40 a week)* (2011) by Robin Mather; *Hit by a Farm: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Barn* (2006), *The Compassionate Carnivore: Or, How to Keep Animals Happy, Save Old MacDonald's Farm, Reduce Your Hoofprint, and Still Eat Meat* (2009) and *Sheepish: Two Women, Fifty Sheep, and Enough Wool to Save the Planet* (2011) by Catherine Friend; *Coop: A Family, a Farm, and the Pursuit of One Good Egg* (2010) by Michael Perry; *The Bucolic Plague: How Two Manhattanites Became Gentleman Farmers: An Unconventional Memoir* (2011) by Josh Kilmer-Purcell; *A Cafecito Story* (2001) by Julia Alvarez; *The \$64 Tomato; Farm City: The Education of an Urban Farmer* (2010) and *The Essential Urban Farmer* (2011) by Novella Carpenter; *Farewell, My Subaru* (2008) by Doug Fine; *No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes About Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process* (2010) by Colin Beavan; *On a Dollar a Day: One Couple's Unlikely Adventures in Eating in America* (2010) by Christopher Greenslate and Kerri Leonard; *Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally* (2007) by Alisa Smith and J.B. Mackinnon; *Not Buying It: My Year Without Shopping* (2007) by Judith Levine; *A Year Without "Made in China": One Family's True Life Adventure in the Global Economy* (2008); *The Power of Half: One Family's Decision to Stop Taking and Start Giving Back* (2011) by Hannah Salwen and Kevin Salwen; *The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* (2007) by Peter Singer and Jim Mason; *All Over Creation* (2004) and *My Year of Meats* (1999) by Ruth Ozeki.

environment; or a vehicle for personal escape from the negative aesthetic, social, environmental and health effects of mainstream consumption.

The imagined audiences for many of these texts highlight the problem that socioeconomic status often determines both access to ethical consumption and the cost of participation. Although the literary works I examine in many cases take up issues of social and environmental justice that reach across class lines and that may be global in scope, most address an audience that is overwhelmingly white, American, and middle to upper class. It is this affluent American audience that such texts ask to redefine their lives as consumers and to create a greener, more just world through conscious changes in consumption behaviors. The literature of ethical consumption typically imagines producers in developing countries or in marginalized communities in the U.S. as rational economic actors responding to a demand for change led overwhelmingly by affluent Americans.²⁰

In the chapters that follow, I turn to a diverse set of nonfiction and fiction writers to develop this thesis: organic farmers and nature writers Wendell Berry and David Mas Masumoto; novelist Julia Alvarez; journalists and memoirists Alisa Smith, J.B. MacKinnon and Colin Beavan; novelist and memoirist Barbara Kingsolver; and memoirists and bloggers Kate Leonard and Christopher Greenslate. Additionally, I look at a diverse set of texts produced by members and supporters of the United Farm Workers union during their 1980s-2000 “Wrath of Grapes” boycott campaign. These authors have adapted familiar literary forms (fables, memoirs, epitaph, short plays) to convey ethical

²⁰ This observation about the audience for ethical consumption books is related to a larger critique of ethical consumption that argues that while thinking of their dollars as votes may be empowering to some consumers, it also means that some of us will have more votes than others. George Monbiot makes this point in a 2009 article. See George Monbiot, “We Cannot Fight Climate Change With Consumerism.”

consumption projects and have attracted large and often remarkably engaged audiences.²¹ Several also suggest expansions of the ethical responsibilities and possibilities not just of commodity consumption but of media consumption as well as their authors move from book to screen to mobilize readers in adopting and sharing ethical consumption strategies and projects. Ethical consumption memoirs, in particular, claim an activist and pedagogical role vis-a-vis their readers: they incorporate recipes, practical advice, references for further reading, shopping guides and other materials that suggest that the reader will respond to this literature by transforming her own consumption. Several of the texts I discuss further suggest that the reader is meant to pass the story on to others. Authors of ethical consumption memoirs often credit other authors for helping to inspire their transformations as consumers; I'll argue that they position their own work as continuing that process in relation to their readership. However, another body of nonfiction and fiction texts variously re-situate and redefine ethical consumption, challenging both the emphasis on consumer knowledge and power and the reification of capitalist exchange as the necessary context for ethical consumption. Cherrie Moraga, the United Farm Workers (UFW) and others writing in response to the 1980s-2000 "Wrath of Grapes" boycott, as I discuss in Chapter Four, make farmworkers the focus of their

²¹ For instance, Alissa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon's memoir *Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally* inspired 100-mile diet challenges all over Canada and the US including Mission, B.C. (See Alissa Smith, "Mission Challenge: 100-Mile Diet Party"), Warren Country, PA (see "Buy Fresh! Buy Local! Join the 100 Mile Diet Challenge"), and Hudson Valley, New York (see Sarah Begley, "Hudson Valley 'locavores' take 100-mile meal challenge"). One reader of Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* claims that after reading she "undertook [her] own eat local project . . . learned to cook . . . tried to garden . . . stopped buying processed junk . . . stopped wasting food . . . changed [her] shopping habits [and began to] cherish food moments"; the same reader also announced her plan to learn canning and preserving and to start raising her own poultry, also in response to Kingsolver's book (see Robin Strong Elton "Gamechanger: Animal, Vegetable, Miracle (Book Club Day).")

narratives and describe a push for social and environmental change informed by farmworker (not consumer) knowledge and experience.

In many of the texts this dissertation considers, attention to the ethical implications of media consumption comes with a heightened concern with the ethics of representation and particularly with the role of narrative broadly. In Julia Alvarez's *A Cafecito Story* (the subject of Chapter Three), the idea that "The future does depend on each cup [of coffee], on each small choice" makes spreading the story of fair trade among U.S. consumers an ethical imperative. As Alvarez's narrator concludes, "The world can only be saved by one man or woman putting . . . a story in someone's head or a book in someone's hands."²² In this image, the story itself becomes the mainspring of fair trade's revolutionary potential: the future depends on "each small choice" but "the world can only be saved by . . . a story." Fair trade for Alvarez rests on a story that organizes and gives meaning to "each small choice." Storytelling in this context takes on ethical weight because of its role in shaping commodity networks and modes of production and consumption that, in the often grandiose terms of such stories, can either save the world or destroy it.

Alvarez is not alone in viewing narrative as ethically and politically impactful. Colin Beavan's "No Impact Man" project promises to reduce waste by modeling a different way to consume. Yet Beavan also worries that readers might see such individualized effort as a substitute for political action.²³ The website for Barbara

²² Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 59; 49.

²³ Among the harmful effects Beavan imagines is a concern expressed by some environmentalist friends and readers of his blog that his project, with its emphasis on reducing his personal impact, will be seen as a substitute for political action on environmental issues. This is a recurring concern for critics of ethical consumption – regardless of any good it might do, critics worry that ethical consumption will encourage

Kingsolver's 2006 memoir *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* acknowledges a tacit expectation that an ethical consumption book signals a commitment to continued activism when it announces that Kingsolver does not plan to quit her day job:

As always, each new book carries [Barbara] into a completely new area of research and fascination. While readers may continue to identify [her] particularly with the subject matter of one or more of her previous books, she will always devote herself mainly to the next one, whatever it may be. And so, while fully supporting the local-food movement on her family's table, she declines to be as spokesperson for it in the world.²⁴

As this disclaimer illustrates, some writers express ambivalence about their own and readers' expectations that the authors of literature aligned with ethical consumption themselves be activists. These texts view everyday acts of consumption as activist, expressive and politically powerful, and they articulate both an ethics and an aesthetics of consumption that seeks to harness that alleged power and understand its daily implication in even our most intimate and necessary rituals. They work to reshape the ethical imperatives and forms of desire that inform everyday consumer decisions; their self-reflexivity about their own influence mirrors the powerful role that they imagine for

government actors to "float responsibility" for social and environmental problems away from governments and corporations and onto the individual. The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (Svenska Naturskyddsföreningen, SNF), for example, is committed to "political systems-oriented environmental policy" and has been wary of ethical consumption schemes that may act as "a way for government to avoid taking political responsibility for serious environmental problems by passing the buck on the regulation of industry from hard law to soft law, that is, to voluntary compliance in negotiations between civil society actors and business institutions." (See Michelle Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, especially pages 3-4, 147, 160.) See also Archon Fung et al, *Can We Put an End to Sweatshops?* and International Council of Human Rights Policy, *Beyond Voluntarism. Human Rights and the Developing International Legal Obligations of Companies*, 7-20 (cited in Micheletti, 207).

²⁴ This note appears on an older version of the website for *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* which was active as of Feb 12, 2012. It can be accessed through "Wayback" at the following URL: <http://web.archive.org/web/20120212175304/http://animalvegetablemiracle.com/Share.html>. See "Changes in Our Lives, and in Our Website," Share Your Local Food Adventure, *Animal, Vegetable Miracle*.

everyday acts of ethical consumption and, by extension, the stories that conceptualize them.

With some exceptions (most notably *The Power of Half* by Kevin and Hannah Salwen), food and agriculture are central to the texts I identify as a part of the wider ethical consumption imaginative literature. To some extent this focus on producing, procuring and preparing food characterizes ethical consumption generally: popular movements for organic, local, fair, and slow consumption are all focused on food. While the fair trade label markets other products (e.g. handicrafts), it is most prominent in the area of specialty food commodities like chocolate and coffee. This focus on food reflects the nature of the anxieties that consumers use ethical consumption to address: people who buy organic food are often concerned about the sustainability of industrial agriculture, and they also have personal concerns about exposure to chemical residues. Consumers worry about more abstract kinds of contamination as well—they may describe conventionally sourced foods as tainted by, for instance, exploitative labor conditions.²⁵ Even as U.S. consumers face a growing abundance of food, we also confront threats to our food supply in the form of lost biodiversity, frightening new genetic technologies, fossil fuel dependence, drought and other vulnerabilities. Humans have to consume food regularly in order to survive, and yet each time we encounter food we also confront this

²⁵ Lawrence Glickman cites an example of this kind of thinking in his “Buy for the Sake of the Slave.” A student sent out a message to a class listserve urging her classmates to buy only fair trade coffee and remarking, “I may have to give up my favorite brand so I don't hear the screams from my coffee grinder at home.” Here the human suffering associated with conventional coffee invades the space of consumption, disturbing its tranquility with “screams.” For this student the consumption of conventional coffee doesn't just depend on past suffering but seems to prolong that suffering as well. According to the economic logic of fair trade, the producers are hurt by the decision to buy conventional coffee. The student's remark seems to suggest something more than this – even after the moment of purchase her processing and consumption of the coffee is tied to the suffering of its producers. Lawrence Glickman, “Buy for the Sake of the Slave,” 889.

proliferation of risks and meanings. Food is also deeply linked to pleasure and desire and for this reason it may be especially fertile ground for attempts to link the political work of ethical consumption to more immediate personal rewards like taste. Food consumption is also key to social relationships—eating together is central to the way we maintain social connections, and cooking for another person is a way of showing care; this link to sociality may make food a natural place to start imaginatively extending those social relationships to include producers.

Whether their projects center around food or consumerism more generally, these texts all share a sense that everyday consumption choices do matter, and that representing those choices in imaginative literature can magnify their effects by modeling various forms of ethical consumption for readers. Although on a day-to-day basis ethical consumption projects are concerned with consumption at a personal or familial scale, the kinds of changes that they advocate would only begin to have noticeable effects if they were widely adopted and considered in aggregate. For this reason, writing about an ethical consumption project in the mode that I have been describing may appear as a natural extension of personal projects in ethical consumption; it is the author's attempt to push the scale of her own intervention from the personal out to the global.

Critical Contexts and Literature Review

Existing work on ethical consumption discourse has focused on rhetorical strategies for appealing to consumers, branding challenges related to consumer education, and public perceptions about the effectiveness of ethical consumption or the credibility of labeling

organizations—work that has emerged primarily from the fields of business and marketing. Meanwhile, more theoretical work has tended to focus on how ethical consumption responds to the political and economic landscape of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries or on the challenges ethical consumption poses to traditional models of consumer behavior, political participation and citizenship. As a consequence, such scholarship glosses over the particular ways ethical consumption has been imagined aesthetically and narratively in nonfiction, fiction, documentary film, and marketing materials. But representations of ethical consumption in cultural and artistic works are not an after-the-fact development merely reflecting the real practice of ethical consumption: instead, they have been important factors shaping its emergence and continued growth. As Chris White says in a TransFairUSA promotional video, “Fair trade isn’t a product, fair trade isn’t a brand – fair trade is a story.”²⁶ It is the product’s story, in this view, that differentiates ethically marked goods from their conventional counterparts. Ethical consumption also tells a story about consumers: about their values, their place in a community, their relationship to their environments, the way they act on the world and even their identities. The literature of ethical consumption thus offers to shape reader-consumer understanding of what ethical consumption means and represents; as such, this creative work merits scholarly attention. Focusing on both nonfiction and fiction, I examine the growing body of imaginative writing about ethical consumption to demonstrate the role of literary criticism in ethical consumption research current in sociology, consumer studies, political science, history and geography; and I approach that

²⁶ Chris White was the National Account Manager for TransFairUSA. Aaron Straight and Ian Jay, “Fair Trade—The Story.”

existing scholarly work on ethical consumption with special attention to how it might inform useful approaches to the way ethical consumption has been imagined in literature.

Several of the texts I discuss here have not attracted much attention from literary critics, and they have not been considered as a group.²⁷ By analyzing these texts together as an emerging literary mode and by putting them conversation with scholarship on ethical consumption in other disciplines, my project reveals fundamental underlying concerns that also speak to key interests in contemporary literary criticism, most particularly the relationship between literature and the environment and the role of literature in imagining and enacting social change. I argue below that this literature should be of particular interest to ecocriticism in literary studies for the way it imagines consumption as a space from which to enact a relationship to the natural world. The literature of ethical consumption also speaks to questions of how literature reflects and intervenes in social and environmental crisis and change. The 2012 American Comparative Literature Association conference “Collapse/Catastrophe/Change” asked participants, “Can the literary re-imagine so as to renew? What is the relation between figuration and change?”²⁸ The imaginative literature on ethical consumption addresses

²⁷ For the memoirs this may be an issue of genre and popularity or may be related to the authors’ backgrounds, which are generally more journalistic than literary. Although *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* is unpopular with many literary critics it has become a part of the discussion in a way that similar projects from less prominent or less literary authors have not (*Farewell, My Subaru: One Man’s Search for Happiness Living Green Off the Grid* by journalist and popular memoirist Doug Fine, *No Impact Man* by journalist Collin Beavan, *The Power of Half* by journalist Kevin Salwen and daughter Hannah, *On a Dollar a Day* by high school teachers Christopher Greenslate and Kerri Leonard). Even in the case of *The 100-Mile Diet* by journalists Alisa Smith and JB MacKinnon most of the work has come out of disciplines other than literary criticism. *A Cafecito Story* has also failed to attract much attention from critics, a circumstance that may stem from the novella’s divergence from Alvarez’s usual style and interests. Trenton Hickman, in the only chapter to address this text, comments on this difference. Alvarez’s other work is interested in history and identity and sensitive to issues of race in a way that *A Cafecito Story* really is not. See Trenton Hickman, “Coffee and Colonialism in Julia Alvarez’s *A Cafecito Story*.”

²⁸ See the American Comparative Literature Association’s 2012 Conference Theme. American Comparative Literature Association, “ACLA 2012.”

this question by re-imagining and renewing consumption as a potential ally for social justice and environmental sustainability, and its authors assume a remarkably direct relationship between figuration and change.

Historical Roots of Ethical Consumption

Although my project zeroes in on late-twentieth- and early twenty-first century ethical consumption narratives and politics, this social movement arguably has a much longer historical arc. Specifically in a U.S. context, Lawrence Glickman²⁹ has traced ethical consumption as far back as the American Revolution, observing that colonists who boycotted English goods already understood that their consumption could have effects that reached across the ocean. In the 1790s, British antislavery sugar boycotters saw a direct relationship between sugar consumption and the continuation of the slave trade,³⁰ and Graham Ullathorne argues that contemporary fair trade tactics draw on these abolitionist campaigns.³¹ Abolitionist “free produce” stores in the U.S. (1826-1867)³² actively promoted free labor alternatives to slave-made goods. The free produce stores conceived of consumption as a space from which to encourage desirable production practices, thus imagining an even more direct causal relationship between consumption and production. This is the same causal relationship that informs consequentialist moral arguments for ethical consumption today. The longer history that Glickman provides also

²⁹ See Lawrence Glickman, *Buying Power*.

³⁰ We see this sentiment expressed in literature in William Cowper’s 1788 poem “Pity for Poor Africans” in which the consumer of sugar and rum is seen as complicit in the exploitation of slave labor, the continuation of the slave trade and the moral corruption of slave traders. William Cowper, “Pity for Poor Africans,” *The Life and Works of William Cowper*, 217-219.

³¹ See Graham Ullathorne, “How Could We Do Without Sugar and Rum?”

³² For a discussion of the free produce movement as a precursor to contemporary ethical consumption, see Lawrence Glickman, “‘Buy for the sake of the slave’: Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism.”

illuminates the focus on quality in representations of ethical consumption today: a major challenge for these antecedents to contemporary ethical consumption was a perception (often justified) that ethically-marked products were inferior in quality. Representations of ethical consumption today frequently emphasize quality—often so much so that (as we saw *True Blood* satirize) ethical considerations appear relevant primarily as they relate to quality.

Contemporary Contexts for Ethical Consumption

Scholars have offered a variety of explanations for the recent surge in interest in ethical consumption, relating it to economic globalization, the changing nature of political participation and citizenship, modernization and changes in information infrastructure and access. These works of sociology and political theory inform my reading of the literary texts in this project, but I also see literature as a valuable (and so far under-examined) source of insight into more fine-grained pressures and opportunities that consumers respond to when they turn to ethical consumption. In particular, this literature offers new perspectives on ethical consumption as a response to neoliberalism, globalization, and risk society.

Neoliberalism, as an economic ideology and system of the post-World War II period, sees sustained economic growth as the key to human progress and holds that the path to such growth lies in the unregulated operation of the market and private sector. The barriers to economic growth that neoliberal economic policy would remove in the name of progress include many of those government mechanisms that have traditionally safeguarded the wellbeing of citizens or protected the environment. In this context of

deregulation and reduced public and environmental safety nets, ethical consumption invites consumers to step in and regulate through their influence on the market.³³ Critics of this form of market-based intervention in neoliberalism debate how effectively ethical consumption can compensate for the decline of state regulation of business and social welfare programs in the United States particularly, but a more fundamental critique concerns the relationship of ethical consumption to neoliberal ideas about individual responsibility. Although ethical consumption may seek to empower individual consumers, critics have also seen it as problematic to the extent that it underwrites a transfer of responsibility³⁴ from government onto the individual.³⁵

In contrast to such critiques, Michele Micheletti sees what she terms “political consumerism” as a way of acting politically beyond the boundaries of the nation state. Rather than supporting candidates or legislation on a national level, consumers hope to influence the global market directly by harnessing their dollars as votes. For Micheletti

³³ For neoliberal economic policy as a context for the increasing popularity of ethical consumption, see Michele Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping: Individuals, Consumerism, and Collective Action*. See also Tania Lewis and Emily Potter, Eds, *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*.

³⁴ David Harvey has observed that under neoliberalism “each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being” and, “Individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings . . . rather than being attributed to any systemic property (such as the class exclusions usually attributed to capitalism)”. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 65.

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Local food and permaculture activist Joel Salatin apparently embraces this shift, saying for instance, “We don’t need a law against McDonald’s or a law against slaughterhouse abuse – we ask for too much salvation by legislation. All we need to do is empower individuals with the right philosophy and the right information to opt out [of the industrial food chain] en masse.” See Michael Pollan, “No Bar Code.” Salatin’s suspicion of legislative solutions is more fully elaborated in his *Folks, This Ain’t Normal* where he argues that regulation of food production tends to create barriers to entry for small producers. See Joel Salatin, *Folks, This Ain’t Normal: A Farmer’s Advice for Happier Hens, Healthier People, and a Better World*.

and other advocates of ethical consumption, political consumerism is ideally suited to influence entities—like transnational corporations—whose global nature makes effective state-based regulation difficult.³⁶ Political consumerism for Micheletti may also be suited to address transboundary issues (climate change, AIDS, terrorism) that require cooperation between states or between state and non-state actors or that require beyond-compliance measures. Although ethical consumption authors do often concern themselves with problems that are global in scale (for instance, climate change) and view their consumption and their writing as intervening in the ways Micheletti describes, there is also an isolating impulse in some of the eco-consumption memoirs that makes it difficult for me to see consumption as a space for this kind of global engagement.

Ulrich Beck's thinking about reflexive modernization suggests another context for and driver of the increasing popularity of ethical consumption.³⁷ For Beck, industrialized Western societies have entered a second, reflexive stage of modernity in which the primary concern is no longer with making nature useful to meet our basic material needs but rather with the problems that have arisen “from techno-economic development itself.”³⁸ Intensifying modernization comes with intensifying risks, in other words, and increasing recognition of these risks has led to the expansion of politics into new areas as “what was until now *considered unpolitical becomes political – the elimination of causes in the industrial process itself.*”³⁹ Since more and more of our risks are derived from

³⁶ See Michele Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*.

³⁷ Parkins and Craig (2006) and Harrison *et al.* (2005) have used Beck's idea of a risk society to explain the increasing popularity of ethical consumption since the last quarter of the 20th century.

³⁸ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society*, 19.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 24.

human activity, consumption in this context becomes a site of political disputes and actions.

In the literature of ethical consumption, these contexts manifest themselves either explicitly as the impetus for a memoirist's turn away from conventional forms of consumption or implicitly as a negative to what a character finds through ethical consumption. It is difficult to trace the effects of one person's ethical consumption on, for example, pollution levels or international worker welfare statistics. Transformations in individuals' feelings of security or fear, health or vulnerability, social harmony or uneasy complicity, self-sufficiency or lack of control are more amenable to representation. In the imaginative literature on ethical consumption, the transformation of the individual often stands in for aspirational change in the areas of social justice and environmental sustainability. For instance in *The Power of Half*, a project inspired by the desire to help others by using less, Kevin and Hannah Salwen's narrative is more compelling when they describe the transformation of their family life at home than when they describe the work their family's money does in Africa. This way of imagining individualized solutions to what Beck defines as the global risk society offers a degree of resolution through a narrative arc that corresponds to individual-level change, but the exact point at which ethical consumption as a movement is presumed to resolve these larger problems is elusive. There is a sense in these texts that the moment of reading participates in a growing wave of change that will push the scale of the transformation from personal to societal.

Theories of Consumer Behavior: Consumption as Productive and Expressive

Traditional theories of consumer behavior have viewed the consumer either as a rational maximizer of economic utility (classical economic theory) or as a passive dupe manipulated by advertisers (Frankfurt school).⁴⁰ Recent theories of consumption have challenged both accounts of consumer behavior by rethinking how consumption can become meaningful and by defining its more than strictly economic functions. My thinking about ethical consumption is informed by work that considers consumption a generative site of identity formation, community, and class distinction. One of my concerns in this project is to trace the interactions among these functions—as in how consumption’s role in the performance of class distinction inflects attempts to leverage it as a political tool.

For sociologists such as Beck, Zygmunt Bauman and Anthony Giddens, consumption in modernity and post-modernity is an arena for identity construction. For Giddens, lifestyle takes on a new importance in this context as it represents “a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfill utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity.”⁴¹ Coming out of these reflexive, always in-process identities is Beck’s “self politics” in which “success means a direct and tangible link-up between private actions . . . and outcomes in which individuals can feel themselves to be authors of global political acts.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Thinking about consumption in this way is not especially useful for explaining ethical consumption. The consumer who pays more for an equivalent product because the workers who made it were paid a living wage is likely not maximizing her own economic utility. And although there is no shortage of manipulative advertising that attempts to appeal to ethically motivated consumers, the ethical consumption movement is built on a fundamental belief in the power of the consumer to drive production that is clearly at odds with the Frankfurt school model of consumer behavior.

⁴¹ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 81.

⁴² Ulrich Beck, *Individualization*, 45.

Thorstein Veblen and Pierre Bourdieu have shown that consumption plays a role in the performance of class distinction. Reading ethical consumption through that lens can temper a tendency to see it as a new and more egalitarian political order. Lewis⁴³ and cultural studies scholar Jo Littler have discerned a conspicuous or competitive aspect of ethical consumption at odds with the liberatory aspirations of many ethical consumption schemes.

Anthropologist Daniel Miller has explored consumer practices as “productive of social, rather than just calculative and marketized, relations,” for example by considering how shopping for others can be an expression of “love and care.”⁴⁴ Consumption viewed in this way appears as an arena that has long been intimately involved in our ethical relationships with one another.⁴⁵

Littler has argued that while shopping at a Whole Foods in an upper-class neighborhood could be seen to embody “progressive environmental ecologies,” that same shopping can also act as a marker of class distinction to “facilitate snobbery” and thus

⁴³ In a discussion of the representation of ethical consumption in lifestyle television, Tania Lewis notes that lifestyle television is concerned “with teaching its audiences to adopt implicitly middle-class modes of ‘good’ consumption and self-surveillance” and that this dynamic does not necessarily disappear when there is a focus on ethical consumption. Instead, the green theme is incorporated into the larger class project in which, “Regulating one’s consumption and embracing the necessary inconveniences of green modes of living are offered up as middle-class virtues to which we should all aspire”. For Lewis, green lifestyle shows contribute to an increasing association of ethically marked consumption practices with the production of class distinction. Tania Lewis, “Transforming citizens? Green politics and ethical consumption on lifestyle television,” 238.

⁴⁴ See Daniel Miller, *A Theory of Shopping*.

⁴⁵ Ethical consumption can be seen as producing community in a number of ways. The establishment of community between producers and consumers is a recurring theme in writing about the local and organic food movements. In *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* Kingsolver recalls a decision to buy something from every vendor at an early spring farmer’s market as a show of support; the same purchases are also a part of her effort to show “love and care” for her own family by satisfying their longing for sour fruit flavor with her purchase of rhubarb. Joel Salatin takes the community-building aspect of consumption seriously and associates it with issues of accountability when he urges farmers’ market shoppers to take their business elsewhere if after a few weekly purchases and conversations a farmer hasn’t invited them to visit the farm. In *The Dirty Life* Kristin Kimball describes the growing sense of community that arises not just between herself and her customers but also among the customers as they share recipes and advice for canning and food storage.

embodies “unequal social and mental ecologies.”⁴⁶ Littler shows that ethical consumption can address exploitation in one area (for example, the environment) while producing it in another (for example, class). I go a step further and argue that ethical consumption’s multiple social functions as a political tool but also as an arena for the performance of identity, the maintenance of community, the performance of class distinction and the pursuit of pleasure mean that the same act of ethical consumption might both address and produce exploitation in that *same* area.

As my reading of *True Blood* suggests, the most provocative implications of these frameworks emerge when we consider them in light of relationships that ethical consumption schemes imagine between consumers and producers. Lewis has argued of fair trade that “undue weight is given to the ability of first world consumers to understand and impact the ‘realities’ of life for producers in the global South—an emphasis that also tends to reinscribe ... colonizing power relations between (agentic) Northern consumers and (passive) Southern producers.”⁴⁷ If this appeals to consumers, it may benefit producers by increasing revenues from fair trade; but it certainly also supports “unequal social and mental ecologies.” In the case of conspicuous fair trade consumption, not only does the ethical consumer potentially reinscribe colonizing power relations, she does so casually as a part of a consumptive project motivated by the pursuit of class distinction; such conspicuous ethical consumption might be seen to fetishize the consumer-producer relationship itself. Its ability to mark class distinction does not exhaust the potential meaningfulness of this consumption—the same fair trade purchase that works to mark the

⁴⁶ See Jo Littler, *Radical Consumption*, 38.

⁴⁷ Tania Lewis, “The Ethical Turn in Commodity Culture: Consumption, Care and the Other.”

consumer's class status can always also be working in something more like Daniel Miller's sense as an expression of "love and care."

The View from Literary Criticism

Given the interest in ethical consumption among academics in other fields and the rise of literary representations of ethical consumption, it is surprising that this work has not attracted more attention from literary critics. The rapid growth and mainstreaming of ethical consumption over the past two decades has posed challenges to longstanding assumptions in consumer studies, political science, economics and sociology at the same time it has inspired persuasive critiques. The attempt to account for ethical consumption has inspired new theories of consumer motivation and has informed the development of new models for citizenship and political participation. However, to date, there have been limited contributions to this wider intellectual conversation from literary studies, a gap my project addresses.

William Rueckert has written of literary criticism that "there must be a shift in our locus of motivation from newness, or theoretical elegance, or even coherence, to a principle of relevance."⁴⁸ The texts I examine here are in some cases formally inelegant or conceptually self-contradictory, but they hold interest to literary and cultural historians in how they put narrative forms to work for developing and modeling alternatives to the helplessness many U.S. consumers feel when faced with the damaging effects of their own consumption and to imagine altered consumption as a space from which to act for

⁴⁸ See William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism."

positive change. Much of this literature aspires to contribute to the ethical consumption movement directly (a claim supported by, for instance, the appearance of Julia Alvarez's *A Cafecito Story* in a list of "Fair Trade Essentials" at www.fairtraderesource.org). These texts further aim to shape the consumption values and habits that will in turn shape large-scale economic, social and environmental realities in the world. The ambition of that project and the enthusiasm with which readers have taken it up lends a sense of urgency to my own. I argue that the language and forms that these texts use to imagine ethical consumption matter, and I frame the contribution of literary criticism in terms of its interrogation of those forms.

The literature of ethical consumption responds to the same crises that ecocritics and environmental humanities scholars take up—issues like climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity—and so it is particularly surprising that environmental literary criticism has not had more to say about the literature of ethical consumption. Environmentalism, as a social movement, has understandably tended to see consumerism of any kind as a nemesis, but these texts reflect a growing trend that positions consumption as a potential ally for environmentalism. Ethical consumption proposes that the impact of consumption does not always have to be negative and seeks to imagine kinds of consumption that would work to slow or reverse climate change, pollution, resource depletion and the other environmental woes we associate with excessive mass consumption. For ecocriticism, this development opens up a large body of texts including both advertisements for particular ethical products and brands and stories about consumption that attempt to develop and express an environmental ethics through their thinking about consumption. Ecocritics have argued that "what appears to be a deepening

environmental crisis makes it necessary that [literary critics] pay attention to environmental issues, specifically by addressing how literature influences human behavior with regard to the natural world.”⁴⁹ The literary texts I address privilege consumption as a primary space from which to enact a relationship to the natural world. For these authors, consumption is one of the most palpable ways in which they impact the natural world; in several, ethical consumption also becomes a source of new connection to and awareness of natural processes. Ethical consumption has taken a practice typically associated with environmental harm and has reimagined it as a potential ally for environmentalism. The imaginative literature about ethical consumption takes this one step further, suggesting that consumption has become central to the way we experience nature. This literature aligns disordered consumption with a disordered perception of nature. For example, in *Farm City* Novella Carpenter describes an encounter with a boy growing up with limited access to fresh foods and gardens in urban Oakland who identifies spaghetti as a root vegetable. Meanwhile, this literature also imagines various forms of ethical consumption as deepening the consumer’s knowledge about and awareness of the natural world. In *The 100-Mile Diet* Alissa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon describe gaining a heightened awareness of their local biome as a result of their project in eating locally. When the literature of ethical consumption models alternative forms of consumption for its readers, it is self-consciously modeling a way of knowing and acting on the environment.

This body of imaginative literature acts for the ethical consumption movement as practical guide, advocate and interpreter of its values and meanings, and has been

⁴⁹ Gretchen T. Legler, “Ecofeminist Literary Criticism,” 227.

accepted by many readers in each of these roles. Given that, it seems especially important to consider the effect of the ethical consumption movement not just in terms of the amount of waste it avoids, the pollution it prevents or the resources it makes available to producers but also in terms of the stories it tells. Any image or story that inspires a consumer to act in a way that reduces pesticide use or guarantees a living wage to a vulnerable worker is arguably addressing exploitation. Without discounting the importance of that contribution, I maintain that it is also possible for a story that addresses exploitation to also produce (or reproduce) it. This is what happens when a fair trade ad campaign increases sales for fairly traded chocolate but does so by eroticizing its black female producers and inviting consumers to join a fight against poverty figured as sexual conquest, or when a story that imagines organic produce as nature's bounty inspires a consumer to eschew industrial agriculture but also renders organic agricultural labor invisible by imagining organic produce as the freely given bounty of nature or as the work of the kind of singular farmer figure familiar from Romanticist and early American pastoral tropes. Careful attention to the stories of ethical consumption suggests that there is not always a clear distinction between texts that mitigate exploitation and those that produce it. Instead, tensions between these texts' aspiration to endorse liberatory politics and the sometimes regressive narratives they employ mean that they may do both.

In her conceptualization of alternative hedonism, Soper implicitly assumes that the "erotics of consumption" that guides consumers to more environmentally sustainable and socially just practices will be entirely new. However, my research indicates that some of these ethical consumption texts, even as they embrace progressive political projects

and attempt to shape consumer desires accordingly, invoke desires that are in some cases starkly at odds with their political goals and draw on longstanding colonial rhetorics. In *A Cafecito Story*, for example, Julia Alvarez draws on colonial tropes to figure fair trade as a civilizing project directed toward producers; this civilizing role may appeal to consumers, but it is also antithetical to fair trade's commitment to empowerment and social justice. Eco-consumption memoirs see themselves as modeling ways to address issues as global as climate change. Yet their imagined audiences, their class politics, the kinds of connections, exchanges and pleasures that they value, and even the resolutions to their plots also work to isolate the individual from collective engagement on anything like a global scale. These texts re-imagine consumption as activist, and they also imagine and model a consumer desire that encompasses considerations of sustainability. Careful attention to the rhetorical strategies that these texts employ can illuminate tensions that arise between these generally progressive commitments and the implicit politics of the rhetorical strategies and forms of desire that they draw on.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two of this project takes up Soper's concept of alternative hedonism (a central concern throughout the dissertation) to explore how David Mas Masumoto and Wendell Berry attempt to reform the concept of taste to incorporate awareness of the conditions of production for agricultural goods. In his 1989 essay "The Pleasures of Eating," Berry writes that "eating is an agricultural act." This idea has become a touchstone for the organic and sustainable food movement. Berry makes the implicit case

that consumers are increasingly unaware of how and where their food is grown; in his view, this blind spot has made quantity rather than quality the primary value within an industrialized food system. For organic peach farmer and nature writer Masumoto, this loss of cultural knowledge about and experiential connection to farming prevents consumers from experiencing the kind of pleasure that would shape their food politics by leading them to choose sustainably produced foods. For Masumoto, consumer attention to food quality (and through it, to provenance) is a necessary condition for a turn toward more sustainable production.

I read Masumoto's *Epitaph for a Peach* and *Four Seasons in Five Senses* as articulating an alternative view of the good life and as evolving an "erotics of consumption" built on an expanded understanding of "taste" and a renewed orientation toward this kind of taste as distinct from appetite. Juliana Mansvelt, in *Geographies of Consumption*, suggests that commodities "are more than just objects; they are shifting assemblages of social relations, which take place and assume form and meaning in time and space."⁵⁰ Masumoto's nonfiction writing traces these assemblages as he sees them at work in his peaches, and he sees them as having a profound effect on the way his peaches taste and the consumer behaviors that taste inspires. Drawing on the concept of umami (the fifth basic taste), Masumoto suggest that when consumers who have learned to value the labor of farmers (including their aesthetic, intellectual and cultural labor) eat sustainably grown food, it has a special taste. He describes this taste as a metaphorical umami imparted not by fermentation but by the labor of an artisan farmer informed by a healthy farming culture and appreciated by a consumer who has learned to value that

⁵⁰ Juliana Mansvelt, *Geographies of Consumption*, 3.

labor. This taste is threatened by the demands of the industrial food system on farmers but also by consumers' loss of connection to and appreciation of agricultural work. Masumoto's work as an author, as a farmer, and as an innovative marketer of his own peaches comes together as a part of a larger project to build an alternative commodity network structured around this richer kind of "taste" and around communities, technologies and forms of exchange capable of valuing and delivering it. I will argue, however, that despite his family history of immigration and migrant labor Masumoto's recuperation of taste does not fully recognize the contributions of the Mexican migrant laborers who work on his farm; the alternative commodity network he envisions still relies on the undercompensated labor of these workers.

Chapter Three looks at *A Cafecito Story*, an "ecofable" novella loosely based on a shade-grown coffee farm that Julia Alvarez and husband Bill Eichner own in the Dominican Republic. As I will argue, *A Cafecito Story* presents itself as an allegory of fair trade in part through its back matter, which frames it as a fair trade story. In an afterword to the story, Eichner makes strong claim for the political impact of individual consumer choices and for the power of stories to organize those choices. "Whenever you drink coffee, remember this *cafecito* story. The future does depend on each cup, on each small choice we make."⁵¹ Supporting this claim that stories can drive more ecologically sustainable and socially just consumption choices, *A Cafecito Story* closes with a listing of fair trade resources that implies that the reader will respond to the story with changes in her own consumption. This resource list is a formal element that *A Cafecito Story*

⁵¹ Bill Eichner in Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 59.

shares with several other ethical consumption texts, and that is especially common in eco-consumption memoirs like the ones I discuss in Chapter Five.

A Cafecito Story tells the tale of Joe, a Nebraska farmer who arrives for a beach vacation in the Dominican Republic and ends up staying to help a group of Dominican farmers in their struggle to keep growing sustainable shaded coffee in the face of competition from industrialized full-sun coffee farms. A figure for the fair trade movement in the story, Joe helps the Dominican farmers by teaching the principles of cooperation and sustainability and by seducing an aspiring writer (a figure for Alvarez) who joins them and writes *A Cafecito Story* to share their story with consumers. Through a formal and historicist analysis of the fable, this chapter explores the tensions between the emphasis on social and environmental justice in fair trade principles and some of its rhetoric on the one hand, and its use of representations that (to invoke Littler above) promote “unequal social and mental ecologies” on the other.

A Cafecito Story and fair trade advertising both present fair trade as offering a reprieve from the stresses of modern life (for Joe, the march of industrialization, a loss of connection to nature, and lack of fulfillment in his work). Although imagining fair trade in this way may enhance fair trade’s appeal for consumers, I argue that it also figures the space of the Caribbean as an object of consumption and works to obscure the long history of violence in the region. Imagining the Dominican Republic as a space for Joe’s escape from modernity obscures the island’s history, misapprehends its present, and exports this idea of the Caribbean for first world consumption along with ethically marked coffee. The Caribbean as an available site for consumers’ self-actualization connects to a long history of representations of the Caribbean that have seen it as uninhabited, uncivilized,

uncultivated, un-Christian and in other ways available for appropriation and exploitation. The text is illustrated with woodcuts by Dominican artist Belkis Ramirez, and I will argue that Ramirez's woodcut illustrations challenge Joe's perspective and that of the narrator at key moments in the text. The woodcuts thus offer a starting point within the text for the critiques my chapter develops.

Alvarez's novella advances another idea that at first blush may seem to inspire consumer desire for fair trade without this kind of representational violence vis-a-vis the histories of colonialism in the Americas: the idea that sustainably grown coffee offers more aesthetic pleasure for consumers in addition to ethical merits. However, on closer examination, the novella is not drawing on a new hedonist imaginary, to cite Soper's concept, but an old one – sustainable coffee appeals to a longstanding exoticization and eroticization of coffee, of the Caribbean landscape, and of the producers themselves. Fair trade advertising often presents its information about product origins in ways that tend to exoticize both the products and the people who make them. Fair trade claims to defetishize commodities in that it lifts the veil from the production process and reasserts an ethical relationship between producers and consumers. However, folding knowledge about origins and conditions of production back into the commodity as an added aesthetic value may represent an additional layer of fetishization. The unsettling conflation of the commodity itself with its producer as an object of consumption is present in *A Cafecito Story*, fair trade promotional materials and a print ad campaign for Divine Fair Trade chocolate.

My analysis of these materials in Chapter Three asks what motivates such exoticized and neo-colonial representations where they would seem so contradictory to

the organizational goals of fair trade that these literary and marketing materials are supposed to support. How can we explain the apparent disconnect between the ethical relationships that these texts advocate and the symbolic ones that they invoke? Are there forms of consumer desire that would seem more appropriate to the equitable relationship these organizations seek to establish, or is desire itself problematic in this context?

Masumoto, although he tries to value labor in its concept of “umami,” has trouble fully incorporating migrant labor into his alternative commodity network. The literature of ethical consumption more generally, my project shows, tends to assign knowledge and action to the role of the consumer, casting producers in the passive role of responding as rational economic actors to a demand for change led by informed consumers. Chapter Four, which focuses on the United Farm Workers 1980s “Wrath of Grapes” boycott, upsets that alignment by examining a series of moments when migrant labor groups articulated a powerful connection between workers’ rights and consumer safety, and organized consumers to demand change from growers of table grapes. I approach the strike through its print culture, oral rhetoric, literary reenactment and media self-representations: the United Farm Worker publication *Food and Justice*, Cesar Chavez’s “Grapes of Wrath” speech, a documentary film by the same name and Cherrie Morage’s play *Heroes and Saints*. In the texts that the other chapters examine, writers position consumers’ knowledge and values as informing demands for change, and in such texts social and environmental risks tend to appear as a kind of negative to what the consumer gains through ethical consumption. For the subject of an ethical consumption memoir, social and environmental risks like isolation, overweight and pesticide exposure always belong to the time before the consumption project or to an imagined scenario in which

the consumption project never happened. In this chapter by contrast, social and environmental risks take center stage as the objects of representation, as the source of authority for laborers and their representatives, and as indicators of an intimate connection between workers and consumers of table grapes.

Ulrich Beck has observed that although exposure to risk (like access to wealth) is uneven, the nature of the risks that accrue from modernization is such that no one can be entirely sheltered from them. The “Wrath of Grapes” campaign is built on a similar understanding of risk. Chavez uses the farmworker’s position relative to risk to imagine farmworkers as thought leaders, citing UFW action on DDT and other dangerous chemicals years before the federal and state governments acted. This figuration – worker rights as a guarantor of consumer safety – reverses the framework imagined in ethical consumption memoirs, which tend to see consumer access to information as the natural guarantor of worker rights and safety. For the UFW, worker rights protect consumers, not the other way around.

Chapters Five and Six return to consumer-oriented ethical consumption as I address an emerging genre I call the “eco-consumption memoir.” These memoirs are personal and introspective but also instructional, and they frequently position themselves as models for how to consume goods in ways conducive to social justice and environmental sustainability. They incorporate recipes and practical advice as well as references to further resources, all of which suggest (like the supplemental materials that accompany *A Cafecito Story*) that the reader will respond to the text with changes in her own consumption. This pedagogical impulse means that these memoirs imagine a powerful social role for themselves. Although most of their authors describe undertaking

consumption projects in response to particular a social or environmental problem, they mark the progress of the project not by a measure of its global impact but rather through more personal transformations in the author's habits and desires, understanding of nature, relationship to a community, and sense of identity. The projects' represented capacities to intervene in the global-scale problems that inspire them are deferred onto a future that includes their reception and the changes that authors imagine readers will make in their own consumption.

My thinking in this chapter draws on a large body of these memoirs, but I focus on a small selection: *The 100-Mile Diet*, *No Impact Man* and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. *The 100-Mile Diet* by Alisa Smith and J.B. Mackinnon describes the couple's year of eating locally as a response to an increasingly accepted view that reducing the distance food travels from sites of production to sites of consumption (a concept known as "food miles") is crucial to addressing the climate change impact of conventional agriculture and global food distribution. The pair also see their project as an attempt to recapture some of the pleasure of a particularly enjoyable locally-sourced meal they shared with friends during the summer before their consumption project begins, a motive that recalls Soper's concept of alternative hedonism and her prediction that any lasting change in consumption habits will have to come with a change in the way we imagine consumer desire and fulfillment.⁵² *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver is an account of the author's move from Arizona to Virginia with her family to pursue a similar project

⁵² This is a Canadian book but is closely tied to the US in several ways. The study that inspires Smith and Mackinnon's project comes out of the U.S. and describes "food miles" in a general North American context. Smith and Mackinnon also live in Vancouver, which means that a large part of their 100-mile range for the project is actually in Washington State. The U.S. also figures importantly in the long industrial food chains that their project attempts to leave behind. Finally, their project in the book has had a major impact on locavorism in the U.S. and on similar projects from U.S. authors including (most famously) Barbara Kingsolver with *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*.

and also lingers in the sensory pleasures of locavorism and small-scale food production. Finally, *No Impact Man* by Colin Beavan describes the author's attempt to live in New York City for a year without creating any trash or using fossil fuels. All three memoirists describe gaining some relief from modern causes of stress, a greater sense of connection to local communities and to nature, and also a degree of security from risks associated with modernization. *The 100-Mile Diet* and *No Impact Man* push the scale of their intervention from the personal back out to the global in part through the authors' encouragement of spinoff projects among readers, and I argue that this move pushes the boundaries of the memoir form past its traditional concern with past events in the life of the author to encompass also a collective future that includes the reader. By modeling alternative forms of consumption for their readers, eco-consumption memoirs aspire to intervene in social and environmental crises that are global in scale. This chapter thus explores the relationship between that larger goal and the concrete effects that their authors are able to achieve on a more personal scale.

Imagining their intervention in this way means that eco-consumption memoirs tend to see desire itself as both the fundamental problem with and primary driver of the dominant mode of consumption. Because they stage their interventions via reforms of consumer desire, they are understandably less interested in how consumption is conditioned and often constrained by other factors like geography, government regulations and subsidies, and socioeconomic class. One result of this framework is that in imagining their lessons as universally relevant, these writers tend to minimize the privilege that underwrites their own projects. Are the pleasures that these texts imagine an initiating moment in a growing wave of change, or do they represent an attempt to

escape available only to the affluent? Chapter Six takes a more skeptical view of these eco-consumption memoirs, drawing on Christopher Greenslate and Kate Leonard's social justice memoir *On a Dollar a Day* (2010) as well as Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* (2001) to point to some of the ways in which ethical consumption as a form of activism and self-care is not available to many consumers. I continue my engagement with eco-consumption memoirs in this chapter, arguing that their authors along with other advocates of ethical consumption have responded to charges of elitism by presenting ethical consumption as always accessible to consumers who prioritize it, by imagining ethical consumption as frugal, and by recasting labor (especially the domestic labor of the poor and labor associated with subsistence) as a form of leisure. My analysis shows that ethical consumption is functionally unavailable as either a personal coping strategy or an avenue of activism for those who are most exposed to the social and environmental harms that ethical consumption would seek to mitigate, from stress and obesity to pesticide contamination and climate change. I further contend that ethical consumption's rhetorical emphasis on desire and individual consumer choice as sites for activism minimizes the systemic and institutional forces that constrain consumer choice for many communities, and that in doing so the discourse risks transferring responsibility to individual consumers for the ways in which the state has failed them as citizens. While eco-consumption memoirs tend to imagine their own middle- and upper-class perspectives as somewhat universal, *On a Dollar a Day* and *Nickel and Dimed* are projects in understanding how low-income consumers live. Although the authors' approach has its pitfalls, I argue that the literature of ethical consumption does have something to learn from their earnest efforts to confront their own privilege as it manifests in their consumption. This is a

critical intervention into the literature of ethical consumption because it resists that literature's tacit acceptance of the state's retreat from responsibility for managing the social, environmental and health risks of modernization and for ensuring the welfare of citizens. *On a Dollar a Day* clarifies the continuing relevance of traditional political action and state intervention by demonstrating that although ethical consumption offers some consumers a space for activism and a cushion from social, health and environmental risks, it remains well out of reach as a mode either of activism or of personal escape for those who remain most exposed to these intersecting risks.

The practice of ethical consumption is fraught with conflicting impulses; my project traces these tensions to the powerful but messy narratives and forms of desire that authors, artists and marketers have invoked in their attempts to imagine consumption as a space from which to respond to social and environmental crisis. Although reader responses suggest that these texts do evoke desire for ethical consumption in some readers, the forms of desire they imagine often draw on and reinforce (to invoke Bennett above) "human dispositions, moods, and cultural ensembles" that undermine rather than support deep commitments to social justice and environmental sustainability. Some problematic aspects of the literature of ethical consumption mimic issues with ethical consumption itself. The literature of ethical consumption, for instance, addresses an audience that is predominantly white, middle-class to wealthy, and living in the first world; this reflects the reality that these are the people who can afford to engage in what is ultimately a form of premium consumption. What are the implications of imagining solving global problems in a space like ethical consumption to which the people most affected by those problems (low income people and those living in the global South) do

not have access? Do the limits to the audience that ethical consumption imagines for itself also limit its imagination of those problems? Ethical consumption recuperates capitalism and consumerism as potential allies for environmentalism and social justice, and the literature of ethical consumption has used narratives of risk and desire to enlist readers in this project. Do the problematic aspects of the way this literature imagines ethical consumption limit its potential to activate a progressive consumer politics in its readers? If so, does this limitation originate with ethical consumption itself (with, for example, its reification of capitalism) or with how it has been represented? Does Soper's alternative hedonism have some potential that this literature does not yet fully exploit? Can the "Wrath of Grapes" campaign, in which shared risk and producer-consumer alliances informed a sustained boycott of California table grapes, or social justice-oriented consumption projects in which consumers artificially limit their consumption in order to understand what it means to live on a constrained food budget suggest more inclusive ways of imagining the pleasures of ethical consumption?

Chapter Two

The Pleasure of Taste as Embodied Knowledge in David Mas Masumoto

The prologue to author and organic farmer David Mas Masumoto's memoir *Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on my Family Farm* (1995) opens with a vision of impending doom for Masumoto's heirloom variety Sun Crest peaches: "The last of my Sun Crest peaches will be dug up. A bulldozer will be summoned to crawl into my fields, rip each tree from the earth, and toss it aside. My orchard will topple easily, gobbled up by the power of the diesel engine and the fact that no one seems to want a peach variety with a wonderful taste."¹ Masumoto's narration of these events in the passive voice (trees "dug up," a bulldozer "summoned," the orchard "gobbled") implies a view of consumption that Masumoto shares with advocates of the growing ethical consumption movement: he sees consumer demand as the ultimate driver of production practices.² These peaches will be "dug up . . . gobbled up" by the tools and economic pressures of industrial agriculture—forces driven in turn by consumer demand for cheap food and apparent indifference to taste. Underscoring the farmer's lack of control, Masumoto suggests that the same market forces that make his peaches obsolete also threaten the survival of the family farm. He writes, "This year will witness not only the possible death of this peach but also the

¹ David Mas Masumoto, *Epitaph For a Peach*, ix.

² In "The Consumer as Economic Voter" Roger A. Dickinson and Mary L. Corsky call this concept "consumer sovereignty" and trace it back to Adam Smith's claim in *The Wealth of Nations* that "consumption is the end and aim of all economic action." Roger Dickinson and Mary Corsky, "The Consumer as Economic Voter," in *The Ethical Consumer*, Eds. Rob Harrison, Terry Newholdm and Deirdre Shaw.

continuing slow extinction of the family farmer. A fruit variety is no longer valued and a way of life is in peril.”³ The peach varieties that have replaced Sun Crest on grocery store shelves were developed to fit the needs of an industrial food system: they ship and store well and they have a red hue that makes them appear ripe even when they have been picked before ripeness. The prologue closes on an ominous note for Sun Crest peaches and family farmers alike, all apparently because consumers and the systems that provision them seem unable or unwilling to appreciate and reward wonderful taste.

In “Philosophy and Ethical Consumption,” Clive Barnett, Philip Cafaro and Terry Newholm observe that ethical consumption campaigns frequently rely on consequentialist moral reasoning: they urge consumers to seek out or avoid particular products (or to reduce consumption overall) because of the positive social, economic, or environmental impacts that they will have (or the negative impacts that they will avoid) by doing so⁴. In Chapter Six, I discuss two social justice memoirs that demonstrate how consumption is conditioned by systemic structures that make particular consumer choices available and attractive; whereas these social justice memoirs foreground class and race in their analysis of consumption, ethical consumption texts in general tend to obfuscate the middle and upper class contours of this practice. Ethical consumption discourse generally sees the consumer as the cause of systemic structures and of effects up and down the food chain. Ethical consumption campaigns of the kind Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm describe ask consumers to gauge the rightness or wrongness of their actions in

³ Masumoto, *Epitaph For a Peach*, xi.

⁴ Clive Barnett, Philip Cafaro and Terry Newholm “Philosophy and Ethical Consumption.” *The Ethical Consumer*, Eds. Rob Harrison, Terry Newholm and Deirdre Shaw, 13.

the marketplace by considering their ripple effects.⁵ This is also the kind of reasoning that historian Warren Belasco imagines driving a possible “anthropological fix” (as opposed to a “technological fix”) for our food future: “thinking deliberately, carefully, responsibly *about the consequences of current actions*, the conscientious consumer will want to select products that are green for the environment, fair for workers and producers, and humane for animals.”⁶

Masumoto’s lament that “no one seems to want a peach variety with a wonderful taste” seems out of place in the context of ethical consumption discourses that emphasizes consequentialist moral arguments for ethical consumption. Although Masumoto buys into the concept of consumer sovereignty⁷ and sets up the groundwork that would support the kind of consequentialist moral argument about food consumption that Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm describe in ethical consumption discourse, nowhere does he refer to consumers’ moral obligation to buy his organic heirloom peaches (or, for that matter, to his own moral obligation to continue growing them). In *Fire and Ink: An Anthology of Social Action Writing*, Frances Payne Adler, Debra Busman and Diana

⁵ A typical appeal along these lines from Fair Trade USA reads, “When you buy Fair Trade coffee from Guatemala, you’re making a difference in the lives of farmers and their children.” See “Every Purchase Matters,” *Fair Trade USA*. Another from Buy Local PA assures consumers that buying local food “ensures that family farms in your community will continue to thrive and that healthy, flavorful, plentiful food will be available for future generations.” See “There are many good reasons to buy locally Grown food,” *Buy Local PA*. Several other organizations use identical language to describe the supposed benefits of local food.

⁶ Emphasis added. Warren Belasco, *Food: Key Concepts*, 120.

⁷ He cites lack of consumer demand as the reason he has to uproot his Sun Crest orchard, and he also suggests that doing so will mean that he risks acceding to the Butzian “get big or get out” mentality of industrial agriculture. That imperative to grow and find efficiencies in production also implies the by now well-rehearsed consequences in terms of resource use, loss of biodiversity, ground water pollution, pressure on small farmers and declining food security. See Tom Phipott, “A reflection on the lasting legacy of 1970s USDA Secretary Earl Butz.” Supporters of Butz’s approach have argued that increased production is necessary to meet growing global demand for food, and also that limiting domestic production through supply management or through rejection of industrial agricultural techniques would leave American farmers unable to compete with producers in other countries. See Blake Hurst, “No Butz About It.”

García identify Masumoto as a social action author whose writing acts “as a way to resist the poisoning of the environment and of [his]/our bodies, and as a catalyst for change.”⁸ If Masumoto uses his writing as a “catalyst for change” to influence consumer decisions without making a moral argument about consumption, by what rhetorical tactics and on what grounds does he seek to catalyze food system change?

Although he understands the benefits of organic farming practices for his community, by his own account Masumoto’s decisions to adopt those practices are predominately personal and often tied to aesthetic preference. Of his decision to start planting cover crops, Masumoto remembers that he did it, “because they look pretty and because my wife, Marcy, likes them.”⁹ According to Masumoto, people should buy his peaches because they taste wonderful—“Yes, wonderful,” he writes, “Sun Crests taste like a peach is supposed to.”¹⁰ That this isn’t happening points to a problem in consumers’ ability to appreciate (or the food system’s ability to deliver) wonderful taste. Taste for Masumoto is an exquisitely physiological but also richly allusive sense; he sees the taste of his peaches as expressive of his own labor, of his particular farm culture and of his relationship to his customers. For Masumoto, consumers’ willingness to buy visually attractive but tasteless industrially grown produce does not point to a moral failing as consequentialist moral reasoning would suggest; nor does it suggest as the social justice memoirs in Chapter Six will that consumption patterns respond to socioeconomic constraints on consumer choice that follow class and racial lines. For Masumoto, the prevalence of industrial peaches points instead to consumers’ loss of

⁸ See Frances Payne Adler, Debra Busman and Diana García, eds. *Fire and Ink: An Anthology of Social Action Writing*, 209.

⁹ David Mas Masumoto, *Epitaph for a Peach*, 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ix.

cultural knowledge about farming and social connection to farm life (in other words, to consumers' lack of taste). Masumoto's intervention in consumption then, comes not via a moral argument or advocacy for broad economic reform but rather through his engagement with questions of taste and his attempt to educate readers about his work and farm culture.

Masumoto shares this emphasis on taste and on the aesthetic pleasures of ethical consumption with much of the ethical consumption literature I discuss in this project. The prevalence of aesthetic concerns in this self-consciously activist literature suggests an alternative framework to consequentialist moral reasoning for thinking about the rhetorical force of ethical consumption campaigns. This focus on taste as the primary driver of consumption choices also means that this literature as a whole tends to downplay the ways in which race and socioeconomic status condition consumption choices and that it addresses an audience that is implicitly affluent and white.

Masumoto's identification of a failure of taste as the underlying problem with the U.S. consumer's relationship to food has an important precedent in the work of another author/farmer, Wendell Berry. Berry draws a similar link between the growing industrialization of American agriculture and what he understands to be consumers' indifference to the pleasures of food in his famous 1989 essay "The Pleasures of Eating." Best remembered for its claim that "eating is an agricultural act," this essay is often invoked to make the point that our decisions as eaters impact the way food is produced.¹¹

¹¹ Ken Taylor of the Minnesota Food Association, for example, interprets "eating is an agricultural act" to mean that consumers use their purchases to vote on the direction they want the food system to move in. See "Eating is an Agricultural Act: Excerpts from Director's Report, MFA Digest, June, 1991," *Minnesota Food Association*. Keith Douglas Warner and David DeCosse similarly emphasize the consequences of

Just as the failure to appreciate a good tasting peach means the slow extinction of family farming for Masumoto, for Berry the industrial consumer's acceptance of convenient but low-quality and context-less food clears the way for ever-intensifying industrialization.¹² Berry imagines a key role for pleasure both in conceptualizing what is lost with industrial agriculture and in discovering a way back. As an alternative to what he sees as a degraded experience of eating, Berry offers eating as an “*extensive* pleasure” that draws on the eater's “accurate consciousness of the lives and the world from which food comes.”¹³ Berry's intervention into this process, like Masumoto's, is aesthetic and embodied rather than abstractly moral.

Masumoto's thinking about the pleasures of sustainable consumption is relevant to the discussions already taking place around Berry's “*extensive* pleasure.” Literary critical work on Masumoto can push those conversations further through engagement with Masumoto's attention to social issues—like agricultural labor—that Berry's “*extensive* pleasure” does not address. Although Masumoto has written several books, has been anthologized in various collections,¹⁴ and has gained some currency with other food writers (for example, Alice Waters and Michael Pollan), his work has not attracted

eating, pointing out that “how we eat shapes how land is treated.” See Warner, Keith Douglass with David DeCosse, “A Short Course in Environmental Ethics: Lesson Eleven Eating and Agricultural Ethics.”

¹² “Indeed, this sort of consumption may be said to be one of the chief goals of industrial production . . . The ideal industrial food consumer would be strapped to a table with a tube running from the food factory directly into his or her stomach.” Wendell Berry, *Bringing it to the Table*, 228.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 233-234.

¹⁴ David Mas Masumoto's writing has been published in several anthologies including *Natural State: A Literary Anthology of California Nature Writing* (Eds. Steven Gilbar and David Brower), *California Nature Anthology* (Ed. Steven Gilbar), *At Home on the Earth: Becoming Native to Our Place: a Multicultural Anthology* (Ed. David Landis Barnhill), *Fire and Ink: An Anthology of Social Action Writing, How Do I Begin?: A Hmong American Literary Anthology*; *Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity and the Natural World* (Eds. Alison H. Heming and Lauret E. Savoy) and *A Fork in the Road* (Ed. James Oseland).

much focused attention from literary critics¹⁵ and no one has looked closely at his thinking about taste. This chapter will demonstrate his relevance to scholarship on ethical consumption (and especially to thinking about the place of pleasure in alternative forms of consumption) and to the question of how the humanities can encourage sustainability.

Where Berry offers his idea of eating as an extensive pleasure to imagine the link between awareness of sustainable, humane farming practices and “eating with the fullest pleasure,” Masumoto borrows the concept of umami from Japanese food culture to imagine how awareness of farming practices manifests in the way food tastes.¹⁶

Discovered in 1908 by Japanese chemist Kikunae Ikeda and recognized by the international scientific community in the 1980s, umami is the savory (meaty and broth-like) taste characteristic of the amino acid glutamate, especially in combination with 5'-nucleotides such as 5'-inosinate (in meats), 5'-guanylate (in plants) and 5'-adenylate (in fish and shellfish). It is the fifth basic taste beyond sweet, sour, salty, and bitter.

Masumoto adapts the concept of umami to describe how cultural knowledge about farming enables consumers to perceive what he views as the superior taste of his sustainably grown heirloom peaches as they are transformed not through fermentation but through the labor of the farmer working in a rich multi-generational local farm culture.¹⁷

His work as an author, as a farmer, and as an innovative marketer of his own peaches come together as a part of a larger project to build an alternative commodity network

¹⁵ The notable exception here is Shih-huah Serena Chou's article “Pruning the past, Shaping the Future: David Mas Masumoto and Organic Nothingness,” which argues that Masumoto's organic farming practice is informed by the Zen Buddhist notion of nothingness or *wu* and the work of the pioneering Japanese organic farmer Masanobu Fukoka. See Chou, Shih-huah Serena. “Pruning the Past, Shaping the Future: David Mas Masumoto and Organic Nothingness.”

¹⁶ Wendell Berry, *Bringing It to the Table*, 234.

¹⁷ See especially David Mas Masumoto, *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, 115-151.

structured around this richer experience of taste and around communities, technologies, markets, and forms of pleasure capable of valuing and delivering it.

By figuring the crisis in American agriculture as a crisis of taste, Masumoto creates a space for his work as an author to intervene through his communication of a cultural knowledge about food and a connection to farming that he understands as threatened. Masumoto undertakes this project “with the spirit of the humanities,” which for him means “a spirit of connection and the power of stories.”¹⁸ This (like similar claims in Julia Alvarez’s *A Cafecito Story* and in the eco-consumption memoirs I discuss in Chapter Five) proposes a rather central role for narrative generally and his own work in particular in “contribut[ing] to the creation of a more sustainable world,” and doing so particularly through his engagement with the pleasure of taste.¹⁹ As I will show, although Masumoto does attempt to engage with migrant agricultural labor, the consumer-producer relationships he imagines through his expanded definition of umami ultimately fail to adequately incorporate these marginalized laborers. These exclusions and the more general difficulty that the literature of ethical consumption has in dealing with economically marginalized producers and consumers points to a limitation of taste and aesthetic pleasure rather than labor rights and social justice as frameworks for thinking about the ethics of consumption.

Masumoto's and Berry's Critiques of Decontextualized Taste in Industrial Food

¹⁸ Ibid., 270.

¹⁹ Daniel Philippon, “Sustainability and the Humanities: An Extensive Pleasure,” 163.

Masumoto's concept of "umami" and Berry's of food as an "extensive pleasure" each proposes an expanded understanding of taste that incorporates awareness of the social, cultural, and environmental contexts of food production. This way of thinking about taste appears in contrast to the radically decontextualizing approach to taste that investigative journalist Eric Schlosser identifies with the industrial food system in his *Fast Food Nation*. As Schlosser demonstrates, the industrialization of the food system and the rise of processed foods has led to a situation in which the flavor of the food we eat arises not from the ingredients we use or the cooking techniques we apply but instead out of specialized chemical processes that manufacture flavor compounds as additives for processed foods. The extent of this specialization remains largely invisible to consumers. "Few people . . . can name the companies that manufacture fast food's taste . . . The fast food chains, understandably, would like the public to believe that the flavors of their food somehow originate in their restaurant kitchens, not in distant factories run by other firms."²⁰ In this setting of extreme secrecy around food production and of flavors abstracted from the raw ingredients and cooking practices we associate with them, Masumoto's "umami" and Berry's "extensive pleasure" attempt to redefine taste as context-dependent. If full appreciation of taste incorporates accurate knowledge about production, then Berry and Masumoto are re-imagining taste in a way that might resist both this kind of abstraction and the often alarming ingredients and unsavory labor and environmental practices it hides. Whereas the industrialized food producers Schlosser describes treat taste as a purely chemical property and seek to obscure their production

²⁰ Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, 121.

practices, Masumoto and Berry imagine taste as intricately tied to the agricultural contexts of food production.

Perhaps not coincidentally, one of the most familiar and controversial of the chemical compounds used to flavor processed food is monosodium glutamate (MSG)—the additive used to add umami flavor to processed foods. As we'll see, Masumoto develops his own interpretation of umami in a way that resists the reductionism of an additive. For Masumoto in *Epitaph for a Peach* and *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, taste originates in complex local ecosystems and through labor informed by a rich farm culture; it is expressive of social relationships that include respect and responsibility between producers (farm owners) and consumers. Masumoto is critical of a scientized approach to food that abstracts taste from these origins and cultural meanings or disregards it entirely.

In *Epitaph for a Peach*, a one-year contract to sell his crop to an organic baby food manufacturer becomes a great source of hope for Masumoto's endeavor to save his heirloom Sun Crest grove: consumers of organic baby food seem ideally suited to appreciate both this product and the values it embodies. Masumoto shares parents' concern about what their babies eat: these parents, he reasons, want to feed their babies food from "farmers who work with, not against, nature."²¹ Masumoto's crop represents his fulfillment of a shared responsibility to care for the young: "it's done 'for the babies.'"²² Masumoto approaches his work on this crop as an extension of the work he does to care for his own family: "Every day during our harvest, my own two-year-old tastes the peaches. I know they've passed his inspection when the front of his shirt is

²¹ David Mas Masumoto, *Epitaph for a Peach*, 121.

²² *Ibid.*, 123.

stained pink. I take off his shirt, and [my dog] Jake licks the juice off my son's face and chest. When Korio giggles and Jake wags his tail, I know these peaches are ripe and ready."²³ The juice-stained t-shirt is a summer ritual from his own childhood that Masumoto now shares with his son. The taste of the baby food peaches, produced out of this sense of shared responsibility and through a cherished family ritual, expresses both Masumoto's particular farm culture and his belonging to an extended community responsible for the babies. This is not merely an economic relationship between Masumoto and the baby food manufacturer but a social one that includes the consumer. Looking for ways to cement the relationship and better connect with these consumers, Masumoto proposes long-term contracts and profit-sharing plans to the baby food manufacturer; the manufacturer rejects these plans and ultimately informs Masumoto that it will not need peaches for the next season.

Reflecting back on this experience eight years later in *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, Masumoto focuses neither on the manufacturer's reluctance to establish a partnership nor its unwillingness to provide a reliable market for growers, but lingers instead on its disappointing attitude toward taste. Masumoto describes his touring the organic baby food processing plant:

They had purchased tons of my peaches, which were destined for the hungry mouths of infants. The quality control manager and I watched my peaches tumble from a conveyor belt where they had been sorted, the damaged fruit tossed aside. Then the fruit went into a hot wash bath and disappeared into a large metal box, where they were blanched, the skins and pits were removed, and they were pureed. I couldn't see how it was done. Instead, from the other end of the contraption came a stream of liquefied peach, ready to be frozen and stored until mixed and combined with water and a few other ingredients to make a peach baby food.

²³ Ibid., 123.

The quality control manager bragged, “Bring in any peach and I’ll fiddle with the acids and sugars. By blending fruits, I can fix any peach,” he said. That wasn’t the perfection I sought.²⁴

Masumoto’s inability to see his peaches and follow them through this process marks a loss of meaning – they enter the process “my peaches” and emerge as “a stream” that the processor views only as a problematic input to be corrected through science. The peaches Masumoto delivers to the baby food processor possess for him a form of care for the babies and a taste expressive of the farming culture he values. The processor neither values nor preserves that taste. Masumoto’s peaches lose their ability to communicate these connections when they enter a system that recognizes their flavor only as a problematic input and that sees its relationship with the grower as strictly economic. Masumoto critiques an abstraction of food from its social and cultural meaning when food is separated from its story treated as a commodity.

Masumoto also critiques an abstraction of food from its environmental context that he sees taking place within the genetic makeup of the modern peach. Responding to the needs of the industrial food system, plant breeders have developed peach varieties with a “lipstick red” color that Masumoto says “seduces the public:” “They’re so red and dark they look ripe all the time, even while green on the tree and immature inside.”²⁵ Here, plant breeders have taken the blush that appears on the sun-facing side of a ripe peach, exaggerated it, and dissociated it from its traditional relationship to ripeness (and, through ripeness, to season and region). Ironically, the peaches that consumers encounter in the supermarket, which now advertise more ripeness than ever before, are increasingly

²⁴ David Mas Masumoto, *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, 134.

²⁵ David Mas Masumoto, *Epitaph for a Peach*, 122.

likely to have been picked before maturity. Masumoto's Sun Crests, whose modest blush is still tied to ripeness, fare poorly in a market that has managed to abstract the appearance of ripeness both from its more problematic qualities (for example, easy bruising and shorter shelf life) and from any relationship to taste. Fruit brokers who market Masumoto's crop urge him to switch to the new varieties. "Better peaches have come along,' they assure me, 'Peaches that are fuller in color and can last for weeks in storage.'"²⁶ This description of the new varieties' virtues rings flat: redder color and long shelf life make the new peaches easier to move in an industrial food chain, but these peaches fail to deliver on taste, which for Masumoto is always attached to story and to cultural and environmental context. These supposedly "better peaches" evoke instead "a recurring nightmare of cold-storage rooms lined with peaches that stay rock hard, the new science of fruit cryonics keeping peaches in suspended animation."²⁷ The suspended animation peaches are tasteless to the point that Masumoto suggests they actually *absorb* taste from their surroundings and become redolent of cardboard box and refrigerator. Eating a ripe Sun Crest presents by contrast "a real bite, a primal act, a magical sensory celebration announcing that summer has arrived."²⁸ The taste and appearance of the ripe Sun Crest evokes its origin in the heat of summer and its connection to a tradition of peach cultivation in which the taste of a ripe peach has come to signify the arrival of summer. In the new peach varieties that taste is lost and the peach's blush actually disguises the peach's relationship to its environment. Masumoto stakes a claim for the role of narrative in leading the way back to more sustainable consumption practices by

²⁶ Ibid., x.

²⁷ Ibid., x.

²⁸ Ibid., x.

insisting that even as the appearance of ripeness has become a product of science, taste remains tied to the cultural and environmental contexts of production.

In “The Pleasures of the Table,” Berry contends that food is “an abstract idea” for consumers who “do not know or imagine [it] until it appears on the grocery shelf or table.”²⁹ Food industry advertisements encourage this ignorance, abstracting foods from their natural form (“one would not know that the various edibles were ever living creatures”), their environmental context (“that they all come from the soil”), as well as from any suggestion of farm labor (“that they were produced by work”).³⁰ This abstraction of food from any knowledge about or physical resemblance to its origins is a necessary part of an industrial food system in which hamburgers from “a steer who spent much of his life standing deep in his own excrement” come laden with antibiotics and other drugs and in which vegetables are grown with toxic chemicals.³¹ The processing, dying, breading and saucing that Berry describes work not to enhance the food but to disguise it. The consumer’s acceptance of this disguised and de-contextualized food secures her place as the final step in an industrial process in which the ideal consumer is “strapped to a table with a tube running from the food factory directly into his or her stomach.”³²

For Masumoto too, a loss of connection³³ to and cultural knowledge about farming enables an industrialization of eating itself:

²⁹ Berry, *Bringing it to the Table*, 228.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

³¹ Berry describes prepared and fast foods as “inert, anonymous substances that have been processed, dyed, breaded, sauced, gravied, ground, pulped, strained, blended, prettified, and sanitized beyond resemblance to any part of any creature that has ever lived.” *Ibid.*, 230.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ This idea of a lost connection to farm life is central to Masumoto’s thinking about the situation of his consumers in *Epitaph for a Peach*. In *Fire and Ink*, Frances Payne Adler, Debra Busman, and Diana García

What happens if you don't have the memory of real peaches or fruit? Lacking experience, you eat quickly. First, you limit yourself by only allowing your eyes to guide you, searching for something red to bite. In your hand could be a peach or plum or a baseball; you don't feel anything except something hard. Next, with a rapid, unthinking motion, you bite as if it were just a reflex connected to "food-in-hand" [...] Finally, as if to dispose quickly of something that lacks flavor, you hardly chew before swallowing. Then you start the next bite before finishing the last. No need for napkins or shirtsleeves to wipe your face with; no time when you're racing.³⁴

This dissatisfying fruit is one in which an appealing color has lost its connection to the ripeness and flavor (and through them, also social and environmental context) that it once signified, but the bigger problem here is with the consumer. Lacking "experience" and "the memory of real peaches," the person who eats this fruit does not recognize that anything is wrong. The peach's lack of flavor (for Masumoto, this is also a lack of connection to farming stories) marks a limit to the food system's ability to deliver fresh peaches across large distances or beyond the boundaries of the peach growing season, but for this inexperienced consumer that lack of flavor is unremarkable. The consumer in this passage begins to resemble Berry's nightmare of the ideal industrial food consumer "strapped to a table."³⁵ For the consumer who eats from the industrial food chain, eating itself becomes industrial; it is no longer a source of pleasure and an expression of social and ecological connection but instead another form of work in which the eater, like workers in a sped-up factory, are "racing." Approaching a tasteless peach the consumer responds with "rapid, unthinking motion;" this kind of eating minimizes awareness of

gloss *Epitaph for a Peach* with the observation that Masumoto "both laments our disconnection from the environment and evokes his deep connection to it." See Frances Payne Adler, Debra Busman and Diana García, eds. *Fire and Ink: An Anthology of Social Action Writing*, 210.

³⁴ David Masumoto, *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, 127.

³⁵ Berry, *Bringing It to the Table*, 228.

itself and certainly does not inspire reflection on the farm culture or production practices that produced the barely-noticed food.³⁶ In Berry's image of food pumped directly into stomachs, a perfect industrialization of eating would bypass taste altogether; for both Berry and Masumoto resisting this process starts with attention to taste and with their insistence that taste is connected to farm stories.

In opposition to industrial food's abstraction of foods from their tastes and of tastes from their agricultural origins and social contexts, Masumoto's umami attempts to define the pleasure of eating in ways that demand knowledge about the social and environmental contexts of food production. For Masumoto, the industrial food system attempts to abstract taste (and the appearance of taste) from the environments, cultures, and social contexts that produce it; acquiescence to that abstraction enables the deepening industrialization of the food system and threatens an industrialization of eating itself. As his emphasis on taste might suggest, embodied knowledge is important to the way that Masumoto imagines consumers leading a move back to more sustainable forms of agriculture. The kind of automatic "food-in-hand" industrial eating that Masumoto describes above is a practice formed to the realities of the industrial food system; he works against that system in part by describing a different eating practice he believes is better tuned to the pleasures of—among other things—tree-ripened Sun Crest peaches. His extensive discussion of the sensory pleasures of these fruits and of rituals structured around their enjoyment models an eating practice in which the kind of rock-hard industrial peach he describes above would not serve.

³⁶ David Mas Masumoto, *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, 127.

Taste as Embodied Knowledge in Masumoto

Masumoto's concept of "umami" and Berry's of eating as an "extensive pleasure" incorporate knowledge of the social, environmental, labor, and cultural contexts of food production into the sensory and bodily experience of taste. By doing so, they imagine taste as an embodied form of knowledge about these contexts. Theorists of embodiment have argued that it challenges Cartesian mind-body dualism by emphasizing the ways in which we think, perceive, and know with and through our bodies, and have shown how bodily practices (even practices that are unconscious or habitual) can themselves express and communicate knowledge.³⁷ What possibilities for critical engagement with food does this kind of embodied knowledge enable, and what are its limitations?

For Berry, when consumers know where their food comes from (and when that food comes from something healthy and beautiful), that knowledge "involves itself with the food and is one of the pleasures of eating."³⁸ This involvement of knowledge with food takes on a more clearly physical meaning in Berry's description of the way knowledge enters into the experience of eating meat: "The thought of the good pasture and of the calf contentedly grazing flavors the steak."³⁹ Here, knowledge about the context of production ("the calf contentedly grazing") becomes tangible in ("flavors") the food ("the steak"). This is the same kind of embodied knowledge that underlies Masumoto's particular definition of umami when he imagines the story of his father's

³⁷ See Mark Sinclair, "Embodiment: Conceptions of the Lived Body from Maine de Biran to Bergson."

³⁸ Wendell Berry, *Bringing it to the Table*, 233.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.

gourmet raisins embodied in their sweetness: “the story a part of the taste.”⁴⁰ This passage suggests that the gourmet raisins are most meaningful (and so have the sweetest taste) when attached to knowledge about how they were made. At the same time, there is a sense in which some of the meaning (the story) seems to inhere in the physical quality of the sweetness as well, as though the taste itself is able to communicate something of its story. Masumoto’s statements about his own farming suggest that he does see taste as able to carry stories in this way: “I want my fruits to manifest the life and spirit of our farm . . . my peaches begin with a journey into taste, texture, and aroma, accompanied by stories.”⁴¹ Masumoto here is imagining the “life and spirit” of his family farm embodied in his peaches and perceptible in the way they taste, feel and smell.

Knowledge can also be embodied in our rituals and habitual actions, and these rituals are an important part of what taste means for Masumoto. In his discussion of the seasonal rituals of the Kabyle tribes in North Africa, Pierre Bourdieu shows how daily rituals communicate the Kabyles’ “understanding” of their world not through abstractions but through “patterns of daily life learned by practicing actions until they become habitual.”⁴² The understanding is implicit in these “patterns of daily life” so that the patterns themselves (or habitus) become a way of knowing. For Joy Parr in *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environment, and the Everyday*, embodied knowledge means that “doing can organize knowing: that logic can be founded in practice.”⁴³

⁴⁰ David Mas Masumoto, *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, 117.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴² Summary in N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Information*, 202.

⁴³ Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1953-2003*, 8.

In their consumer education efforts, advocates of sustainable agriculture generally work from the more familiar position that knowing can organize doing: efforts at consumer education focus on explaining, for example, the environmental arguments in favor of eating food from local sources. This is true even when consumer education addresses questions of taste: consumers learn that food tastes better in season (knowing) so that they will choose to eat food that is in season (doing). Masumoto does some of this kind of teaching, but dealing with taste as an embodied knowledge also allows him to take a different tack. His discussions of taste often dwell in the “doing”: in watering mouths, in leaning forward to bite a juicy peach, and in juice-stained T-shirts. This “doing” organizes (or embodies) “knowing” in several ways. For example, it can only take place when the Sun Crest is ripe, and its context (hot summer days) and content (stained T-shirt) both speak to the seasonal and geographic specificity of his Sun Crest peaches. “Doing” this ritual can also become a way of “knowing” the disconnect between Masumoto’s values and those of the industrial food system, the products of which are no more suitable for this ritual than a ripe Sun Crest is for an industrial supply chain.

Masumoto’s encounter with his workers is in some ways also an encounter with industrial agriculture, and he uses both taste and the peach-eating ritual to communicate his different values to workers. Used to picking for the mainstream industrial market where peaches are harvested before ripeness, the pickers who come to Masumoto’s farm do not at first understand what he wants. Just as in his relationship with consumers, Masumoto turns to embodied knowledge gained through taste and through rituals of eating as a way of communicating his values.

The workers are not used to working with such mature fruit. Normal harvests are carried out before the fruit softens. They start to discard all the soft ones, dropping them on the ground. I plead with them to save those peaches. This year's harvest can be riper, I explain, nearly overripe and bursting with natural flavor. They look at me oddly as I explain that the gushy ones are the best. I offer them bites of a ripe peach, and they have to lean over before the juice oozes down their faces. They grin, and I sense we now understand each other.⁴⁴

As this passage clarifies, for Masumoto meaning can be expressed not just in words but in a taste or a ritual as well. In this passage, sharing the taste of his peaches and his ritual for eating them allows Masumoto to communicate where telling does not. Explanation yields only odd looks, but one bite of a ripe peach and “we now understand each other.” The need to lean over because the peach is so juicy is a common thread running through Masumoto's memories of his childhood on a peach farm (his shirts were always stained with juice from ripe peaches) and that of his son. Masumoto explains his picking philosophy to his workers by offering a taste and a ritual that imply a different way of valuing fruit. He is also asking them to see the peaches the way that they might as consumers—not seeking the sturdy peaches that the industry finds convenient, but rather the qualities that appeal to consumers. While this passage illustrates how Masumoto sees knowledge as embodied in taste and rituals of eating, it also exhibits an emphasis on quality and taste over specific discussion of labor conditions that is characteristic of both his work and of local and organic food discourse more generally⁴⁵. I will take up this problem later in the chapter where I argue that for all the work it does to revalue Masumoto's labor as a farmer/owner and to assert his social relationship to consumers, neither Masumoto's metaphorical umami nor the extended commensality he imagines

⁴⁴ David Mas Masumoto, *Epitaph for a Peach*, 122.

⁴⁵ See for instance Margaret Gray, *Labor and the Locavore* and Julie Guthman, *Agrarian Dreams*.

with consumers fully include migrant labor in the renewed social relationship they imagine between producer and consumer.

An important implication for thinking of taste as embodied knowledge about food as “a highly condensed social fact” is that it allows Masumoto to imagine how he might communicate with consumers directly through his peaches. In *Epitaph* and *Four Seasons*, Masumoto sees his writing as a tool to educate consumers about sustainable farming, but he also suggests that a similar knowledge might be accessible directly through the peach. Masumoto describes eating a Sun Crest peach:

Your fingertips instinctively search for the gushy side of the fruit. Your mouth waters in anticipation. You lean over the sink to make sure you don't drip on yourself. Then you sink your teeth into the flesh, and the juice trickles down your cheeks and dangles on your chin. This is a real bite, a primal act, a magical sensory celebration announcing that summer has arrived.

The experience of eating a Sun Crest peach automatically triggers a smile and a rush of summer memories. Eating a Sun Crest reminds us of the simple savory pleasures of life.⁴⁶

Masumoto describes his own peach-eating ritual here, and his thinking about the seasonal symbolism of the ripe peach is informed by a lifetime of growing peaches. At the same time, the passage suggests that this kind of response to a truly ripe peach is hard-wired. The movement of the fingertips is instinctual, the watering mouth a part of the body's response to the peach's perfume. A “real bite” (a bite of real food in its season) is a “primal act” with a meaning that Masumoto explores in his writing but that he also suggests can be accessed directly through his peaches. Viewing his peaches as meaningful in this way means that the peach itself can become a way for Masumoto to communicate with his consumer: “I often picture shoppers picking a Sun Crest out of one

⁴⁶ Ibid., x.

of my boxes, not knowing the hidden treasure that awaits them. When they bite into it they'll say, ““Aah. *This* is a peach!””⁴⁷

Or, if this response is not exactly hard-wired, it may be drawing on physical rituals of eating that still remember ripe peaches. If leaning forward as we bite into a peach is an example of what Bourdieu calls habitus—if it reflects “a disposition . . . durable enough to pass down,” then that disposition or inclination becomes a space from which the consumer recognizes and appreciates Masumoto’s heirloom peaches.⁴⁸ Perhaps Masumoto’s imagined consumer says, “Aah. *This* is a peach!” because this peach finally resonates with a learned eating motion that implicitly expects ripeness and juiciness.⁴⁹ Or if we can imagine Masumoto’s literary audience and his peach audience converging (as he clearly does in his family’s literary cookbook), perhaps readers eating his peaches will emulate the peach-eating ritual he describes so that Masumoto’s writing becomes the model for a bodily practice that values ripe, juicy peaches.

In his books, Masumoto explains to readers why a delicious, perfectly ripe peach is so inextricably tied to summer, but a ripe peach might plausibly convey the same information to its eater because she will only be able to find and enjoy it in the summer when peaches are ripe. In a video about his peaches, Masumoto points out other ways that the peach speaks to the environment from which it comes. Holding out a peach for the camera, Masumoto says,

⁴⁷ Ibid., xi.

⁴⁸ N Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 202.

⁴⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 82.

This is the Sun Crest peach and when it's ripe it becomes this golden color. I love it because these peaches also have a characteristic of this wonderful blush on them, and you can almost see where this mark here was a leaf mark where a leaf once was on the peach, and you can see these other peaches where the leaf makes a signature as if the peach remembers the tree in that sense.⁵⁰

If Masumoto's peaches can speak to consumers about the contexts of their production in this way, then taste becomes not just a desirable quality or a source of pleasure but a medium for communication as well. A taste that reflects its origins (what Nikiko Masumoto calls *terroir*) might itself work against the anonymity of the commodity form by inserting awareness of the space of production into the moment of consumption. Katherine Hayles argues that embodied knowledge is inherently attentive to context: "Embodiment creates context by forging connections between instantiated action and environmental conditions."⁵¹ This attentiveness to context in embodied knowledge enables Masumoto's turn to taste and eating as embodied forms of knowledge about food as a way to focus on the social and environmental contexts of production.

Forestalling Loss: From Epitaph to Umami

The intimate relationship between Masumoto's work as a farmer and as a writer and his work as a marketer of his own peaches emerged out of a crisis in his farming life that would become the occasion for *Epitaph for a Peach*. The prologue for *Epitaph for a Peach* first appeared as an article in the *LA Times* in 1987. Like a traditional elegy, this article "Epitaph for a Peach" contains elements mirroring three stages of loss. It opens

⁵⁰ Victoria Pearson, "David Mas Masumoto's California Peach Orchard."

⁵¹ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 203.

with lament: “The last of my Sun Crest peaches will be dug up . . . My orchard will topple easily, gobbled up by the power of the diesel engine and the fact that no one seems to want a peach variety with a wonderful taste.”⁵² The final words of this lament (“wonderful taste”) already begin to slip into the second stage: praise and admiration of the idealized dead—a peach variety that tastes “wonderful” and “like a peach is supposed to,” with “a natural perfume that can never be captured.”⁵³ The article ends, like traditional elegy, with consolation: “I’ll plan on going out daily to watch the fire, my face and arms warmed by the heat of burning wood. Later I’ll plow the ashes back into the earth. The ground will be renewed, and I’ll hope that my next orchard will become as rich . . . This, it seems, is my epitaph for a peach.”⁵⁴ The article closes with a sense of finality and acceptance of loss; Masumoto will undermine this closure when he incorporates the article into *Epitaph for a Peach* as his prologue.

After appearing in the *LA Times*, “Epitaph for a Peach” was syndicated nationally and attracted significant attention from readers who urged Masumoto not to give up on his Sun Crest peaches.

In the following weeks I received dozens of phone calls and letters, strangers urging me to “keep the last good-tasting peach.” These were city folk who care about the foods they eat and sympathized with my plight. For them, food has meaning beyond mere nourishment. They longed to be connected to farming.

*The day the bulldozer arrived, I met it out in the fields and stopped it from entering my Sun Crest orchard. I decided to keep those trees for one more harvest.*⁵⁵

⁵² David Mas Masumoto, *Epitaph for a Peach*, ix.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1. Italics in original.

Epitaph for A Peach grows out of this response to the initial article. Whereas Masumoto's article is easily recognizable as elegy, the book begins by refusing both the elegy's traditional lament and the loss that occasions it: "*The day the bulldozer arrived, I met it out in the fields and stopped it.*"⁵⁶ The article mourns what it positions as the inevitable loss of Masumoto's heirloom Sun Crest orchard; *Epitaph* documents Masumoto's attempt to forestall that loss by tapping into a market of people who responded to the article. The possibility of refusing this loss emerges through readers' response to his elegy for the Sun Crest. The "bulldozer" is indeed "summoned" but Masumoto "[meets] it out in the fields and stop[s] it." This moment of refusal initiates an ongoing project for Masumoto that brings together his work as an author, a sustainable farmer, and a marketer of his heirloom fruit. The praise that Masumoto uses to eulogize his Sun Crests in the article becomes the starting point for a concept of taste as "extensive" in Berry's sense, one that remembers the cultural and environmental context of production and resists the anonymity and loss of connection to farm stories that Masumoto ascribes to the commodity peach in the industrial food system.

Ironically, when Masumoto's Sun Crest peach does appear in a graveyard it is not as the lost beloved but as the epitaph itself. In *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, Masumoto recalls visiting the grave of a woman who had toured his farm and been "so moved that she asked a peach to be engraved on her headstone."

Were I in Fresno, Modesto, or Marysville, where farming and orchards thrive, this would all be expected . . . I had learned, though, that Alice was born and raised in San Francisco and never spent much time on a farm or out in the fields . . . Only later she had read one of my stories and wanted to learn more about our farm family, and, of course, the peach.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3.

Her husband, Yo, writes in a letter: “. . . Shortly after we returned home [from your farm], she started chemotherapy, which was not successful. Her final wishes were for a peach to be a part of her headstone. I remember a phrase you wrote that ‘eating a Sun Crest peach automatically triggers a smile and a rush of summer memories.’ That is what the peach engraved on Alice’s headstone does for me.”⁵⁷

Alice Abe’s epitaph represents a complete reversal of the situation Masumoto writes about in his article for the LA Times. The Sun Crest goes from being eulogized because city people like Alice have become disconnected from farming and no longer value it, to being so meaningful to this city woman that she chooses it to mark her own headstone. Masumoto’s project in *Epitaph* is founded on the possibility of precisely this kind of reader response. Masumoto believes that urban consumers do not demand organic, heirloom produce because they have lost their connection to farming and that stories like his in *Epitaph* and *Four Seasons* can reestablish those connections. Alice Abe’s response to one of Masumoto’s stories affirms for him that narrative can function in this way. The appearance of this episode in *Four Seasons* marks a success for that project. *Four Seasons* is less focused than *Epitaph for a Peach* on the immanent possibility of loss, but its exploration of the relationship between food’s sensory pleasures and its social and environmental contexts continue *Epitaph*’s project of modeling ways to value socially and environmentally sustainable foods.

Revaluing Farm Work: Umami and Eating Together

⁵⁷ David Mas Masumoto, *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, 267-9.

Some of the ways in which Masumoto accounts for the superior taste of his peaches are fairly familiar from the rhetoric of the organic and local food movements. These include his commitment to tree-ripening, his use of heirloom varieties developed for taste rather than shelf life or ease of shipping, his intimate knowledge of and ability to adjust for subtle differences in soil quality, climate and the characteristics of individual trees, and a feeling that “juicy grapes and luscious peaches” should come from a vibrant green landscape and not the sterile-appearing ground of a conventional orchard. Above, I asked what it means for “a shifting assemblage of social relations” or “highly condensed social fact” to have a taste, and what would go into a good taste. In *Epitaph for a Peach* and *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, Masumoto draws on and elaborates two familiar concepts—umami (savoriness) and commensality (eating together)—to imbue food with a taste that is inextricable from its function as “highly condensed social fact.” In his family’s literary cookbook *The Perfect Peach*, Masumoto writes, “When we lack a language of taste, we lose one of the main ingredients for creating lasting meaning. If foods are not paired with stories, no one hears the farmer’s voice and the farmer is easily dismissed.”⁵⁸ Masumoto develops his own metaphorical definition of umami that involves awareness of the labor of production and also imagines farmers and consumers as “eating together” as a part of his effort to develop and communicate a “language of taste” tying food to social, ecological, and cultural contexts that include production. By building the social meaning of food (the labor and social relationships involved in its production and the relationships it expresses and reaffirms when people eat together) into

⁵⁸ David Mas Masumoto, *The Perfect Peach*, 5.

his thinking about an experience of taste that is also physical, Masumoto imagines the social meaning of food as embodied in its taste.

Taste for Masumoto is a delightfully physical sense that is also built on exquisite awareness of the farmer's labor involved in food production and of the social relationship expressed by its production and exchange. The physical aspect of taste and the appreciation of the way food is produced come together in Masumoto's particular interpretation of umami. Drawn to umami as a way to describe the special taste of his Sun Crest peaches, Masumoto travels to Japan where a professor specializing in umami explains that the chemicals responsible for umami arise from natural processes like drying or fermentation that alters foods' taste. "These foods undergo a change," the professor explains, "The process brings out the umami."⁵⁹ Although he shakes his head at Masumoto's suggestion that tree-ripened peaches have umami, the professor does recognize umami in Masumoto's description of his father's late harvest gourmet raisins. Masumoto explains:

[His father] waits until the workers have gone through the fields for harvest; afterward he walks up and down the rows, searching for the bunches they missed, a late gleaned weeks after the crop is normally in. He dries these in his yard, watching them daily, covering them at night to keep moisture away . . . turning each bunch so they dry evenly, then rolling and boxing each tray.

The professor grinned and said, "Humph . . . *Hai* . . . yes, *umami* . . ." ⁶⁰

Despite the professor's opinion that tree-ripened peaches do not have umami, his recognition of umami in these carefully tended gourmet raisins opens a door for Masumoto to develop his own more metaphorical definition of umami. Working from

⁵⁹ David Mas Masumoto, *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, 117.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

this recognition and from the emphasis on transformation in the professor's account of umami, Masumoto develops an understanding of umami that includes his peaches and also helps him to account for what he insists is the special taste of produce from small family farms. Masumoto believes that his peaches have umami in the physical sense (a rich, savory quality) but also in a metaphorical sense. For this metaphorical umami, the transformation that gives rise to the flavor occurs not through fermentation but rather through the touch of the farmer, and the eater's knowledge of the farm culture and relationship of caring that this touch expresses. For eaters who no longer have social and familial ties to farming, this knowledge of farm culture is communicated through storytelling. Thus Masumoto's work as an author creates the conditions wherein his farm work can be properly valued.

When the professor sees umami in Mr. Masumoto's late harvest gourmet raisins, he is recognizing a chemical presence introduced by the drying process. However, for Masumoto, drying is not the most important transformation in this story. The treatment of this crop separates it from the anonymity of the commercial raisin crop: Mr. Masumoto picks the grapes after the workers have gone, and dries them not between rows in the vineyard but in the familial space of his yard. The gourmet raisins also represent a more intimate encounter with nature on the farm. Masumoto also suggests that these raisins have a special taste for him because they are touched by someone he loves and values. He writes, "I realized the flavor of Dad's raisins were also affected by his presence—they were made sweeter because they were from his hands—the story part of the taste. So I added a human element to my definition of umami."⁶¹ Masumoto's definition of umami

⁶¹ Ibid., 117.

adopts the emphasis on transformation from the professor's account but also adapts it to describe a transformation through the touch of the farmer, the knowledge and values that shape that touch, and the relationship that gives meaning to the work itself and finds expression in that product.

The transformation that Masumoto is describing here resists being reduced to its function as a value-adding processing step. His father's ritual does not produce "hand-touched" or "hand-sweetened" raisins but raisins that are "sweeter because they were from his hands" which is something a bit different. Mr. Masumoto transforms the late-harvest grapes into raisins through his labor, but their flavor is also "affected by his presence." The specificity of those hands and the idea that "the story" is "a part of the taste" suggest that appreciating the full flavor of these raisins, their umami, requires an awareness of the work that made them and an awareness of that work as meaningful in excess of its economic value or the physical transformation it effects. In Masumoto's account of his father's gourmet raisins, his love for his father and for this tradition and the sense of continuity that it conveys are an important part of its umami. By adding "a human element" to his definition of umami, Masumoto re-imagines taste as an expression of a social relationship.

This touches an important question about ethical consumption in general: does it work against commodity fetishism by making production visible and by explicitly acting on the relations of production? Or does it merely add a new layer of fetishization, naturalizing capitalism by turning to the commodity form itself to address its harms?⁶²

On the defetishization side, Patricia Allen and Martin Kovach proposed in 2000 that the

⁶² Patricia Allen and Martin Kovach. "The capitalist composition of organic: the potential of markets in fulfilling the promise of organic agriculture," 221.

alternative market in organic food “tends to undermine commodity fetishism in the agrifood system” and that it could thus work to “strengthe[n] civil society.”⁶³ For them, the greatest potential benefit of the organic market is in “its potential to demystify the commodity form of food,” unmasking both human social relations and relations between society and nature.⁶⁴ David Pepper has similarly argued that green consumerism can work against commodity fetishism by pushing consumers “to look beneath the appearance of commodities as mere depersonalized things.”⁶⁵ Similar arguments about the capacity of ethical consumption to “socially re-embed” commodities frequently appear in discussions of fair trade⁶⁶ (a movement with which Masumoto has expressed some affinity). Those who see ethical markets as to some degree defetishizing and who are optimistic about its affirmation of “non-economic values” would likely look favorably on Masumoto’s definition of umami because it refuses the view of a commodity—even at its most physical—as a mere thing, and instead seeks to understand food as an expression of social relations that include the relation between place and multigenerational histories and narratives.

Arguing against what he calls the “defetishization thesis,” Sociologist Ryan Gunderson maintains that the imperative to grow makes capitalism “inherently

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 223.

⁶⁵ David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism*, 90.

⁶⁶ Laura Reynolds has argued, for instance, that “Fair Trade networks socially re-embed commodities, so that items arrive at the point of consumption replete with information regarding social and environmental conditions under which they were produced and traded” (See Laura T Reynolds, “Consumer/Producer Links in Fair Trade Coffee Networks.”) Gavin Fridell describes two main arguments emerging in scholarship about how fair trade challenges fetishism: “(1) fair trade reveals the social and environmental conditions under which goods are produced, which challenges the commodification of these goods into items with an independent life of their own; (2) Fair trade affirms non-economic values of cooperation and solidarity which challenge the capitalist imperatives of competition, accumulation, and profit-maximization. See Gavin Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee: The Projects and Rituals of Market-driven Social Justice*.

ecologically and socially harmful.” Furthermore, he argues, ethical commodities and alternative markets “cannot fundamentally counteract the pervasiveness and scale of capitalism,” and therefore ethical consumerism does not defetishize but instead adds a new layer of fetishism. This new layer “masks the harms of capitalism by convincing society that the harms of capitalism can be rehabilitated with the commodity form itself.”⁶⁷ Gunderson’s argument points to a potential strength of Masumoto’s focus on a new form of desire rather than on a particular type of market or ethical brand: the taste that Masumoto values does not necessarily have to be delivered through capitalist exchange. In fact, he models both his definition of umami and his extended commensality on food exchanges that happen outside of capitalism: Masumoto models his metaphorical umami on raisins produced for family consumption, and he models his idea of an extended commensality that includes producers and consumers on the commensality that he sees arising out of exchanges in a local barter economy. These pleasures may be available through capitalist exchange, but they also work in (and may even suggest) other kinds of exchange as well.

Masumoto’s rejection of the “lipstick red” peaches is also a rejection of peaches as anonymous commodities disconnected from their social meaning and environmental context. For Masumoto, once his peaches enter the industrial food system:

they were no longer Masumoto peaches. They had become a number an order, reduced to simply a “thing.” Once my peaches entered the conventional food distribution system, I became a supplier of raw materials destined for markets that I need not bother to know. My farm was a factory in the fields, and my job was to

⁶⁷ Ryan Gunderson, “Problems with the defetishization thesis: ethical consumerism, alternative food systems, and commodity fetishism.”

forge something that looked like a peach, a bright red peach if at all possible, pack them in boxes, and kiss them all goodbye.⁶⁸

The specificity of Masumoto's labor disappears when his peaches enter the market as anonymous commodities where their value is determined not by "sweat equity . . . valued and passed on as a peach journeys to market" but instead by supply and demand. Because the price he gets for his peaches is determined by supply and demand, there are years when Masumoto actually loses money on his peaches. This sometimes negative value in economic terms is difficult to reconcile with the value Masumoto sees in his own work and in his peaches' taste: "I know for sure that a peach that doesn't earn money can still have taste. That hasn't changed, only how their value is measured did . . . I hope consumers appreciate their value—a value beyond price."⁶⁹ If Masumoto's version of umami connects the special taste of his peaches to his own labor and touch, he is describing a situation in which the price he gets for his peaches periodically does not recognize that labor as valuable. "Lost in this journey is the craft of the individual laborers—their contribution to taste quickly becomes invisible."⁷⁰ Masumoto's definition of umami, with its focus on transformation through touch, rejects the anonymity of supplying "raw materials" and works against this invisibility at least as it pertains to his labor as a farmer/owner working his own land. As I describe below, Masumoto's umami and the material practices on his farm both fall short of fully valuing the "craft" of the mostly Hispanic migrant laborers who actually pick and sweat over the overwhelming majority of Masumoto peaches.

⁶⁸ David Mas Masumoto, *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, 5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

Masumoto does seem to believe that he can transmit something like the umami of his father's gourmet raisins to his own consumers through his peaches. In his descriptions of his own labor and the working of nature on his farm, he repeatedly returns to this notion of a palpable trace left by his touch. The shape of a peach tree—a branch bowed where too many peaches were allowed to ripen years earlier, another carefully braced or stretching over a ground cover of culled peaches in an effort to prevent the same fate: to an eye that recognizes them as signs of care, these details express the hopes and the mistakes of the farmer. Just as with his father's raisins “the story” is “a part of the taste,” Masumoto sees his own farming as a form of storytelling. He loves farming, he says, because to farm is “to grow a peach or grape or raisin and hope there's a story shared in a simple, honest way.”⁷¹ His farming is in this sense similar to his writing: “It's more than just the art of self-expression: I farm and write with the spirit of the humanities. . . . A spirit of connection and the power of stories.”⁷²

Masumoto believes that his peaches can communicate to customers about his farm culture, his values, and the social relationship he feels with his consumers. This implications for the way he imagines the people who eat his peaches.

I don't feel comfortable with the term “end user,” nor do I like “consumer;” both sound terribly impersonal. I like the term ‘audience’ for my peaches, something alive, with feelings on everyone's behalf The audience for my peaches pay attention to their foods. They care about meaning and, given a choice, are interested in difference I hope to create a new appreciation when my audience can take it – and it means a story – with them.⁷³

⁷¹ Ibid., 270.

⁷² Ibid., 270.

⁷³ Ibid., 21.

This concept of an audience for peaches insists again that peaches are expressive beyond their value as commodities.

The strategies that Masumoto adopts as a marketer of his own peaches are informed by his expanded understanding of what makes good taste and of how a farmer-consumer relationship mediated by the industrial food system fails to communicate that taste. In a study of food sharing as a form of nonverbal communication among American college students, Lisa Miller, Paul Rozin, and Alan Page Iske point to studies suggesting that Americans implicitly believe in a “law of contagion”⁷⁴ whereby contact between a person and food “can cause the person’s essence to enter that food.” Because of this belief, they argue, the “sharing of touched food is a potentially powerful form of interpersonal communication” and “ingestion of food usually involves consubstantiation with another person.”⁷⁵ Noting that the “interpersonal history of foods” is of less importance in the U.S. than in some non-Western cultures, they suggest that this is in part because of the “impersonal, ‘sterile’ presentation of food in supermarkets.” The “language of taste” that Masumoto develops in *Epitaph for a Peach*, *Four Seasons in Five Senses* and *The Perfect Peach* resists this kind of de-personalization and sterilization. Masumoto invites his readers to view his products not as anonymous or sterilized raw materials but rather as created through touch and capable of communication. His thinking about umami in particular seems to draw on something like the “law of contamination.” His father’s raisins were “affected by his presence;” if these raisins are Masumoto’s model for farming umami, then his project is to grow peaches

⁷⁴ This law was proposed by Tylor as one of the laws of sympathetic magic and research suggests that it is “widely ‘believed’ in American culture”. See Lisa Miller, Paul Rozin and Alan Page Fiske, “Food sharing and feeding another person suggest intimacy; two studies of American college students,” 425-425.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 425.

“affected by” his own “presence” and to do so in a way that consumers are able to appreciate. He writes, “I think of my peaches as handmade—personalized with my family’s touch, a touch I hope translates into taste.”⁷⁶ The marketing strategies that he adopts look for ways to deliver fresh, ripe heirloom peaches but they also seek to inform consumers about the work behind those peaches and the cultures and intentions that inform that work. This is the impetus behind, for instance, Masumoto’s peach and nectarine tree adoption program. Groups apply to “adopt” a tree months in advance of harvest and commit to pick the 4-500 lbs. of fruit themselves on two consecutive weekends whenever the fruit happens to ripen. Participants experience on a limited scale the uncertainties of farming and the work and rewards of the harvest. Masumoto also uses the Price Look Up sticker on fruit to connect consumers to his thoughts and stories about farming via his website.

Another way that Masumoto resists the anonymity of the industrial food chain and asserts a social relationship between consumer and producer is by invoking an imaginatively extended commensality between himself and his consumers. Masumoto imagines (and encourages his readers to imagine) himself and his consumers meeting at the dinner table:⁷⁷ “This his how my harvest begins, my fields suddenly connected to kitchens and family dinner tables.”⁷⁸ By extending the social gathering at meals to imaginatively include both consumers and producers, Masumoto makes room for producers in a space where Wendell Berry argues they have been erased by industrial

⁷⁶ David Mas Masumoto, *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, 7.

⁷⁷ Commensality literally means eating at the same table (*mensa*), and has also been understood more generally to mean “eating with other people”. See Claude Fischler, “Commensality, society and culture,” 529.

⁷⁸ David Mas Masumoto, *Epitaph for a Peach*, 81.

food: “The products of nature and agriculture have been made, to all appearances, the products of industry . . . And the result is a kind of solitude . . . in which the eater may think of eating as, first, a purely commercial transaction between him and a supplier and, then, as a purely appetitive transaction between him and his food.”⁷⁹ For Berry, the industrial food system presents food to consumers in a way that limits awareness of its social and ecological contexts. In *Buying Power*, Historian Lawrence B. Glickman argues that consumer activism fundamentally works against this kind of commodity fetishism by promoting a “long-distance solidarity” that uses communication networks and markets to expand the parameters of “the inclusive community of the affected.”⁸⁰ Masumoto combats the erasure of the farm and the farmer through the industrial food chain by asserting a relationship between farmer and consumer at the table.

The choice of the table (rather than the field or the market) as a meeting place is not arbitrary. Sociologists have shown how eating together builds “regularized personal relationships that establish and maintain desired forms of social integration and establish and reinforce common identities.”⁸¹ Claude Fischer locates the “magic” of the meal in its ability to “counterac[t] the essential, basic, biological, ‘exclusive selfishness of eating’ and tur[n] it into . . . a collective, social experience.”⁸² By imagining a space for himself (through his peaches) at consumers’ tables, and by imagining a place for consumers at his own table, Masumoto harnesses this “magic” to counteract the kind of commodity fetishism that Berry describes in the industrial food system and to affirm producers and consumers as members of something like Glickman’s “inclusive community of the

⁷⁹ Wendell Berry, *Bringing It to the Table*, 230.

⁸⁰ Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America*, 3.

⁸¹ Jeffrey Sobal and Mary K. Nelson, “Commensal eating patterns: a community study.”

⁸² Claude Fischler, “Commensality, society and culture,” 531.

affected.” In 2006 Alice Waters described slow food values as “the values of the family meal, which teaches us, among other things, that the pleasures of the table are a social as well as a private good.”⁸³ For Waters, the pleasures of the table “beget responsibilities” that (like Berry’s extensive pleasure, Glickman’s long-distance solidarity and Masumoto’s imaginatively extended commensality) exceed the immediate space of the dinner table and reach “to one another, to the animals we eat, to the land and to the people who work it.”⁸⁴

In *Epitaph for a Peach*, Masumoto identifies the family meal (as opposed to mindless “food-in-hand” eating) as a time for heightened awareness of the full meaning of food: “Babies and meals, a time we care about foods, foods as a part of life.” In his descriptions of eating at the home of his wife’s grandmother Rose, Masumoto models the way that this kind of extended commensality can maintain community and communicate knowledge about the social and environmental contexts of food production. Grandma Rose’s table is a space in which eaters remember (as Berry says) that “eating is an agricultural act” and in which food is always embedded in the social relations of its production and exchange.

Grandma Rose . . . values knowing where foods come from and who is responsible for them; she honors them by attaching names to dishes. Around the dinner table I can hear, “Please pass Gladys’s squash” or “Little John’s first venison sausage.” Even my California raisins have a place at the table; after Marcy and I were married, she called them “Mas’s raisins.”

Food often becomes the focus of mealtime conversations When I eat a meal of “brat and kraut,” I not only learn who grew the cabbage and made the sausage but also am apprised of the evolution of the “brat”—where the pig was raised, who butchered the animal (and if an agreement was made for the butcher to keep a full ham), and who stuffed the links with their secret blend of spices.

⁸³ Alice Waters, “Slow Food Nation.”

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Fortunately she refrains from announcing the name of the creature that gave its life for our meal.⁸⁵

Food at Grandma Rose's table is insistently connected both to the person who made it and to the specific nature and meaning of the labor they performed. Gladys, Little John, the neighbor who raised the pig, the butcher who slaughtered it, and the maker of the secret blend of spices do not have to be physically at the table to share in social relationships that both shape and are reinforced by this meal. The naming of the food's producer at the table marks the specialness of the dish, and it also asserts a community among the people who produced the food and those who sit to eat it. The role that this naming plays in marking community registers in the attachment of Masumoto's name to "Mas's Raisins" and again comically in Masumoto's relief when Grandma Rose omits the pig's name from her account of the brats. Although they may not be physically present to share the meal, these people have shared in its creation; for Grandma Rose, this means that they have a place at the table as a part of the community that the meal creates and celebrates.

This idea of meeting at the table is further elaborated in the Masumoto family's "literary cookbook" *The Perfect Peach*. In his introduction to the cookbook, Masumoto associates each section with both a category of food and particular kind of meeting between himself and his audience that takes place on Masumoto's farm. In the first section, the beverages are tied to the experience of working and sweating on the farm. In the section on main courses, the reader joins the Masumoto family to "gather at the family table, a table filled with stories of working the land as a family, along with the

⁸⁵ David Mas Masumoto, *Epitaph for a Peach*, 85.

food that brings company together, and share savory recipes.” In the final section, techniques for preserving peaches are a part of a shared project of “preserving . . . the legacy of the family farm.”⁸⁶ For Nikiko Masumoto (David Masumoto’s daughter and co-author of *The Perfect Peach*), making Central Valley farm culture a “part of our concept of *terroir*” means “that the journey of growth continues as we meet on the page, in the kitchen, at the table.”⁸⁷ Here again, by insisting that the peach is connected to its story, Nikiko Masumoto is able to imagine the table as space where the farmer and consumer meet.

In “Ghosts of Farmworkers” (a short essay in *The Perfect Peach*), Masumoto addresses the invisibility of farmworkers, describing them as ghosts that “haunt my fields.”⁸⁸ This invisibility reflects both the marginalization of migrant farmworkers in U.S. society and consumers’ lack of awareness of their labor. The workers’ invisibility makes them ghosts, and they haunt through the marks they leave “on our trees and vines” and on each piece of food that arrives at the table. This haunting is a very different trace, with different social contexts, than the trace of his own labor that Masumoto as farmer/owner identifies as umami in his peaches. Masumoto attempts to counteract this invisibility by turning again to the space of the table to imagine a meeting between workers and consumers. He asks readers to: “Imagine sharing a great meal with ghosts of farmworkers. Ghosts become a part of the conversation; their stories belong alongside the great chefs and cooks.”⁸⁹ The food that a chef makes in a restaurant is seen as expressive—we see in it creativity and skill, and it implies both the trust of the eater and

⁸⁶ David Mas Masumoto, *The Perfect Peach*, 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

the care of the chef. By asking us to “share a great meal with ghosts of farmworkers,” Masumoto is pushing us to see agricultural produce not as anonymous ingredients but as expressive in the same ways that the meal prepared by a chef is expressive, and as representing labor that is meaningful. This meeting at the table would mean recognizing farmworkers’ humanity and acknowledging their invisible contribution.

Nakiko Masumoto sees the beginning of this kind of awareness in *The Perfect Peach*, writing:

I appreciate it when a chef lists the names of the farms that provided the raw materials for the dishes on the menu. Although their naming ritual is always incomplete – for example, I have never seen farmworkers’ names . . . As a farmer, I feel honored when our family name is cited, and as an eater, I am reminded that many more people are involved in my food than are physically present at my table. Recognition creates more gratitude.⁹⁰

Nakiko describes her family tradition of saying “Itadakimasu” performing a similar function as they sit to eat. The phrase, which means “I receive,” is for Nakiko a moment in which to acknowledge both the people “around the table” and the stories, present in the food, “of farmers, farmworkers, and many other laborers whose wisdom and sweat bring us our food.”⁹¹ This is the awareness and sense of connection that Masumoto points to with his concept of umami and with his idea of consumers and producers meeting at the table.

The Limits of Taste: Searching for Low-Income Consumers and Migrant Laborers in Masumoto’s Umami

⁹⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁹¹ Ibid., 72.

In *Geographies of Consumption*, social geographer Juliana Mansvelt writes that commodities “are more than just objects; they are shifting assemblages of social relations, which take place and assume form and meaning in time and space.”⁹² In a similar vein, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai describes food in particular as “a highly condensed social fact.” Masumoto suggests that such “assemblages” are at work in his peaches, and at the same time he insists on their aesthetic effects. He also incorporates awareness of social contexts into the pleasure of eating by imagining a mutually rewarding meeting of consumers and producers at the table. But what is it for a “highly condensed social fact” to have a taste, and what defines good taste in Masumoto? Does taste pleasure of the kind Masumoto imagines offer a viable space in which to engage with food as the “shifting assemblage of social relations” that connects consumers with producers? What kinds of engagement does this kind of approach facilitate, and what are its limits?

With their elaborated understanding of “taste,” Masumoto and Berry both attempt to redefine the nature of the pleasure that we experience in eating. Where *A Cafecito Story* and fair trade advertising (the subjects of the next chapter) come into tension with the political goals of fair trade by suggesting that fair trade consumption offers such problematic pleasures as the figurative consumption of an exoticized other, Masumoto and Berry take more control by defining the form (not just the object) of the pleasure that they associate with sustainable consumption. Masumoto reimagines umami taste to allow it to describe the pleasure of sustainable consumption, and also develops an imaginatively

⁹² Julia Mansvelt, *Geographies of Consumption*, 3.

extended commensality between consumer and producer as a space for the enjoyment of sustainably produced foods. Wendell Berry, meanwhile, redefines taste as an “extensive pleasure” that includes awareness of production. This re-imagination of pleasure and attention to context are considerable strengths and seem like a step toward something like Kate Soper’s “alternative hedonism.”

As Warren Belasco has observed, “To eat is to distinguish and discriminate, include and exclude.” This boundary-drawing is even more evident when we focus on issues of taste. Masumoto offers taste as a way of revaluing the labor of the farmer, but what are the limits of this revaluation of agricultural labor through taste? In “Food at Moderate Speeds” Sidney Mintz observes that Slow Food (which, like Masumoto and Berry, politicizes pleasure and taste) has reached “a limited number of people, most of them in the West, most of them educated people of some means.”⁹³ Daniel Philippon acknowledges that a focus on pleasure (rather than, for instance, on environmental justice) opens the sustainability movement to charges of elitism.⁹⁴

If the limited selection of processed foods available to the urban poor is, as Berry and Masumoto suggest, tasteless or deceptive in its flavor, does that mean that the poor have less understanding of food or of the social context of its production and distribution? The poor encounter the industrial food system as low-wage agricultural laborers, processors, grocery store workers, cooks or servers and also as consumers with limited access to fresh, whole, nourishing food and the means to prepare and preserve it. Arguably, these experiences mean that low income consumers understand the realities of food as a “highly condensed social fact” in ways that the relatively privileged consumer

⁹³ Sidney Mintz, “Food at Moderate Speeds,” 10.

⁹⁴ Daniel Philippon, “Sustainability and the Humanities: An Extensive Pleasure,” 173.

to whom Berry and Masumoto speak do not. Masumoto and Berry suggest that consumers who grow their own food or who eat outside of the industrial food chain where relationships to farmers are more direct and food is more closely tied to stories about its production have the most accurate knowledge of food's social, environmental and labor context. Although these consumers may learn and communicate a great deal through these encounters with the social life of their food, such encounters largely exclude any awareness of what food looks like and means for the large part of American society that does not have access to these forms of premium consumption. Notably missing from the embodied knowledge about food that I have described as being accessible through Masumoto's peaches and his rituals for eating them is an awareness of how access to those foods and these knowledges are conditioned by wealth and class. That uneven access is a part of the social relations that are veiled by the commodity form, and so even if we see Masumoto's umami and his extended commensality as unveiling social relations between himself and consumers, this does little to address the wider context. If access to Masumoto peaches is limited by economic class, a wealthier consumer's ability to enjoy a socially and environmentally embedded Masumoto peach is conditioned on a whole web of other exploitative relationships that remain veiled.

Masumoto openly acknowledges that the people he markets his fruit to—people for whom “food has meaning beyond mere nourishment,” who “care about the foods they eat” and who “lon[g] to be connected to farming”—are also “exclusive buyers willing to spend money for the best.”⁹⁵ He offers us two ways of seeing this willingness to spend: as reflecting a shift in values that causes the consumer to re-prioritize her allocation of

⁹⁵ David Mas Masumoto, *Epitaph for a Peach*, 3; 119.

limited resources or as an extension of the wealthy consumer's desire to buy the best available product: "I joke to Marcy that these peaches are bound for no one we know. She quips that our goal may be to grow peaches none of our friends can afford."⁹⁶ The Masumotos may have achieved that goal: since the publication of *Epitaph for a Peach*, Masumoto peaches have been featured at Cliff's Edge Restaurant in Los Angeles as a part of a harvest beer dinner (\$75 plus tax and gratuity)⁹⁷ and are regularly featured at expensive, upscale Bay Area restaurants including Chez Panisse (Berkeley), Water Bar (San Francisco), and the French Laundry (Napa) and sold at Whole Foods Markets (the upscale grocery store whose prices have earned it the nickname "Whole Paycheck").

Although he criticizes a tendency among American consumers to care only about cost, Masumoto does recognize that many consumers are priced out of the market for his peaches. What he may not fully appreciate is the immovability of this barrier and the set of other related barriers that limit access to his food for disadvantaged consumers who also recognize that "food has meaning beyond mere nourishment," who still "care about the foods they eat" and who may even "lon[g] to be connected to farming." His observation (in "Eating Rejects: A Letter to Alice Waters") that his peaches cost less by weight than Twinkies suggests that affording sustainable food is a matter of prioritization. Masumoto describes his attempt to explain to his son Korio that "value was all relative and personal":

I decided to show a real-life example of value to him, so we visited a local grocery store. I explained that the price of our organic fruit — which may sell for three dollars a pound — was actually not that expensive. First, I hoped people ate all of the fruit because it was ripe and didn't waste half and toss it away. Second,

⁹⁶ Ibid., 119.

⁹⁷ Chris Quiroga, "Masumoto Peach Harvest Beer Dinner 2013."

you had to compare prices relative to each other. So I selected Twinkies as an example. The three-ounce sugary sweet treat sold for about a dollar. I calculated that to be over five dollars a pound, and told my son, “See, now which is more expensive?”⁹⁸

Even setting aside the substantial caloric difference (a Twinkie packs 150 calories; the equivalent weight of fresh peach has just 33) that makes Twinkies a more affordable source of energy than peaches, it is misleading to see this as a straightforward choice between fresh and processed food. The upscale grocery stores, restaurants and hotels that offer Masumoto peaches are unlikely to carry Twinkies; more relevantly, the stores where many consumers choose Twinkies offer a limited selection of any produce, a still more limited selection of local or organic produce, and almost certainly not Masumoto peaches. Alice Waters picks up Masumoto’s peach/Twinkie comparison in a September 2006 article for *The Nation* titled “Slow Food Nation,” where she uses it to challenge claims “that eating well is an elitist preoccupation.” Such concerns are, for Waters, “a smokescreen that obscures the fundamental role our food decisions have in shaping the world.”⁹⁹ Although Waters immediately (and apparently unconsciously) contradicts this claim by attributing the higher cost of “fresh, wholesome foods” to “agricultural policies that subsidize fast food” her invocation of the twinkie comparison, like Masumoto’s, figures unhealthful and ecologically damaging food consumption as a straightforward matter of consumer choice. The reality is that for many consumers, food choices are much more constrained than this comparison would suggest.

Berry in “The Pleasures of Eating” maintains that the kind of knowledge about and social connection to farming that makes food an “extensive pleasure” is available

⁹⁸ David Mas Masumoto, *Heirlooms: Letters from a Peach Farmer*, 54.

⁹⁹ Alice Waters, “Slow Food Nation.”

even to urban consumers, but in doing so he implicitly imagines an urban consumer who has access to a variety of grocery stores, farmer's markets, transportation and open space as well as cooking and food storage facilities and the time in which to use them. For the urban poor living in food deserts, this kind of access is often unavailable. By suggesting that geography is the only barrier to urban consumers' access to food as an "extensive pleasure" and that this barrier is easily overcome, Berry misconstrues a harsh social reality and discounts low-income consumers' considerable knowledge about the contexts of food production and consumption. I will return to this critique of Berry in Chapters Five and Six, where I discuss an emerging genre of eco-consumption memoirs in which authors undertake typically yearlong experiments in local, organic, reduced or in other ways ethically marked consumption. Many of these memoirs explicitly invoke Berry's thinking about food as an extensive pleasure either directly or through Michael Pollan. None of these eco-consumption memoirs fully acknowledges the extent to which food choices are conditioned by economic status or explores the experience of budget-constrained consumption as productive of legitimate insights into food politics.

Another limit to the ability of Masumoto's umami and Berry's extensive pleasure to imagine a taste that engages with the cultural, economic and ecological realities of modern agriculture relates to the importance of long-term connection to a particular place for both authors. For Masumoto, "ingredients for a peach" include both "a farmer father" and "family generations working the land."¹⁰⁰ This listing of "ingredients" offers an implicit critique of reductive approaches to farming that focus exclusively on inputs and yield while discounting the social context and cultural work of farmers. But it also

¹⁰⁰ David Mas Masumoto, *Four Seasons in Five Senses*, 3.

imposes an implicit limit on whose work and cultural knowledge count; this comes as a surprise given both the immigrant status of Masumoto's grandparents and his own efforts to communicate the value of migrant laborer. Does this point to a danger of erasing migrant labor in offering local specificity as a counter to reductionist agricultural science and agricultural economics?

Berry likewise privileges long-term residency (and preferably ownership) in one place. His preference for the local is apparent in "The Pleasures of Eating" where his suggestions about what consumers can do emphasizes direct participation in and observation of food production across a full growing season: "Only by growing some food for yourself can you become acquainted with the beautiful energy cycle that revolves from soil to seed to flower to fruit to food to offal to decay, and around again. You will be fully responsible for any food that you grow for yourself, and you will know all about it. You will appreciate it fully, having known it all its life."¹⁰¹ Berry's preference for local food is also based in this emphasis on intimate knowledge. He instructs readers, "Learn the origins of the food you buy, and buy the food that is produced closest to your home. The locally produced food supply is the most secure, the freshest, and the easiest for local consumers to know about and to influence."¹⁰² The idea is appealing but as my discussion of food deserts above suggests, it is not as universally available as Berry seems to imagine.

Less obvious is the implicit exclusion of migrant agricultural labor from the ranks of those who might "appreciate [food] fully." The nature of migrant agricultural labor dictates that workers encounter foods only at certain key and labor-intensive moments in

¹⁰¹ Wendell Berry, *Bringing it to the Table*, 232.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 232.

their life cycles; these laborers may have extensive knowledge about the larger picture of growing cycles in and across regions, but the migrant nature of their work which follows the growing seasons from place to place also means that they are unable to develop the kind of knowledge about their food that Berry suggests is requisite to eating with full pleasure. Meanwhile, the notion that “every locality should be, as much as possible, the source of its own food” focuses on the location of the farm to the exclusion of its labor. The suggestion that the “locally produced food supply” is “the easiest for local consumers to know about and influence” further assumes either that migrant labor does not exist or that it is of little concern as a potential object of influence. In his fiction, Berry overwhelmingly describes a world in which migrant labor is absent. Farms are small enough to be managed by a family, possibly with some permanent paid help, and seasonal tasks are undertaken as a cooperative effort with community members and neighboring farmers. Berry’s notion of eating as an extensive pleasure is well-calibrated to capture knowledge about agriculture in the world of his novels, but it fails to imagine or an accurate knowledge of modern migrant labor as a part of the extensive pleasure of eating.

Berry also discounts the cultural knowledge of the migrant laborer. In “Damage,” he describes an incident that occurred when he tried to dig a pond on his property. The pond that he dug collapsed a part of the hillside it was on, leaving a scar in the landscape. Berry had expert advice but, he suggests, insufficient “knowledge of [his] whereabouts.” This knowledge, which it is the job of culture (whether in the form of a scar in the landscape and its accompanying story or in the form of art) to communicate, marks the

limits for human intervention. In “Damage,” Berry describes the function of art in this sense:

Culture preserves the map and the records of past journeys so that no generation will permanently destroy the route.

The more local and settled the culture, the better it stays put, the less the damage. It is the foreigner whose road of excess leads to a desert.¹⁰³

For Berry, a local culture that remembers its own past mistakes in managing its land and that recognizes the remnants of those mistakes as they manifest in its landscape is a necessary curb on the tendency to wield too much power over nature without the knowledge to foresee how it will turn out. What is troubling in both of these accounts is the inability of culture as they conceive it to speak to or learn from the migrant, the unlanded, the new-arrived resident, or (explicitly in Berry) “the foreigner.”

Masumoto does considerably more than Berry to make room for migrant labor in his definition of umami, in his idea of producers and consumers meeting at the table, and in his thinking about how embodied knowledge can inform interactions with food. Masumoto considers, for example, how the taste, texture and appearance of his peaches contain traces of his relationship with the migrant farm workers who harvest his trees. The absence of the crew’s boss who would translate the farmer’s instructions or a failure to communicate the ripeness he wants all leave their trace in the taste of the fruit that Masumoto delivers to consumers. A perfect peach delivered to market embodies a mutual understanding between the farmer and the laborers; and as I showed above, Masumoto shares his own summer peach-eating ritual with his workers as a way of developing this

¹⁰³ Wendell Berry, *What Are People For*, 8.

understanding. His workers are also an important source for the knowledge¹⁰⁴ that informs Masumoto's decisions as a farmer, a knowledge that his concept of umami suggests is an important part of the special taste of his peaches. Masumoto communicates what he is looking for through taste, and his workers mark the peaches that leave Masumoto's farm through their interpretations of that taste.

Although the scene in which Masumoto uses taste and a ritual of peach eating to communicate his values to the migrant workers on his farm appears to include them in the community he creates through renewed attention to taste, and although his short essay "Ghosts of Farmworkers" explicitly recognizes farmworkers' contribution to taste and attempts to include them in the imaginatively extended commensality he shares with consumers, other moments in his writing point to lingering tensions in Masumoto's relationship with the migrant laborers who work his farm. Given his success at communicating with his workers through taste, and given his recognition of eating together as a way of maintaining community and valuing one another's labor, it comes as a surprise when Masumoto refuses his workers' attempts to share food with him.

Masumoto describes an incident that occurred while visiting his farmworkers:

The workers live in a small outbuilding behind my foreman's house [...] On my visit to their home, I recognize two of the squatting workers who picked my peaches that morning. With beers in their hands, crushed cans lying next to them, one jumps up and waves me over to offer a beer. I am about to accept in a gesture of friendship, but somehow I can't. I know the price they pay for a six-pack of beer equals an hour of work. I calculate that a single beer equals picking one extra tree in 105-degree heat. I think of that worker earlier in the day, his sweat

¹⁰⁴ To offer just one example, Masumoto recalls the advice of a crew boss during thinning: "Good farmers don't look down during thinning; the sight of the thousands of bodies would trouble their thoughts. Too easily, I translate fallen fruit into lost profits and I'm tempted to leave more on each tree, which actually results in lots of small, low-priced fruit. Once, while thinning, a crew boss waved his hands upward and told me, "Look up! Look up! Good farmers look up!" (David Mas Masumoto, *Epitaph For a Peach*, 44).

mingling with peach fuzz, his expression exhausted. I politely decline the drink and squat next to him.¹⁰⁵

Masumoto's decision not to share a beer with his workers acknowledges what the beer would have cost the workers in labor, but this is an anxious moment in the text and a troubling one for my reading of Masumoto's work. Masumoto values eating together as an expression of community in his visits to Grandma Rose's house, and he extends commensality imaginatively to assert a kind of community between himself and his consumers. In refusing this beer (and turning away from the "gesture of friendship" that it would represent), does Masumoto rebuff an attempt to assert a similar kind of community? The "language of taste" that Masumoto develops through his writing asks us to consider food as positively and meaningfully transformed by the labor that produces it and also by its expression of a social relationship between producer and consumer. Masumoto's reactions to his workers on this occasion, although reasonable, suggest that the commensality (and associated sense of community) and the language of taste through which he imagines mutually caring and respectful relationships with his consumers are somehow unavailable in this relationship between himself and his workers. If this is the case, it certainly limits the sense in which we can see the "wonderful taste" and umami of Masumoto's peaches as embodying a "moment of perfection" in the social world of Masumoto's farm.

This discomfort resurfaces later in the same scene:

Inside the house are rows of bunks and a small kitchen, with a bathroom attached to the outside. One fellow is designated cook, and he explains how skillful he is at saving money and stretching out the meat with beans and vegetables. The cook

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 24-25.

says he makes lunches for everyone who has work the next day. They pool their expenses. Some of my peaches are sitting on the counter to be shared. He finishes his beer, asks if I'd like a peach, and smiles. I can't tell if he's joking or not.¹⁰⁶

If, as Masumoto believes, a peach is transformed through the touch of the farmer, there is a sense in which these peaches are something new and different from what Masumoto could pick himself. These peaches were selected by hands that have a completely different relationship to Masumoto's farm. When Masumoto picks a peach from his orchard he does so as a second-generation owner of his orchard for whom the organic heirloom peach represents both a legacy he hopes to preserve and a promising market niche he hopes to develop and tap. It is expressive of his childhood, his continuing relationship to his land, and of the relationship he hopes to build with consumers. The peaches he encounters in this passage were picked by migrant workers who may or may not return to Masumoto's farm from year to year and for whom Masumoto's commitment to organic farming means less exposure to toxic chemicals but not a dramatic difference in pay. For them Masumoto's farm represents a dream for their future: when Masumoto finds workers' discarded lottery tickets and asks what they would do if they won, they propose to buy his farm. The peaches, which they pick together and intend to share, also represent a caring relationship among the workers. Masumoto's unease first about his unequal economic relationship with these workers and then with their appropriation of peaches from his farm gets in the way of his ability to appreciate either the display or the gesture or to consider the different meaning and taste with which the workers' touch may have invested these peaches.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 25.

This section becomes the most uneasy one in Masumoto’s discussions of his relationships with his workers: as he leaves the house he remembers his idealistic decision (taken as a new Berkeley graduate) to pay twice the prevailing wage, and the financial loss that it caused him. “Now I try to pay a little better than the prevailing wage and work out in the fields alongside the workers. And sometimes I still squat with them.”¹⁰⁷ To locate the mutual respect between himself and his workers Masumoto turns to his physical presence—squatting, working alongside—rather than to taste, which seems too strained in this context by Masumoto’s unequal social and economic relationship with his workers. If taste is not a viable way for workers to communicate with Masumoto and if uneven economic relationships preclude eating together, it becomes difficult to imagine that migrant labor is a part of the umami or the “moment of perfection” that Masumoto invites his consumers to see expressed in his peaches. This is a significant omission because migrant labor is central to the functioning of Masumoto’s farm.¹⁰⁸

An additional issue that emerges out of Masumoto’s engagement with taste is that, as I suggest in my introduction to this chapter, taste as a framework for ethical consumption (like the consequentialist moral reasoning that Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm describe) strongly implies consumer sovereignty over production. Rhetorically, this emphasis on consumer sovereignty and his focus on consumer taste as the site of his intervention allows Masumoto to express sympathy for the situation of his workers without assuming responsibility for the material conditions of their employment, including

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰⁸ Masumoto drives this point home in a discussion of a raisin harvest that was ruined because he could not find migrant laborers to harvest them before they were spoiled by moisture from a summer storm.

the wage he pays. As his own account of their wages and living conditions testifies, Masumoto's practice of paying "a little better than the prevailing wage" for migrant agricultural labor does not represent an adequate solution to the problem of migrant labor exploitation. Masumoto assumes an entirely passive stance toward this problem, framing his most ambitious attempt to address it as the youthful mistake of an idealistic Berkeley graduate. But if (as Masumoto argues in "The Ghosts of Farmworkers") these workers like Masumoto's father affect the peaches with their presence—if their labor becomes a part of the peach's umami—this suggests that their labor like Masumoto's has intrinsic value that should be recognized in their wage as a manifestation of their social relationship with Masumoto and his consumer. *Epitaph for a Peach* seems to suggest that because the Sun Crest peach is no longer threatened, Masumoto's intervention into consumption via taste has been successful, the veil of commodity fetishism has been lifted, and social relations between producer and consumer have been restored. If (as Masumoto at moments seems to want) we include migrant farmworkers in this social relationship, we see that this is really not the case.

A final question I have for both Masumoto and Berry's attempts to reimagine the pleasures of eating is to what extent the new forms of pleasure they imagine are open to appropriation by the industrial food system they critique. A recent example of a food narrative similar to Masumoto and Berry's being employed to encourage consumption within the industrial food system is the video advertisement "The Scarecrow" and the accompanying smartphone game released by the restaurant chain Chipotle. The ad replicates Masumoto and Berry's critique of the industrial food system. Chipotle offers this summary of the ad on its website:

In a dystopian fantasy world, all food production is controlled by fictional industrial giant Crow Foods. Scarecrows have been displaced from their traditional role of protecting food, and are now servants to the crows and their evil plans to dominate the food system. Dreaming of something better, a lone scarecrow sets out to provide an alternative to the unsustainable processed food from the factory.¹⁰⁹

The scarecrows' displacement from their traditional role and their absorption into the tightly controlled world of Crow Foods mirrors Berry and Masumoto's concerns about the loss of family farms and their consolidation into a few large agribusiness conglomerates. Hiding behind a façade of traditional family farm scenes are heart-wrenching scenes of animal suffering that recall Berry's description of industrial farming as "like a concentration camp."¹¹⁰ Also like Berry and Masumoto, the ad depicts an industrialization of eating itself: in the video, consumers approach to absently consume each product as it leaves the assembly line on a conveyor belt.

The title character of "The Scarecrow" returns home from work disillusioned by what he has seen, but a red pepper (think: Chipotle logo) growing in his garden inspires him. He harvests a crop from his small farm, loads up his truck and begins serving up tacos. The food breaks the thrall of the conveyor belts as listless customers perk up and begin to make their way over to the scarecrow's "Cultivate A Better World" booth. An accompanying smartphone game reinforces the ad's messages, as players are invited to serve Chipotle food to customers before they become Crow Foods zombies; plant and harvest fields without allowing them to be contaminated by Crow Foods drones; liberate chickens, cows and pigs from Crow City on a wind-powered flying machine; and liberate fresh produce from the Crow Foods factory before it can be contaminated.

¹⁰⁹ "The Scarecrow." *Chipotle*.

¹¹⁰ Wendell Berry, *Bringing it to the Table*, 233.

However, as critics have pointed out, the “alternative” that the ad associates with Chipotle’s approach is far from representative of the company’s practices.¹¹¹ Although Chipotle markets itself as an environmentally friendly, humane, healthful fast food chain, precise information about its sourcing is difficult to come by. Information that is available is often troubling—for instance, the fact that it took Chipotle six years to sign on to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers’ Fair Food Program to protect the human rights of Florida tomato workers. For all the symbolic heavy lifting being done by conveyor belts and assembly lines in the “The Scarecrow,” Chipotle restaurants use precisely this assembly-line model to construct their tacos, burritos, bowls and salads. Chipotle has also been criticized for its employment practices, which are certainly not reflected by the self-employed scarecrow in the ad. Vegans and animal rights activists have pointed out that the ad appropriates vegan rhetoric to advertise a chain whose offerings are distinctly meaty.¹¹² In short, although the Chipotle ad makes a critique of the industrial food system similar to that modeled by Masumoto and Berry, and although it also makes a similar argument about the superior taste and ethical standing of its own product, the company is in fact open to many of the same criticisms it directs toward the fictional Crow Foods.

¹¹¹ David Sirota, writing for Salon, argues that the ad uses vegetarian messaging to promote Chipotle’s meat-heavy offering. In a *New Yorker* article, Elizabeth Weiss points to a tension between the animal rights message of the ad and Chipotle’s willingness to use conventionally sourced beef when more humane options are unavailable. A Funny or Die parody ad “Honest Scarecrow” points out that Chipotle (like the evil Crow Foods in the ad) is a “giant corporation” and describes the ad itself as “pure manipulation.” See David Sirota, “Chipotle’s Self-Serving Deception: A ‘vegetarian’ bait-and-switch,” and Elizabeth Weiss, “What does ‘The Scarecrow’ tell us about Chipotle?”

¹¹² The sad eyes of a production line cow carry the brunt of the ad’s emotional appeal, and the food the scarecrow serves farmer’s market style from his taco stand is vegetarian. In the game, players harvest tomatoes, peppers, carrots, onions, beets, corn and celery but only liberate animals. In reality, Chipotle sells a very meat-heavy product and recently made the news for failing to disclose the non-vegetarian status of its pinto beans.

I chose “The Scarecrow” as an example here because it so closely mirrors both the critique of industrial agriculture and the identification of a pleasurable alternative we see in Masumoto’s and Berry’s writings. However, such farm-to-fork stories have become increasingly common, and Chipotle is far from the least sustainable company to use this discourse in its advertising. To name just one more particularly striking example, McDonalds—long the subject of intense critique for its environmental destructiveness, exploitative labor practices, and unhealthful menu—has a series of farm-to-fork video advertisements that attempt to align the company with the values of sustainable agriculture¹¹³ and credit those values for what they assert is the high quality and superior taste¹¹⁴ of McDonalds products. McDonalds potato supplier Frank Martinez credits McDonalds’ superior taste to its sourcing practices with a claim reminiscent of Masumoto’s ideas about umami: “If you grow the best potatoes you are going to have the best French fries. When you make something with pride, people can taste it.” McDonalds was a central focus of Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation*, which describes how the

¹¹³ Although vague, sustainability claims are prominent in these ads. In the “Field to Fork,” McDonald’s Lettuce Supplier Dirk Giannini aligns McDonalds suppliers with sustainability, saying: “Farmers are stewards of the land, and we know how to take care of this resource better than anyone.” Kenny Longaker (McDonalds fish supplier) similarly notes of wild Atlantic pollock, “We’d love to see this fishery last for many many years to come, and I think we’re doing a real good job doing that. You take care of the ocean the ocean takes care of you, and it’s been really good to me.” In “Raising Cattle and a Family,” McDonald’s beef supplier Steve Foglesong implicitly suggests that McDonalds fuels the reclamation of degraded landscapes by describing how his ranch property was formerly a part of a coal mine. He also aligns McDonalds with the local food movement, noting, “Most everything that we put into these cattle comes either from this ranch or from somewhere local. The fact that we produce beef for McDonalds – it’s a big deal – they have a certain set of quality expectations that absolutely have to be met.” All of the ads present suppliers as small family farmers – farm laborers are absent despite the industrial scale (potato grower Frank Martinez has 1,000 acres of potatoes) and equipment of the featured farms, and all work appears to be done by the farmer and his family. See “Field to Fork,” *YouTube*; “The Last Frontier,” *YouTube*; “Raising Cattle and a Family,” *YouTube*; “Dream Come True,” *YouTube*.

¹¹⁴ In Foglesong’s narration, his claims about local sourcing are followed immediately by a shift to McDonalds’ quality standards, suggesting that local sourcing is both a McDonalds’ policy and responsible for the chain’s superior taste: “They have a certain set of quality expectations that absolutely have to be met. You can’t get taste without good quality.” See “Raising Cattle and a Family,” *YouTube* and “Dream Come True,” *YouTube*.

flavors and aromas of McDonalds food derive largely from flavor additives rather than from ingredients that most consumers would recognize as food.

This kind of appropriation is potentially handled in Berry's "extensive pleasure" by his stipulation that the consumer's knowledge about food be "accurate," but I see a more promising answer in the way taste functions as a form of embodied knowledge for both authors. While the potential for appropriation does point to a problem for this kind of critique, it is precisely in this context of ready appropriation of sustainability rhetoric that embodied forms of knowledge like taste and rituals of eating and food preparation may prove most useful. For viewers of the Chipotle ad, its critique of production lines and meat consumption sits uneasily with the familiar consumer experience of selecting from among several meat choices hardening in a warmer as the first step in the overtly assembly-line style production of a Chipotle meal. Here the smooth narrative of "The Scarecrow" catches on the logic implicit in the bodily experience of ordering and eating at Chipotle: the sideways shuffling and pointing to ingredients at successive stations that make up the consumer's experience of Chipotle's assembly-line production process and the feeling of tough meat shreds stuck between teeth contradict both the anti-industrial and the animal liberationist message in *The Scarecrow*."

If labels like "organic" on produce and even "cage free" or "free range" on eggs have become less and less meaningful, an embodied knowledge—a palate and set of practices and inclinations—that can distinguish, for instance, tree-ripened peaches from those picked green and shipped long distances may offer a useful test for advertising claims about farming practices. A palate trained to the gamier taste of grass-fed cattle and a kitchen practice calibrated to the lower fat content and greater muscle tone of these

animals may be an important complement to sourcing claims provided at point of sale. A shopping habit accustomed to handling whole foods in minimal packaging might provide a space from which to notice and question the ethical and aesthetic value of a 10-pack of organic dates individually encased in hard plastic shells. Barry Estabrook claims in *Tomatoland* that Florida's socially unjust and environmentally devastating winter tomato industry cannot produce a good-tasting tomato. If that is true, then taste might be a useful complement to labeling for consumers who want to avoid buying tomatoes from the worst offenders. In a context where ethical claims have become a routine part of branding for many food brands, theories of taste as embodied knowledge may provide a space from which consumers can take a critical stance toward some of those claims.

My reading of Masumoto's interactions with the migrant workers on his farm, however, suggests that the knowledge embodied in taste and in rituals of eating is not enough to give consumers a full picture of the socioeconomic conditions of production for locally or organically grown produce. Locally and organically grown foods, this analysis shows, can embody apparent harmony with the local environment while veiling the still exploitative and unsustainable labor practices of the specialty organic and local food sectors. Approaching this problem from the fields of geography and political science, Julie Guthman and Margaret Gray have both extensively documented such exploitation of farm labor as it occurs even on small, family-owned, local or organic farms.¹¹⁵ As alternative consumption continues to emerge as a concern in U.S.

imaginative literature, literary criticism can contribute to this work by tracing the contradictions between dominant narratives of local, organic and small-scale production

¹¹⁵ See Julie Guthman, *Agrarian Dreams* and Margaret Gray, *Labor and the Locavore*.

and actual practices as they manifest in the form of narrative tensions and elisions in ethical consumption literature. These tensions and elisions in ethical consumption narratives, my project will show, often correspond to lingering problems in the material conditions of production for ethically branded goods. Because narrative is so central to the way that ethical consumption has imagined itself and presented itself to consumers, this correspondence between narrative tensions in ethical consumption literature and sociopolitical tensions in the ethical consumption movements suggests that literary critical analysis can serve as one entry point for thinking through real-life ethical consumption practices.

Chapter Three

“a story in someone’s head”: *A Cafecito Story* and Fair Trade Advertising

In an afterword to Julia Alvarez’s *A Cafecito Story* (2001), the author’s husband Bill Eichner makes a strong claim for the political impact of individual consumer choices and for the power of stories to organize those choices: “whenever you drink coffee, remember this *cafecito* story. The future does depend on each cup, on each small choice we make.”¹

Alvarez’s narrator closes with a similar moral claim:

The world can only be saved by one man or woman putting a seed
in the ground or a story in someone’s head or a book in someone’s hands.
Read this book while sipping a cup of great coffee grown under
birdsong.
Then, close your eyes and listen for your own song.
As for this story, pass it on.²

The “cafecito story” that Alvarez and Eichner call on the reader to imagine and pass on takes shape as a fable whose moral center is fair trade. Alvarez’s protagonist Joe, a white, middle-aged teacher from a Nebraska farming family, personifies the fair trade movement in the story. Meeting a local coffee farmer (Miguel) and his family while on vacation in the Dominican Republic, Joe is impressed both by the quality of Miguel’s shade-grown coffee (“so much better than anything I’ve tasted in fancy coffee shops in Omaha”)³ and by the labor that it represents (“I didn’t realize so much work went into

¹ Bill Eichner in Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 59.

² Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 49-50.

³ *Ibid.*, 31.

one cup!”).⁴ When Joe learns of the pressure that Miguel and his small-farming neighbors are under to sell their land to industrial agriculture interests, he thinks he knows just what is needed: “What Miguel needs to do is write his story down, spread the word, so coffee drinkers everywhere will know of his plight.”⁵ Miguel cannot do that because (among the other obstacles to small farmer direct-marketing to U.S. consumers), as he tells Joe, “I do not know my letters.”⁶ Joe decides to stay and help Miguel, and his strategies mirror on a smaller scale those employed by the fair trade movement internationally. Joe buys an adjoining parcel to Miguel’s, teaches Miguel and his fellow farmers the principles of cooperation and sustainability, makes a pact to pursue environmental sustainability, empowers them through literacy, and finally enlists an aspiring writer to share the farmers’ story with consumers. The narrator of *A Cafecito Story* is its fictional author, an American waitress who learns the power of good *cafecito* from Joe and then fulfills her own dream of becoming a writer by telling this story.

In the passage above, Alvarez’s narrator likens “putting . . . a story in someone’s head” to planting seeds. This correlation between planting seeds and planting stories comes up repeatedly in the novella. As a teacher, Joe reflects that putting books in his students’ hands was not so different from planting seeds on his father’s farm. Later as Joe teaches Miguel’s family to read the narrator measures their progress against the growth of the coffee seeds that Joe has also planted. This concept of storytelling as planting gestures toward a central feature of the imaginative literature of ethical consumption, which sees itself as an initiating moment in a larger process that includes the text’s reception and the changes that it inspires in the reader’s consumption. The germination

⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁶ Ibid., 23.

and growth of the story happen in its readers and in its effects on the world. A fair trade story like *A Cafecito Story* represents but also aspires to shape and grow fair trade as a movement. The literary form of ethical consumption texts is informed by this aspiration, with ethical consumption authors selecting or altering their chosen forms in order to incorporate a teaching role with respect to their readers. Whereas the authors of the eco-consumption memoirs I will discuss in Chapter Five have reworked the memoir form to accommodate pedagogical content, Alvarez in *A Cafecito Story* works with the already explicitly pedagogical fable form. Like the eco-consumption memoirs, the back matter of *A Cafecito Story* reinforces the text's pedagogical function by offering readers additional resources for learning about and participating in ethical consumption.

Imaginative literature has been important to advancing the fair trade social movement since its inception, when the first formal fair trade label, Max Havelaar, took its name from a character in the Dutch novel *Max Havelaar* (1860) who opposed the exploitation of coffee pickers in the Dutch colonies. But where Max Havelaar drew from a novel to communicate a message about its brand, Alvarez's *A Cafecito Story* was published out of a partnership between her publisher (Chelsea Green) and a fair trade certifier (Global Exchange) who have together positioned it as the story of fair trade in fable form. The narrator's closing words claim a central role for narrative and especially the fable in organizing "each small choice," or individual act of consumption, and so in supporting environmental sustainability and economic empowerment for producers. The identification of *A Cafecito Story* as a fair trade fable by fair trade labeling organizations both responds to and reinforces this claim that narrative can intervene in readers' consumption practices. What makes a fable so attractive to organizations that seek to

grow consumer interest in fair trade, and what can *A Cafecito Story* tell us about the potential pitfalls of this form?

The narrator's words above point to additional aims that do not seem immediately relevant to fair trade's project of supporting small-scale producers or *A Cafecito Story*'s project as a fabular instruction of readers in an ethical lesson about consumption. In *A Cafecito Story*, benefits to producers take a back seat to the novella's exploration of what fair trade might mean for consumers. In the story, fair trade coffee offers consumers several benefits: a break from the stresses of modern life and a space in which to pursue their dreams; a superior flavor enhanced by "birdsong" (and compelling stories); a sense of connection both to producers and to nature. Although *A Cafecito Story*'s project as a fable articulating the moral of fair trade seems an uneasy pairing with its exploration of the pleasures that fair trade offers first world consumers, fair trade advertising and rhetoric frequently pair these same two rhetorical gestures. How do *A Cafecito Story* and fair trade advertising imagine fair trade delivering all of this to consumers, and how do these imagined roles interact with fair trade's promise to save the world by supporting environmentally sustainable and socially just business practices in developing countries? Kate Soper has argued that any successful turn toward such practices will have to come with a re-imagining of the pleasures of consumption and an awareness of how consumers themselves benefit from more sustainable forms of consumption. Can *A Cafecito Story*'s exploration of the self-regarding gratifications of fair trade support its effort to teach an ethical lesson about fair trade, or are these processes at odds? I argue that in attempting to make fair trade appealing to consumers, *A Cafecito Story* and fair trade advertising employ rhetorical strategies that ultimately undermine their more

progressive message of economic empowerment for producers and environmental sustainability of production practices.

The relationship between Alvarez and Eichner and their fictional counterparts Joe and the narrator are complicated and have important implications for the way we read this work. Like Joe and the narrator, Eichner and Alvarez own a coffee farm in the mountains of the Dominican Republic (although as I discuss below there are important material differences in the ownership and labor structure on their real life farm versus the one Alvarez imagines in *A Cafecito Story*). Like Joe, Eichner comes from a Nebraska farm family. In a novella with a sparse writing style, Alvarez makes a point of marking her narrator as having “dark hair and eyes the color of coffee beans.”⁷ This suggests the possibility that she might be of Dominican descent (like Alvarez) and works against a thread in the story that suggests Joe’s Nebraska farming background qualifies him to best understand coffee farming in the Dominican Republic. Although the narrator is overwhelmingly sympathetic to Joe’s perspective, this slight suggestion that she also shares a connection to Dominican coffee production introduces some dissonance in her enthusiastic endorsement of Joe’s perspective, especially when that perspective seems to rely on colonialist forms of desire.

Woodcuts by Dominican artist Belkis Ramirez, which are the cover art for the novella and originals of which hang in Alvarez’s writing studio at her coffee farm, depict visions of fair trade and of a Dominican coffee farm floating in a cloud above a woman’s head as she smells a cup of coffee. These images also illustrate the scene when Joe first introduces the narrator to shade-grown *cafecito*. Does this woodcut represent Alvarez’s (or alternatively the narrator’s) literary imagination and so foreground the role of her

⁷ Ibid., 41.

craft in constructing this *cafecito* story, or does this image represent something like the song that Miguel says shade-grown *cafecito* will “put . . . inside you”?⁸ Whose agency drives the way this text imagines desire for shade-grown coffee, and in whose agency might offer resistance to and critique of that representation? Although strongly suggesting identification between herself and the narrator, Alvarez also distances herself from the narrator. Whereas Alvarez approaches *A Cafecito Story* as an already well established author in the U.S. with strong relationships with publishers and whose works are taught in university classrooms, the narrator has a much more tenuous relationship to writing. When she meets Joe she is only an aspiring writer; if we take the narrator at her word then *A Cafecito Story* and her writing career come not out of her intentional dedication to her craft but rather as a product of the irresistible story of the coffee or of her relationship with the protagonist Joe. This introduces a distance between Alvarez and her narrator. In the end, Alvarez also distances her narrator from Joe’s role in the story. Although the narrator appears highly sympathetic to Joe’s perspective throughout the story, she appears to disclaim it the closing paragraphs when with the same breath that claims ownership over the story (“I am the woman behind the counter who wanted to be a writer”) she also disclaims it, asserting, “This is really Joe’s book.”⁹ This ending introduces significant ambivalence into what has been to this point a highly sympathetic account of Joe’s adventures in the Dominican Republic and begs the question of what it means for this to be “really Joe’s story” and how the narrator’s story (or Alvarez’s, or Miguel’s) might differ.

⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹ Ibid., 49.

What does it mean for *A Cafecito Story* to be “really Joe’s book”? As I argue below, Alvarez’s imagination of desire for fairly traded produce draws on both a feminization of the space of the Dominican Republic and a colonialist vocabulary that imagines it as available for white/European/male enjoyment and exploitation. These are issues to which Alvarez as a Dominican American woman author is elsewhere quite sensitive. Does she draw on them self-consciously here to appeal to a white American audience and create demand for fair trade coffee? Does the distance she introduces between first herself and then her narrator and the story suggest that the text functions as a critique of these colonial tropes and forms of desire? As I will show, these questions are further complicated by Alvarez’s use of similar language in a purely commercial context divorced from the nuances of literary ambiguity when she draws on it in an announcement advertising parcels of her Dominican farm for sale to an implicitly white U.S. buyer.

Framing *A Cafecito Story* as a Fair Trade Story

In this chapter, I read *A Cafecito Story* as a fair trade story and its protagonist Joe as a figure for fair trade. Although the story invites this reading, fair trade is never explicitly mentioned within the story or in Bill Eichner’s Afterword, which describes Alvarez and Eichner’s project at Alta Gracia, their real-life coffee plantation in the Dominican Republic that Alvarez says inspired *A Cafecito Story*. In fact, although they claim to offer a fair trade price to workers, Alta Gracia has (to my knowledge) never been fair-trade certified, and it certainly was not certified when Alvarez published *A Cafecito*

Story.¹⁰ Instead, the identification of the fictional plantation in *A Cafecito Story* with fair trade occurs largely through the way the story has been framed both by its back matter (which includes a “fair trade primer” by Equal Exchange co-founder Jonathan Rosenthal) and by fair trade websites and online stores that have presented the book as an educational resource.

Rosenthal’s “fair trade primer” appears immediately following Eichner’s Afterword in *A Cafecito Story*, and consists of a two-page introduction to fair trade entitled “A Better-Coffee: Developing Economic Fairness” and a six-page listing of shopping and information resources. The primer explicitly interprets *A Cafecito Story* as a story of fair trade, and also implies that *A Cafecito Story* is itself already important to the success of the movement (to pick up on Alvarez’s planting metaphor, the seeds have already started to germinate). Rosenthal’s listing of resources that “will help you make your own fair-trade relationships” reinforces this message and suggests that readers will respond to the story by looking for practical opportunities to support fair trade through their own consumption. The first entry in the listing of resources is for Alvarez and Eichner’s Alta Gracia, which in turn supports the framing of *A Cafecito Story* as a fair trade story by presenting its real-life counterpart as though it were a fair trade farm.

An odd layout choice amplifies the framing effect of Rosenthal’s fair trade primer in *A Cafecito Story*. Whereas Eichner’s Afterword is clearly labeled with his name, Rosenthal’s name is missing from “A Better Coffee” and does not appear at all until the final entry in the resource list where a note within the listing for Equal Exchange acknowledges, “This fair-trade primer has been prepared by Jonathan Rosenthal, co-

¹⁰ Sarah DeCandio who worked with Alta Gracia writes, “We do not yet have fair trade status, although our workers during the harvest are paid better than fair trade, the certification is a long and costly endeavor” (Sarah DeCandio, “Re: Hola”).

founder (retired).” Reference to Rosenthal’s contribution is entirely absent from the book’s “About the Author” page, which has listings for Alvarez, Eichner, artist Belkis Ramirez and translator Daisy Coco De Fillipis. Reviews suggest that readers often miss the buried attribution to Rosenthal altogether: Francette Cerulli of the Times Argus describes Rosenthal’s fair trade primer as “the last section” of the book, while Karen Marzloff of HippoPress Manchester calls it “part three.”¹¹ Appearing just after Eichner’s Afterword and drawing broad connections between the events of the story and the real-life history and practice of fair trade, Rosenthal’s “A Better Coffee” reads like an omniscient conclusion to the text as a whole rather than like a message from an interested partner in its publication. This position is especially powerful when we consider how *A Cafecito Story* has been identified and marketed as a fable: in fables, the moral is often stated most explicitly at the end. Rosenthal’s message, which encapsulates the moral message of the book, functions in this role by suggesting that *A Cafecito Story* is the story of fair trade and that the reader who learns from it will become a part of that story by joining the fair trade movement.

Externally to the text, activist organizations have framed *A Cafecito Story* as a fair trade story by invoking it as an educational resource. Equal Exchange, for instance, includes *A Cafecito Story* in an online listing of “Fair Trade educational tools . . . to share with your congregation, school or community.”¹² Global Exchange recommends it as a fair trade resource in their fair trade action pack¹³ for aspiring activists. The Fair Trade Resource Network lists *A Cafecito Story* among “Fair Trade Titles We Recommend” and

¹¹ “A Cafecito Story,” *Chelsea Green Publishing*.

¹² “Shop Education and Display,” *Equal Exchange Fairly Traded*.

¹³ “Fair Trade Resources from Global Exchange.” *Fair Trade Campaign: A How-To Guide That Shows What You Can Do To Promote Fair Trade Products*.

calls the book, “a great, short intro to Fair Trade for people of all ages.”¹⁴ The book has also been recommended as a fair trade resource or offered for sale by activist organizations, stores and other advocates of fair trade including Buyer Be Fair,¹⁵ Café Campesino,¹⁶ Fairtrade America,¹⁷ Dean’s Beans,¹⁸ Fair Trade Institute,¹⁹ Organic Consumers’ Association (for World Fair Trade Day), Fair Trade Wire,²⁰ Biose Weekly²¹ (in a feature on fair trade websites and resources), Fair Trade Lowell,²² and Everyday Justice.²³ By invoking the book as a resource for fair trade, these organizations become a part of the framing that makes *A Cafecito Story* a fair trade story.

Alvarez herself has drawn connections between her project and fair trade, and has described the Alta Gracia project (and implicitly *A Cafecito Story*) as an attempt “to model Fair Trade practices.”²⁴ The association with fair trade is strong enough that coffee from Alta Gracia is frequently misidentified as Fair Trade certified,²⁵ and in fact images

¹⁴ “Fair Trade Titles We Recommend.” *Fair Trade Resource Network: Education and Discussion to Make Trade Fair*.

¹⁵ Buyer Be Fair lists *A Cafecito Story* under “Coffee & Fair Trade Books.” See “Coffee and Fair Trade Books,” *Buyer Be Fair*.

¹⁶ Café Campesino does not list *A Cafecito Story* on its resource page but does offer it for sale on its “Gift Ideas” page, which prominently displays both a Fair Trade Federation membership badge and a USDA organic logo. The banner on this page also introduces Café Campesino as “a fair trade coffee company.” See “Gift Ideas,” *Café Campesino*.

¹⁷ Fairtrade America picks up the endorsement from Fair Trade Resource Network and recommends *A Cafecito Story* to viewers of their facebook page. “Have you ever read 'A Cafecito Story'? A great intro to where your coffee comes from for young readers and old readers alike,” Fair Trade Mark, *Facebook*.

¹⁸ Dean’s Beans is a 100% organic and fair trade coffee roaster that offers *A Cafecito Story* for sale through its website. “Coffee,” *Dean’s Beans*.

¹⁹ “Publications,” *Fair Trade Institute*.

²⁰ “Global Exchanges Fair Trade Challenge,” *Fair Trade Wire*.

²¹ “Starbucks/Fair Trade Campaign,” *Organic Consumers*.

²² A website claiming to be the community’s premier website for Fair Trade information, resources and connections at RESD. “Fair Trade Print Resources,” *Fair Trade Lowell*.

²³ “Recommended Reading,” *Everyday Justice*.

²⁴ See Alvarez’s May 1, 2012 blog post “High And Amazing Graces.” (Julia Alvarez, “High and Amazing Graces,” *Powells*.) See also her short article about the Border of Lights Gathering, where she writes that one of her ideas with Café Alta Gracia was “to model Fair trade practices of agriculture.” (Julia Alvarez, “Massacre Testimonio”).

²⁵ A profile of Alvarez on the website for Goucher College’s Center for Creative writing says that Alta Gracia “produces organic coffee on a fair trade basis” (“Julia Alvarez,” *Kratz Center for Creative Writing at Goucher College*). In an article about volunteers visiting Finca Alta Gracia, Jarabacoa Project Director

from the text (which have long appeared in the packaging for Alta Gracia coffee) are now being used by Alta Gracia's former roaster, the Vermont Coffee Company, to bolster the fair trade credentials of its new line of Dominican coffees.²⁶ The story as it has been published and as it has been framed both by these organizations and by Alvarez herself is clearly a fair trade fable, and its dogmatic moral is to buy fair trade. Some of the tensions that I will explore between *A Cafecito Story* and the principles of the fair trade movement that it has been seen to represent may originate in the way that the story's framing and reception thus impose fair trade as its central concern.

A Fable of Fair Trade Activism and Agriculture

In my introduction, I argue that representations of ethical consumption in cultural and artistic work have been important factors shaping the emergence and continued growth of ethical consumption. Fair trade activists, readers and, in many ways, *A Cafecito Story* itself have made strong claims for the text's ability to intervene in dominant modes of consumption by modeling sustainability and fair trade as a compelling and effective alternative to mainstream consumption. These claims seem to be related to ideas about its form.

For me, the question of form is one of the most difficult things to deal with in *A Cafecito Story* because it touches on both a dearly held hope for and a deep concern about

Sarah Squire mistakenly claims that Alta Gracia has been cultivating "organic, fair trade coffee" for the past fifteen years ("DR Volunteers Visit With Julia Alvarez," *Amigos de los Américos*). In an article for *The Middlebury Campus*, Andrea Glaessner describes Alta Gracia's as "a fair trade organic line of coffee" (Andrea Glaessner, "Alta Gracia Coffee With a Conscience Julia Alvarez' Grassroots Coffee Brand Exemplifies the Spirit of Vermont.")

²⁶ "100% Organic Viva Café Dominicano—Vermont Coffee Company—Café Tostado Para Amigos." *Vermont Coffee Company*.

how imaginative literature might represent ethical consumption as transformative. The hope is that imaginative literature can help us to imagine solutions and to see what our lives might look like lived as a part of those solutions. This hope perhaps comes through most clearly via the fable form because there is the understanding that it is meant to instruct and that there will be a clear and applicable lesson. What *A Cafecito Story* lacks in nuance and historical accuracy it makes up in clarity. Readers of *A Cafecito Story* come away from the text with a clear understanding of its moral and the assurance that they as readers are now already a part of the fair trade movement. The concern is that in telling such a story imaginative literature might over-simplify the social realities that ethical consumption responds to and that, in its eagerness to present clear solutions and to make ethical consumption appealing to readers, it risks reinforcing the same narratives that have worked to make these problems so intractable. The simple narrative and clear moral that *A Cafecito Story* achieves comes at the expense of fully acknowledging the complexity of the problems that fair trade attempts to address. The fable form also carries with it the potential for misrepresentation. As I will discuss below, the farm in *A Cafecito Story* differs in important ways from its real-life counterpart Alta Gracia. However, the story blurs the line between the two, and the story has been used to market Alta Gracia products in a way that suggests these differences do not matter.

Alvarez and Eichner's claims about the form of *A Cafecito Story* are connected to ideas about its moral and political efficacy. Eichner, who asks readers to remember *A Cafecito Story* "whenever you drink coffee" because "the future does depend on each cup, on each small choice," calls it a parable: "My wife Julia and I are not the man and

the woman in the story, but our story is related to this parable.”²⁷ For her part, Alvarez has described it as “a modern, ‘green’ fable,”²⁸ while reviewers have described it (following publisher Chelsea Green) as an “eco-fable.”²⁹ The OED defines parable as a “(usually realistic) story or narrative told to convey a moral or spiritual lesson or insight” and fable as “a short story devised to convey some useful lesson.”³⁰ The qualities that Eichner, Alvarez and others signal in classifying *A Cafecito Story* under these two genre headings are its clear moral and its pedagogical intent. Because *A Cafecito Story*’s moral concerns consumption practices that fair trade makes political in their stakes, this pedagogical role gives *A Cafecito Story* an implicit activist role within the fair trade movement.

For Rosenthal, *A Cafecito Story* does not merely document or describe the fair trade movement, it has the potential to spread it. In his primer, Rosenthal writes that:

Julia Alvarez’s moving *Cafecito Story* is happily not just a story; it is now the living reality of half a million family coffee farmers around the world. These farmers and their partners in the marketplace – people that include Carmen, Miguel, Joe, and you, yourself – have turned decades of hard work and dreams into a powerful international movement called *fair trade*.³¹

Carmen and Miguel are characters in the book but they are the names of real people who worked as caretakers at Alvarez’s farm. The reader (“you, yourself”) is also a real person. Joe bears some biographical resemblance to Bill Eichner, and I have also argued that he is a figure for the fair trade movement in *A Cafecito Story*, but he is a fictional character. By including the protagonist of a fair trade fable in his list of “partners” who have

²⁷ Bill Eichner’s “Afterword” in Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 53.

²⁸ Alvarez, Julia. “About Me.”

²⁹ See for example Karen Marzloff, “A Better Cup of Coffee,” *HippoPress Manchester*. Quoted in listing for *A Cafecito Story*, Amazon.

³⁰ “Fable,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

³¹ Jonathan Rosenthal, “Fair Trade Primer” in Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 61.

worked and dreamed to create fair trade as a “living reality,” Rosenthal asserts the power of fiction to intervene in that reality and shape “a powerful international movement”. Rosenthal confirms that power by including “you, yourself”—the reader who is only just about to learn what fair trade is—in the list of those who “have turned decades of hard work and dreams into a powerful international movement called *fair trade*.” By asserting that this cafecito story is not just a story but that it articulates lived reality and history and by crediting that notion to two real Dominicans along with a fictional character and the reader, Rosenthal makes a strong claim for the transformative power of “moving” narrative. He locates that transformative power in the story’s potential effect on its readers, who he imagines will respond to the story (and make use of the resource list) by becoming committed fair trade consumers.

Reviews suggest that many readers are happy to oblige. In her review of the book, Karen Marzloff (Hippo Press Manchester) writes: “I’m drinking a cup of certified organic coffee as I write this. How could I drink anything else? This book is meant . . . to change your thinking, and it’s likely that it will. . . . Like a young tree, the parable and the real-life story intertwine and take root in the reader.”³² Marzloff picks up Alvarez’s analogy between planting seeds and telling stories and interprets her choice of organic coffee as the fruit of the story that *A Cafecito Story* plants in her. In a review titled “Buying a book is a political act – and so is buying food,” Amazon user hall1118 similarly writes that the book “was moving to me” and recommends it “for anyone who is trying to live her life or his life deliberately, trying to help with sustainable agriculture, and trying to make a difference in small but vital ways to a more balanced global economy.”³³ Amazon

³² Listing for *A Cafecito Story: El Cuento de Cafecito*. *Amazon*.

³³ *Ibid*.

reviewer Wildness echoes this sentiment, reflecting, “It is also the story of how people can change the way things are done for the better and in the course of it all begin to change the world.”³⁴ These readers respond to *A Cafecito Story* as a parable or fable meant to instruct, and their claims about the story’s wider transformative power (“to change your thinking,” “to make a difference,” to “begin to change the world”) are grounded in that pedagogical function. It is a part of the fable form that the experiences of a few characters hold a lesson applicable to all readers. When readers emphasize *A Cafecito Story*’s ethical lessons, their understanding of the form conditions their response.

A Cafecito Story’s faith in the transformative power of stories seems related to the power it attributes to narrative. For Joe, stories are important because they “help me understand what it is to be alive on this earth.”³⁵ His decision to stay at Miguel’s farm comes in response to Miguel’s inability to add his own voice to that understanding—to “write his story down, spread the word, so coffee drinkers everywhere will learn of his plight.”³⁶ Interestingly, as Miguel and his family gain literacy in *A Cafecito Story* they do not use it to share their story with consumers but rather to read contracts and negotiate better terms. Joe begins teaching Miguel and his family to read immediately upon joining their community, and although the narrator tells us that as she writes the story, “everyone is reading”, only “I [the narrator] am writing!”³⁷ This is strange given that Miguel’s inability to share his own story with consumers (“I do not know my letters”) is central to the way the story establishes a need for Joe to intervene. It is perhaps less strange when

³⁴ Listing for *A Cafecito Story: El Cuento de Cafecito*. *Amazon*.

³⁵ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

we consider that storytelling is also central to the way that Alvarez (through *A Cafecito Story*) and fair trade labeling organizations imagine their own roles in fair trade. Fair trade labeling organizations, through consumer education, their marketing and labeling, aim to write the stories that they imply producers cannot write for themselves. This is one of the areas where fair trade is open to critique, because when labeling organizations in the first world control the narrative about what is and is not fair trade they make it difficult for producing countries to implement their own labeling initiatives.

Although Alvarez draws heavily on her experience at Alta Gracia in creating *A Cafecito Story*, the history, ownership and power structure at Alta Gracia are substantially transformed for the story. In his Afterword, Eichner writes, “My wife Julia and I are not the man and woman in the story, but our story is related to this parable. We do own a farm-foundation in the mountains of the Dominican Republic with caretakers, Miguel and Carmen, who live there with their children.”³⁸ Although emphasizing commonalities, this first paragraph points to an important difference between the ownership and power structure at Alta Gracia and those depicted in the story. In the story, “Joe buys a parcela next to Miguel’s. They make a pact.”³⁹ Joe’s relationship to Miguel is that of neighbor and friend, and their pact is made between equals in that sense. When Joe sells his coffee, he does so as a part of a cooperative with Miguel and other neighbors. At Alta Gracia, Carmen and Miguel are not neighbors but hired caretakers on a property owned by Alvarez and Eichner. When Alvarez draws from her farm as inspiration for Joe’s fictional project in *A Cafecito Story* she keeps Carmen, Miguel, their daughter Miguelina, their zinc roof and other details but transforms them from employees into neighbors and

³⁸ Ibid., 53.

³⁹ Ibid., 33.

friends. This transformation puts the farm in the story more in line with the way fair trade rhetoric imagines the fair trade / farmer relationships: fair trade organizations tend to describe partnerships and relationships, emphasizing farmers' independence (trade not aid) and the organizations' commitment while minimizing any unevenness in the power relationship. Alta Gracia at the time *A Cafecito Story* was published was ineligible for fair trade certification precisely because of its ownership structure. Daniel Jaffe notes that "since its inception the term *fair trade* has signified that products come from democratically organized farmer or artisan cooperatives."⁴⁰ As he also notes, the more recent trend of certifying unionized plantations as opposed to small-farmer organizations is accordingly controversial.⁴¹

The relevance of those power relations asserted itself in my conversations with Carmen and Miguel during a visit to Alta Gracia, where I learned that they were no longer employed by Alta Gracia at all. In *A Wedding In Haiti*, Alvarez describes a series of bad farm managers at Alta Gracia: "We left money in the wrong hands for payrolls never paid. One manager was a drunk who had a local mistress and used the payroll to pay everyone in her family, whether they worked on the farm or not. Another, a Seventh-Day-Adventist, who we thought would be safe . . . proved to be bossy and lazy. . . . Another manager left for New York on a visa I helped him get." Alvarez does not say which if any of these bad farm managers is Miguel, but by the time I went to see the farm in the summer of 2005 he had been replaced (according to him, with little explanation) and the farm placed under the management of the Instituto Dominicano de Investigaciones Agropecuarias y Forestales (IDAF), which had been given a five-year

⁴⁰ Daniel Jaffe, *Brewing Justice*, 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

contract to “tur[n Alta Gracia] into an experimental coffee demonstration farm to teach good coffee growing methods in the community.”⁴²

Another related difference between Alta Gracia and the fictional farm in *A Cafecito Story* is in size. Although Alvarez does not specify the size of Joe’s “parcela,” the implication is that he becomes a smallholder like Miguel, with a farm small enough for him to work mostly by himself. By the time Eichner writes his Afterword for *A Cafecito Story*, Alta Gracia is a 260-acre plantation with multiple full-time employees plus additional seasonal labor. Most Dominican coffee farmers, by contrast, are smallholders managing only 1-3 hectares (2.5-7.5 acres) of land. *A Cafecito Story*, in contrast, represents both Joe and Miguel as smallholders. This is a problematic change if we want to see *A Cafecito Story* as a parable of fair trade at work, because at the time of its writing plantations did not qualify for fair trade certification. It is also a problem in that *A Cafecito Story* is ostensibly showing readers how smallholder farming is economically feasible in the modern global economy so long as farmers employ sustainable methods and consumers read and respond to their stories through their own shopping habits. As Jaffe shows in his quantitative analysis of outcomes for smallholder coffee farmers in Yagavila and Teotlasco, Mexico during the 1999-2003 coffee crisis, the premium price that farmers receive for fair trade does not necessarily mean that they will be earning a living wage all of the time. In fact, he shows how during the coffee crisis even some fair trade coffee farmers found themselves operating at a loss.⁴³ Because Alta Gracia has been so strongly associated with fair trade following the publication of *A Cafecito Story*, Alvarez and Eichner’s apparently exaggerated claims about their project

⁴² Julia Alvarez and Bill Eichner, “‘Lessons Learned’ from Café Alta Gracia.”

⁴³ Daniel Jaffe, *Brewing Justice*, 100.

as a model for fair trade might be taken to mean that fair trade makes dependence on a tropical commodity export a secure living for smallholder coffee farms, obviating any need for more fundamental reforms of international trade institutions and ideologies. Jaffe's analysis, although it certainly identifies many benefits for smallholder farmers from fair trade, would not support this conclusion.

A more subtle difference between Alta Gracia and the coffee co-op Joe forms in *A Cafecito Story* is in the age of the project. In *A Cafecito Story*, Joe leaves for the Dominican Republic as a young teacher and is fifty-five with hair turning white by the time he meets the story's fictional author. By the time Alvarez's narrator tells Joe's story, then, the project is already 20-30 years old. This passage of time lends the text some of its authority and serves as the proving ground for Joe's ideas. The changes set in motion by Joe's innovations early in the story are complete by the time the story's fictional author puts them to paper. The narrator summarizes the effect of these changes:

Miguel and Joe's idea spreads. Many of the small farmers join them, banding together into a cooperative and building their own beneficio rather than having to pay high fees to use the compañía facilities. They can now read the contracts the buyers bring and argue for better terms. Joe buys books in the ciudad where he goes periodically to ship the cooperative coffee to the United States. Carmen cooks for the workers and adds eggs from her hens or cheese from her goats to the bowl of víveres she serves her family at night. More hens and more goats mean more abono for the coffee plants. Miguelina no longer makes a zero when she is asked to write her name . . . The hillsides are full of songbirds the cedros are tall and elegant, the guama trees full, the cherries bright red.⁴⁴

When *A Cafecito Story* is published Alvarez and Eichner's Alta Gracia project is much younger. Eichner and Alvarez started Alta Gracia in 1996, and the first edition of *A Cafecito Story* was published just five years later in 2001.

⁴⁴ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 37.

This shift in time scale serves an important purpose in *A Cafecito Story*: it gives a sense of completeness to the story and allows Alvarez's narrator to illustrate the long term benefits of Joe's innovations to the community in the form of socially and environmentally sustainable practices and to connect the virtue of these practices to their effects. It also has potential drawbacks, including that it may project a confidence not warranted by the (at the time of publication) short duration of the Alta Gracia project. As Alvarez and Eichner revealed in a recent social entrepreneurship presentation at Middlebury College, many of the projects they undertook at Alta Gracia ended in failure.⁴⁵ In the fable Carmen adds eggs from her hens, but at Alta Gracia the poultry project failed: the first year's chicks were sold on credit that was never repaid and the project ran out of money to feed its laying hens. In the fable a cooperative beneficio allowed the farmers to process their own beans "rather than having to pay high fees to use the compañía facilities."⁴⁶ This hopeful project also failed when Alvarez and Eichner tried it at Alta Gracia: the beneficio was built and used once and then never again. Perhaps the greatest failure was in the farm's relationship with Carmen and Miguel. In the story they prosper and remain Joe's campesino familia. The real Carmen and Miguel still live near Alta Gracia but they are no longer employed there, and their relationship is strained. At the time of writing *A Cafecito Story*, this shift in timescale would have allowed Alvarez to imagine a future in which her hopes for Alta Gracia has already been realized. As it turns out, she was overly confident in her predictions. As time has passed and the reality at Alta Gracia has moved away from what Alvarez describes in the story,

⁴⁵ Julia Alvarez and Bill Eichner, "'Lessons Learned' from Café Alta Gracia."

⁴⁶ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 37.

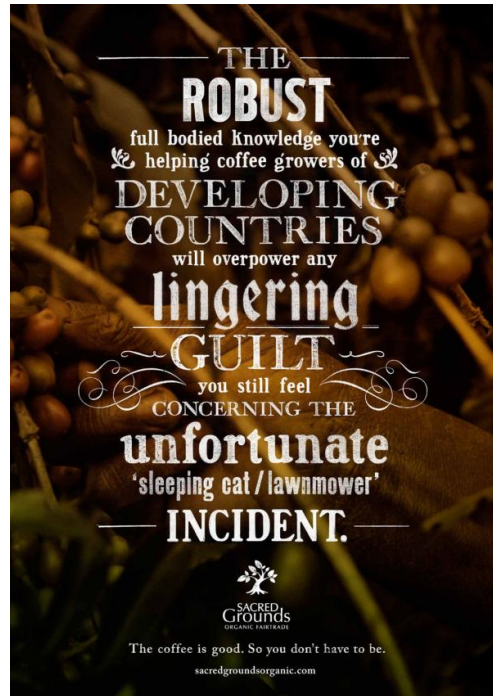
A Cafecito Story has become more and more problematic as a fictional representation of Alta Gracia and its product.

A similarly premature sense of completeness is also present in some fair trade advertising, which presents the benefits of fair trade as though they were instantaneous. Whereas fair trade activists tend to see fair trade both as a work in progress and as only one way to address economic inequality, fair trade advertising to consumers tends to imagine each fair trade purchase as accomplishing a complete turnaround in conditions for producers and in the producer-consumer relationship at the moment of purchase. In particular, fair trade advertising frequently offers consumers an unrealistic freedom from complicity with global poverty. The World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO), for instance, has a “Guilt Free Shopper Campaign.” Patty Laurel, a Philippine WFTO ambassador, describes the campaign in her blog as, “The 100% Guilt Free Shopper campaign that aims to inform consumers that they have the power to eradicate poverty, stop child and forced labor, advocate for gender equality, support sustainability and capacity building, safeguard the environment, promote equality in trade, and open opportunities for health and education with a single, conscientious purchase through Fair Trade.”⁴⁷ An ad campaign from Sacred Grounds (Figures 3.1 and 3.2) takes Laurel’s already wildly ambitious claim a step further by humorously suggesting not only that consumption of fair trade coffee secures the consumer’s innocence vis-à-vis producers but that this guiltlessness (or at least the feeling of it) can extend to such unrelated incidents such as “having slept with your fiancée’s sister last night” or “the unfortunate sleeping cat / lawnmower incident.”

⁴⁷ “You can become a 100% Guilt Free Shopper,” *Come Waste Your Time With Me – Patty Laurel Filart*.



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Figure 3.1 “Sacred Grounds Organic Fair Trade Coffee: Fiancee” Ad agency: The Campagin Place, Sydney, Australia.⁵⁰ **Figure 3.2** “Sacred Grounds Organic Fair Trade Coffee: Lawnmower.” Ad agency: The Campaign Place, Sydney, Australia.⁵¹

Fair trade organizations generally acknowledge that fair trade is only a partial solution to the problems faced by producers, and yet their advertising largely contradicts that idea. This misrepresentation of fair trade understanding of the challenges they hope to address may be helpful in terms of helping consumers associate their fair trade purchases with benefits to producers, but it also strongly suggests that the consumer who buys fair trade is already doing enough and that market solutions obviate the need for more fundamental reform of international trade. As Jaffe argues in *Brewing Justice*, this message, implicit in much fair trade advertising, does not represent a consensus among advocates of fair trade. Although some participants do view fair trade as a way “to reform or improve the

⁴⁸ “Outdoor Sacred Grounds Organic Fair Trade Coffee: Fiancee,” *Best Ads on TV*.

⁴⁹ “Outdoor Sacred Grounds Organic Fair Trade Coffee: Lawnmower,” *Best Ads on TV*.

⁵⁰ “Sacred Grounds Organic Fair Trade Coffee: Fiancee,” *Ads of the World*.

⁵¹ “Sacred Grounds Organic Fair Trade Coffee: Be-atch,” *Ads of the World*.

functioning of a deeply flawed global market, to ‘fix’ markets so that they value the right criteria,” others view it as “a tool with which to fundamentally transform the economic relations that have immiserated rural communities worldwide.”⁵² For this second group of fair trade participants, addressing global poverty demands fundamental reforms of international trade institutions and ideologies. Laurel and the Sacred Grounds ad both suggest that purchasing a fair trade item offers the buyer freedom from complicity with global poverty. This way of imagining fair trade clearly does not reflect the views of the second group of fair trade participants Jaffe describes.

Although it is a fictional tale, *A Cafecito Story* stands in for the actual history of Alvarez and Eichner’s Alta Gracia project in several sources that describe that project and its origins, and woodcuts from the book are also used to represent Café Alta Gracia on its product labeling. The blurring of the line between the fictional narrative of *A Cafecito Story* and the material structure and practices of Alta Gracia introduces the potential for *A Cafecito Story* to slip from being a “fable” in the sense of a simple and instructive tale to a “fable” in the sense of an untruth or a falsehood. The description on the back cover calls *A Cafecito Story* “a story for the Americas” and a “touching tale of different worlds bridged by coffee,” but instead of a gloss of the story there is this description of Alvarez:

She lives with her husband, Bill Eichner, in the Vermont countryside, but maintains close ties to her Dominican Republic homeland through Alta Gracia, an organic coffee farm established to demonstrate the principles of sustainable living.⁵³

⁵² Daniel Jaffe, *Brewing Justice*, 9.

⁵³ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, back cover.

The substitution of biographical details for a description of the story or for attention to the political and environmental landscape of the Dominican Republic here starts to conflate *A Cafecito Story* with Alta Gracia, a process that continues inside the book and in the accounts of it online. In an “About Me” page on her website, Alvarez describes the relationship between *A Cafecito Story* and her actual farm:

About eleven years ago, Bill and I started a sustainable farm-literacy center called Alta Gracia. Rather than telling you the whole long story here about why we are growing organic, shade-grown coffee; why we started a school on the farm; why sustainability is so important a concept for us all to be thinking about, I’ll send you to *A Cafecito Story*, a modern, “green” fable I wrote inspired by our project . . . Visit our website cafealtagracia.com and find out how to order our coffee, Café Alta Gracia, and maybe even visit the farm!⁵⁴

Here, Alvarez directs website readers to her fiction to learn about her real farm. For readers who buy Alta Gracia coffee, the appearance of several of the story’s woodcut illustrations on the packaging further confuses these lines.

The potential for such misrepresentation extends to claims about the effectiveness of the projects Alvarez and Eichner undertake at Alta Gracia. The starkest example of this comes in another description of *A Cafecito Story* on Alvarez’s website. Alvarez writes:

I’ve often described this book as a “green fable and love story.” The book grew out of a project Bill and I started in the Dominican Republic: an organic coffee farm modeling sustainable methods with a school on site to teach basic reading and writing. There’s now a new Spanish/English edition, *A Cafecito Story / El cuento de cafecito*. One of the special moments of my writing life happened when we took this bilingual edition down to the farm, and our once illiterate neighbors were able to read passages in which their names appeared!⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Julia Alvarez, “About Me,” *Julia Alvarez*.

⁵⁵ Julia Alvarez, “Books: For Young Readers of All Ages,” *Julia Alvarez*.

For a reader familiar with the story, this account strongly implies that the newly literate neighbors who read passages from *A Cafecito Story* include Carmen and Miguel. Their real-life achievement of literacy completes a transformation Alvarez prefigures in the fable— “The coffee is thriving. The farmers are thriving. Everyone is reading. And I am writing!”⁵⁶—and works to confirm *A Cafecito Story*’s hopeful claim that the world “can . . . be saved by one man or woman putting a seed in the ground or a story in someone’s head or a book in someone’s hands”⁵⁷ But this claim about Miguel’s family is not born out by anything I learned in my conversations with Carmen and Miguel while at Alta Gracia. Not only had they not read the story, they were illiterate. In fact, after listening to me read the story aloud (Carmen said they had never heard it), Carmen told me that only three things in the story were true: that Miguel works from before sunrise to after sundown, that Carmen can pick two boxes of coffee a day, and that their door is always open. The rest, she said, was made up.

In *A Cafecito Story*, Joe’s experience with Miguel and the other farmers seems to suggest that small-scale farming can offer even farmers with large families (in the story, Miguel has a half a dozen children) a living wage provided that they commit to cooperation and sustainability and that the cooperatives they work within can access international trade markets via fair trade groups and the stories fair trade disseminates to consumers. Outside the text, the website for Alta Gracia coffee makes a similar claim. Echoing the narrator’s assurance at the end of *A Cafecito Story* that “the coffee is thriving. The farmers are thriving,” the website claimed in 2003 (2 years after *A Cafecito Story*’s publication in 2001) that Alta Gracia was “thriving despite the lowest coffee

⁵⁶ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 49.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

prices in 40 years. By striving to improve our coffee quality, we have found a niche in the specialty market.”⁵⁸ But in 2005, Sarah DeCandio (who handled communication for the Foundation Alta Gracia) told me that there had never been a profit from the sale of Alta Gracia coffee.⁵⁹ The assertion of the farm’s profitability in 2003 was made in the context of a coffee partnership offer that I will describe more below, and so there may have been an aspiration to make the farm attractive to potential investors at that time. It also strongly resembles both the account of Joe’s success in *A Cafecito Story* and the wider fair trade rhetoric in which commitment to sustainability, improvements in quality and higher prices go hand in hand. These apparent exaggerations of Alta Gracia’s success, like Joe’s in *A Cafecito Story*, aim to affirm the effectiveness of sustainable farming and ethical labeling. Read generously, this extends *A Cafecito Story*’s fictional strategies into Alvarez’s account of the real farm.

Overall, the story’s fable form enables *A Cafecito Story* to position itself (and enables other to position it) as growing the fair trade movement by socializing its readers to become fair trade consumers. Some readers have described their own responses in ways that suggest it is effective in this role, but I have argued that the simplicity of its plot and moral mean that *A Cafecito Story* risks minimizing both the challenges faced by cooperative farmers as well as plantation farmworkers in the Americas and the structural obstacles to addressing those problems. Jaffe’s analysis of fair trade outcomes in Mexico, although describing many benefits, suggests in particular that a living wage is not the certain outcome for fair trade farmers that *A Cafecito Story* seems to suggest.

⁵⁸ “Finca Alta Gracia: our sustainable coffee farm in the Dominican Republic.” *Café Alta Gracia*. As it appeared Feb. 13, 2003.

⁵⁹ Personal communication Monday, August 29, 2005.

Alternative Hedonism and the Pleasure of Consumption

I suggested above that although the narrator's closing words in *A Cafecito Story* claim a central role for narrative in organizing individual consumer choice to support social, economic and environmental sustainability, they also register concerns that do not seem immediately relevant to these issues. In the final paragraph of this fair trade fable, the emphasis is on pleasure rather than how fair trade consumption participates in a collective social movement. The narrator urges readers, "Read this book while sipping a cup of great coffee grown under birdsong." This coffee may be great because of the way it is grown, but the passage suggests that we purchase and sip it because it tastes good. The narrator asks us to close our eyes not to imagine the other-regarding virtues of shade-grown coffee but for ourselves to "listen to your own song." What is this attention to the self-regarding virtues of shade-grown coffee doing in an account of how "the world . . . can be saved" by a compelling fair trade fable?

In her introduction to *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, Kate Soper argues that a widespread shift toward more socially and environmentally sustainable consumption will only happen if we can develop an alternative conception of what desirable consumption is—a concept she calls alternative hedonism. Soper sees consumers' growing awareness of how their consumption fails to make them happy as setting the stage for this shift to alternative hedonism. She writes:

The enjoyment of previously unquestioned activities—such as driving, or flying, or eating out-of-season strawberries that have been transported halfway round the world, or buying a new refrigerator – is now tainted by a sense of their side-effects. The pleasures of the consumerist lifestyle as a whole are troubled by an

intuition of the other pleasures that it constrains or destroys, especially those that would follow from a slower, less work-dominated pace of life.⁶⁰

The new “erotics of consumption” and “hedonist imaginary” that Soper advocates would emerge as attractive alternatives in the context of these recognized consequences of mainstream consumption. Does *A Cafecito Story*'s engagement with the self-regarding virtues of fair trade coffee consumption answer this call?

The fair trade movement, through fair trade advertising and through its invocation of *A Cafecito Story* as a fair trade story, similarly problematizes mainstream consumption in order to articulate the pleasures of fair trade. One ad for Marks and Spencer fair trade coffee, for example, promises: “Our coffee won’t leave a bitter taste in your mouth. It’s Fairtrade.” *A Cafecito Story* opens on Joe’s own awakening awareness of how the pleasures of mainstream consumerism are both “tainted” by their negative effects and “troubled” by the other pleasures they foreclose. The adult Joe whom readers meet early in *A Cafecito Story* is lonely, profoundly unhappy, nostalgic for his childhood on a family farm that no longer exists, and unfulfilled by his work:

Early mornings, in his rented apartment, he would sit at his desk, reading a book, sipping a strong cup of coffee. Sometimes, he’d look out over the fields that his father had once owned and farmed. Computerized projections now determined the size of the harvest before the seeds were in the ground. The rows were all uniform. The gulls, gone.

Years went by. The fields outside Joe’s window became parking lots and housing developments, small malls with big chain stores. The coffee he drank got fancier. Beans from all over the world. The loneliness deeper.⁶¹

The uniform rows Joe sees from his window contrast the “zigzags” of rows that he planted as a distractible child on his family’s farm—rows in which Joe’s father had read

⁶⁰ Kate Soper, *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, 4

⁶¹ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 7

“the heartbeat of his son’s attention.”⁶² The uniformity of the rows that replace them, the computer projections, the transfer and consolidation of ownership and the disappearance of wildlife are all signs in the narrative of the industrialization of American agriculture. Spaces associated with mass consumption (parking lots, housing developments, small malls, big chain stores) displace fields that for Joe recall dreams of becoming a farmer and memories of “a hard life with sweet moments, many of the sweetest in the company of birds.”⁶³ Joe’s increased access to mass consumption as an adult does not bring him happiness: fancier coffees from more distant locations are accompanied here by loneliness. This unhappiness and sense of loss amidst multiplying opportunities for ever more varied consumption recalls Soper’s observation that the pleasures of mainstream consumption have become both “tainted” by awareness of their costs (to wildlife, to farm families, to the fields paved over for parking lots⁶⁴) and “troubled” by the other enjoyments that they constrain or destroy (the view of a field from one’s window, the possibility of choosing to farm, sweet moments in the company of birds).⁶⁵

Joe, like Soper’s unhappy consumer without a compelling alternative conception of what it means to be happy, initially does not recognize that there is a problem with his consumption. For years he keeps “following his routines, but still feeling adrift, a little lost”⁶⁶. Joe’s first major effort to combat his unhappiness (“help him get out of the rut he was in”) involves another kind of consumption: tourism in the Caribbean.⁶⁷

⁶²Ibid., 3

⁶³ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁴ The song “Big Yellow Taxi” by Joni Mitchell includes the famous line, “They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.”

⁶⁵ Kate Soper, *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, 4

⁶⁶ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 7.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 7.

It being winter, it being Nebraska, he thought of the tropics. Searching the Web, he discovered all kinds of resort packages, photos showing barely clad beauties tossing beach balls with waves sounding in the background.

That's just what he needed. Some time to figure out where he was going, maybe mend a broken heart with a new romance – and get a suntan in the bargain.

Joe browsed for hours, sipping his cup of coffee.

He found a great deal: *Dominican Republic: the land Columbus loved the best . . .* Joe clicked and typed and pressed, and in a few minutes, he was confirmed on a package vacation to the lap of happiness.⁶⁸

Dissatisfied with his life, Joe books a vacation to the Dominican Republic where he hopes to find sun, sex, and unpressured time. His consumption of the Caribbean begins before he even leaves his computer as he sits for hours sipping coffee (a major Caribbean export) and consuming images and narratives of the Caribbean as a tropical paradise. Although sympathetic to Joe, the narration suggests both that his Caribbean vacation is not the most original idea for combating middle-class malaise and that his concept of the tropics as paradise is constructed through a discourse of difference. Joe's notion that the Caribbean is the place to find sun, sex and an escape from the stresses of modern life participates in an imagination of the region that has its roots in colonial discourse and a thriving home in contemporary tourism, a point the narration underlines with the reference to Columbus in the Dominican tourism slogan invoked.⁶⁹

When Joe arrives at his beach resort, he is again disappointed:

The beach resort is surrounded by a high wall, guards at the entrances, checking ID cards. No natives are allowed on the grounds except the service people who wear Aunt Jemima handkerchiefs and faux-Caribbean costumes and perpetual, desperate smiles of welcome.

The barely clad beauties come with men already attached to their arms.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 9.

⁶⁹ Cary Hector and Alain Gilles note that this is a “promotional theme directed at potential tourists” and that there is “no archivistic proof” that Columbus preferred Hispaniola. See Cary Hector and Alain Gilles. Review Article. “The Dominican Republic, or ‘The Land Columbus Loved Best,’” 114.

⁷⁰ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 13.

Joe's discomfort and dissatisfaction with his resort hotel experience registers some of the same problems that social scientists have identified with this form of tourism.

Anthropologist Denise Brennan describes the enforced exclusion of locals from all-inclusive resort hotels in Sosúa in the Dominican Republic as introducing "a kind of tourism apartheid" and an environment "segregated by race, class and citizenship,"⁷¹ while sociologist Mimi Sheller has seen "the gated security guarded, even fortified, private enclaves of the all-inclusive resort [as] exemplary of a development strategy that makes Caribbean space more accessible to foreign visitors than to local inhabitants."⁷²

An illustration of Soper's contentions, Joe's enjoyment of the pristine beaches and the welcoming service people is also "tainted by a sense of their side effects": the exclusion of locals from beaches now colonized by resorts for foreign tourists, the idealization of plantation life represented by Aunt Jemima kerchiefs, the commodification and distortion of Caribbean culture. As with his consumption of fancy coffees in small malls and big chain stores at home, Joe's enjoyment of the resort hotel is also "troubled by [his] intuition of the other pleasures that it constrains or destroys,"⁷³ and he begins to long for a more authentic encounter with Dominican landscapes and cultures.

The directness with which the form of Joe's unhappiness points to the harmful social and environmental effects and injustices of both industrial agriculture in the U.S. and the resort hotel industry in the Dominican Republic seems promising in terms of *A Cafecito Story's* potential to imagine how an "alternative hedonism" might correspond to

⁷¹ Denise Brennan. *What's Love Got to Do With It?: Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic*, 78.

⁷² Mimi Sheller, "The New Caribbean Complexity: Mobility Systems, Tourism and Spatial Rescaling," 196-197.

⁷³ Kate Soper, *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, 4.

forms of consumption that support more sustainable and just systems. If *A Cafecito Story* and fair trade advertising are imagining a new kind of desire along the lines of what Soper calls for, we should see a link between the pleasures of sustainable consumption and the positive effects of that consumption. Alvarez does develop a birdsong trope that attempts to connect the pleasure of sustainable coffee to its positive environmental effects, but the other draws that the story imagines for fair trade coffee are both more compelling and seemingly less in line with such political stakes. In fact, some of the strategies that Alvarez uses to imagine consumer desire for fair trade seem to invite critiques very similar to the ones she directs at the resort hotel industry. Although *A Cafecito Story* begins on a note akin to Soper's argument with a critique of mainstream consumerism that links a lack of pleasure to awareness of negative side effects, Alvarez struggles to imagine an alternative form of desire that would align with the progressive and radical social changes fair trade seeks. Even as she imagines desire for fair trade coffee, Alvarez is often still imagining that desire in ways that are harmful for the denial of history, privileging of U.S. knowledge, acceptance of neoliberal ideas about responsibility, and imagination of the Caribbean as an object of consumption.

A Cafecito Story imagines shade-grown coffee (or *cafecito*)—the product but also its story, its taste and its meaning—as capable of releasing U.S. consumers from the stultifying patterns of their consumption. When Joe decides to leave the world of his resort hotel, what he finds is *cafecito*. The coffee is immediately set apart from the fancy coffees in Omaha: “No long menu of options to choose from. Coffee comes in one denomination: a dollhouse-sized cup filled with a delicious, dark brew that leaves stains

on the cup. Joe closes his eyes and concentrates on the rich taste of the beans.”⁷⁴ When Joe has finished his coffee the barra owner’s wife reads his fortune in the coffee stains. “I see mountains, she says, pointing. I see a new life. I see many, many birds.” This fortune answers Joe’s needs exactly, from his desire to make a change to his yearning for the happy farm life of his childhood and the company of birds. In fact, it is this first cup of “cafecito” that precipitates his life-changing trip to Miguel’s farm. (Miguel is the cousin of the barra owner.)

This role for cafecito is most explicit in Joe’s interaction with the woman who will become the narrator and fictional author of *A Cafecito Story*. When Joe meets her in a Nebraska café, the narrator is unfulfilled by her work as a waitress and reveals that she once wanted to be a writer: “This was just meant to be temporary. She looks around the shop as if she has been held against her will by the cash register, the glass jar of jerky, the microwave, the stacks of napkins, the tray of salt and pepper shakers, the plastic containers of mustard and ketchup.”⁷⁵ Far from bringing her happiness, the markers of consumption in this context constrain both her happiness and her free will. The flavor of the *cafecito* that Joe offers her and the story of how it is made move her to the point that she suggests he “write that story down” and “make it like a book or something,” but she is still unable to imagine herself freed of her stifling relationship to mainstream consumption. When Joe suggests that she write the story she declines:

I can’t, the woman says, wiping the counter extra hard, erasing some mark only she can see there. I need to earn a living, you know.
You need another cup, Joe says, pouring. Close your eyes for this one.
The woman closes her eyes.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

Cafecito here releases the waitress from the thrall of the old bad coffee and from “the supplier,” inspiring her to say that Joe should write the story down; and yet, she remains tied to the world of her consumption habits and unable to follow her dreams by writing “the kind of book I always dreamed of writing”⁷⁷ because she needs “to earn a living.”⁷⁸ Joe’s response explicitly positions *cafecito* as the cure (“You need another cup”), and it seems to work: “When she is finished drinking, she opens her eyes. I heard something, she confesses.”⁷⁹ In the final pages of the story the narration shifts to the first person, and the narrator reveals, “I was the woman behind the counter who wanted to be a writer [...] And I am writing!”, thus affirming again the power of shade-grown *cafecito* to bring happiness to those who drink it, preferably with eyes closed. This imagined transformation extends out from Joe and the narrator to Alvarez’s reader when the narrator urges, “Read this book while sipping a cup of great coffee grown under birdsong. / Then, close your eyes and listen for your own song. / As for this story, pass it on.”

The narrator here invites the reader to join Joe, herself and other fair trade participants in enjoying the alternative pleasure of fairly traded shade-grown coffee. This pleasure is not purely gustatory but instead encompasses an opportunity to achieve self-actualization by disconnecting from mass consumption. In her account of the pleasure of alternative hedonism, Soper emphasizes the pleasures that “would follow from a slower, less work-dominated pace of life.” Joe and the narrator both find this less pace of life in the Dominican Republic, where Joe finds a replacement for the family land he lost in Nebraska and where the narrator’s need to “earn a living” disappears as she finds herself

⁷⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 45.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 46.

able to pursue her dream of writing. What does it mean to imagine that fair trade coffee consumption (which, as I will discuss in Chapter Six, is form of consumption only available to elite consumers) delivers this kind of freedom from mass consumerism? What are the implications of imagining the Dominican Republic as the space for this alternative and hedonistic retreat from a pace of life dominated by work?

Consuming the Caribbean: The Exotic in *A Cafecito Story* and Fair Trade Advertising

Above, I show how Joe's first cup of coffee represents his decision to turn away from the tainted pleasures and troubled experiences of mainstream consumption as his resort hotel experience embodies them. Here, I want to interrogate the alternative pleasure that Joe finds in *cafecito*. One of the persistent themes in *A Cafecito Story* concerns the relationship between agricultural practices and birds. Early in the story the disappearance of seagulls from Joe's native Nebraska signifies the environmental cost of industrial agriculture and illustrates the human impact of that loss. In the Dominican Republic, Miguel tells Joe that his coffee tastes so good because of the birds.

Joe learns about Miguel's farm, planted with coffee the old way, under shade trees that offer natural protection to the plants, filtering the sun and the rain, feeding the soil and preventing erosion. Not to mention attracting birds that come to sing over the cherries.

That makes for a better coffee, Miguel explains. When a bird sings to the cherries as they are ripening, it is like a mother singing to her child in the womb. The baby is born with a happy soul.

The shaded coffee will put that song inside you, Miguel continues. The sprayed coffee tastes just as good if you are tasting only with your mouth. But it fills you with the poison swimming around in that dark cup of disappointment.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Ibid., 21.

This passage begins by setting up what looks like a familiar argument about the superior quality of sustainably grown food, connecting sustainable practices to better growing conditions and ultimately a better-tasting product. In the second paragraph, this argument shifts, and Miguel asserts that the superior quality of shade-grown coffee is not a physical quality resulting from different growing conditions but rather a product of the coffee's "happy soul." Miguel attributes Joe's appreciation of *cafecito* to his being a farmer's son who tastes with his "whole body and soul," suggesting (as does David Mas Masumoto in *Epitaph for a Peach*, the subject of Chapter Two) that the ability to taste the difference between a conventionally grown cup of coffee and *cafecito* is not automatic, especially for consumers disconnected from farming. The capacity of the waitress/narrator to taste *cafecito* and hear its song suggests, however, that this ability can be developed through storytelling and imagination.

The image of a song that shade-grown coffee will "put . . . inside you" comes up at key moments in the story and seems to differentiate this *cafecito* from full-sun coffee. In his visit to the roadside barra that starts his adventure, Joe hears a "faint whistle" when he closes his eyes to concentrate on the taste of his coffee. The narrator has a similar experience when she closes her eyes to taste the coffee—"I heard something, she confesses."⁸¹ This whistling represents the song that *cafecito* will "put . . . inside you" and also recalls the song of the migratory birds that thrive in shaded coffee farms. In this image, an ecological benefit of fair trade coffee also takes on a metaphorical meaning that the consumer is able to ingest and benefit from.

But environmental sustainability is not the only meaning that attaches to birdsong in the story, and the pleasure that the story associates with birdsong is more complicated

⁸¹ Ibid., 46.

than an experience of sustainable agriculture. In his chapter about *A Cafecito Story* in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*, Trenton Hickman points out that Joe first hears the “faint whistle” Alvarez will associate with birdsong during his plane ride to the Dominican Republic, where it is associated not with birds but with his vision of the beaches and barely-clad beauties he hopes to find in the Caribbean. For Hickman, this whistling sound marks an exoticizing form of desire that Joe simply redirects from Dominican women onto a feminized Dominican coffee landscape: “Suddenly, Joe, the white divorcé who came to the Dominican Republic seeking an exotic, dark-skinned woman’s love, finds himself seduced not by a half-naked, dark-skinned Dominican ‘beauty’ but by a similarly exoticized cup of coffee.”⁸² For Hickman, this feminized exoticization of both Dominican coffee and Dominican nature works to authorize Joe’s project in the Dominican Republic, where he becomes “husband to the land” and head of (Miguel’s) “campesino familia.”⁸³

This erotic exoticization of products is a recurring theme in fair trade advertising and often accompanies problematic representations of fair trade products and their producers. Along with coffee, chocolate has been a particularly prominent product in the fair trade movement with the result that fair trade advertising moves between representations of Latin American and African rural communities. This dynamic emerges most starkly in a series of advertisements that the fair trade chocolate brand Divine Chocolate ran in *The Guardian* in the UK as a part of Make Poverty History week leading up to the 2005 G8 Conference in Gleneagles, Scotland.⁸⁴ The sexually suggestive ads depict female cocoa growers from the Kuapa Kokoo cooperative in Ghana, which

⁸² Trenton Hickman, “Coffee and Colonialism in Julia Alvarez’s *A Cafecito Story*, 76.

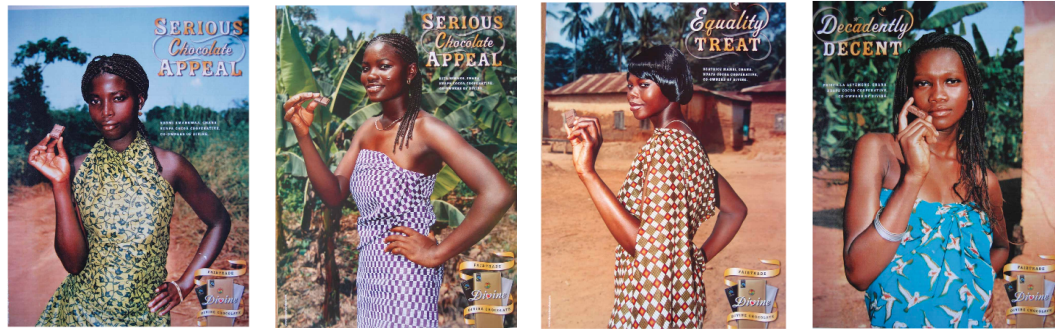
⁸³ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 38.

⁸⁴ Bob Doherty, George Foster, John Meehan, Chris Mason, *Management for Social Enterprise*, 150.

grows cocoa for Divine. In each, a young and attractive female member of Kuapa Kokoo is pictured in a colorful print wrap dress holding a small section of chocolate with a cocoa farm in the background.

In her article about another series of ads featuring these images, African studies scholar Kristy Leissle praises Divine for an ad campaign that she argues depicts farmers as “cosmopolitan consumers of luxury goods and owners of the chocolate company,” an image that for her poses a challenge to “narratives that cast Africa as continually on the losing side of harmful binaries—primitive/civilized, traditional/modern—and in an eternal development lag.”⁸⁵ I disagree with Leissle that the ads portray the women as “cosmopolitan consumers of luxury goods”—the settings of the photo shoot work against this reading—and I am not convinced that it would be a good thing if they did. Although fair trade offers concrete benefits to participants and Divine’s ownership structure makes it a particularly progressive fair trade brand, imagining African fair trade cocoa farmers as cosmopolitan consumers of luxury goods overstates the extent to which simply buying fair trade can address the still vastly unequal economic relationship between African producers and first world consumers of fair trade chocolate.

⁸⁵ Kristy Leissle, “Cosmopolitan cocoa farmers: refashioning Africa in Divine Chocolate advertisements,” 121.



Figures 3.3 Divine Chocolate advertisement featuring Naomi Amankwaa. Photograph by Freddie Helwig and St. Luke's advertising agency. **Figure 3.4** Divine Chocolate advertisement featuring Rita Nimako. Photograph by Freddie Helwig and St. Luke's advertising agency. **Figure 3.5** Divine Chocolate advertisement featuring Beatrice Mambi. Photograph by Freddie Helwig and St. Luke's advertising agency. **Figure 3.6** Divine Chocolate advertisement featuring Priscilla Agyemeng. Photograph by Freddie Helwig and St. Luke's advertising agency.

For Leissle the women in the ads are themselves consuming chocolate: “Pairing images of the women holding chocolate with titles such as ‘Equality Treat’ and ‘Decadently Decent’ suggests to viewers that their own enjoyment of Divine bars should come not only from the pleasure of eating chocolate, but from the fact that *these* women also enjoy it.”⁸⁶ Although as fair trade producers these women do enjoy material benefits that conventional coffee growers do not, it is unlikely that they actually enjoy Divine chocolate with any great frequency outside of the context of commercial shoots like this one. Divine chocolate sources raw cocoa from Ghana, but its chocolate is manufactured in Europe for sale to consumers in Europe and the United States. The fabric that the women are wearing in the photo shoot is African wax-print, which Nina Sylvaus argues

⁸⁶ Leissle, Kristy. “Cosmopolitan cocoa farmers: refashioning Africa in Divine Chocolate advertisements.”

functions as a status symbol in Africa and in which “the African signifier appears as a source of renewal in cosmopolitan self-construction” in international markets.⁸⁷ The cloth’s function as a status symbol in Africa supports Leissle’s argument that the women are portrayed as cosmopolitan consumers, however these images were created for consumption by a European audience and in that context I would argue that the prints function more as a the “renewal in cosmopolitan self-construction” that Sylvaus describes.

My very different reading of these images is informed by the slogans that accompany each ad as they ran in the 2005 Eat Poverty History Campaign for Make Poverty History week.



⁸⁷ Nina Sylvanus, “The fabric of Africinity,” 205.



Figures 3.7-3.11. These ads were run in print in the Guardian UK Newspaper in June 2005 during the lead up to the G8 Conference in Gleneagles, Scotland.⁸⁸

This campaign promoted sexually suggestive slogans, all of which were paired with exoticized photographs of African women: “Just developed an appetite for fighting global poverty?”; “Craving a better world or just another piece?”; “Eat Poverty History”; “Suddenly into Fair Trade now it’s chocolate flavored?”; and “It’s not just the taste that makes you feel good.” In my view, the chocolate in the ads does not suggest that the woman herself enjoys eating chocolate but instead conflates the product (chocolate) with the body of its producer. If referring to the woman herself (as her prominence in each image would seem to suggest) the slogans exoticize her (“chocolate-flavored”; “chocolate that makes everyone feel good”; “Just developed an appetite for fighting global poverty?”), sexualize her (“Craving a better world or just another piece?”; “It’s not just the taste that makes you feel good”; “Chocolate that makes everyone feel good”) and offer her to the fair trade consumer as an object of consumption and sexual conquest.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Bob Doherty, George Foster, John Meehan, Chris Mason, *Management for Social Enterprise*, 150. For the images see Fair Trade Divine Chocolate, Originally published in *The Telegraph* July 2005.

⁸⁹ Fair Trade Divine Chocolate, Originally published in *The Telegraph* July 2005.

The kind of desire that these ads imagine thus draws on a colonial history of imagining African women and women of African descent as hyper-sexualized and objectified. By invoking this sort of image to sell fair trade products, these ads—like *A Cafecito Story*—draw on an imperial vocabulary that ultimately undermines their more progressive message of economic empowerment for producers and environmental sustainability of production practices.

The sleazy tone of the slogans leeches into the more serious message that appears in smaller print in some of the ads, “Divine chocolate is made with the finest cocoa from farmers who co-own the company. And because the cocoa is fair trade, they get a guaranteed income while you get guaranteed pleasure.” “Pleasure” here can refer to the flavor of chocolate “made with the finest cocoa,” a message that would actually be in line with rhetoric that describes fair trade as allowing farmers to invest in improving the quality of their product. But this is not the thrust of these ads. Rather, the chocolate ads invite consumers to imaginatively consume an exoticized African female body while eating Divine fair trade chocolate. The unevenness of the economic relationship between producers and consumers is fundamental to the kind of desire that the ads are invoking, and so they paradoxically rely on and indirectly valorize the very economic inequality that fair trade seeks to reduce.

To return to *A Cafecito Story*, Alvarez’s use of exoticized birds (parrots, which Hickman⁹⁰ tells us are not found in the area, and a thrush, whose song he argues Alvarez romanticizes) means that she misses an opportunity to imagine the shared enjoyment of producers and consumers within a thriving and fundamentally shared ecosystem. In a recent talk at Middlebury College, Eichner revealed that the couple’s work to restore

⁹⁰ Trenton Hickman, “Coffee And Colonialism in Julia Alvarez’s *A Cafecito Story*.”

bird habitat at Alta Gracia attracted the attention of ornithologists in Vermont, as the habitat restoration efforts at Alta Gracia were positively impacting migratory birds. The birds that lend *A Cafecito Story* some of its exotic atmosphere, in other words, also define a part of the familiar wildlife in Vermont, where Alta Gracia coffee is roasted and largely consumed. By exoticizing the Caribbean ecosystem in *A Cafecito Story*, Alvarez actually obscures this interconnectedness and thus fails to imagine more reciprocal forms of pleasure. An emphasis on the fundamental otherness and strangeness of nature and culture in producing countries means that exoticizing representations of fair trade will miss these kinds of opportunities to represent interconnectedness.

Historically, exoticization as a representation strategy has worked to authorize exploitation of exoticized others. As G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter explain, “The invention of the ‘exotic’ . . . legitimized treating the peoples of the ‘third world’ as fit to be despised—destroyed even, or at least doomed, like the Tasmanian aborigines, to extinction—while concurrently also constituting them as projections of Western fantasies.”⁹¹ Kamala Kempadoo notes, “the notion of exoticism captures the simultaneous romanticization and domination of the racial, ethnic, or cultural Other that has occurred through colonial and imperialist projects. As an approach to the non-Western world, it is associated with the legitimation of European conquest, control, and domination.”⁹² Although invoked to encourage consumers to make fair trade purchases, the desire for exoticized otherness that Alvarez constructs in *A Cafecito Story* and that Divine invokes in its Eat Poverty History campaign is neither new nor progressive, in other words. With respect to chocolate in particular, Yolanda Gamboa in “Consuming the Other, Creating

⁹¹ G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter. “Introduction,” 6-7.

⁹² Kamala Kempadoo. *Sexing the Caribbean*, 35.

the Self” interprets such desire historically among the colonial upper classes as a symbolic craving to devour the colonized territory. She writes, “The upper classes in Europe became enamored with [chocolate, which] represented both the mysteries of the New World and the control they had over it.”⁹³

Despite this history, the exoticizing rhetoric in *A Cafecito Story* does not necessarily mean that the text is covertly sympathetic to colonial histories of and ongoing instruments of dominating Dominican Coffee farmers. As Kempadoo reminds us, exoticism also has been deployed in the interest of human rights: “efforts to abolish slavery and to argue for just treatment of Indians and Africans on the basis of their humanity reintroduced an exoticist discourse, with ‘noble savages,’ ‘Ebony Queens,’ and ‘Sable Beauties’ appearing in the accounts of travelers, traders, and antislavery advocates.”⁹⁴ In *A Cafecito Story*, the exotic is evoked in a move that is paradoxically both conservationist and exploitative. *A Cafecito Story* invokes the exotic as a part of its effort to inspire consumption of fair trade products, which the text sees as in turn encouraging both environmental sustainability and social justice. At the same time, the form of the desire that *A Cafecito Story* invokes works at cross-purposes to its progressive goals, exoticizing *cafecito*, Dominican farmers and the space of the Dominican Republic itself and offering them up as objects of consumption for first world readers. Because the kind of exoticizing desire that *A Cafecito Story* imagines tends to deny interconnectedness and shared interests between consumers and exoticized producers, this kind of desire (although it may be invoked to inspire consumption of fair

⁹³ Yolanda Gamboa, "Consuming the Other, Creating the Self: The Cultural Implications of the Aztec's Chocolate from Tirso de Molina to Agustín Moreto and Pedro Lanini y Sagredo."

⁹⁴ Kamala Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labor*. New York: Routledge, 2004: 35.

trade products) seems unlikely to be a part of any really effective turn to alternative hedonism of the kind Kate Soper advocates.

Expropriating the D.R.: The Space of Fair Trade Production as a Place to Escape

The exoticized imagery in *A Cafecito Story* and the Eat Poverty History campaign are clearly problematic as answers to Soper's call for a new erotics of consumption and hedonist imaginary. *A Cafecito Story* is also problematic in the way it imagines the spaces of production. One of the major benefits that *cafecito* offers both Joe and the narrator is a space in which to both escape the stresses of modern life and finally realize their dreams—benefits that the narrator imagines extending out to the reader of *A Cafecito Story* who is urged to enter this space imaginatively by drinking shade-grown coffee, closing her eyes and listening for her own song. Although associating fair trade coffee consumption with escape and self-awareness in this way may appeal to reader-consumers, offering the Dominican Republic as the space for that retreat in this way both oversimplifies the region's colonial and postcolonial histories and imagines it as available for expatriation, entrepreneurship and pleasurable yet also profitable escape by outside consumers.

In the narrative, *cafecito* offers Joe a new life in a place figured (despite the palpable pressures of industrial agriculture) as somehow prior to modernity and “off the grid of civilization”—a place in which (despite the generous hospitality of Miguel's family) Joe can “los[e] his manners.” This picture of the Caribbean is quite different from the one described by historian Sidney Mintz, who has argued that Caribbean people are

the first to enter modernity in world history and has tied that entry specifically to a history of food-related violence. For Mintz, “Caribbean peoples . . . were modernized by enslavement and forced transportation; by ‘seasoning’ and coercion on time-conscious export-oriented enterprises; by the reshuffling, redefinition and reduction of gender-based roles; by racial and status-based oppression; and by the need to reconstitute and maintain cultural forms of their own under implacable pressure.”⁹⁵ Shaded coffee cultivation is closely tied to this violent history. Coffee was first introduced to the Dominican Republic under colonialism, and it was cultivated there by slave labor. Its presence in the Dominican Republic today is a product of the area’s violent entry into modernity. By imagining *cafecito* as offering this kind of escape from the stresses of modernity, Alvarez obscures this history.

In her discussion of European travel and exploration writing in *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt uses the term “anti-conquest” to describe “the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony.”⁹⁶ Although Pratt is working in a different context, several of the representational strategies she describes resonate with *A Cafecito Story* and particularly with the way it clears space in the Dominican Republic for Joe and the narrator. Is the presence of these strategies in *A Cafecito Story* merely an artifact of earlier colonial models for writing about the Caribbean, or might it point to a similar need to secure innocence while also asserting hegemony?

⁹⁵ Sidney Mintz, “Goodbye Columbus: Second Thoughts on the Caribbean Region at Mid-Millennium,” Walter Rodney Memorial Lecture, delivered at the Centre for Caribbean Studies, University of Warwick in May 1993 and subsequently published by them as a pamphlet. Quoted in David Scott, “Modernity that Predated the Modern: Sidney Mintz’s Caribbean,” *History Workshop Journal* 58.1 (Autumn 2004): 191-210.

⁹⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7.

In one of the strategies Pratt associates with anti-conquest narrative, the European “advance scouts for capitalist ‘improvement’ . . . encode what they encounter as ‘unimproved’ and, in keeping with the terms of the anti-conquest, as *disponible*, available for improvement.”⁹⁷ I see a similar representational strategy at work in *A Cafecito Story*. Even as shade-grown coffee is naturalized to the Dominican landscape through the imagery of birds and through descriptions of such coffee as “your old way,”⁹⁸ the commitment to shade coffee farming as an environmentalist project is also presented as Joe’s innovation. That innovation is crucial to authorizing Joe’s presence in the D.R. and for distinguishing that presence from his touristic presence at the Resort Hotel.

During the first day of Joe’s visit to Miguel’s coffee farm, Miguel explains the ascendancy of full-sun coffee in a way that suggests Joe bears some responsibility for the growth of full-sun coffee farming and its negative social and environmental impacts in the D.R. “The new way you can plant more coffee, you don’t have to wait for trees, you can have quicker results, you can have more money in your pocket. / Miguel keeps pointing at Joe when he says, ‘you.’”⁹⁹ As an American and a habitual coffee drinker, Joe here is in a position of guilt that would be a barrier to any plan for an extended stay in the farm. This position changes quickly:

The next morning, Miguel shows Joe the line on the mountain where the shaded coffee ends and the green desert begins. He and his small farmer neighbors are about to cave in and rent their plots and grow coffee for the company using the new techniques.

[...]

⁹⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁹⁸ See Trenton Hickman, “Coffee And Colonialism in Julia Alvarez’s *A Cafecito Story*,” 71.

⁹⁹ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 21.

But an idea is percolating in [Joe's] head. What Miguel needs to do is write his story down, spread the word, so coffee drinkers everywhere will learn of his plight.

I cannot do that, Miguel says quietly. I do not know my letters.

Later that morning, Joe tests Miguel's kids. Standing in the vivero where the new plants are growing, he asks them to scratch their names in the soil with a stick. They shake their heads shyly. The little one, Miguelina, takes the stick and draws a circle in the ground, then looks up smiling, as if her name is zero.

By evening, Joe has decided to spend his whole vacation up in the mountains.
(23)

Here, Joe's self-perceived innocence and usefulness are both defined by his willingness and ability (and the farmers' unwillingness or inability) to oppose the spread of environmentally harmful full-sun coffee farming techniques.

This perception of the threats sustainable farming and of Dominican farmers' inability or unwillingness to adequately resist industrialization allow Joe to move from the "you" responsible for industrialization to an agent of change who will spend his entire vacation in the mountains. We see the same scene rehearsed again, with higher stakes and a more explicit articulation of Joe's ability to help, to set up Joe's decision to purchase land in the Dominican Republic:

You can't sell your land! Joe tells Miguel that evening. You need to keep planting coffee your old way. You need to save this bit of earth for your children and for all of us. You've got to convince your neighbors before it's too late.

Easy enough for you to say, Miguel says. You don't have to live this struggle.

That night, Joe decides.

[...]

Joe buys a parcela next to Miguel's. They make a pact. They will not rent their plots to the compañía and cut down their trees. They will keep to the old ways. They will provide a better coffee.

And, Joe adds, you will learn your letters. I myself will teach you.

Every day, under Miguel's gentle direction, Joe learns how to grow coffee. They make terraces and plant trees.

Every night, under the light of an oil lamp, Miguel and his family learn their ABCs. They write letters and read words.¹⁰⁰

It's not clear in the passage from whom Joe buys his land, but any problems are apparently resolved by Joe's new position as a community leader and a protector of Dominican smallholder shade coffee farming. Joe's investment in sustainability works to secure his innocence at the same moment that it asserts his control. This dance between naturalizing shade coffee as Miguel's "old way" (one apparently untroubled by any connection to coffee's violent colonial history in the Dominican Republic) and justifying Joe's intervention requires that Alvarez's narrative imagine Dominican farmers' own commitment to sustainability (as in shade coffee production) as on the verge of breakdown. Joe's innocence is secured, his presence in the Dominican Republic justified, and the fulfillment of his dream of becoming a farmer made possible by his role in fostering a model of sustainable agriculture constructed as in danger before his arrival.

In the passages above, the illiteracy of Miguel's children, like the peril to shaded coffee cultivation, seems tailored to meet the interests and talents of an English teacher for whom, "Putting books in his students' hands was not all that different from sowing seeds in a field."¹⁰¹ In her discussion of the representation strategies of anti-conquest, Pratt tells us that, "It is not only habitats that must be produced as empty and unimproved, but inhabitants as well."¹⁰² In *A Cafecito Story*, Joe cultivates Miguel and his family just as he cultivates his coffee. The narrator describes the family's growing literacy under Joe's tutelage:

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰² Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 61.

By the time Miguel and Carmen and their children have learned to write their names, the little seeds have sprouted. When the trees are a foot high, the family has struggled through a sentence. All of them can read a page by the time the trees reach up to Miguel's knees. When the coffee is as tall as little Miguelina, they have progressed to chapters. In three years, by the time of the first coffee harvest from trees Joe has planted, Miguel and Carmen and their children can read a whole book.¹⁰³

In this passage, Miguel and his family have become a product of Joe's work. Joe's presence in the D.R. is justified largely by his intervention in the literacy of Miguel and his children, with the value of this work expressed most emphatically in the narrator's claim that, by the time the story is written, "Miguelina no longer thinks her name is zero."

The woodcuts illustrations by Belkis Ramirez partly push back against such justifications of Joe's presence in the Dominican Republic by questioning some of the assumptions that lead Joe and the narrator to imagine that Joe is welcome and needed on Miguel's farm. Joe's decision to stay in the Dominican Republic is precipitated in part by his discovery that Miguelina believes "her name is zero." Both interaction in which Joe "discovers" that Miguelina believes her name is zero and the way he interprets that interaction are problematic. Joe brings a suitcase full of books with him to the Dominican Republic. If we can take this strong attachment to the written word to indicate that he has probably also carried along a pen or a pencil, then the decision to "test" the children by having them scratch their names in the ground with a stick is already heavily loaded in terms of what Joe expects to find. Joe's expectations shape more than his administration of this test; they color his interpretation of the result as well. To assume that a child who has not learned to form the letters of her own name is well schooled enough in scripting numbers to understand the meaning of zero, self-identify with it, and then write that down

¹⁰³ Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 35.

is a failure of common sense. Miguelina's circle could be read as a symbol for infinity, for recycling, for completeness; as a drawing of the sun, moon, or earth, or a coffee bean, or a view of her head from above. In one of the woodcuts that illustrate this vignette, Belkis Ramírez depicts a child playing a game on the ground with what appear to be marbles. Miguelina may be inviting Joe to play *her* game, the woodcut suggests.

Interpreting this drawing as the image of a game in which the child has agency helps to explain another woodcut illustration that immediately follows the testing scene. Ramírez depicts Miguelina looking angrily up with fists balled at Joe, who is seated in the only chair and over a large circle on the ground. One of Miguelina's brothers holds a calming hand on the girl's shoulder as the others look on. Whatever Miguelina's meaning, it is lost on Joe. He reads in Miguelina's drawing exactly what he expects, and uses what he finds to carve out a place for himself in the space of the Dominican Republic.

The illiteracy of Carmen and Miguel's family and their resulting inability to share their story in writing with consumers are circumstances justifying Joe and the narrator's move to the Dominican Republic and the project of *A Cafecito Story* itself. If the woodcuts by Belkis Ramirez undermine the coherence of this narrative, they also offer a space from which to look critically at Joe's presence on Miguel's farm. The narrator herself is critical of Joe's expectation early in the novel that the Dominican Republic will provide just what he needs and of the resort hotel's distortion of the Dominican culture and landscape for the purpose of fulfilling such tourist desires. Miguel's farm is introduced as the anti-resort, accordingly, but Joe's experience of Miguel's farm conforms very closely to his original desires for traveling to D.R. and seems to deliver everything he was looking for in the resort hotel. On Miguel's farm, Joe enjoys an escape

from the pressures of his work-focused life, the fulfillment of his childhood dream of owning and farming his own land, and an opportunity to exercise his masculinity by becoming “husband to the land” and patriarch to a “campesino familia.”¹⁰⁴ The narrator too escapes her “need to earn a living” and fulfills her dream of becoming a writer.¹⁰⁵ The fulfillment of these desires in the space of the coffee farm is distinguished from the resort hotel by the idea that the Dominican farmers need Joe and the narrator. Joe “decided to spend his whole vacation up in the mountains” ostensibly in response to Miguelina’s illiteracy. The narrator’s own move to the Dominican Republic meanwhile is justified by her role as storyteller on the farmers’ behalf. As Joe determines early on, “What Miguel needs to do is write his story down, spread the word, so coffee drinkers everywhere will learn of his plight.”¹⁰⁶ The narrator, who as the story’s fictional author has obvious parallels to Alvarez, justifies her own appropriation of the space of a Dominican coffee farm by authoring this story on Miguel’s behalf.

This appropriation of space in the Dominican Republic for First World expatriation and storytelling under the banner of sustainability and fair trade consumption is not just a theoretical concern. During the Spring, Summer and Fall of 2002 (just a year after *A Cafecito Story* was published), Alvarez and Eichner’s Finca Alta Gracia (the farm that inspired the story) was offered for sale to an implicitly U.S. audience¹⁰⁷ via the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁷ The listing appeared only in English, and the contact information for interested buyers excluded country and country code. The description of the property also situated it for a potential buyer who is more familiar with U.S. and European than Caribbean landscapes, describing Jarabacoa as “a small city in the ‘Dominican Alps’, popular for ecotourism” and Pico Duarte as “the highest peak east of the Mississippi River.” See “Finca Alta Gracia: our sustainable coffee farm in the Dominican Republic,” *Café Alta Gracia*, as it appeared June 3, 2002.

farm's website atagracia.com¹⁰⁸. Although the listing does refer to the farm's fair trade project, it describes the property first as "260 acres of tropical mountain paradise."¹⁰⁹

This listing, which is open to the same critiques Mimi Sheller and Alvarez herself have made of the hotel industry, suggests that there is a danger in invoking colonial forms of desire to imagine ostensibly decolonial models of production and consumption.

By Feb 13, 2002 the entire farm was no longer for sale, but interested parties could still purchase a two-acre piece of paradise as a part of the farm's new coffee partnership program, a description of which replaced the listing at www.cafealtagracia.com/sale. The description of some aspects of the program is vague, but the general idea was that the (implicitly U.S.) "buyer" would pay \$50,000 in order to receive 2 acres for personal use and an additional acre intended for an (implicitly Dominican) "coffee partner." The coffee partner would agree to work for wages on the buyer's land for five years, and would work for himself on his own portion. He would pay \$500 to the Alta Gracia Foundation over the course of the five years, and at the end his obligation to the buyer would be terminated and he would own his one-acre parcel. This partnership deal was offered on the Alta Gracia website until at least February 6, 2005.

Although the details are missing regarding what kind of wage the coffee partner would be paid, what assistance he would have (if any) in marketing his coffee, and what his liabilities would be if he decided to back out of the partnership before five years had passed or the parcel had been fully paid for, the program is presented as a way for a "family of the campo" to gain access to landownership: "The coffee partner and his/her

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

family will enjoy an otherwise unknown chance to own land and have the means and guidance to develop it in a useful, healthy and sustainable manner.” As in *A Cafecito Story*, though, the thickest description is reserved for the way these coffee partnerships provide for the happiness and security of the consumer:

The buyer will enjoy a beautifully sited mountainside retreat, suitable for a year-round vacation home, along with a ready made opportunity to practice sustainable living at its finest. The model is there, the building blocks are set up for you. You can learn fruit and coffee farming but bypass the mistakes that we’ve weathered by ‘going it alone.’ You can further the larger cause of sustainability (social, environmental, political, economic) by enabling one family of the campo to enter the world of specialty coffee while standing on their own feet.”¹¹⁰

Like Miguel’s farm for Joe, the land being offered through this coffee partnership deal seems perfectly designed to meet an implicitly U.S. reader’s desire for an escape while also justifying the appropriation of Dominican land with the promise that doing so will help to preserve that land for sustainable use and will also provide for a “family of the campo.” Whereas in *A Cafecito Story* as a literary text the tension between Joe’s perspective and those of the narrator and of artist Belkis Ramirez work to complicate the narrative and challenge its apparent reliance on colonialist tropes and forms of desire, in the description of this coffee partnership deal Alvarez serves up these same tropes without the benefit of those competing perspectives to offer critical distance.

Conclusion

¹¹⁰ “Finca Alta Gracia: our sustainable coffee farm in the Dominican Republic.” *Café Alta Gracia*. As it appeared Feb. 13, 2003.

I see several challenges for Soper's vision of / call for alternative hedonism emerging out of this analysis of *A Cafecito Story* and fair trade rhetoric. The first is that the forms of desire that drive consumers to modes of consumption imagined as sustainable and just will not necessarily be new or especially consistent with the underlying political goals of ethical consumption. Imagine, for instance, the consumer of Divine chocolate whose preference for fair trade chocolate responds to Divine's exoticization and sexualization of its female producers. This consumer supports fair trade through his purchases, but the pleasure he takes in consumption confirms rather than challenges underlying ideas that drive economic exploitation. This does not mean that new forms of desire cannot or will not emerge for such a consumer, but it does suggest that the determination of whether a particular form of desire embodies what Soper defines as alternative hedonism needs to be more complex than making sustainable consumption attractive and desirable to consumers.

Another issue that emerges is that desires for products that promise agricultural sustainability can unwittingly work against this environmental framework. This is the point that Jo Littler makes in her *Radical Consumption* when she suggests that while an activity like shopping at Whole Foods in an affluent neighborhood may embody "progressive environmental ecologies," that same shopping can also act as a marker of class distinction to "facilitate snobbery" and in this sense embody "unequal social and mental ecologies."¹¹¹ Soper positions alternative hedonism against "altruistic compassion" and with "self-regarding gratification" to imagine precisely how privileged consumers might be motivated to consume differently. One alternative to this alternative hedonism that my analysis here has suggested is a shift in the way we conceptualize the

¹¹¹ See Jo Littler, *Radical Consumption*, 38.

self that consumes and that receives pleasures. What if fair trade invited the self-regarding pleasures of consumption but expanded that notion of self to include producers, families, neighborhoods, or future generations?

In a recent presentation to Middlebury College's Center for Social Entrepreneurship, Alvarez makes some comments about her work as a writer and her attempt to intervene in the decline of shade coffee that are illuminating with regards to how she now sees *A Cafecito Story*. Early in the talk, Alvarez recalls an encounter she had with a group of Dominican coffee farmers while researching coffee farming for a Nature Conservancy-sponsored article about the effects of full-sun coffee varieties introduced in the region by USAID. "I was writing my story about [the coffee farmers] and they asked as we became very involved in listening to the story if we could help them, and I said sure you know I'm going to write a terrific article that will bring people to your cause, and they said, 'No, can you help us?'" The farmers' lack of faith in the political and moral efficacy of narrative to effect real change contrasts with *A Cafecito Story's* insistence on the power of stories to "[change] the world." The way that Alvarez and her husband ultimately decide to have such an impact is through their project at Alta Gracia. But the theme of their talks at Middlebury College is "lessons learned," and they focus largely on the false starts and failures that Alvarez and Eichner encountered with the Alta Gracia project. Toward the end of the talk Alvarez reflects:

The thing that's a quandary for me is . . . You feel like an immediate need and you feel drawn to it but you realize as you're up over your head that it's not your time, that it's not your calling, and this is the quandary for me now. We've talked about it, you know, I consider myself a storyteller – a writer – and my question now is what is the role of stories in the circle of transformative change that has to happen if we're going to survive as a human family. I mean the farmer said, "No, will you help us?" and maybe that's where I took a wrong turn. It wasn't my skill

to help run a coffee farm or even a project from afar and I think my question is how to use what is the craft I've developed to work in that community and to use it.¹¹²

Although *A Cafecito Story* remains an important text within the fair trade movement, the fact that she does not mention it here suggests to me that Alvarez may not see *A Cafecito Story* any more than *Alta Gracia* as offering a satisfactory answer to the question of how to intervene. Instead, “how to use . . . the craft I've developed to work in that community” remains an open question for Alvarez. Although she maintains the position implicit in her authorship of *A Cafecito Story* that storytelling does have a role to play, she does not seem nearly as confident here as her narrator does in *A Cafecito Story* that she has hit on the right way to intervene.

¹¹² Alvarez, Julia and Bill Eichner. “‘Lessons Learned’ From Café Alta Gracia.”

Chapter Four

“Kind of canaries”:

Risk Positions and Thought Leadership in the UFW “Wrath of Grapes” Boycott

Literary representations of ethical consumption tend to assign considerable agency to consumers, investing consumers’ purchases with the power to maintain and restore both ecosystems and human communities. Bill Eichner privileges consumer agency in this way his in his afterword to *A Cafecito Story*: “whenever you drink coffee, remember this *cafecito* story. The future does depend on each cup, on each small choice we make.” Even David Mas Masumoto, who endeavors to intervene in consumption habits by intervening in taste to incorporate more awareness of production, periodically signals that as a producer he is ultimately passive vis-à-vis market forces; he laments for instance that, “No matter what you believe in, you can’t farm for very long and be rewarded only with good-tasting peaches.”¹ In this context, consumer knowledge about the social and environmental costs of consumer products becomes increasingly important—to the point that in *Ecological Intelligence*, bestselling author Daniel Goleman describes “radical transparency” (consumers’ increased access to information about production) as the “information fix” that “has been a missing piece in the free market system all along.”² For Goleman, detailed knowledge about labor conditions and environmental impacts of production in the hands of consumers is so powerful that it “holds the promise of ending

¹ David Mas Masumoto, “Epitaph for a Peach, and for the Sweetness of Sumer.”

² Daniel Goleman, *Ecological Intelligence*, 246.

the eternal tension between profit and public welfare.”³ Like Goleman, much of ethical consumption discourse assumes that this fundamental contradiction of capitalism can be resolved through consumer education and consumer empowerment alone.

Its emphasis on consumer agency allows ethical consumption discourse to imagine a strong causal relationship between individual acts of consumption and the construction of a more ecologically sustainable and socially just world. Ethical consumption discourse frequently features claims about consumer agency that follow the pattern, *When you buy [type of ethical product], you [description of social or environmental goals that the consumer achieves by buying that product]*.⁴ Kelsie Axelrod of FairTradeUSA, for instance, tells readers of the group’s blog, “When you purchase a Fair Trade certified product, you are investing in the growth of local economies, protecting the environment and ensuring the workers responsible received fair compensation for their hard work.”⁵ Although this may be a fair assessment of the potential benefits of fair trade, describing it in this way minimizes the substantial role that fair trade certifiers and producers themselves (and not just consumers) play in achieving

³ Ibid., 245.

⁴ Kendall Cook of Napa Valley Naturals (which sells certified organic vinegars and cooking oils) also emphasizes consumer agency in his account of what it means to buy organic.

When you buy Organic Foods, you help keep the Earth's air and water free from pesticides and chemical fertilizers. You help preserve a piece of the Earth's past for future generations. You help support small entrepreneurial farmers who are committed to building the living soils of their farmland and the living souls of their employees. You help lay the groundwork for agricultural diversity that has always been the backbone of cultural individuality. You help make the commitment to renewal that sustains the Earth's ability to nurture life.

For the consumer of Napa Valley Naturals’ certified organic vinegars and cooking oils, their contribution to reducing pesticide and fertilizer pollution, to “preserv[ing] a piece of the Earth’s past” or to “treat[ing] the Earth well” is mediated by both Napa Valley Naturals’ decisions about how to pursue those goals and by the decisions that have shaped organic certification in the United States. In Cook’s account of what it means to buy organic, the substantial agency implied in those decisions is only faintly registered in the word “help.” (See Kendal Cook, “Why Buy Organic Products?”)

⁵ Axelrod, Kelsie, “It’s Fairly Simple: Buy Fair. Be Fair.”

these goals. Dr. Edward F. Group III of the Global Healing Center describes the benefits of buying fair trade: “When you buy fair trade, organic coffee you also support environmental sustainability through organic practices that reduce and/or eliminate the use of harmful toxic agrochemicals, pesticides and other chemical additives.”⁶ This formulation seems to suggest that consumers themselves are using “organic practices,” which effectively communicates the importance of consumer decisions but also minimizes the role of certifiers and producers in shaping fair trade networks, defining what a value-based framework (organic⁷, natural, heirloom, bird-friendly, etc.) means in a particular context, and translating those principals into practice. This pattern of overstating consumer contributions and minimizing the work of producers is not unique to fair trade. A sign at Auntie’s bookstore in River Park Square in Spokane congratulates shoppers with, “Here’s what you just did [by buying locally]!”, and offers a list of achievements that include, “You kept dollars in our economy . . . You created local jobs . . . You helped the environment . . . You nurtured community . . . You created more choice . . . You invested in entrepreneurship . . . You made us a destination.”⁸ If we drill down further into any of these consumer achievements it quickly becomes apparent that they are substantially mediated by the actions and choices not of consumers, but of the local businesses they patronize. If “you created jobs,” it is because, as the sign elaborates, “local businesses are better at creating high-paying jobs for our neighborhood.” Local businesses even mediate the community-nurturing effect of shopping local, as the sign explains, “Studies have shown that local businesses donate to community causes at more than twice the rate of chains.” The Gainesville Chamber of Commerce similarly invests

⁶ Group, Edward. “7 Reasons You Should Buy Fair Trade Coffee.”

⁷ This work is typically done by state actors such as the USDA.

⁸ “Errandonee with a Twist: Biking & Walking Got It Done,” *Bike Style Spokane*.

the consumer with power with its slogan “Buy Local Save Jobs.”⁹ A widely shared quotation attributed to Mother Earth News urges, “Every time you *buy* organic, you’re persuading more farmers to *grow* organic.”¹⁰ Or as Maryn McKenna puts it for National Geographic, “Buy the Change You Want to See in the World.”¹¹ Each such slogan imagines the consumer as driving change while the producer passively responds to market forces. What are the implications of this rhetorical emphasis on consumer agency in ethical consumption discourse when we consider that consumers of premium products like fair trade and organic and local foods are predominantly white, middle to upper class, and living in the first world?

The emphasis on consumer agency and consumer knowledge in ethical consumption discourse encourages consumers to make more sustainable choices by convincing them that their choices do matter. In this sense, it works against a thread of helplessness that runs through many discussions of consumers’ relationship to the environment.¹² In the literature of ethical consumption, an emphasis on consumer agency also presents a clear vision of what it means to read and engage with ethical consumption literature. As these books make clear through direct calls to action, instructional content and explicit discussions of their authors’ hopes for impact, to be a successful reader of these books means not just taking in and understanding but also acting on the information that they provide by adopting the practices they model. By imagining the informed and

⁹ “Buy Local.” *Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce*.

¹⁰ Peter Parkour, “Buy the Food Changes You Want to See in the World.”

¹¹ **Maryn McKenna, “Resolutions for 2015: Buy the Change You Want to See in the World.”**

¹² Colin Beaven describes his experience of this kind of helplessness in *No Impact Man*: “Lack of well-sourced information mixed with a surfeit of corporate PR resulted only in confusion. I’d hear of one study saying that the energy used in washing ceramic cups damages the environment as much as the use of disposable plastic cups that won’t biodegrade for a thousand years . . . The spin merchants seemed to want to convince me that trying to make any difference was futile.” (Colin Beaven, *No Impact Man*, Kindle Edition.)

tasteful consumer as leading the charge toward more sustainable and socially just production practices, the literature of ethical consumption claims a role for itself similar to the one Goleman assigns to technologies that facilitate radical transparency in his *Ecological Intelligence*. This literature sees itself as shaping the consumer habits that will shape future social and ecological outcomes.¹³

Although an emphasis on consumer actions and on the knowledge that informs those actions allows ethical consumption discourse to make a strong persuasive argument for ethical consumption that includes clear calls to action, my reading of fair trade and buy local rhetoric in the prior chapters suggests that there are also drawbacks to that emphasis. Ethical consumption is ultimately a form of premium consumption; as such, the consumers who ethical consumption empowers are predominately middle to upper class, white, and living in the first world. The environmental justice movement teaches us that environmental risks disproportionately affect the poor, racial minorities, and those living in the developing world. In other words, ethical consumption seeks to address environmental crisis by empowering the population least affected by it. What kinds of agency does ethical consumption discourse undervalue and what kinds of knowledge does it exclude in focusing on the agency and knowledge of the consumer? What political commitments do advocates of ethical consumption compromise when (like Goleman) they presume that the consumer occupies the only or the most knowledgeable and empowered position from which to direct production in more socially just and ecologically sustainable directions? What insights about production do we elide when we

¹³ Alvarez's narrator in *A Cafecito Story* is imagining this kind of role for literature when she declares that, "The world can only be saved by one man or woman putting . . . a story in someone's head or a book in someone's hands." (Julia Alvarez, *A Cafecito Story*, 37). The author of *No Impact Man* makes a similar claim when he describes his memoir as an attempt to "lead by example." (Colin Beavan, *No Impact Man*, Kindle Edition.)

imagine that consumers' access to information (Goleman) or to taste as a form of embodied knowledge (Masumoto, Wendell Berry, Kate Soper) is enough?

In this chapter, I address a set of texts that the United Farm Workers (UFW) published as a part of the 1984-2000 "Wrath of Grapes" boycott campaign that emphasize producer rather than consumer knowledge and responsibility in order to investigate how we might imagine an ethical consumption discourse that values producer knowledge and empowers producers, racial minorities and low income laborers as much as it does the already privileged ethical consumer. The membership of the UFW during this boycott was predominantly Hispanic and lower income and included many migrant workers. Organizing in the wake of health scares like the McFarland Cancer Cluster and chronic occupational exposure to pesticide residues, and working also in the context of a developing environmental justice movement and Chicano environmental movement starting in the early 1960s, the UFW self-consciously understood its members to be victims of environmental racism. The union's print culture during the Wrath of Grapes campaign reflects this analysis, and its consumer-directed publication *Food and Justice* sought to interpret and make it relevant for the wealthier white audiences whose support the UFW sought in the boycott. My chapter considers both the UFW's environmental justice critique of agricultural labor practices and the strategies it used to imagine that critique as a source of authority in its address to the wealthier white audiences who it sought to enlist as boycott supporters. As I will argue, the UFW bridged this environmental justice critique with its need to speak to the concerns of a wealthier white audience by drawing on ideas about knowledge and risk to present disenfranchised Chicano farm laborers as thought leaders on issues of pesticide risk. In contradistinction

to most ethical consumption discourse, which views ethical consumption as a means of empowering consumers to act on production through market forces, the UFW called on consumers to support boycott efforts and labor reforms that would empower farm laborers directly. Their conception of how this empowerment of farmworkers would also benefit consumers was based in their particular marriage of environmental justice with risk theory.

In emphasizing the consumer's ability to impact production, most ethical consumption discourse casts producers in the more passive role of responding as rational economic actors to a demand for change led by consumers. This chapter upsets that alignment by showing how the UFW used concepts of risk and contamination to position agricultural workers as thought leaders on issues of pesticide safety in their 1980s-2000 "Wrath of Grapes" boycott. Through the "Wrath of Grapes" campaign, the UFW developed an argument that farmworkers, because of their relatively high exposure to risk from pesticide use, are also more knowledgeable about those risks and motivated to mitigate them. This figuration—worker rights as a guarantor of consumer safety—reverses the relationship we see in most ethical consumption discourse, which (when it concerns itself with labor at all) tends to see consumer access to information as the guarantor of worker rights and safety as well as the environment. For the UFW, strong labor rights allow workers to act on knowledge acquired through their unique experience of risk in ways that can ultimately protect consumers, the environment and workers themselves. This idea continues to inform UFW food safety programs today.

I approach the "Wrath of Grapes" boycott through some of its most influential texts: the UFW magazine *Food and Justice*, Cesar Chavez's "Wrath of Grapes" speech,

and a documentary film by the same name. In each of these texts, the UFW presents farmworkers as thought leaders on pesticide risk and attributes this thought leadership to the farmworkers' high exposure to risk. We see this insight echoed in Cherrie Moraga's 1994 play *Heroes and Saints*, which was inspired by Moraga's viewing of the *Wrath of Grapes* documentary. In *Heroes and Saints*, a farmworker community's knowledge about pesticide risk and consequences for the community and the will to resist exploitation are concentrated in Cerezita, a body-less young woman whose form marks her as one of those most radically exposed to risk from pesticide use. For the UFW, farmworkers' understanding of and embodied experience of pesticide risks make them the natural leaders in any attempt to control pesticide use or mitigate its risks, whether that attempt is motivated by concern for consumer safety, the environment, or the safety of workers themselves. As a labor union, the UFW identifies unionization and protections for organized labor as essential to enabling farmworkers to use their knowledge to intervene in pesticide practices.

This way of imagining the relationship between consumer safety and worker rights develops gradually: the earliest issues of *Food and Justice* do ask consumers to support workers' rights, but they do so primarily through appeals to sympathy or altruism. My chapter traces the gradual development of this argument about shared risk across several issues of *Food and Justice*, where its evolution coincides with a series of articles by pesticide expert and physician to the farmworkers Dr. Marion Moses. Moses's appearance is also central to the argument that producers are most knowledgeable about pesticide risks in *The Wrath of Grapes* documentary, where she describes workers as "kind of canaries . . . for the consumers out there." This figuration, which draws on

Rachel Carson's thinking about environmental risk in *Silent Spring* and is focused through Dr. Moses's clinical experience with farmworkers and the UFW's institutional commitment to labor rights, would become a central feature of UFW campaigns in the mid-80s through the present. In contextualizing the emergence of this argument, the chapter will consider how it mobilized "toxic discourse"¹⁴ to respond to the particular challenges faced by the UFW in the 1980s and 1990s. These challenges include appealing to a conservationist and wilderness protection-oriented mainstream environmental movement whose pesticide concerns at this time diverged from those of the UFW, appealing to middle class whites, distinguishing the UFW from rival unions, and addressing a general decline in labor organizations and support for unions during this period.

The other primary texts this dissertation examines ask consumers to imagine themselves encountering and impacting their environments directly through their consumption, and search for ways to make that impact concrete in the aesthetics and ethics of consumption that they develop. Alvarez, for instance, proposes that coffee grown under birdsong tastes noticeably better. Masumoto's "umami" and Berry's "extensive pleasure" similarly attempt to develop awareness of and concern for the conditions of production into the experience of taste. By contrast, the UFW "Wrath of Grapes" campaign asked consumers to empower farmworkers to use their own knowledge to shape ecological decisions on the consumer's behalf. In its privileging of farmworker knowledge acquired through somatic and economic encounters with risk, the UFW point to the limits of commodity aesthetics (including alternative, natural or eco-centric commodity aesthetics) as a reliable guide for socially just or environmentally

¹⁴ See Lawrence Buell, *Writing for and Endangered World*.

sustainable consumption practices. In fact, the UFW would suggest that commodity aesthetics are readily manipulable by growers and advertisers who respond to changes in consumer tastes by adjusting their advertising without meaningful changes in their production practices.

The “Wrath of Grapes” campaign came during a period of decline for the UFW.¹⁵ It was not as successful in the 1980s as the powerful boycotts of the 1960s and 1970s,¹⁶ and it has attracted relatively little interest from historians¹⁷ and biographers writing about the UFW, the history of agricultural labor relations in California, and UFW leader Cesar Chavez. Despite this relative lack of success, the “Wrath of Grapes” campaign does suggest a compelling rhetorical alternative to the exclusive focus on consumer knowledge and consumer taste in most contemporary ethical consumption discourse. Especially in the memoirs I discuss in Chapter Five, these texts imagine ethical consumption largely through their invocations of the pastoral mode to imagine the world that the consumer achieves through ethical consumption. In the “Wrath of Grapes” campaign, as in Moraga’s *Heroes and Saints*, social and environmental risks take center stage as the object of representation, as the source of authority for laborers and their representatives, and as indicators of an intimate ethical and ecological relationship

¹⁵ Richard Griswold del Castillo describes the time from the mid-1970s until César Chávez’s death in 1993 as one of decline for the union both in terms of its membership and its political influence. (Del Castillo, Richard Griswold. “César Estrada Chávez: The Final Struggle.”)

¹⁶ A July 19, 1993 article in the *New York Times* describes a distinct lack of momentum for the boycott, reporting that “few Americans know that for the last six years it has been urging consumers to boycott grapes” and noting that grape sales actually reached record levels during that time. “Experts said the union’s primary message in the current boycott – that pesticides threaten the health of consumers – has not struck home in the way that public anger over farm working conditions fueled the successful boycotts of the 1960s and 1970s.” (“After Chavez, Farm Union Struggles to Find New Path.”)

¹⁷ The 80s grape strike gets short shrift in accounts of the history of the Delano Grape Strike. The PBS timeline “Fight in the Fields” does not register the 80s strike at all, noting only the election of Governor Dukmejian and slowing enforcement of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA) in 1982 and Chavez’s Fast For Life in Delano in 1988. (Rick Tejada-Flores, Ray Telles, “The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers’ Struggle.”)

between farmworkers and consumers of table grapes. This use of risk suggests a potential corrective to an over-emphasis on consumer knowledge and consumer agency that emerges when pleasure and desire are the primary focus of ethical consumption texts.

Toxic Discourse and Farmworkers as Thought Leaders in the Wrath of Grapes Documentary

The “Wrath of Grapes” campaign participates in a rhetorical tradition that Lawrence Buell has called “toxic discourse.” In his *Writing for an Endangered World*, Buell defines toxic discourse as expressing “anxiety . . . from the perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification” and describes four of its major rhetorical strategies. Toxic discourse for Buell is characterized by: a ‘rhetoric of pastoral betrayal’ that involves a “shock of awakened perception”; images of “toxic diffusion” that imagine “a world without refuge from toxic penetration”; a “threat of hegemonic oppression” in which the weak face the powerful in a David vs. Goliath type struggle;¹⁸ and finally “gothic elements that surface in descriptions of deformed bodies and polluted landscapes.”¹⁹ The UFW’s use of toxic discourse in the “Wrath of Grapes” campaign aligns it with the environmental justice movement, which as Buell observes “has increasingly been led by nonelites, more often than not women, and includes a strong minority presence for the reason that those populations tend to be those most exposed to environmental injustice.”²⁰ Because the “Wrath of Grapes” campaign attempted to

¹⁸ Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, Kindle Edition.

¹⁹ Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet*. Kindle Edition.

²⁰ Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Mass, 1996: 141.

address environmental injustice through a boycott (rather than, for example, through legislation), the UFW needed to find ways to make the environmental concerns of the farmworkers relevant to white middle class consumers of table grapes. Some of the rhetorical strategies it used were available in the toxic discourse tradition, and especially in the notion of “toxic diffusion.”

German Sociologist Ulrich Beck has observed that although exposure to risk (like access to wealth) is uneven, the nature of the risks that accrue from modernization is such that no one can be entirely sheltered from them. In *Risk Society*, Beck explains:

with the globalization of risks a social dynamic is set in motion, which can no longer be composed of and understood in class categories. Ownership implies non-ownership and thus a social relationship of tension and conflict, in which reciprocal social identities can continually evolve and solidify – ‘them up there, us down here’. The situation is quite different for risk positions. Anyone affected by them is badly off, but deprives the others, the non-affected, of nothing.

Expressed in an analogy: the ‘class’ of the ‘affected’ does not confront a ‘class’ that is not affected. It confronts at most a ‘class’ of not-yet-affected people.²¹

The UFW’s “Wrath of Grapes” campaign and its deployment of images of toxic diffusion in its fight for labor protections are built on a similar insight about risk: although the severity of farmworkers’ occupational and environmental exposure to carcinogenic and teratogenic pesticides is determined by their class position, risks from pesticide use extend to consumers through environmental contamination (especially groundwater

²¹ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society*, 40.

contamination) and through pesticide residues on foods. The voiceover narration for *The Wrath of Grapes* documentary (1986) underlines how consumers share in food system risks: “The dangers . . . are not confined to farmworker families. The California Department of Agriculture found residues of [eleven pesticides] on grapes they sampled. Most of these residues cannot be completely washed off. The long-term effects of pesticides on consumers are unknown, and may not show up for many years.” Although (as the documentary shows) farmworkers are most exposed to this risk, pesticide risk extends to consumers through environmental contamination and through residues on the food they eat. The images of “toxic diffusion” that Buell identifies with toxic discourses are central to the UFW’s rhetorical strategies in its *Wrath of Grapes* campaign because of their potential to take the consumer of table grapes (“a ‘class’ that is not affected” in Beck’s terms) and place her into the more vulnerable and more radicalized “‘class’ of not-yet-affected people.”

The *Wrath of Grapes* documentary is graphic in its illustration of the risks of pesticide exposure. It opens on a scene of workers picking grapes, their faces protected by handkerchiefs, then cuts to a menacing shot of a black helicopter spraying pesticides outlined against a red sky, and then to a Hispanic farmworker woman who details the suffering that she attributes to pesticides: “I’ve been very ill, I had four miscarriages and ever since I’m afraid because I think it’s pesticides.” After another clip of the menacing helicopter another woman of color confides, “We never thought that they were doing something that would endanger us.” The film cuts to the menacing shot of the helicopter again, and this time a white woman speaks, “It makes me furious that my children drank contaminated water and no one gave a damn.” This series of interviews presents a

progression of pesticide risk affecting non-white farmworker women to pesticide exposure for the children of a white woman who does not appear to be involved in farm work (her concern is about contaminated water rather than occupational exposure).

The structure of the documentary as a whole mirrors this progression it sets up in the first minutes. In its first half, the *Wrath of Grapes* mainly addresses dangers faced by farmworkers and their immediate families, beginning with injuries that happen directly in the workplace. “Every year more than 300,000 farmworkers are poisoned in the United States. Farmworkers have the highest incidence of job-related illness in California. Grapes are the most dangerous crop. Pesticides cling to leaves, and are absorbed through the skin.” The pesticide exposure this narrator describes is occupational, affecting only workers whose skin comes into contact with grape leaves. The documentary then shows footage from the funeral of 32-year-old farmworker Juan Chaboya, who died of pesticide poisoning after entering a San Diego county field that had been sprayed with the pesticide Monitor just an hour prior. Connecting Juan’s death to the government’s failure to protect workers, the narrator notes that there was no sign posted to warn Juan of the danger. A proposal to require warning signs in sprayed fields had been vetoed by Governor Dukmejian²² over grower concerns about cost. Again, the risk here is occupational in nature, affecting only those like Juan Chaboya who must enter potentially dangerous fields in the course of their farm work.

²² George Deukmejian was a Republican governor of California whose policies undermined the goals of the UFW. Under him, the California Agricultural Labor Relations Board (established by the 1975 Agricultural Labor Relations Act in order to prevent practices that the ALRA defined as infringements on employee rights) became more friendly to grower interests to the point that the UFW asserted the ALRB was no longer effective. The UFW presented the “Wrath of Grapes” boycott as a response to the gutting of the ALRB. See Stacy Lee, Ed, *Mexico and the United States*, 120; Marshall Ingwerson, “Deukmejian tries to rein in farm labor board”; Robert Lindsey, “Pioneer Farm Labor Act is Imperiled in California”; Miriam J. Wells, *Strawberry Fields: Politics, Class, and Work in California Agriculture*, 91-95.

After discussing the death of Mr. Chaboya, the documentary extends its focus to the children of farmworkers. Nine-year old Salvador DeAnda was exposed to pesticides both in utero and after following his father into the fields to work, and has been diagnosed with an inoperable cancer. Amalia Lario was born with a piece of her spine missing after her mother worked in sprayed fields during the early months of her pregnancy. Five-year-old Felipe Franco (Moraga's inspiration for the body-less Cerizita in *Heroes and Saints*) was born without arms or legs after his mother worked in the grape fields into her eighth month of pregnancy. In each case the parents attribute their children's illnesses to pesticide exposure and express regret at not having known that they were putting their children at risk by working. In the illnesses of these children we see the risk from pesticides exceeding the boundaries of occupational risk to become also an environmental risk for the children of farmworkers.

In the second half of the documentary, the circle of those affected by pesticide poisoning grows wider still, as the narrator describes sprayed pesticides drifting for miles from their intended targets, seeping into underground water supplies and "threatening neighboring communities." This part of the documentary focuses on the community of McFarland, the site of a cancer cluster related to pesticide contamination. As the narrator explains, many of McFarland's 6,000 residents are not farmworkers at all—their exposure to pesticides arises through their proximity to the fields and vineyards where pesticides are used. Connie Rosales, a mother from McFarland (the town on which Moraga bases the town in *Heroes and Saints*), tells the interviewer, "I'm very angry. I'm angry that something like this could go on around you in the environment when you think that you're safe. What we're dealing with here is invisible . . . our children are our flags.

They're dying, and that is showing us that there is something wrong here." In a scene that recalls the "shock of awakened perception" and "rhetoric of pastoral betrayal" that Buell identifies with toxic discourse, another mother describes her loss as the loss of an American dream: "These homes were our dream homes—our piece of the American dream and it's almost like it's turned in a nightmare. And we don't know what's happened here . . . it's out of control." The narrator describes this danger as spreading to "town after town in California's extensive central valley," and describes people as "afraid—afraid what's in their water, afraid to eat the fruit that's grown around them, afraid to let their children play in school yards next to fields." This part of the documentary describes an environmental risk that is invisible (until it manifests in illness) and increasingly pervasive: from affecting farmworkers in the fields it has spread to neighboring communities and ultimately everywhere through groundwater contamination and pesticide residues on food.

The narrator conveys an increasingly general sense of doom: "Pesticides were once considered a miracle of science—they've become a chemical time bomb, threatening to contaminate our food supply and our environment." By this point in *The Wrath of Grapes* the groups of people affected by pesticide poisoning have expanded from those directly involved in farm labor, to their children, to those in neighboring communities, and now finally to the viewer/consumer as well who is addressed here in the inclusive "our" as sharing in the food supply and environment that the "chemical time bomb" of pesticides threatens. The documentary ends with a series of shots that illustrate how the risk spreads—workers pick grapes, workers pack grapes, and then a mother picks up a pack of grapes and hands them to her child in a supermarket shopping cart.

This rhetorical expansion of the community of those affected by pesticide poisoning—the image of “toxic diffusion” in Buell’s terms—will enable the UFW to then position farmworkers as thought leaders about pesticides as a fundamentally shared risk and as the hero in a David and Goliath type struggle with wealthy and politically influential growers.

In keeping with its argument that pesticide poisoning affects everyone, the documentary emphasizes both worker and consumer safety in its ultimate articulation of UFW goals regarding pesticide regulation. The narrator tells us, “Chavez wants growers to stop using five very dangerous pesticides that kill and injure farm workers and threaten consumers with toxic residues.” Although the risk to farmworkers (“kill and injure”) is more immediate and severe than to consumers (“threaten”), the same pesticides are dangerous to both groups. Expressing the threat in this way aligns the interests of farmworkers (Beck’s “ ‘class’ of the ‘affected’ ”) with those of consumers (Beck’s “not-yet affected”). The UFW positions itself as a protector of consumers again in its labor demands: “The UFW wants fair and free elections in the workplace, good faith bargaining with the growers, and a joint grower-UFW program to test grapes in supermarkets for pesticide residues.” The demand for a joint testing program in supermarkets clearly places the UFW in the role of protecting consumers as well as farmworkers. The documentary’s account of past boycott efforts also suggests that labor organizers have been able to address issues of pesticide risk more effectively than government regulators in the past. “Growers signed contracts with the UFW which banned the use of five deadly pesticides including DDT even before the federal government acted.”

In the documentary, Dr. Marion Moses uses a metaphor to underline the point that risk from pesticide exposure is shared, if unequally, between producers and consumers: “The workers are kind of canaries if you will for the consumers out there, because if the workers are being harmed these are the same residues that are ending up on the food that’s being bought in the market and being fed to sick people and infants.” In this metaphor although their greater vulnerability means that farmworkers have been hit hardest by acute pesticide poisoning, consumers are being exposed to the same cancer- and birth defect-causing chemicals even if the effects of that exposure are not yet fully realized in their own bodies. The voiceover underlines this argument, saying, “The effect of pesticides on farmworkers and others who live in agricultural areas are a clear signal to all consumers that there is danger hiding in our food.” The “Wrath of Grapes” campaign uses the farmworkers’ relatively higher exposure to risk from pesticide exposure to position farmworkers as thought leaders on issues of pesticide use. In his Wrath of Grapes Boycott Speech delivered in 1986 Chavez writes, “We farm workers are closest to food production. We were the first to recognize the serious health hazards of agriculture pesticides to both consumers and ourselves.”²³

This way of thinking about worker rights as a guarantor of consumer safety reverses the framework imagined in most contemporary ethical consumption discourse, which tends to see consumer access to information as the guarantor of worker rights and safety. This kind of leadership from below, although not typical of contemporary mainstream ethical consumption movements²⁴ like organic, local and fair trade, is characteristic of the environmental justice movement of which the “Wrath of Grapes”

²³ Chavez, “Wrath of Grapes Boycott.”

²⁴ Casey Lee Schnitz finds that ethical consumers tend to have higher income levels and educational attainment. See Casey Schnitz, “Demographic characteristics of ethical consumers.”

campaign should be considered a part. In both their membership (mostly white²⁵ and with a higher income²⁶) and their rhetoric (emphasizing the aesthetic and drawing on pastoral imagery), the local, slow food, organic, and even fair trade movements resemble the mainstream preservationist wing of the environmental movement. In contrast, the UFW's Wrath of Grapes campaign has much more in common both demographically and theoretically with the environmental justice movement.

Contexts for UFW Self-Definition as Thought Leaders on Pesticide Risk

At an organizational level, the UFW strategy of presenting farmworkers as thought leaders on issues of pesticide risk developed out of three contexts: the UFW's perception of declining support in U.S. politics for organized labor, the union's need to distinguish itself from rival unions, and the union's need to appeal to the mainstream environmental movement. The strategy was also shaped by larger contexts including the changing nature of risk that accompanies modernization, and by developments in media technology including VHS.

The UFW appears to have developed its strategy for the Wrath of Grapes boycott partially in response to its perception of declining support for labor, as registered in the decreased political effectiveness of established activist tactics. In an October 10, 1984, article for the *New York Times*, Robert Lindsay cites "an internal UFW document" stating "that Americans generally no longer are moved by picketing, marches and rallies; instead, it should now attack growers on the basis of three issues with emotional appeal:

²⁵ Yana Manyukhina, "Profiling the Ethical Consumer. Part 2."

²⁶ Casey Lee Schnitz, "Demographic Characteristics of Ethical Consumers."

consumerism, toxic wastes and sexual harassment.”²⁷ As I have shown, the issue of toxic waste and especially images of toxic diffusion would prove particularly important to the campaign because it gave the UFW an opportunity to re-imagine labor protections as central to managing broader societal and public health risks from toxic diffusion.

Another important context for the Wrath of Grapes boycott—one that forms an important recurring theme in *Food and Justice*—was the weakening of labor protections won under the 1975 Agricultural Labor Relations Act in California. The ALRA created a three-person Agricultural Labor Relations Board whose job it was to oversee union elections and contract negotiations. Despite often siding with the UFW in disputes with growers, the board was limited in its ability to force growers to bargain in good faith. After the election of Republican governor George Deukmejian to California in 1982, the appointment of anti-UFW members to the board further undermined the effectiveness of the ALRA. In the mid-1980s, as the UFW turned back toward boycotting, California farm workers “were again without the protective provisions of the UFW contract and were exposed to a broad array of potentially hazardous chemical pesticides.”²⁸ The ALRA has been a significant legislative win for the UFW; faced with its diminishing effectiveness the UFW in the Wrath of Grapes Boycott turned to consumers to support their right to organize.

In addition to responding to a general decline in support for organized labor, the UFW’s positioning of farmworkers as thought leaders on issues of pesticide safety may also have emerged as a part of the union’s effort to distinguish itself from the other unions that were vying to represent the farmworkers at the time, most notably the

²⁷ Robert Lindsey, “Farm Workers Facing New Teamster Contest.”

²⁸ Robert Gordon, “Poisons in the Fields: The United Farm Workers, Pesticides, and Environmental Politics,” 74.

powerful Teamsters' Union. Although the Teamsters' Union was larger and better-known than the UFW, it was neither developed for nor exclusively focused on the needs of farmworkers. By privileging farmworker knowledge in the management of pesticide risk, the UFW was also staking a claim for itself as the union that understood pesticide risk.

We can also see the Wrath of Grapes campaign as responding to the UFW's difficulty in appealing to the mainstream environmental movement in the U.S. Environmental historian Robert Gordon has considered the prominent place of pesticides in UFW rhetoric as a part of the union's efforts to "expand its base of support by linking hazardous working conditions with growing environmental awareness." Gordon describes the climate throughout the 1970s as one of cooperation between labor and environmental movements, arguing that union and environmental activists realized that "hazardous working conditions, workplace pollution, and the deterioration of the natural environment were intimately linked."²⁹ Despite this general climate of cooperation,³⁰ the UFW struggled to gain the support of the mainstream environmental movement, a problem that Gordon attributes to cultural differences as well as differences in the way the two groups viewed recent developments in pesticide technologies. The newer generation of pesticides, although they were more acutely toxic and so especially dangerous to farmworkers, broke down more quickly and so were arguably less damaging to the broad ecosystem and to wildlife around farms than previous generations of pesticides. Whereas the UFW was most concerned about the risks that pesticides presented to workers, mainstream environmental groups were more focused on

²⁹ Ibid., 54.

³⁰ Industrial unions at this time were developing successful alliances with mainstream environmental organizations. The Sierra Club, for instance, supported an OCAW strike of Shell Oil Workers in 1973. See Robert Gordon, "Poisons in the Fields: The United Farm Workers, Pesticides, and Environmental Politics."

wilderness preservation and may have seen the new generation of pesticides as an improvement for this reason.

Strategically, the Wrath of Grapes campaign also took shape in light of the UFW's self-conscious embrace of modern communication technologies including both print and mailing technologies and VHS. In articles in *Food and Justice*, UFW writers stress the importance of communication technologies to the boycott. "We realize our future depends, to a great extent, on our ability to use modern methods of mass communications."³¹ According to accounts in *Food and Justice*, new communication systems include "state-of-the-art printing presses and mailhouse equipment."³² Its use of in-house printing presses and direct mail to potential supporters enabled the UFW, through its consumer-directed publication *Food and Justice*, to share farmworkers' stories with consumers while also enlisting readers as potential activists to spread the campaign message. Each issue of the magazine included tear-out business reply forms inviting readers to donate time and money, to share the addresses of potentially sympathetic readers, or to request campaign materials (including VHS copies of the Wrath of Grapes documentary). The UFW distribution strategy for the *Wrath of Grapes* documentary was similarly dependent on the development of VHS technology. Rather than paying to broadcast the movie widely, the UFW made VHS copies of the documentary freely available to consumers who requested them and encouraged would-be activists to consider showing the documentary as a form of activism. This kind of easy activism would not have been feasible before the development and popularization of VHS because the cost of showing a movie would have been substantially higher.

³¹ Cesar Chavez's report to the UFW's 7th Constitutional Convention. See "The UFW's 7th Constitutional Convention . . . union democracy in action."

³² Ibid.

In a larger sense, we can also see the development of this argument about farmworkers as thought leaders as a response to the changing nature of risk. In *Risk Society*, Ulrich Beck writes that whereas hazards of the past (for example, the poisonous fumes of an early 19th Century London sewer) “assaulted the nose of the eyes . . . the risks of civilization today typically *escape perception* and are localized in the sphere of *physical and chemical formulas* (e.g. toxins in foodstuffs . . .).”³³ He also writes that although the nature of contemporary risks is such that no one can be completely sheltered from them, exposure to risk is distributed unevenly along class and economic lines. These two characteristics of risk are fundamental to the UFW’s positioning of farmworkers as thought leaders on pesticide risk. The invisibility of risk means that consumers cannot rely on their senses to identify hazards and protect themselves in the marketplace, while farmworkers’ history of greater exposure means that they have already come to understand these risks through their manifestations as acute pesticide poisonings, birth defects, and cancers. The shared nature of the risk aligns consumer interest with those of farmworkers, while the difficulty of perception places a premium on farmworker knowledge and seems to demand that they assume leadership in any shared effort to combat the risk. The invisibility of pesticide risk means that it comes to be known first through its manifestation as disease in the body. Both individually and as a community, consumers are in Beck’s class of those not-yet affected by pesticide risk. Like the farmworkers, they are exposed; unlike the farmworkers, they have not yet seen how the risk from that exposure will manifest in their bodies and communities. Farmworkers emerge as leaders in the response to an unevenly shared risk because their

³³ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Toward a New Modernity*, 21.

disproportionate exposure has led them to recognize and understand that risk in ways that the consumer as yet cannot.

The Emergence and Development of Farmworkers as Thought Leaders in *Food and Justice*

By the time the UFW produced its *Wrath of Grapes* documentary in October 1986, the group's argument that farm workers are thought leaders on pesticide issues was well developed. This was not the case in the early days of the boycott (1984), and we can trace the development of this argument in the UFW's consumer-directed magazine *Food and Justice*. The earliest issues of *Food and Justice* appeal to readers' altruism and sense of justice, asking them to support the renewed boycott of table grapes because it will help farmworkers, or because it is the right thing to do. In the third issue (Dec. 1984), Chavez characterizes the audience of the new magazine as "Americans who believe in fairness and justice." Another article announcing the new boycott quotes Chavez: "We're prepared to stake our future on [the consumer's] good will."³⁴ A call to action on the next page draws on the same language, telling the reader that, "[The farmworkers'] hope is your good will . . . Where else can they turn to help if not to you?"³⁵ Although this imagined audience cares about pesticides, its reasons for doing so are altruistic, rooted in a commitment to "fairness and justice." The risk from pesticide use that emerges in these earliest issues of *Food and Justice* affects farmworkers exclusively; if consumers care

³⁴ United Farm Workers. "The New Grape Boycott," *Food and Justice* (Dec 1984): 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

about this risk, as several articles suggests they do, it is because they care about farmworker welfare.

In their discussions of farmworker issues, these early issues of *Food and Justice* focus on human dignity, human rights and respect for farmworkers. Although pesticide poisoning is a central topic beginning with the earliest issues of *Food and Justice*, coverage there focuses exclusively on how pesticide use impacts farmworkers and does not draw a connection between pesticide risk to farmworkers (via occupational exposure) and to consumers (via environmental contamination and residues on marketed products).³⁶ These earlier issues of *Food and Justice* present pesticide poisoning incidents in terms of growers' lack of respect for farmworkers. A December 1984 article titled "The Issue at Bruce Church, Inc. is Respect!" describes first the pesticide-related infection, right-arm amputation and subsequent firing of irrigator Manuel Amaya after he had been employed with Bruce Church for 12 years, and then the fatal poisoning and consequent firing of lettuce worker Aurelia Pena. The article describes Pena's firing: "The company didn't send a representative to express sympathy to the family . . . but 15 days after she died, Mrs. Pena's widowed husband and his two young sons did receive an official notice from Bruce Church, Inc. in her name informing Aurelia Pena that she was fired for having died. Mr. Pena thought the company was ridiculing him."³⁷ The article interprets both incidents as symptomatic of a lack of respect for farmworkers: the author observes, "Too many growers treat their workers as if they were only agricultural tools.

³⁶ In the Dec 1984 issue of *Food and Justice*, for instance, "The New Grape Boycott" summarizes the effects of the 1970s boycott: "Over 17 million Americans boycotted grapes. As a result, farm workers won better wages and working conditions, and protections from dangerous pesticides and other abuses" (Ibid., 3).

³⁷ United Farm Workers. "The Issue at Bruce Church, In. Is Respect!" *Food and Justice* 1.3 (Dec 1984): 28.

They behave as if farm workers are not important people.”³⁸ The next month, a statement from union leader Cesar Chavez makes a similar argument. Chavez writes, “All my life, I have been driven by one dream, one goal, one vision: To overthrow a farm labor system in this nation that treats farm workers as if they are not important human beings. Farm workers are not agricultural implements—they are not beasts of burden—to be used and discarded.”³⁹ These early issues of *Food and Justice* do recognize farmworkers’ relatively high exposure to risk from pesticides, but they frame that exposure as a farmworker issue rather than as a shared concern for consumers and farmworkers. Although Mrs. Pena’s death in particular would be relevant to concerns about consumer safety (she succumbed to poisonous fumes while working a lettuce wrap machine), the article does not raise concerns about consumer safety related to either her death or the injury of Manuel Amaya. In fact, neither the December 1984 nor January 1985 *Food Justice* mentions consumers at all, addressing them only as potentially sympathetic supporters.

In another article in the same December 1984 issue of *Food and Justice*, “Pesticide Poisoning is More Than an Accident,” the author argues that repeated incidents of pesticide poisoning point to an underlying disregard for worker safety and describes two incidents that would be of limited personal concern for consumers.

Last August, a crew of 35 lettuce workers was ordered into a field which was “collared” or surrounded by adjacent fields which had been sprayed only two hours earlier with Phosdrin . . .

[. . .]

In 1981, at the same ranch, 38 farm workers entered a lettuce field shortly after it was mistakenly sprayed with Phosdrin. An order to cancel the spraying

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁹ United Farm Workers, “Farm Workers Respond to ‘Immoral’ Attack by Affirming UFW’s Legacy,” *Food and Justice* (January 1985): 24.

was carelessly handled by office personnel at SoilServe, a local pesticide application firm.

Unlike the concerns about groundwater contamination and pesticide residues on food that dominate later issues of *Food and Justice*, the incidents described here involve spatial and temporal concerns around pesticide use that are specific to workers laboring in the fields. These workers are being injured because growers send them to work either too close to (“a field . . . ‘collared’ or surrounded by adjacent fields which had been sprayed”) or too soon (“only two hours earlier”; “shortly after”) into a field that has been sprayed. This article recognizes that “migrant and seasonal farm workers are the most exposed group in the nation to pesticides,” but does not yet imagine that greater exposure makes them authorities on a risk that is fundamentally shared with consumers.

Chavez’s comment in the January 1985 *Food and Justice* that farmworkers “are not agricultural implements” is suggestive here. Pesticide exposure in these early issues of *Food and Justice* operates similarly to the way the short-handled hoe does in the UFW’s previous organizing efforts: as a serious and unnecessary occupational hazard that workers face as a result of growers’ lack of care about their well-being. The language that Chavez in 1985 uses to critique growers’ disregard for worker safety harkens back to earlier moments in the farmworker movement. Criticizing the use of “el cortito” (the short-handled hoe) in 1969, Chavez had said, “Growers look at human beings as implements. But if they had any consideration for the torture that people go through, they would give up the short-handled hoe.”⁴⁰ The short-handled hoe was disallowed in California fields in 1975; when Chavez invokes the idea of people as agricultural implements in *Food and Justice*, he is objecting to a similar process of objectification

⁴⁰ Susan Ferris and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement*, 207.

that allows growers to expose farmworkers to dangerous levels of pesticides. The critiques of abusive labor practices and the appeals to altruism in these earliest issues of *Food & Justice* are in keeping with UFW rhetoric in earlier campaigns, in which the union's demands were presented in terms of civil rights and a critique of racism against Mexican American farmworkers.⁴¹ To return to Beck's terms, the UFW in these early issues of *Food and Justice* still imagines consumers as "a 'class' that is not affected"; the terms of its appeal to consumers will shift radically as it begins to understand consumers instead as "at most a 'class' of not-yet affected people."

Food and Justice first begins to relate farmworker concerns about pesticide exposure to consumer safety in February 1985, eventually developing the link between worker rights and consumer safety as a core theme of the boycott. The return of Dr. Marion Moses (formerly a volunteer nurse working with the UFW in 1966) after completing her medical education and residency⁴² appears to have substantially influenced both the decision to link farmworkers' occupational exposure to consumers' exposure via residues on marketed fruit and the argument that farmworkers' greater exposure to pesticides makes them (or their union) thought leaders on pesticide risk. This latter idea in some ways reflects the trajectory of Dr. Moses's own process of learning about the dangers of pesticide exposure. In an interview conducted in the mid-1990s, Moses describes her interest in pesticides as arising out of her contact with farmworkers: "people . . . ask me when did you get interested in pesticides, and I said I never got

⁴¹ See Heidi Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime: Grapes and Consumption in Cold War Chile and the United States*, 107.

⁴² Marion Moses first began working with the UFW as Administrator of the Health Program in Delano from 1966 to 1971, during which time she also worked on the 1965-1970 UFW boycott. She received an M.D. from Temple University in 1976, and then completed residencies in Internal Medicine at the University of Colorado Medical Center and in Occupational Medicine at Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York. She was named Medical Director and Administrator for the National Farm Health Group in Keene, CA in 1983. See description of Holdings, The Marion Moses, M.D. Collection.

interested in pesticides: I got interested in farmworkers and it was a problem that they had.”⁴³ Facing a lack of information through official channels, Moses encountered pesticides first through their effects on the health of farmworkers and their families. She explains,

at that time . . . there was [no] regulation and nobody really cared . . . what came to my attention were things like serious poisonings. I noticed a big increase—a problem with asthma in children that I soon learned was definitely related to spraying season—so it was kind of a gross kind of a thing and there really—the laws were even weaker than they are now, there was no way that we could find out what was being used, if they didn’t want to tell you they didn’t tell you.⁴⁴

Moses first encounters the risk from pesticides as it expresses itself in the bodies of farmworkers and their families in a time of weak regulation and limited access to information. It is perhaps not surprising that she would later influence the UFW to locate knowledge about pesticides in the farmworkers themselves and in their experience of pesticide risk.

Moses’s return to the UFW appears to have been an important influence on the way the union imagined the relationship between workers’ occupational concerns about pesticides and the concerns that pesticides presented for consumers. In the February 1985 issue of *Food and Justice*, an article announcing a new series by Dr. Moses positions pesticide exposure as a shared risk for farmworkers and consumers for the very first time, promising, “this series will help make you aware of the danger these chemicals pose for farm workers as well as consumers.”⁴⁵ As Moses makes clear in the later interview, this

⁴³ Paradigm Productions Farmworker Movement Interviews – 1995/1996. Interview with Marion Moses. <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/medias/oral-history/>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ United Farm Workers, “Dr. Marion Moses and Agriculture’s ‘Deadly Dozen,’” *Food and Justice*, February 1985: 11.

focus on a shared risk between farmworkers and consumers reflects her own influence on UFW rhetorical strategies:

I remember Cesar asked me . . . to look at things that posed a problem to consumers only, that left residues. I told him I thought we should look three ways and that's kind of the way things focused: we should look at impacts or adverse effects on workers, consumers and the environment, and basically we picked the five – he asked me to pick the five worst chemicals on that basis. And as you know we did pick five. That became incorporated into the union's strategies . . .

Moses here claims responsibility for what would become a cornerstone of the UFW's rhetorical strategy in the “Wrath of Grapes” boycott. Was this her own innovation entirely? It seems likely that Moses's thinking about how to represent pesticide risk was influenced by her understanding of “toxic discourse,” and so it is perhaps not surprising to learn that one of the first texts she turned to in learning about the effects of pesticide exposure on human health was Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring*, a book Buell invokes as the “effective beginning” of toxic discourse in American environmental culture.

By choosing to focus on pesticide risk as a fundamentally shared concern between farmworkers and consumers, Moses set the stage for the argument, developed through later UFW publications, that the best way to ensure consumer safety was by protecting the labor rights and health of farmworkers. Following the February 1985 issue of *Food and Justice*, there is an increasing association between concerns for farmworker safety and consumer safety in official UFW discourse about pesticide use. Whereas the earliest issues of *Food and Justice* do not mention consumers at all, mentions of farmworkers and consumers increasingly go hand-in-hand in later articles that address pesticide risk.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ In an article in the October, 1985 *Food and Justice* (“‘65 Delano Strike Observed: Farm Workers Protest Pesticide Peril”), the author describes a march on Delano “to . . . protest the pesticide poisoning of *workers and consumers*.” The article invokes risks to farmworkers and consumers in the same breath again: “*Farm workers are being poisoned in the fields and your food is being poisoned*. Join us in our struggle against

Food and Justice mentions consumers an average of ten times⁴⁷ in each issue after the announcement of Moses's series on the Deadly Dozen pesticides in February 1985. In her article in the May 1986 *Food and Justice*, Marion Moses even collapses the categories of farmworker and consumer into one, observing that “virtually all of the American people are exposed to pesticides in their food. . . . Since everyone must eat, there is involuntary exposure of the entire population to potentially harmful pesticide residues. It is difficult—and may be impossible—for the consumer to find out what pesticide residues are in fruits, vegetables and other foods at the time of purchase.”⁴⁸

In addition to these frequent invocations of consumer safety alongside concern for farmworkers, we also see a shift in the kinds of pesticide risk addressed in *Food and Justice*. Above, I showed how the type of pesticide exposure that the UFW describes in its December 1984 issue of *Food and Justice* is occupational in nature and thus of limited direct personal concern to consumers who do not have occupational exposure to

law-breaking growers whose reckless use of pesticides threatens *you and us!*” This pattern of invoking concerns about farmworkers’ occupational exposure to pesticides and consumers exposure via residues continues in subsequent issues of *Food and Justice*. An article titled “Boycott Hopes Soar in Canada” in the January 1986 issue reports that Chicago Mayor Harold Washington, “praised [Chavez] for publicizing the dangers of pesticide poisoning *to farm workers and consumers.*” (My emphasis. United Farm Workers, “Boycott Hopes Soar in Canada,” *Food and Justice* 3.1, January 1986: 6.) An article in the July 1988 argues that compassion for farmworkers “*must embrace consumers too*, who unwittingly eat fruits and vegetables contaminated by residues of *the same toxic pesticides that imperil farm workers* in the fields.” (My emphasis. United Farm Workers, “Non-Cooperation With Supermarkets . . . Take On Your Local Store!” *Food and Justice* 5.5, July 1988: 4) Appealing to consumers in a June 1986 editorial, Chavez tells readers of *Food and Justice* that the UFW “need your help in getting [California table grapes] out of stores – *for our sake, but also for yours.*” (My emphasis. Cesar Chavez, “Editorial,” *Food and Justice* 3.5, June 1986: 2.) An article about the boycott in the August 1986 *Food and Justice* describes a “threat of pesticide poisoning to . . . *workers picking grapes in the vineyards as well as to consumers buying table grapes covered in pesticide residues.*” (Emphasis added. United Farm Workers, “UFW Now Boycotting ALL Table Grapes!” *Food and Justice* 3.7, August 1988.)

⁴⁷ I arrived at this number by averaging the number of times “consumer” was mentioned in each issue of *Food and Justice* available through the University of San Diego’s Farmworker Movement Documentation Project, which is to my knowledge the most complete collection of *Food and Justice* publicly available. The issues available include: December 1984 – 1985, February 1985, April/May 1985, September - October 1985, January 1986 February/March 1986 - July 1987, October 1987 - November 1987, January 1988 - February 1988, April 1988 - May 1988, July 1988, September 1988 - October 1988, December 1988 – January 1989, September 1989 – January 1990, and April 1996. Missing editions reflect years in which the magazine was not regularly published as well as some that appear to have been lost.

⁴⁸ Dr. Marion Moses. “Pesticides: The Poisons in Our Foods.” *Food and Justice* 3.4 (May 1986): 12.

pesticides. The picture of risk in *Food and Justice* shifts in the October 1985 issue, when the UFW begins to imagine risk specifically as it emerges through the consumer's encounter with produce at the grocery store and at the table. The occasion for this shift is the UFW's response to what the Center for Disease Control called "the largest recorded North American outbreak of foodborne pesticide illness," which affected consumers of green watermelons contaminated with aldicarb sulfoxide, the active ingredient in the pesticide Temik.⁴⁹ By the end of the outbreak, the CDC had identified 692 probable cases of aldicarb poisoning in California alone, plus 483 additional cases in Alberta, Alaska, Arizona, British Columbia, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. Reported symptoms included seizures, loss of consciousness, cardiac arrhythmia, hypotension, dehydration and anaphylaxis, and although coroners did not attribute any deaths to aldicarb sulfoxide, there were reported six deaths and two stillbirths "following acute illnesses associated with watermelon ingestion."⁵⁰ The salient difference between this aldicarb sulfoxide poisoning and the poisoning incidents that *Food and Justice* had documented previously is that this incident did not involve any increased risk for farmworkers. These poisonings happened because the chemical was inappropriately used on fruits that would be consumed raw, and so the heightened risk all concentrated on the consumer.

Just as in the earlier issues of *Food and Justice* the discussions of occupational risk identified temporal and spatial concerns specific to farmworkers' occupational exposure, Marion Moses's thinking about the risks that pesticide residues pose to consumers is sensitive to patterns in the experience of consumption that may exacerbate

⁴⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Epidemiologic Notes and Reports Aldicarb Food Poisoning from Contaminated Melons – California."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

risks to consumers. In an article critical of government tolerance levels for carcinogens, Moses observes that the “tolerance-setting process . . . ignores the fact of exposures to multiple pesticides on the same and other products” and argues that “through synergism or other mechanisms, the risk to health from such multiple exposures may be greater.”⁵¹ When the EPA sets a tolerance level for a particular chemical on a particular food, the consumer potentially confronts either a single food with multiple different kinds of residues or a variety of foods which, taken together, may in practice exceed the tolerated level or expose the consumer to unanticipated combinations of chemicals. Just as the analysis of risks to farmworkers above addressed spatial and temporal issues that affect farmworkers’ exposure to risk, the terms of Moses’s critique here is informed by her thinking about the cultural context of consumption. Just as the focus on specifically occupational forms of pesticide risk in earlier issues of *Food and Justice* suggest that the UFW viewed pesticide risk as exclusively a farmworker issue, this new attention to eating patterns and to how pesticide residues might affect different parts of the consumer demographic reflect a shift toward viewing pesticide risk as fundamentally (if unevenly) shared between farmworkers and consumers.

Similar to the expanding circle of those affected by pesticide poisoning that I describe in the *Wrath of Grapes* documentary, *Food and Justice* shows an increasing emphasis on the spread of pesticide exposure across racial, class and occupational lines. Adopting one of the rhetorical strategies Buell identifies with toxic discourse, *Food and Justice* invokes images of “toxic diffusion” in a “world without refuge from toxic penetration.” An article in the April 1986 issue quotes Cesar Chavez at length describing the inexorable spread of risk from pesticide exposure from farmworkers to consumers:

⁵¹ Dr. Marion Moses, “Pesticides: The Poisons in Our Foods,” *Food and Justice* 3.4 (May 1986): 13.

“Nobody’s safe anymore,” Chavez said, “Growers have flooded this state with so many pesticides that everybody’s drowning in them, not just farm workers. Farm workers have to wade through pesticides on the ground and pick fruit and vegetables covered with them. Their babies are born with severe birth defects. Pesticides from fields are seeping into and contaminating the well water of people living in nearby towns. Pesticides air-sprayed on fields are drifting over cities. And consumers would be astonished if they knew how much pesticide residue remains on the food they buy at supermarkets.”⁵²

The language Chavez uses here—flooding, drowning, wading—searches for concrete images to express the ubiquity of pesticide exposure on the farm but also in agricultural areas and seeping into the supermarket and the home. The November 1986 issue illustrates the inescapability of toxic exposure in an article about 6-year-old leukemia patient Jennifer Shepherd. The article states, “Jennifer may seem like an unlikely victim of pesticide poisoning. The six-year-old girl does not have farm worker parents. (Her father is a barber.) Jennifer’s only connection with agriculture is that she had the misfortune to live in a town surrounded by fields.”⁵³ Jennifer’s father Dan argues explicitly that his daughter’s illness illustrates how the toxic threat of pesticide poisoning can permeate class lines: “I want people who read this to know they are not safe. Just because you are white, middle-class or educated does not mean you are not at risk of being contaminated—it does not mean your children are not at risk.”⁵⁴

The UFW imagines toxic diffusion most vividly with images of pesticide drift; which becomes a metaphor for how risk from pesticide exposure permeates racial, occupational, class and geographic lines.

Pesticide drift – it’s uncontrollable.

⁵² United Farm Workers, “Chavez Leads Protest at Grape Growers’ Meeting,” *Food and Justice* 3.3 (April 1986): 10.

⁵³ United Farm Workers, *Food and Justice* (November 1986): 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

Nothing better symbolizes how out of control the pesticide plague is these days: chemical companies producing more and more pesticides; laboratories testing them carelessly; growers flooding their fields with them; regulatory agencies not enforcing even weak regulations; thousands of farm workers annually being poisoned and in many cases killed by them; their children dying of cancer and born with severe birth defects; townspeople drinking water contaminated by them; and consumers eating residues of them still on produce at the market.

[. . .]

Like pesticide drift, the pesticide plague is out of control. Since those who produce, test, authorize, use, and regulate pesticides won't exercise control, we who are endangered by them – farm workers, townspeople, and consumers – must rise up and demand that our health and safety be considered more important than the profits of the agribusiness-chemical industry.⁵⁵

In this passage, the expanding circle of those affected by pesticide poisoning also implies an expansion in the groups radicalized by their experience of exposure to risk. As the pesticides drift from fields to neighboring communities and onto every table, the group of people who “must rise up” is expanding too—from “farmworkers” to “townspeople” to every “consumer.” Lawrence Buell has written that “if anything like a universal environmental discourse is to come into being, toxic discourse is certain to be one of the key ingredients.”⁵⁶ In the “Wrath of Grapes” campaign, images of toxic diffusion in particular are central to the UFW’s attempt to create an environmental discourse that is universal in its scope.

In addition to showing how farmworkers and consumers face a shared risk from pesticides, the UFW sets up farmworkers as thought leaders by questioning the efficacy of other forms of knowledge about and regulation of pesticide risk including government regulation, commodity aesthetics and advertising—each of which I explore in turn in what follows.

⁵⁵ Cesar Chavez, “Editorial,” *Food and Justice*.4.1 (January 1987): 2.

⁵⁶ Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 35.

UFW's Critique of Government Regulations

Throughout the later issues of *Food and Justice*, the UFW repeatedly calls into question the efficacy of existing government regulations in protecting workers and consumers. In May 1986, Marion Moses writes, “Most people assume federal law assures safety of the food supply. On the contrary, the laws regulating pesticides violate basic public health principles by allowing the entire population to be exposed to potentially harmful pesticide residues.”⁵⁷ Articles in *Food and Justice* point to government officials blocking necessary regulations because of grower influence. An article in the January 1986 issue quotes Chavez speaking to an audience at Southern Methodist University, “In California . . . we have a governor who vetoes a field posting bill to warn workers of pesticide dangers because growers said it would be too costly for them to buy the signs.”⁵⁸ The UFW also sees farmworkers and consumers as both suffering from what the UFW portrays as the rather cold attitude of government regulators toward potential risks to farmworker and consumer safety. The article describes how tolerance levels on Captan, which were based on fraudulent test data from Industrial Bio-Test Laboratories, had been reevaluated by the EPA leading the agency to determine that Captan should not be used on any food product. Despite this finding, the EPA decided to issue a tolerance level anyway because economic interests were found to outweigh the health risk. The UFW comments that under this decision, “consumers and farm workers serve as guinea pigs for manufacturers and government agencies.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Marion Moses, “The Poisons in Our Foods,” *Food and Justice* 3.4 (May 1986): 12.

⁵⁸ United Farm Workers, “Boycott Takes Off In Texas,” *Food and Justice* 3.1 (January 1986): 12.

⁵⁹ United Farm Workers, “Gaps in Test Data Endanger Consumers and Farm Workers,” *Food and Justice* 3.7 (August 1986): 13.

In the October 1986 issue, an article by Marion Moses implicitly responds to this decision by seriously challenging the government's ability to set and monitor allowable amounts for pesticide residue on marketed food:

In 1977, there was a big scandal when it was discovered that Industrial Biotest Laboratories (IBT) had sent fraudulent data to EPA in support of 100 pesticide registrations. Captan was among these and **none** of its 12 tests were valid. This meant that the NOEL (no observable effect level) used in the "scientific" determination was also fraudulent.

The U.S. government did nothing about the tolerance level or the maximum allowable residue on marketed food in spite of these findings.⁶⁰

Moses here calls into question both the scientific authority of the EPA and the responsiveness of the government to changing scientific knowledge. Her use of scare quotes around "scientific" undermines the word's connotations of accuracy and objectivity, and in doing so calls into question the very idea that pesticide risk can be safely and fully managed by expert knowledge. This critique of scientific research findings and of the government's ability to regulate pesticide use points to a regulatory void that the UFW proposes to fill by empowering farmworkers.

The UFW's Challenge to Commodity Aesthetics as a Framework for Ethical Consumption

Food and Justice also challenges the notion that information provided through marketing or implicit in a product's aesthetic qualities is sufficient for consumer protection. These challenges have important implications for thinking about ethical consumption because ethical brands rely on advertising to differentiate environmentally and socially responsible products from conventional products, while the literature of

⁶⁰ Dr. Marion Moses, "Dr. Marion Moses's 'Deadly Dozen' Pesticide Series: Captan," *Food and Justice* 3.1 (October 1986): 13.

ethical consumption has often suggested that the consumer's aesthetic sense can guide her in distinguishing between more and less ethical products. As Glickman notes in *Buying Power*, the effects of ethical consumption "are often invisible to the consumer"; one of the challenges of ethical consumption discourse is to make these effects discernable. This has often meant that ethical consumption discourse attempts to de-fetishize commodities, revealing their origins and the conditions of their production so that the social relations of production become visible. Paradoxically, this has often also meant the development of an alternative commodity aesthetic (for example, the aesthetics described in Masumoto's concept of "umami" or Berry's of eating as an "extensive pleasure") imagines the products themselves as holding the ethical characteristics of the commodity chain that a particular kind of ethical consumption is trying to support. The UFW's "Wrath of Grapes" boycott directly challenges such commodity aesthetics, including ethical commodity aesthetics, as a reliable substitute for direct knowledge and transformation of the conditions of production and as a framework for consumer decisions. This is important because it challenges the notion—central to ethical consumption discourse—that consumer knowledge alone is enough to drive a change toward more ethical and sustainable production practices. For the United Farm Workers in the Wrath of Grapes campaign, farmworkers' greater vulnerability to risks from pesticide poisoning gives them access to knowledge that consumers don't have. Because farmworkers understand these risks best, their empowerment (through unionization, legislation and the negotiation of contracts) is in turn the key to managing those risks.

One way that the UFW challenges the sufficiency of a consumer's aesthetic sense to reliably guide their selection of safe, ethically produced foods is by emphasizing the

difficulty of detecting pesticides. Methyl bromide, for example, is described as “colorless, odorless.”⁶¹ If pesticide residues have no visual or sensory trace for consumers, somatic (tactile, olfactory, gustatory) aesthetics begins to seem unreliable as a way of avoiding contaminated and socially and environmentally harmful foods. Growers take advantage of this invisibility to sell contaminated grapes. As the UFW claims, “the American consumer gets more for his money than meets the eye—more poison. Poison in the form of invisible pesticide residues inside and outside of the luscious-looking, cosmetically doctored-up table grapes”⁶² Far from indicating wholesomeness, an appearance of lusciousness becomes a treacherous deception in UFW rhetoric, where a flawless appearance may itself be an effect of excessive pesticide use.

Beyond demonstrating the unreliability of the aesthetic senses of sight and taste to tell consumers which foods are safe or have been produced without undue risk to farmworkers, the UFW suggests that the consumer’s aesthetic preference for unblemished fruits may actually push her toward produce that has been treated with pesticides. The UFW describes the danger of relying on aesthetic judgments in the October 1985 *Food and Justice*:

Lawrie Mott, biochemist at the San Francisco office of the Natural Resources Defense Council, recently wrote: “Consumers have to recognize that the price they pay for cosmetically perfect fruits and vegetables is liberal doses of pesticide. Why did the watermelon growers use aldicarb? Perhaps only because it makes melons bigger and juicier?”⁶³

Juiciness in fruit is a trait that consumers tend to associate with ripeness and wholesomeness. In *Epitaph for a Peach*, conversely, juiciness (as opposed to color,

⁶¹ Dr. Marion Moses, “Methyl Bromide Kills Farm Workers!” *Food and Justice* 2.4 (September 1985).

⁶² United Farm Workers, “Chilean Winter Grapes: Beware!” *Food and Justice* 4.2 (February 1987): 7.

⁶³ United Farm Workers, “Union Carbide Pushes Aldicarb Use on Grapes,” *Food and Justice* 2.5 (October 1985): 9.

which he suggests is more open to manipulation) is one of the characteristics that Masumoto associates most strongly with organically farmed, tree-ripened heirloom peaches. Whereas for Masumoto an aesthetic that values juiciness will also tend to support small farmers who grow heirloom varieties, Mott's analysis here suggests that the same juiciness can also signal something much more sinister.

As the UFW shows in its critique of grower advertising, commodity aesthetics can be unreliable as a way to determining that a food is safe and its production ecologically sustainable. The invisibility of pesticides, combined with their use to produce cosmetically and gustatorily flawless grapes, means that consumers who rely on their own senses and aesthetic preferences to find the healthiest foods may ironically end up choosing those foods that have been most contaminated by pesticides. An article in The January 1988 issue of *Food and Justice* describes the results of a pesticide residue testing program for marketed fruits undertaken by the Kansas City Star: according to the tests, "The biggest offenders . . . were grapes. Nearly 40 percent tested positive." The testing revealed, moreover, that, "The strongest positive indicator came from the cleanest looking bunch, neatly wrapped in plastic and Styrofoam."⁶⁴ Here the appearance of cleanliness becomes a possible marker of a contamination that, as the UFW frequently observes, cannot be washed off. Another article in the July 1987 *Food and Justice* claims that growers use pesticides specifically to make grapes more attractive.⁶⁵ According to the UFW, aesthetics is also a motive driving growers to illegally use chemicals not approved for use on grapes, like the pesticide 4-CPA ("Fix"). "Grape growers like Fix because, according to Fred Jensen, a retired viticulturist, grape berries increase in size by

⁶⁴ United Farm Workers, "Residue Tests: Grapes 'Biggest Offender,'" *Food and Justice* 5.1 (January 1988): 9.

⁶⁵ United Farm Workers, "More Evidence against Residues," *Food and Justice* 4.7 (July 1987): 11.

30% when even a ‘miniscule amount’ is applied to the grape vine”⁶⁶ In each instance, the apparent wholesomeness and cleanliness of the grape belies an underlying contamination that will always be imperceptible to the consumer who relies on her own sensory perception and aesthetic judgments to make her selections in the marketplace.

This critique of commodity aesthetics is antithetical to Masumoto’s project in *Epitaph for a Peach* and *Four Seasons in Five Senses*. In these texts, Masumoto encourages readers to experience a peach’s juiciness as expressive of the farmer’s commitment to heirloom varieties and tree-ripening. Juiciness for him bespeaks commitment to traditional farming techniques and a respect for nature. But Masumoto’s project is to imagine the peach itself as speaking to consumers about the way it was produced in order to re-imagine taste and aesthetic judgment as a form of communication between farmer and consumer and as a possible guide for ethical consumption. For the UFW, whose project is to empower farmworkers, commodity aesthetics are suspect and likely to mislead consumers who encounter products in the grocery store without a full understanding of how they were produced.

The UFW’s Critique of Advertising

The UFW also critiqued the reliability of grower-generated narratives about and images of grapes in advertising to consumers. The UFW’s argument that commodity aesthetics—even a seemingly natural or alternative commodity aesthetics—are an unreliable way to determine the safety and environmental impact of a consumer product came together in its critique of the California Table Grape Commission’s “Natural Snack” advertising campaign. This critique was one of the explicit goals of the “Wrath of

⁶⁶ United Farm Workers, “Growers ‘Fix’ Editor,” *Food and Justice* 5.7 (October 1988): 12.

Grapes” boycott campaign: as an article in the March 1986 issue of *Food and Justice* explains, “ ‘The [Wrath of Grapes] boycott message will counter grape growers’ television ads featuring fresh grapes as a natural snack”⁶⁷

Established under the 1937 California Marketing Act⁶⁸, the California Table Grape Commission was itself created in 1968 largely in response to the UFW-led grape boycotts of the 1960s.⁶⁹ The “Natural Snack” campaign was a print, radio and television campaign that the California Table Grape Commission launched in 1973. Heidi Tinsman writes of the campaign that it “stressed grapes’ convenience and proximity to nature” and “addressed growing consumer skepticism about food contamination and harmful additives, offering grapes as a natural alternative to snacks made with dyes and preservatives.”⁷⁰ Tinsman sees this messaging as a part of the grape industry’s attempt to compete with processed convenience foods, appealing to working women with grapes as a snack that was convenient, but closer to nature (and implicitly healthier) than processed foods. In December of 1970, the Produce Marketing Yearbook (a publication of the national organization Produce Marketing Association) had reported that Americans considered frozen and canned produce to be healthier than fresh, and had called on members to educate people about what they should want.⁷¹ The “Natural Snack”

⁶⁷ United Farm Workers, “‘Wrath of Grapes’ Campaign to Counter Grape Growers’ Natural Snack Theme,” *Food and Justice* 3.2 (March 1986): 3.

⁶⁸ The California Marketing Act provided the framework for mandated marketing programs for California agricultural products. Once a program is enacted under this legislation (which happens in part through a supermajority vote of producers covered by the program), all producers are subject to its provisions and required to pay assessments that cover its costs. Although in the 1930s and 1940s programs emphasized supply controls, they now focus more on generic advertising and promotion, food safety inspection, health and nutrition research and market information. (See Hoy F. Carman, “California farmers adapt mandated marketing programs to the 21st century.”)

⁶⁹ See Heidi Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime: Grapes and Consumption in Cold War Chile and the United States*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

campaign was a part of an active industry effort to “link the concept of fresh with nature and health, as distinct from processed food.”⁷²

The “Natural Snack” campaign attempted to disrupt the growing popularity of processed snacks by presenting fresh fruits as healthier and closer to nature. As Tinsman recounts, one 1975 television ad “poked fun at artificial grape flavor, featuring a bewildered child inspecting a stick of gum as a narrator admonishes: ““If you want the real taste of a grape, why not eat a grape?” Grapes are a natural snack.”⁷³ The UFW challenged this message in part by challenging the Grape Commission’s definition of naturalness: for the UFW, California Grapes were unnatural because of the way they were produced. The UFW made this point explicitly in *Food and Justice* where a May 1986 article warns:

The first table grapes of the 1986 season are now arriving in supermarkets across the nation. But no matter how luscious they have been made to look – like “the natural snack” – they are a threat to consumers.

From the time pesticides are first mixed into the ground during the pre-harvesting vineyard work, through irrigation with more toxics, through pesticide spraying on the growing blossoms and bunches, through the application of additional chemicals during storage and shipment, until they arrive in the nation’s stores with pesticide residues still on them, California table grapes are unnatural from the outside skin to the seed inside.⁷⁴

This account of the grape growing process follows the natural life cycle of the grape, pointing to the unnatural aspects of industrial grape production at every step. First the soil from which grapes grow appears suspect, with “pesticides . . . mixed [in]”; then life-giving irrigation becomes another opportunity for the introduction of “more toxins”; “growing blossoms and bunches” that would mark fertilization become a target for

⁷² Ibid., 108-109.

⁷³ Ibid., 109.

⁷⁴ United Farm Workers, “Grape Growers’ Pesticide Philosophy: More is Better!” *Food and Justice* 3.4 (May 1986): 3.

“pesticide spraying”; and instead of ending in a “natural snack,” the movement of the produce from farm to table encompasses the “application of additional chemicals during storage and shipment” and has been transformed into a delivery mechanism for pesticide residues.

The UFW also made this argument more subtly, by exploiting a sense of cognitive dissonance between the familiar claims of the California Grape Commission’s “Natural Snack” campaign and what farmworkers knew was extensive pesticide use in grape growing and lingering pesticide residues on marketed grapes. References to the “Natural Snack” campaign in *Food and Justice* juxtapose references to grapes as a “natural snack” with descriptions of the same fruit as poisoned, chemical-laden and covered in pesticide residue⁷⁵. A May 1988 article in *Food and Justice* reports for instance that: “this year . . . California grape growers have reacted to our boycott pressure by boosting their 1988 advertising budget to \$8.3 million to promote their poisoned grapes as the ‘natural snack’”⁷⁶ Other references to the “natural snack” reinforce this cognitive dissonance, as with the phrases “grapes, the highly but falsely touted ‘natural snack’”⁷⁷ and

⁷⁵ Although I focus on pesticide residues in this chapter, the UFW mounted a similar critique of the reliability of commodity aesthetics and advertiser messages in its response to the use of sulfites to prolong freshness in table grapes. Sulfur dioxide is an inorganic sulfate that has been used since the 1920s to treat the fungus *Botrytis cinerea*, which causes bunch rot on grapes. Sold as a compressed liquid, the chemical transforms into a gas when released and can be used to fumigate grapes in cold-storage warehouses or during transportation. The Food and Drug Administration classified sulfating agents like sulfur dioxide as GRAS (generally recognized as safe) for food additive use on raw fruits or vegetables until July 1986 when the classification was removed in response to reports of deaths and severe allergic reactions among consumers sensitive to sulfates. The risk that caused the FDA to remove sulfites from the GRAS list and the EPA to require labeling for grapes fumigated with sulfates is different from the kinds of risk I’ve been discussing here in some important ways. As Lindsey, Briggs, Moulton and Kader note, the risk posed by sulfites is of a different type than that posed by chemicals that are not GRAS because they are known carcinogens or reproductive toxins. Most relevantly to my analysis, farmworkers do not have an especially high exposure to risk from sulfur dioxide exposure, since fumigation occurs post-harvest. The UFW decision to take a stance on sulfur dioxide residues is a product of the strategic decision to position the union as a protector of consumer as well as farmworker safety.

⁷⁶ United Farm Workers, “What Else Can We Do?” *Food and Justice* 5.4 (May 1988): 8.

⁷⁷ United Farm Workers, “Thanks – But No Thanks!” *Food and Justice* 4.9 (November 1987): 2.

“California’s pesticide-riddled ‘natural snack,’”⁷⁸ or describe ironically how “chemicals were applied to the grapes for shipment to preserve them and keep them looking delicious—like a perfectly ‘natural snack’”⁷⁹ This strategy of pointing to contradictions between the Grape Commission’s messaging about grapes’ “naturalness” and the conditions of grape production bolsters the UFW’s claims about the need for strong labor and environmental protections by revealing how sensory perception, aesthetic judgments and advertiser messages all can conspire to mislead consumers.

In another article pointing to a disconnect between the way California grapes are framed by advertising and PR and their actual conditions of production, the UFW points to an anonymous grape grower who had been scheduled to appear in an “educational advertising” video emphasizing the safety of Raley’s Supermarket produce. This unidentified grower was supposed to have been “an innovative grape grower who uses a minimum of pesticides”:

The script was ready, the vineyard selected, the starring grapes in place, the supporting actors primed to perform: the proud grape grower, of course; a Raley’s produce official; and a representative of NutriClean, an independent pesticide residue testing firm in Oakland.

Then the shocker. The grapes blew their big chance for popular success. They flunked their screen test. Too many pesticide residues, NutriClean discovered. Though outwardly luscious-looking, the way some pesticides are designed to make grapes look, deep down they were too ugly, too full of poison. Kill the commercials.⁸⁰

This disconnect between the narrative that had already been prepared for the shoot – literally “the script”—and the very different story told by the Nutri-clean residue testing suggests that Raley’s and the growers have shaped the narrative to fit their marketing

⁷⁸ United Farm Workers, “Grape Growers Getting the Message” *Food and Justice* 4.9 (November 1987): 4.

⁷⁹ Cesar Chavez, “Editorial,” *Food and Justice* 3.4 (May 1986): 2.

⁸⁰ United Farm Workers, “Table Grapes Flunk Screen Test,” *Food and Justice* 5.7 (October 1988): 10.

objectives rather than to reflect the real conditions of production. The so-called “educational advertising” spot was created as a part of Raley’s “safe-produce publicity campaign,” and the article points out that although producers shifted to cleaner strawberries as the fruit featured in the video, Raley’s did not see the failed pesticide residue test as a reason to pull grapes from their shelves. “At the same time that they were shooting commercials about pesticide-free strawberries, they kept right on selling poisoned table grapes. The grapes might not have met NutriClean standards, but they were good enough for consumers!”⁸¹ The article suggests that the narrative Raley’s creates through this “educational advertising” is misleading (it uses selective pesticide testing to endorse all Raley’s produce even as test performed as a part of the spot’s production demonstrate that table grapes from even a supposedly innovative grower don’t meet the standard set by NutriClean’s residue tests). It also affirms again the idea already introduced above that the aesthetic qualities of table grapes are misleading for consumers interested in clean food: far from being an indicator of naturalness or healthiness, luscious appearance in table grapes is “the way . . . pesticides . . . make grapes look” and suggests that “deep down they [are] . . . ugly, . . . full of poison.”

Farmworker Knowledge in the Context of Unreliable Government Regulation, Aesthetic Judgment and Advertising

Into this confusion of ineffective government regulation and unreliable marketing messages and aesthetic judgments, the UFW positions the farmworker union as the only group with both the knowledge and the motivation to protect consumers, whose interest in safety the UFW argues is fundamentally aligned with that of farmworkers. The

⁸¹ Ibid., 10.

metaphor of farmworkers as the canaries in the coalmine, which Moses introduces in her interview for the *Wrath of Grapes* documentary, informs the way that the link between farmworkers and consumers is presented in *Food and Justice*. The UFW argues that in a context of unreliable scientific knowledge and ineffective government oversight, the knowledge and political will needed to protect producers and consumers is born out of direct experience of risk. Articles about the McFarland cancer cluster describe knowledge about the risks of pesticide use arising out of a shared experience of what it means to inhabit the bodies and the communities most exposed to those risks. In an article about the March 16 death of 10-year-old Frankie Gonzalez, *Food and Justice* describes one moment in the awakening of this kind of awareness:

The mother of another McFarland child with cancer, Connie Rosales, recalls her first conversation with Frankie's mother: "She said, 'My name is Sally Gonzalez, and my son just had his leg amputated. He's nine years old.' "

Rosales, whose son, Randy, has Non-Hodgkins lymphoma (cancer of the lymph glands), said she knew there was an unusually high number of cancer cases in the area and thought pesticides were to blame. She told Sally Gonzalez, "Well, that's it. Something is wrong here."

The parents of the cancer victims became friends as time passed. "We were thrown together at the hospitals, and everyone became close."⁸²

These parents' knowledge does not come to them through government channels, consumer information or even news media, but instead out of their shared experience of risk as it manifests as cancer and birth defects in the bodies of their children. This same, shared experience of risk leads to the formation of communities ("we were thrown together in hospitals"). In another article in the same issue, McFarland parents describe avoiding water they fear is contaminated ("I am pregnant . . . And I'm not taking any chances") or not allowing their children to play outside because they hear helicopters ("I

⁸² United farm Workers, "Another McFarland Child Dies," *Food and Justice* 3.4 (May 1986): 8.

knew they were spraying . . . My little boy wanted to go to the park and play baseball, but I said no”).⁸³ These decisions are conditioned by the parents’ common experience of the McFarland cancer cluster, which has led them to identify pesticides (whether from groundwater pollution or drift from helicopter spraying) as a serious risk to their community.

In a later issue of *Food and Justice*, the UFW explicitly argues that that farmworkers’ direct and detailed knowledge about pesticide risks—gained through exposure and its expression in their bodies, in the chromosomes of their children, and in the diseases that affect their communities—substantially precedes scientific knowledge. An article titled, “No Surprise for Farm Workers: New Research on Pesticide-Birth Defect Link” opens:

The results of the latest research on the link between pesticides and birth defects will come as no surprise to many farm worker mothers.

They have known for a long time, through tragic personal experiences, what researchers are finally discovering through scientific studies: women living or working in California agricultural counties where pesticide use is high experience almost double the normal risk of having babies with birth defects.⁸⁴

Although “latest research” would seem to connote new discoveries, a main premise of this article is that this new research is only catching up with and confirming what farmworkers already knew about the risks of pesticide exposure.

In addition to preceding scientific knowledge, the knowledge that farmworkers gain through exposure to risk is in some ways more authentic and more certain than scientific knowledge. The article concludes:

⁸³ United Farm Workers, “McFarland: Too Much Cancer,” *Food and Justice* 3.4 (May 1986): 7.

⁸⁴ United Farm Workers, “No Surprise for Farm Workers: New Research on Pesticide-Birth Defect Link,” *Food and Justice* 5.8 (December 1988): 8.

Dr. Lowell Sever, an expert on birth defects at the federal government's Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, said [four existing research studies] linking pesticide exposure to limb-reduction defects create "a compelling theory."

For the farm worker mothers who have given birth to babies with missing or severely deformed arms and legs, the compelling theory is tragic reality – one that will continue until the growers and pesticide manufacturers demonstrate a concern for farm workers as compelling as their concern for profits.⁸⁵

This distinction between "compelling theory" and "tragic reality" is important. For science, the link between pesticide exposure and birth defects is statistical, and a "compelling theory" is generated out of the imperative to explain an observed pattern. Farmworkers lack the luxury of distance and abstraction, and engage with this link not as a theory but as one of the shaping realities of their lives. Where a "compelling theory" might inform future research designs and eventually public policy recommendations, a "tragic reality" directly shapes the lives and politics of the people who face it. Their unique experience of the pesticide-birth defect link as tragic reality rather than compelling theory is an important impetus behind farmworkers' struggle for basic labor rights, and it is a key source of their privileged knowledge about pesticide risk.

It is in relation to the invisible yet all-to-real risk of pesticide exposures that disfigured children figure in *Food and Justice*, *The Wrath of Grapes* and Cherrie Moraga's *Heroes and Saints*. In *Heroes and Saints*, children living (and dying) in a pesticide-poisoned town hang the bodies of children who have already died on crosses in the fields in protest against government and grower inaction to address pesticide poisoning. Moraga's use of the body-less young woman Cerezita as the mouthpiece for the farmworker community and these expressions of resistance and opposition to growers speaks to the central role of children's bodies in making the argument for farmworkers' and consumers' shared exposure to pesticide risk. Disfigured children have remained

⁸⁵ Ibid., 9.

powerful figures in fights against abuse of agricultural laborers.⁸⁶ The figure of the disfigured child testifies to the abuses suffered by farmworkers as a socially, legally and economically vulnerable population, and it also resonates with consumer fears about the as yet unknown effects of low-level pesticide exposure on their own health and that of their children.

As the character Mario observes in *Heroes and Saints*, “Kids’ bodies are so vulnerable. They pick up stuff way before adults. They got no buffer zone. ‘The canary in the mine shaft’ . . . that’s exactly what they are.”⁸⁷ Moraga here echoes Moses’s analysis in the *Wrath of Grapes* documentary, but identifies children specifically rather than all farmworkers as the group whose knowledge and its importance for guiding change is born through their bodily experience of risk. It is fitting that Cerezita, the most disfigured of all, should become their leader. Moraga here literalizes the underlying premise in *Wrath of Grapes* and throughout the later issues of *Food and Justice* that knowledge and authority about pesticide risk comes not through academic science, government regulation, commodity aesthetics or traditional media (Moraga portrays the reporter character in *H&S* as clueless) but rather through bodily experience of risk. Unlike the disfigured children in the documentary, Cerezita in *Heroes and Saints* exercises control over her role. Responding to her mother’s desire to keep her hidden away at home where people won’t stare at her, Cerezita pleads, “Give me a chance, ‘amá. If nobody ever sees me, how will I know how I look? How will I know if I scare them or make them mad or . . . move them? If people could see me, ‘amá, things would change.”

⁸⁶ More recently, Carlitos Candelario, born without arms or legs to a mother who was exposed to pesticides early in her pregnancy, has played a prominent role in recent legal battles over pesticide use and labor conditions in Florida’s winter tomato industry. See Berry Estabrook, *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed our Most Alluring Fruit*.

⁸⁷ Cherrie Moraga, *Heroes and Saints*, 104.

Conclusion

Considered as an example of ethical consumption discourse, the UFW's Wrath of Grapes campaign builds on a critique of environmental racism to disrupt both the concept of consumer sovereignty and the notion that ethical consumption can be guided by an alternative commodity aesthetics because of how the campaign conceptualizes knowledge about risk: if consumers lack knowledge about pesticide risk and growers and the government cannot or will not provide it, then investing the consumer with the power to regulate production through her consumption choices does not work. Most ethical consumption discourse sees the consumer's awareness of and impact on the environment and conditions of production as potentially quite direct: gleaned knowledge about production from the aesthetic qualities of products, the consumer can reliably make decisions that both provide aesthetic pleasure and support environmental sustainability and social justice. Although the Wrath of Grapes boycott does ask consumers to use their purchases to support social justice, it is much more skeptical about the consumer's ability to know the conditions of production from commodity aesthetics and marketing. Knowledge for the UFW is embodied not in aesthetic pleasure but in bodily encounters with risk. Race and class status condition these bodily encounters with risk with the implication that the often middle to upper class, white consumer can never know what the lower income, immigrant farmworker always must.

If workers rather than consumers have privileged access to the knowledge that can inform a shift toward more sustainable production, this has tremendous implications for

the political message and rhetorical tactics of ethical consumption. Ethical consumption as Soper imagines it is fundamentally consistent with free market capitalism, turning to capitalism itself for the solution to capitalism's historical over-exploitation of natural and human resources. We see this basic affinity with capitalism expressed baldly in Goleman's *Ecological Intelligence*, where he writes:

Radical transparency offers a way to unleash the latent potential of the free market to drive the changes we must make by mobilizing consumers and executives to use data to make more virtuous decisions. An ecologically transparent marketplace lets each of us become a far more effective agent of amelioration, giving shoppers as crucial a role as that of executives. Such a marketplace incentive could reverse the momentum begun at the dawn of the industrial revolution, when manufacturing technologies began to come into use without full understanding or regard for how they affect ecosystems.⁸⁸

Notably missing is any aspiration to incorporate the knowledge or develop the decision-making power of the producer. For Goleman, ecological sustainability and environmental justice would be served by giving shoppers "as crucial role as that of executives." The comparison to executives marks this empowered consumer as wealthy, white and male. Goleman's notion of radical transparency is uniformly top-down in the change it imagines. In contrast, the Wrath of Grapes campaign, because it imagines knowledge as emerging through direct embodied and lived encounters with risk that are themselves conditioned by class, race and gender challenges the tendency in ethical consumption discourse to value the knowledge and agency of relatively wealthy consumers operating within capitalist market contexts.

For media and communications scholar Tania Lewis, the emphasis on consumer agency in much ethical consumption discourse is problematic for its perpetuation of

⁸⁸ Daniel Goleman, *Ecological Intelligence*, 81.

uneven power relationships between consumers and producers and for its tendency to discount producers' knowledge and experience. TV representations of fair trade, she argues, give "undue weight . . . to the ability of first world consumers to understand and impact the 'realities' of life for producers in the global South – an emphasis that also tends to reinscribe rather than undo the colonizing power relations between (agentic) Northern consumers and (passive) southern producers."⁸⁹ Ethical consumption discourse runs into similar problems when it sees ethical consumption decisions as focused through the consumer's aesthetic judgment about commodities.

If the Wrath of Grapes campaign offers a corrective to the over-emphasis on consumer knowledge and consumer agency that emerges when aesthetic attributes and values form the lens for ethical consumption decisions, it does so by imagining consumer decisions as a space in which the consumer encounters risk and by showing how the consumer's understanding of that risk is necessarily limited by her class position and distance from production. The Wrath of Grapes campaign bridges its critique of pesticide poisoning as environmental racism with risk theory, arguing that because of their race and class privilege consumers do not have access to the knowledge that they need to keep themselves and their families safe from harmful pesticide residues. In an article for *Food and Justice*, Dr. Marion Moses describes a consumer who lacks both agency and knowledge about her exposure to pesticide residues. "Since everyone must eat, there is involuntary exposure of the entire population to potentially harmful pesticides. It is difficult – and may be impossible – for the consumer to find out what pesticide residues

⁸⁹ Lewis, Tania. "The Ethical Turn in Commodity Culture: Consumption, Care and the Other." *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*. Eds. Tania Lewis, Emily Potter. Routledge, 2013: 15.

are in fruits, vegetables and other foods at the time of purchase.”⁹⁰ The Wrath of Grapes campaign suggests that as a framework for ethical consumption in the context of environmental racism, risk and toxic discourse offer a way to value producers’ knowledge and agency where aesthetic pleasure and pastoral imagery do not.

⁹⁰ Marion Moses, “The Poisons in Our Food,” *Food and Justice* 3.4 (May 1986): 12.

Chapter Five

Eco-consumption Memoirs

Chapter Five shifts the focus from producer-led back to consumer-led ethical consumption as I address an emerging genre I call the eco-consumption memoir. This shift from producer-led to consumer-led ethical consumption also comes with a shift in the authors' class and racial identities and an accompanying shift in the way that texts conceptualize and relate to the urgency of the environmental problems they address. In Chapter Four I argue that the UFW's claim to thought leadership in the Wrath of Grapes boycott emerged out of their recognition of Chicano farmworkers' exposure to pesticide risk as a form of environmental racism. Their whiteness and class status means that the authors of eco-consumption memoirs, by contrast, enjoy relative protection from environmental risk; for the authors in this chapter their authority on environmental issues emerges instead out of their embrace of forms of premium consumption (including organic and local food) that they understand to be environmentally sustainable. These authors have gained significant visibility within ethical consumption movements, a circumstance that I will argue both reflects the classed nature of access to ethical consumption and speaks to their privileged access to publishing networks.

My argument in this chapter develops from patterns and shared characteristics I have observed across a large body of these memoirs, but my analysis will focus on three memoirs. *The 100-Mile Diet*¹ by J.B. MacKinnon and Alisa Smith describes the Vancouver couple's attempt to eat only foods produced within a 100-mile radius of their home for a year, an experiment

¹ This book was published in an international edition with the title *The 100-Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating* and is best known by that title. It was first published under the title *Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Robust Year of Eating Locally* and has also been published as *Plenty: Eating Locally on the 100-Mile Diet*.

inspired by the oft-cited and to locavores like MacKinnon and Smith disturbing statistic that the average food item travels 1,500-3,000 miles.² *No Impact Man* by Colin Beavan describes the author's attempt to live with his wife and baby daughter in New York City for a year without creating any trash or using fossil fuels. Finally, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver, daughter Camille Kingsolver and husband Steven Hopp describes the author's move from Tucson, Arizona to rural Virginia to pursue a similar project.

Eco-consumption memoirs document their authors' typically yearlong projects of embracing a form of consumption (typically locavorism, homesteading or downshifting) that they consider to be beneficial for the environment. These memoirs are personal and introspective but also instructional, and they frequently position themselves as models for how to consume in ways conducive to environmental sustainability. They incorporate recipes and practical advice as well as references to further resources—all of which suggest (like the supplemental materials that accompany *A Cafecito Story*) that the reader will respond to the text with changes in her own consumption. This pedagogical impulse suggests that these memoirs imagine a powerful social role for themselves. Advocates of ethical consumption see their everyday consumption choices as sites for activism; accordingly, pedagogical content that instructs readers in how to consume functions as an instrument of activism in eco-consumption memoirs. The activist aspirations of

² This is a Canadian book but is closely tied to the U.S. in several ways. The study that inspires Smith and MacKinnon's experiment comes out of the U.S. and describes "food miles" in a general North American context. The statistics they use to characterize industrial food systems throughout the book refer to American food systems in general or are specific to the U.S., and the authors understand these statistics to speak to a Canadian context as well. (For instance, as an example of one success of the industrial food system MacKinnon sites the fact that the U.S. produces enough food to feed double its population; as a failure, he cites U.S. Dept. of Agriculture statistics indicating that 436 of the 463 known varieties of radish from the early twentieth century are now extinct.) The authors understand their project as an attempt to move away from consumption patterns that they identify as North American. Smith and MacKinnon also live in Vancouver, which means (as a shopping trip across the border underlines) that a large part of their 100-mile range for the experiment is actually in Washington State. The U.S. also figures importantly in the long industrial food chains that their experiment attempts to leave behind. Finally, their project in the book has had a major impact on locavorism in the U.S. and on similar projects from U.S. authors including Colin Beavan (*No Impact Man*) and Barbara Kingsolver (*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*). See JB MacKinnon and Alisa Smith, *No Impact Man*, 99.

these memoirs and the global scale of the environmental problems they address are often in apparent tension with both the intensely personal focus of the bulk of their narratives and their tendency to address a relatively narrow audience of implicitly white middle- to upper-class consumers.

Although most eco-consumption authors describe undertaking consumption projects in response to a particular environmental problem, the impetus of each project typically fades to the background for a large portion of the memoir. These memoirs reserve their thickest description not for climate change or for images of the waste that industrial food systems generate but rather for the immediate sensuous pleasures of what Kate Soper has called “consuming differently”: meals and other experiences enjoyed alone, with family, or with a few close friends. Although authors describe undertaking their consumption projects in response to statistics about, for example, large-scale problems like food miles, waste and water usage, the memoirs mark the progress of each project not by objective measures of their global impact but rather through more personal transformations in the author’s habits, desires, tastes, understanding of nature, relationship to a community, and sense of identity. In her *Global Appetites*, Allison Carruth suggests that imaginative literature displays a particular “facility with shifting from macroscopic to intimate scales of representation” which allows it to provide “an incisive lens on the interactions between local places and global markets that are so central to how communities and corporations produce, exchange, and make use of food in the modern period.”³ This chapter maps those shifts in scale in terms of where they fall in the narrative arcs of eco-consumption memoirs and asks what the timing of those shifts can tell us about how these memoirs imagine their interventions into environmental crises. I argue that the pleasures that these authors describe experiencing and their personal escape from some of the risks and stressors of modern

³ Allison Carruth, *Global Appetites: American Power and the Literature of Food*, 5.

life allow them to achieve narrative resolution on a personal scale and that this personal-scale narrative resolution stands in for the larger change they hope to effect through their writing. The personal-scale change that these memoirs depict appear as analogues to the larger-scale changes that they imagine will happen as readers (so they imagine) embrace en masse their concepts of desire and the eco-friendly consumption patterns they model.

I have argued that in ethical consumption memoirs the intimate pleasures and personal security from social and environmental risk that the authors achieve stand in for the larger scale changes that they hope their projects may inspire. The possibility of achieving such narrative resolution is, of course, underwritten by class privilege. As I will describe in more detail in Chapter Six, ethical consumption (despite these authors' assertions that it is affordable and universally accessible) is ultimately a form of premium consumption. Even if these forms of premium consumption were universally available, they would still be unable to offer personal security from social and environmental risk to the poor, who encounter disproportionate environmental risk not just through their consumption but also through occupational exposures and greater exposure to environmental contamination in the neighborhoods where they live. Thus both the ability to choose relatively healthful forms of consumption and the situation of having consumption appear as the most significant source of one's exposure to environmental risk are both tied to class privilege.

The type of narrative resolution that these memoirs achieve also relies on the authors' ability to imagine a ready audience for their projects, and in this respect too these projects are underwritten by the authors' privilege. Authors of ethical consumption memoirs are typically white, professional class, and include many journalists and authors already well established in their careers with ready access to publishing networks. Alissa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon were

both already making their livings as professional journalist when they began their 100-mile diet. Colin Beavan was an established author who hatched his idea to write *No Impact Man* during a lunch meeting with his book agent. Barbara Kingsolver, perhaps the most commercially successful author to undertake such a memoir, had already written several bestsellers when she undertook her ethical consumption experiment. These authors' feeling that their personal consumption has the potential to model transformations in the consumption of others is enabled by their ready access to established publishing networks and to wealthy audiences that have the money and leisure time to read eco-consumption memoirs and consider undertaking their own eco-consumption projects.

The specific forms of their consumption have, in these authors' view, considerable power to determine their personal impact on the environment and also either to cultivate their intimate knowledge of nature or to alienate them from it. Like Masumoto and Berry they see participation in the industrial food chain as encouraging unsustainable food systems and ignorance about natural processes⁴; in their view eating from local and organic food systems strengthens those systems and cultivates personal awareness of and connection to nature. *No Impact Man* extends this thesis to suggest that any use of processed fossil fuels (whether embodied in industrial foods, in electricity from the power grid, or in motorized transportation) tends to disconnect us from nature. In imagining the "nature" from which the modern consumer is alienated and to which alternative consumption offers re-connection, these authors draw on an idealized sense of life in pre-industrial agricultural society. Awareness of nature in their view may mean knowledge about where food is grown and awareness of the seasons especially as reflected in the seasonal availability of foods. Eco-consumption memoirs should be of particular interest to environmental literary criticism for the way they push the traditional form and function of the memoir in

⁴ Novella Carpenter in *Farm City*, for example, recalls one child's identification of spaghetti as a root vegetable.

cultivating such awareness. These memoirists aspire to intervene in environmental crises by influencing the consumption choices of their readers; this means that they are engaging with the traditionally autobiographical and reflective dimensions of the memoir form in a way that attempts to make it an instrument of that author's global activism.

Each of these memoirs is inspired by the author's desire to stop contributing (and to encourage others to stop contributing) to global-scale environmental crises as reflected in environmental statistics about, for instance, food miles and global warming. However, as I suggest above, both these statistics and the direct environmental impacts that each project may aspire to generate fade into the background as the memoir progresses, replaced by attention to transformations in the author's personal relationship to and awareness of nature. The shift from this intimate horizon back to a global scale does not typically happen within the memoir itself but is instead deferred onto an imagined future shaped by the project's reception. In this way, the pedagogical elements of each memoir and the reader's imagined response become an integral part of the way each memoir imagines both its own narrative resolution and its intervention into environmental crisis. Reflecting the importance of reader response to the success of each project, and to resolving the tension between their personal focus and aspiration to intervene in global-scale environmental crises, all of these authors have embraced the role of nurturing readers' spinoff projects. Eco-consumption memoirs understand themselves as helping to found and grow a movement, in other words. The intimate scale of the transformations they document stands in for the larger-scale transformations that the authors imagine taking place as readers embrace the consumption projects they model.

The citation of environmental statistics as an impetus for the author's consumption project has become a convention of the eco-consumption memoir, as has the shift in focus I

describe from the global scale to the personal as a strategy for achieving narrative resolution. This way of relating to environmental problems marks another difference between the way these memoirs relate to environmental risk and the way that the UFW relates to risk in the Wrath of Grapes Campaign. Authors of eco-consumption memoirs may describe environmental problems manifesting in their daily lives (Kingsolver, for instance, describes her experience of ongoing drought when she lives in Tucson; Beavan describes environmental problems manifesting mainly in the anxiety that he feels about them) but these environmental problems do not present an existential threat in their own lives. Accordingly, they turn to environmental statistics to convey the urgency and enormity of these problems. The UFW, by contrast, relies more heavily on descriptions of personal encounters with environmental risk in the form of cancers, chronic and acute illnesses, and deaths in the Chicano farmworker community. And the UFW, because it is advocating for the rights of a population that will remain exposed to risk until there are systemic changes in pesticide usage, also does not represent any sort of resolution happening as a result of individual changes in consumption habits in the way that eco-consumption memoirs do. In this sense, the way that the eco-consumption memoir represents the urgency of environmental problems and their ability to imagine plot resolution for their environmentally-driven narratives both reflect their authors' privileged positions relative to environmental risk.

These memoirs' capacity to make this jump from representing how a consumption project transforms the author's life to imagining how it might intervene in environmental crisis on a global scale depends heavily on the author's ability to imagine and represent audience engagement with each project. *The 100-Mile Diet* and *No Impact Man* present their projects as transformative on this larger scale by first representing their own engaged and growing audiences and then establishing online spaces in which to nurture and document spinoff projects

following the publication of their memoirs. These spinoff projects undertaken by readers extend each project beyond the bounds of what the memoir can represent and offer the implicit promise of documenting an impact that they imagine will become global. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, despite its pedagogical content and its concern with the global impact of individual consumption choices, does not ultimately push the scale of its own intervention from the personal back out to the global in this way. Whatever their actual effects, *No Impact Man* and *The 100-Mile Diet* push the form of the memoir to extend their stories into their ongoing reception and public life in a way that *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* does not.

The Eco-consumption Memoir as Activist

Although authors sometimes express doubts about the efficacy of their interventions⁵, eco-consumption memoirs do present themselves as activist. Eco-consumption memoirs signal their activism through pedagogical elements including recipes, advice and instructions for readers making similar changes, and resource lists. The eco-consumption memoir understands these pedagogical elements as the instrument of its activism. In *The 100-Mile Diet*, *No Impact Man* and to a lesser extent *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, the project of instructing readers in how to consume differently also extends beyond the boundaries of the text through spinoff projects cultivated by the authors. These spinoff projects reinforce the expectation—implied in recipes, instructions and resource lists—that readers will respond to the texts by making changes in their

⁵ MacKinnon, for instance, laments that, “As I pedal through another midwinter rainfall, virtually every indicator of global ecological health continues to worsen, from biodiversity to energy consumption, and my *being* has done little to *change* the world. My actions are abstract and absurd, and they are neither saving the rain forest nor feeding the world’s hungry.” See J.B. MacKinnon and Alisa Smith, *Plenty*, 17.

own consumption patterns, and they attempt to document the transformation of each project from a personal experience to a movement.

One of the ways that eco-consumption memoirs signal their intent to influence the consumption habits of readers—and thus to contribute to a kind of activism—is through the inclusion of recipes. *The 100-Mile Diet* offers a recipe to open each chapter. The first, a recipe for herb tea, signals the text’s commitment to local eating casually in a modifier: the instructions read, “Place the *fresh-picked* leaves in a mug.”⁶ Another recipe for poached salmon with wine cream sauce similarly signals its commitment to local eating by calling for a “*seasonal* vegetable stock.”⁷ In other recipes, the commitment to local eating is more explicit: instructions for a Spring Salad explain, “A spring salad is not a process, but a pattern. The choice of greens depends day by day on seasonal weather. Choice is limited; use everything that is available.”⁸ Smith and MacKinnon stress the importance to environmentalist living of local ingredients, seasonality and community as a counter to what Smith describes as conventional cookbooks’ corresponding insistence on participation in the global industrial food chain. Describing a winter day when she (not normally the cook in the family) decides to surprise MacKinnon with a soup, Smith observes, “Of course, this was easier said than done. Cookbooks, with their insistent list of nonlocal ingredients, were no use. All I had to guide me were mental images of James making soup, and vague memories of simple Japanese broths I had tasted. I was on my own, riffing.”⁹ Smith is critical of mainstream cookbooks, whose recipes and ingredient lists often contain processed foods or ingredients that are not in season in the same place at the same time. The recipes in *The 100-Mile Diet*, which are looser in their ingredient lists and emphasize

⁶ Alisa B. Smith & J.B. Mackinnon, *Plenty*, 0. My emphasis.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 128. My emphasis.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

improvisation and using what is available locally, offer an alternative model that is more friendly to the locavorism that Smith and MacKinnon would like their readers to embrace.

Like Julia Alvarez's *A Cafecito Story*, eco-consumption memoirs also signal their pedagogical intent through their inclusion of resource lists and additional references, implying that the reader will respond to the memoir by seeking to adopt similar lifestyle changes to those that the author in essence field tests and models. In *No Impact Man*, Colin Beavan provides a listing of additional resources explicitly aimed at helping his readers reduce their own environmental impact in an appendix titled, "You Can Make A Difference!" Beavan breaks these resources down according to the reader's particular areas of interest and the magnitude of the change she is ready to make. Beavan introduces one section, "If you think your passion lies in lifestyle change and you want more information than this book or my blog supplies, the following will help."¹⁰ A different set of resources is available for readers who are not "up to a lifestyle change per se but would like to make an effort to use less damaging resources."¹¹ There is no special resource list for readers who prefer not to change their consumption habits at all, presumably because satisfaction with the status quo is not among the appropriate responses to this kind of memoir.

These two memoirs also refer readers to their own websites and spinoff projects as a way of obtaining additional information and getting involved. At their website www.100milediet.org, Smith and MacKinnon offer additional resources including a mapping tool to help readers plot their own 100-mile diets. Beavan's "You Can Make a Difference!" appendix refers reader to NoImpactMan.com for "tips on environmental lifestyle redesign" and to NoImpactCommunity.org for "ways to participate in our cultural response to the crisis in our

¹⁰ Colin Beavan, *No Impact Man*, 228.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

habitat.”¹² In this way, the website associated with each text becomes a part of the way that each signals and attempts to fulfill its activist aspirations and to push the scale of its plot resolution from the personal to the global. As I will discuss below, the spinoff projects documented through these websites become an important part of the way that these texts imagine themselves as agents of large-scale change, the scope and time horizon of which necessarily exceed the boundaries of each memoir.

Shifting Scales: From the Global to the Personal in *The 100-Mile Diet* and *No Impact Man*

One feature widely shared among eco-consumption memoirs is that they present themselves as responding to a particular environmental problem, often expressed in the form of a striking statistic or series of statistics. In *The 100-Mile Diet*, for instance, Smith and MacKinnon’s project is a direct response to the statistic that the average North American meal travels 1,500-3,000 miles. Although each author presents his project as occasioned by the need to respond to a particular environmental problem, the thickest description centers not on images of environmental harms or on evidence of incremental change that their projects achieve but rather on the personal benefits and immediate sensuous pleasures of “consuming differently.” The pleasure that these authors describe and their escape from some of the risks and stressors of modern life allow them to achieve a plot resolution on a personal scale that stands in for the larger change that they imagine happening as more people embrace their concept of desire. The relationship we see playing out here between personal pleasure and larger-scale change is anticipated somewhat in Soper’s theorization of alternative hedonism. Considering the relationship between the personal pleasures of riding a bike and the perceived environmental and

¹² Ibid., 227.

social benefits, Soper writes, “There are intrinsic pleasures in walking or cycling which the car driver will not be experiencing. But cycling or walking themselves are much pleasanter, and may only be possible, where car use is limited – that is, where others too are making alternative hedonist commitments to self policing in car use and are supporting policies that restrain it.”¹³ Here, as in eco-consumption memoirs, the pleasures of consuming differently are seen as intrinsic, but to realize them fully requires a movement. Eco-consumption memoirs present themselves as helping to model and spread a form of consumer activism that will be adopted by readers and eventually achieve a scale that will register in new statistics that show our collective impact on the environment. Because that process depends on reader response it is impossible to depict directly in each memoir. Personal experiences of pleasure and escape from environmental risks stand in symbolically for this larger scale change, which the memoir defers onto a future shaped by its own reception and by widespread adoption of the practices it advocates.

The 100-Mile Diet

Of the three eco-consumption memoirs I discuss in this chapter, *The 100-Mile Diet* mounts the most direct response to the troubling environmental statistic that inspires it.

Describing the impetus for the project, MacKinnon writes:

According to the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, the food we eat now typically travels between 1,500 and 3,000 miles from farm to plate. The distance had increased by up to 25 percent between 1980 and 2001, when the study was published. It was likely continuing to climb.

I didn't know more about it than that. It was enough.¹⁴

This statistic is initially troubling not (as a reading of the rest of the memoir might suggest) because of what it means about the kinds of tastes, relationships to producers, or experiences of

¹³ Kate Soper, “Introduction,” *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, 5.

¹⁴ Alisa B. Smith and J.B. MacKinnon, *Plenty*, 3.

seasonality that are available to consumers, but rather for its connection to a host of environmental phenomena related to global warming and the depletion of natural resources.

MacKinnon elaborates:

There is no shortage of information about this bright blue planet and its merry trip to hell in a hand-basket . . . about “dead zones” in the Gulf of Mexico or creatures going extinct after 70 million years . . . we could not ignore the gut feeling, more common and more important than policy makers or even scientists like to admit, that *things have gone sideways*. That the winter snow is less deep than it was when we were children, the crabs fewer under the rocks by the shore, the birds at dawn too quiet, the forest oddly lonesome. And that we, the human species, are in one way or another responsible.¹⁵

As the statistic focusing the memoir’s environmental critique of the global industrial food system, 1,500-3,000 miles represents that food system’s carbon footprint and by extension its contributions to global warming, groundwater and soil contamination and resource depletion that make “winter snow less deep . . . the crabs fewer under the rocks . . . [and] the forest oddly lonesome.” Smith and MacKinnon’s decision to eat from within a 100-mile radius of their home is environmentally motivated then just as is MacKinnon’s decision to “pedal through another midwinter rainfall”; the 100-mile diet represents the couple’s attempt to break away from a pattern of resource use and environmental destruction they find troubling.

As the memoir continues, concern about the state of the world gives way to a series of more personal concerns. Smith writes, for instance, “It’s no secret that we, as a society, have been losing the traceability not only of our food, but of every aspect of our lives. On any given day, chances are high I will have no idea what phase the moon is in.”¹⁶ Here, Smith conflates the globalization and industrialization of the food system (“losing the traceability of . . . our food”) with the more personal problem of a loss of connection to natural processes (a failure to know “what phase the moon is in”). This conflation is crucial to Smith and MacKinnon’s ability to find

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶ Ibid., 55.

some plot resolution in a memoir that, although inspired by a macro-level environmental statistic, must necessarily defer any claim to affect that statistic onto a future that exceeds the scope of the memoir. The memoir form is non-fictional and concerns events of the past. Although Smith and MacKinnon hope to affect change through the reader's response to their memoir, they are thus unable to depict directly the scope of the change that they envision. And so rather than describing the transformations that they anticipate in the future, Smith and MacKinnon zoom in to a more intimate scale and describe the changes they have personally observed over the course of the project: the intimate sensual pleasures of local food, and the transformations their project has brought for their own knowledge, outlook and relationship. These more personal transformations model the immediate rewards that readers can expect if they adopt Smith and MacKinnon's locavore lifestyle, and they also stand in narratively for the larger changes that the narrative asks readers to expect when it presents itself as a response to the problem of food miles.

Standing in for a direct, measurable impact on environmental crisis are more personal transformations in Smith and MacKinnon's relationship to one another, their community, and their local biome. Above, Smith regrets the likelihood that at any moment she "will have no idea what phase the moon is in" because eating from a globalized and industrial food chain has made awareness of such natural cycles and processes invisible in her everyday life. Although *The 100-Mile Diet* cannot depict society regaining the traceability of its food, it can show its authors' own growing awareness of the seasons and of what each season means in their local environment. Seasons remain abstracted¹⁷ or else absent entirely¹⁸ from big box stores, but the farmers'

¹⁷ MacKinnon describes how asparagus season in the big-box stores is abstracted from local conditions in Vancouver. In May of their year of eating locally, Smith and MacKinnon begin to notice food writers paying extra attention to asparagus to mark its traditional season. They note too the nod to asparagus season in the grocery store: "Suddenly, asparagus was conspicuously available in the produce departments – where it had been available all

markets, community garden plots, berry patches, beekeepers, fishmongers and vegetable growers that Smith and MacKinnon frequent as a part of their local diet become their entry into a detailed education about the seasons of Vancouver as they manifest in the local foodscape. MacKinnon marvels, “I’d never known that melons grew in my part of the world, but now I knew that September was their high season, and that fact would forever be marked on my mental calendar.”¹⁹ This rediscovery of seasonality is a recurrent theme in locavore memoirs, where the discovery of seasonal tastes like rhubarb and asparagus signal a transformation in the author’s connectedness to nature generally and her local biome in particular.

At the close of the memoir, none of the signs MacKinnon points to in arguing that “*things have gone sideways*” has changed in any measurable way, and yet the memoir has still managed to document several meaningful transformations. First, there is a lasting change in the couple’s diet: “Our 100-mile diet hadn’t ended, not really . . . For us, the balance of global versus local food has been reversed.”²⁰ Motivating this shift in diet is a corresponding transformation in taste: “A few favorites have slowly made their way back into the kitchen – lemons, and rice, and beer. Many others, like bland bananas and white sugar, haven’t yet . . . It comes down to this: we just like the new way better.”²¹ Enabling this shift in habits and in taste is a newfound competence – “it’s been easier this the second time through the seasons.”²² And Smith and MacKinnon’s relationship, strained during the experiment, appears stronger at its conclusion than before they

winter, just like strawberries and tomatoes and every other unlikely product. The clockwork promotion of the year’s traditional first delicacy, the vegetable whose very name is rooted in the person for “sprouts” or “shoots,” was a parody of seasonality. It was asparagus season, somewhere. In California, according to the labeled bunches in the grocery stores, and in Peru, which is now the world’s greatest asparagus exported.” In reality, unusually heavy rain meant that asparagus season never came to the North Pacific that year at all. Alisa B. Smith & J.B. Mackinnon, *Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally*, New York: Harmony Books, 2007: 43.

¹⁸ Smith and MacKinnon describe experiencing seasons and even “microseasons” through the varied offerings at their local farmer’s market and note that, “many of these foods never turned up at the nearest big-box store.” *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 259.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 259.

²² *Ibid.*, 259.

began. In earlier chapters, each author in turn had described tensions in their relationship that came to a head in a fight while canning tomatoes. In the shared epilogue they write in the first person plural, “We canned tomatoes side by side.”²³ These intimate transformations in their own tastes, habits, abilities and relationship stand in narratively for the kind of large-scale environmental impact that would resolve the initial problem of the memoir: that the average meal travels 1,500-3,000 miles. Although they have radically reduced their own food miles, Smith and MacKinnon at the close of their memoir have done nothing that would have a measurable impact on this central statistic that informs their project. Although they have seen major changes in their relationship to their local biome, the cumulative effect of their new consumption habits on even that local biome are infinitesimal compared to the scale of the environmental crisis that motivates them. And so instead of describing a transformation that has not taken place, Smith and MacKinnon locate the success of their project in its effects on their personal lives.

Smith and MacKinnon defer the resolution of the larger food miles problem onto a future (just beyond the horizon of the memoir) in which they suggest that others will have responded to their project by embracing locavorism. At the close of the memoir these ideas are already beginning to spread—the beginnings of a reader response to the project made possible by Smith and MacKinnon’s documentation of it through their contributions to the online magazine *The Tyee*. Smith and MacKinnon’s engagement with this reader response to their project gives them a window into the relationship between the intimacy of their own experience of their project and its potential to inspire change in the lives of others and in turn to impact the environment on a scale corresponding to the statistics that inspire their project. “And the idea continued to germinate. Local eating experiments were launched from Britain to Australia, from Albany, New York to Eugene, Oregon . . . Alisa’s youngest sister made jam for the first time in her life from

²³ Ibid., 260.

blackberries picked in her mother's backyard."²⁴ As I will argue in my discussion of spinoff projects below, this adoption of the 100-mile diet by other people in other places is where Smith and MacKinnon locate their ability to eventually intervene in the larger environmental crises that inspire their project.

No Impact Man

In the first chapter of *No Impact Man*, Colin Beavan paints a picture of himself as a man deeply distressed by everything he learns about the state of the world he lives in and yet feeling powerless to change it. He worries about global warming in the form of polar bears "drowning as they tried to swim what had become hundreds of miles between ice floes in search of food."²⁵ His concern about solid waste focuses on the floating patch of garbage in the Pacific Ocean twice the size of the continental United States.²⁶ His concerns about acid rain appear as 14,000 Canadian lakes that no longer support marine life.²⁷ His fears about deforestation take shape in "the 32 million acres of woodland we chop down around the world every year to make toilet paper and disposable coffee cups." His particular distress about living in New York focuses on its production of 9 billion pounds of garbage every year. Like Smith and MacKinnon with their sense that things have "gone sideways, Beavan reports feeling "ill at ease. What I read in the news only confirmed, I believed, what I could already feel in my bones."²⁸

Despite his over-determined environmentalist anxiety, Beavan initially feels powerless to do anything: "After all, if the government wasn't doing anything, what could I do? Write another

²⁴ Ibid., 261.

²⁵ Colin Beavan, *No Impact Man*, 8.

²⁶ Ibid., 10.

²⁷ Ibid., 11.

²⁸ Ibid., 9.

history book?”²⁹ Beavan is both dissatisfied with his own failure to respond to environmental crisis (“I was worried sick about something and doing nothing about it . . . I was sick of my comfortable and easy pretension of helplessness”) and troubled by his intuition that he is, at the same time, failing to enjoy life.³⁰ As he observes,

What really filled me with despair . . . was that I didn’t believe that the way of life that was steadily wrecking the planet even made us happy. It would be one thing if we woke up the morning after a big blowout party, saw that we’d trashed our home, but could at least say we had had a rip-roaring good time. But if I had to generalize, I would say that, on average, the 6.5 billion people who share this globe are nowhere near as happy as they could be.”³¹

These paired insights—that for all his worry Beavan himself is not really doing anything to address environmental crisis and that his profligate use of resources also fails to make him happy—become the personal analogue to the global problems that he hopes his memoir will intervene in. For the bulk of his memoir, Beavan will engage with environmental crisis at this personal level, addressing his own inaction and unhappiness.

In his attempt to intervene, Beavan explicitly rejects his accustomed mode of engaging with environmental crisis. He quotes his book agent’s response to his initial proposal to write about the environment: “The way you talk about it is a bummer. It’s a drag. You’re not wrong, but how will I be able to convince a publisher that people will spend twenty-four ninety-five on a book that tells them how screwed up they are? And even if anybody wanted to hear it, why would they want to hear it from you, a history writer with no credentials in this area?”³² This response to Beavan’s initial proposal may help to explain both the rhetorical optimism of ethical consumption memoirs in general and their need for happy resolutions in particular. A yearlong

²⁹ Ibid., 9.

³⁰ Ibid., 9.

³¹ Ibid., 8.

³² Ibid., 9.

vigorous effort that ends as these memoirs do without having any observable impact on the large-scale environmental crises it seeks to address would certainly be “a bummer” and “a drag.” Such a self-confessed exercise in futility would also not be likely to confer upon its author the expert status that Beavan’s book agent considers requisite to the publication of a successful book. In the absence of any demonstrable large-scale impact, authors of eco-consumption memoirs have responded to the apparent market demand for optimism in part by moving to a personal scale to resolve their narratives on an upbeat note and articulate what success means for an ethical consumption project. This shifting of scales also resolves the problem of the author’s non-expert status, because the memoirist is an expert on the subject of her own life. In Beavan’s case, his public engagement with his personal consumption through his No Impact project ultimately has the effect of conferring him expert status in the public eye. As he begins to document within his memoir, Beavan’s *No Impact* project makes him a spokesperson on environmental issues—a role he embraces. That public role has continued since the publication of his memoir. Beavan ran as the Green Party candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives seat representing New York’s 8th Congressional District in 2012. More recently, he has continued speaking and writing about environmental issues and has also offered his services in “impact coaching” to help clients identify lifestyle changes “that move us closer to a life in line with our values.”³³

Beavan finds supposedly scientific approaches to the problem of personal consumption equally as unhelpful as his own “comfortable and easy pretension of helplessness”.³⁴

Lack of well-sourced information mixed with a surfeit of corporate PR resulted in confusion. I’d hear of one study saying that the energy used washing ceramic cups damages the environment as much as the use of disposable cups that won’t degrade for a

³³ Colin Beavan, “Impact Coaching.”

³⁴ Colin Beavan, *No Impact Man*, 9.

thousand years. I'd hear of another that said using hot water and detergent to wash cloth rags harms the planet more than cutting down trees to make paper towels. If I listened to the promulgated wisdom, it seemed that everything was as bad as everything else. The spin merchants seemed to want to convince me that trying to make any difference was futile.³⁵

Beavan's answer to both analysis paralysis and the difficulty of marketing a bumper book by a non-expert is to take a step back from trying to convince anyone else to do something about the environment: "I ought first to worry about changing myself." This refocusing on the self solves Beavan's problem of moral authority and, in the eyes of his book agent, makes his project marketable (perhaps in part by also making his project a memoir). As I will discuss in Chapter Six, this refocusing on the self and related acceptance of personal responsibility for environmental crises ironically plugs neatly into neoliberal capitalism. It also pushes Beavan toward an understanding of the relationship between his lifestyle, his writing, and his intervention into environmental crisis that bears striking similarity to Smith and MacKinnon's in *The 100-Mile Diet*. Although Beavan's project represents his attempt to respond to environmental problems that are global in scale, and although the statistics that inspire the project reflect environmental crisis on that global scale, the bulk of his narrative (like Smith and MacKinnon's) focuses instead on the transformations he effects in his personal and family life as a result of his project.

As in *The 100-Mile Diet*, the bulk of the narrative in *No Impact Man* concerns not the multiple signals of environmental crises that inspire the project, but instead the transformations on this more personal scale that Beavan experiences as a result of his decision to live a year, in his terms, making zero impact on the environment. Beavan's own account of all that "has changed since I began this project" skirts any mention of polar bears or Canadian lakes but emphasizes, instead, "My thinking. My career. My friendships. My fatherhood. My marriage."

³⁵ Ibid., 9.

This reflects a narrative necessity introduced by the scale of the change Beavan aims for versus the constraints of his chosen nonfiction form (a memoir documenting changes in his personal consumption over the course of a single year). Even as the changes he makes are motivated by global environmental crisis, the effects Beavan is able to document are by design smaller and more personal.

One example of this scale shifting is the transformation that Beavan describes coming out of his decision to detach from the New York City power grid. One family unplugging from the grid has, of course, no measurable impact on the power used by a city of 8 million people. Where this decision does have noticeable effects is in Beavan's own life. Beavan's daily experience of time changes in response to his commitment to live without fossil fuels: his reliance on solar panels forces him to stop work when the sun goes down, and his family life and sleep patterns change as a result (Beavan finds a precedent for his new sleep patterns in the pre-industrial phenomenon of the "second sleep"). Thus, while his decision to unplug cannot reverse the forces of industrialization, it does seem to mitigate them as they manifest in his own life. Although Beavan's decision to unplug from the power grid does not have any measurable effect on power usage in New York it does push him into a rhythm with both his sleep and his family life that he figures as being more natural.

Beavan reports significant improvements in his family life as a result of the project. He describes family life before the No Impact project as having a "hamster-wheel quality": he and his wife Michelle and their daughter Isabella enjoy a high standard of living, but the hamster-wheel feeling pushes him to ask, "is this 'high standard of living' the same as a good quality of life?" His family enjoys a variety of convenient take-out and delivery food options in New York, but he and his wife also work ten hours each day to pay for that convenience. Beavan looks back

with nostalgia to the pace of his grandparents' home life, where the family took time to watch the sunset together in silence and "dinner . . . was the opposite of a rush." As a result of the *No Impact* project, Beavan reports an increasing sense of ease and time in his own family life. Forgoing a Thanksgiving trip to see his parents to reduce his fossil fuel consumption, Beavan reports, "We denied ourselves the trip and ended up having no stress." No television means, "I have time for my meditation practice at night. Michelle and I have time to talk." His reliance on solar energy to power his laptop prevents work from intruding on Beavan's time with his family. Like the changes in his sleep cycle, Beavan sees these changes in the rhythms of his family life as harkening back to an earlier time (in this case, his grandparents') when he imagines that things were simpler. Reducing his family's consumption, although it has no measurable impact on the 9 billion pounds of garbage that New York City produces each year or on the fate of polar bears affected by global warming, does offer Beavan and his family benefits that he figures as a personal escape from some of the risks and stressors of modern life. Beavan reflects, "We think that the stuff and the energy and the accouterments of modern life make us free, but until I took some time to do without them, I never got the chance to see the extent to which they also trapped me."

Like Smith and MacKinnon in their epilogue, Beavan gestures toward his project's potential to effect larger scale environmental change by documenting the beginnings of a reader response to his project. His project's ability to inspire such change on a scale that would address the problems of drowning polar bears and fishless Canadian lakes is deferred onto a future in which others have followed the example of his project. Early in his memoir Beavan asks, "Is individual action, lived out loud, really just individual action?" The implicit answer in his memoir is a resounding "no." Beavan's project attracts significant press prior to the publication

of his memoir, and that response makes him in his own words “something of an environmental spokesman.” This preview into the potential for a galvanizing reader response to his project enables Beavan to imagine his memoir and the project it documents as addressing some of the larger problems that inspire him by motivating others. As I will argue below, Beavan’s cultivation of spinoff projects to realize this potential for inspiring others to follow his model represents an attempt to push the scale of his intervention from the personal (what he is able to document in his memoir) to the global (what he imagines might be possible if his project can inspire a movement). It is at this global movement level that he imagines the No Impact project being able to intervene in the global-scale environmental crises that first inspire it.

From Personal Back to Global: Early Audience Engagement and Spinoff Projects of *No Impact*

Man and *The 100-Mile Diet*

Smith and MacKinnon (*The 100-Mile Diet*) and Beavan (*No Impact Man*) documented their projects extensively through blogs and other media outlets prior to the publication of their memoirs. This early engagement with their audiences about their projects allows them to imagine their readers’ response as a part of the work of their projects. This invitation to reader response, including presumed changes in readers’ consumption habits, is what allows these authors to imagine that their very personal consumption projects might one day have a discernable impact on the larger-scale problems that inspire them.

Audience engagement with Smith and MacKinnon’s 100-mile diet project began well in advance of the publication of *The 100-Mile Diet* in 2007. On June 28, 2005 as Smith recounts,

“we published our first dispatch on our project.”³⁶ That article, published at independent online magazine *The Tyee*, introduces readers to both the project’s impetus (an attempt to reduce food miles) and some of its major themes (the pleasure of local eating and local eating as a way to reconnect with the local environment) and challenges (food cost and seasonal limits on availability of certain foods).³⁷ Smith’s discussion of the initial reader response to the couple’s project illustrates a few interesting and perhaps unexpected effects of this kind of publication schedule. First, although in this chapter I present eco-consumption memoirs as pedagogical, examination of reader responses to these early publications demonstrates that the pedagogical relationship with readers is reciprocal. Smith and MacKinnon’s June 2005 article for *The Tyee* opens with a conundrum: they want to preserve local in-season strawberries to eat in the winter, but their 100-mile diet rules mean that they cannot use sugar. Smith recalls a conversation she has with MacKinnon as they are picking strawberries at a local u-pick farm, “‘If I make jam we can have strawberries all year,’ I say. James asks with what, exactly, I plan to make jam? Sugar? One of the planet’s most exploitative products, shipped in from thousands of kilometres away? ‘But what,’ I reply, ‘will we eat all winter?’”³⁸ The online discussion of the article includes a comment from “Lani” who suggests apple juice as a sweetener for preserving strawberries. This suggestion and the encouragement that accompanies it in turn appear in the memoir of Smith and MacKinnon’s project, where Smith writes of the online response, “there was ‘Lani’ who knew exactly how to make jam without sugar and how to ignite the restless imagination.”³⁹ This combination of instruction and encouragement from others will in turn become what Smith and

³⁶ Alisa B. Smith and J.B. Mackinnon, *Plenty*, 83.

³⁷ Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon, “Living on the 100-Mile Diet.”

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon, *Plenty*, 84.

MacKinnon seek to offer their own readers as they incorporate locavore recipes and further references into their memoir.

As in the case of David Mas Masumoto's *Epitaph for a Peach* (which documents a project Masumoto claims was inspired by an overwhelming response to his LA Times article of the same name and which features in my second chapter), awareness of how readers may engage with Smith and MacKinnon's project becomes an explicit and motivating concern in *The 100-Mile Diet*. Smith writes:

Two days before the end of June, we published our first dispatch on our progress. We put it together simply and without expectation between other deadlines, fairly certain that the outside world couldn't possibly care about some self-inflicted exile from the industrial food system. The article appeared on a vital if singularly local website called *The Tye*, but then nothing on the internet is local. It went up at midnight, and it must have been midmorning the following day before I even thought to check up on it. There were already a dozen or so messages from readers, a strange and sudden loss of isolation.⁴⁰

This kind of early publication about a project, the narrative of which will later take book form, is a shared characteristic with *No Impact Man*; both projects are the work of professional journalists whose first publications online precede the ultimate book releases. This kind of early engagement with audience informs the way that each memoir imagines the scale of its own impact. As I argue above, there is a tension between these memoirs' intensely personal and familial focus and their ambition to effect change on a global scale. By imagining and facilitating reader response as a part of each project's work from the outset, these authors see themselves as pushing the scale of their intervention rhetorically from the personal back out to the global. These authors draw on early audience engagement with their projects through blogs and other media to convey a sense of widespread excitement about their projects that make this jump to thinking about global-scale impact more plausible.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 83.

The reader response to online publications about their project offers Smith and MacKinnon a view into the value of establishing spaces and opportunities for their readers to continue discuss and experiment with locavorism. The thread in response to “Living on the 100-mile diet” is also a conversation between readers. What starts as a series of responses to Smith and MacKinnon’s project develops into several related discussions as readers turn to one another for information about, for example, how to build topsoil⁴¹ or how to talk to a landlord about converting lawn into vegetable garden.⁴² In the comments on Smith and MacKinnon’s posts to *The Tyee*, we see the beginnings of a response to locavorism that goes beyond simply taking in what Smith and MacKinnon have written. The self-directing nature of these conversations may help Smith and MacKinnon to imagine how their 100-mile diet project might continue to evolve into a movement.

The “growing groundswell”⁴³ of people interested in locavorism also includes at least one organized spinoff project, the TV series “The 100 Mile Challenge” that documents the experiences of six Mission, British Columbia families who sign up to live on the 100-mile diet for 100 days. By the time they are ready to publish their memoir, Smith and MacKinnon already have (from their experience of reception online and in other media outlets) a fairly developed sense of the book’s capacity to initiate ongoing conversations and to intervene in the food consumption habits of its readers. They write, “And the idea continued to germinate. Local-eating experiments were launched from Britain to Australia; from Albany, New York to Eugene, Oregon.”⁴⁴ Smith and MacKinnon continued to directly encourage additional spinoff projects via

⁴¹ User “brightday” asks this of user Fiat Lux, who identifies himself as Ed Deak of Big Lake. Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon, “Living on the 100-Mile Diet.”

⁴² User “redriversgirl” asks this and receives a detailed response from user “Rhea.” Ibid.

⁴³ Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon, *Plenty*, 169.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 260.

their website www.100-milediet.org through July of 2011.⁴⁵ Like their memoir, the website offered local eating tips. It also provided a mapping tool to help visitors visualize their own 100-mile diet. A “pledge” button on the website allowed users to sign up for a monthly newsletter and interestingly also to sign up as a local media contact. A note explained, “News media outlets across the continent are looking for local eaters in their area. You don't need to be an expert—just someone who is exploring local food in your own way. And don't worry, we'll only put you in touch with pre-screened media.” These varying options for how to get involved suggest that Smith and MacKinnon see 100-Mile Diet spinoff projects as something more complex than individual readers adopting changes in their own diets. By encouraging readers to sign up as media contacts, Smith and MacKinnon are also relinquishing control of a public discourse and recruiting their readers as spokespeople for the 100-mile diet as a movement. 100MileDiet.org's Thanksgiving efforts similarly sought to empower visitors to the site to become spokespeople who could inspire even more widespread interest in locavorism. The website offered 100-Mile Thanksgiving promotional materials for download and provided a forum for users to share their own locavore Thanksgiving stories.⁴⁶ This strategy appears to have worked. Although 100MileDiet.org has since become defunct, the project has been picked up by numerous other websites that continue to offer resources for local eating as well as to document the results of their own 100-mile diet challenges.⁴⁷ In *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Kingsolver even cites “The 100-Mile Diet Challenge!” as evidence that locavorism's moment has arrived.

⁴⁵ “Take the Local Eating Pledge,” *100 Mile Diet*.

⁴⁶ “100-Mile Thanksgiving,” *100 Mile Diet*.

⁴⁷ LocalFoodChallenge.org invites anyone to join in various kinds of local food challenges (“Planning,” *Local Food Challenge*). The Organic Consumers Association documented their own 100-mile challenge in 2014 (“Eating Local: There's No Plate Like Home,” *Organic Consumers*). St. Andrew's church in Grafton is launching its 8th annual 100-Mile Diet Event in September, 2015 (“Grafton's 100 Mile Diet Event,” *100 Mile Grafton*.) and maintains an active Facebook page dedicated to the project (“100-Mile Diet Event, Grafton.” *Facebook*).

Like with *The 100-Mile Diet*, Beavan's No Impact project extends well beyond the boundaries of his memoir and includes both his own work in other media and projects and conversations that others have undertaken in response to the book. Spinoff projects for *No Impact Man* include the website noimpactproject.org, the film *No Impact Project* (which is itself packaged and presented as a tool for activism), and organized No Impact Experiments that invite participants to join a "one week carbon cleanse" and "see what a difference no-impact living can have on your quality of life."⁴⁸ A screening toolkit for the film advises readers that "the mission of the No Impact Project is to empower citizens to make choices that better their lives and lower their environmental impact through lifestyle change, community action and participation in environmental politics" and offers ideas about how to put on a green screening of the movie as well as discussion questions and follow-up activities designed to encourage participants to adopt more environmentally friendly lifestyles, which for Beavan means lifestyles that are less resource-intensive. The questions in the toolkit particularly encourage viewers of the film to consider how they might adapt some of the practices modeled in the film for their own lives. One discussion question asks, for instance, "Do you identify with pre-No Impact Year Michelle or Colin? How did Michelle change her eating habits during the year? What are some ways you could change your eating habits this month? Is there something you could commit to doing differently right now?"⁴⁹

Like Smith and MacKinnon, Beavan through NoImpactProject.org has encouraged readers not just to follow the changes he models in his own consumption project but to take an active role in shaping and encouraging others' No Impact lifestyle experiments as well. Under "Change Yourself" at NoImpactProject.org, "Colin's How-To's" are less prominent than "Tell

⁴⁸ "What is the experiment?" *No Impact Project*.

⁴⁹ "Screening Toolkit," *No Impact Project*.

Us How You Are Lowering Your Impact.” The site attempts to provide a forum for users to share their own insights and tips about how to live in eco-friendly ways while gaining “more money,” “clearer conscience,” “more fun,” “better health,” or “more time.” NoImpactProject.org also encourages users to get involved in organizing locally, offering kits for people interested in organizing a No Impact Week at universities, middle and high schools, and in their communities and workplaces. NoImpactProject.org also encourages users to get involved outside of its own branded lifestyle challenge, inviting them, for instance, to “Change the World” by joining 350.org and becoming “a local organizer in the fight against climate change.”

Authors of eco-consumption memoirs thus believe that their own consumption projects, if replicated on a large enough scale, would be able to address large-scale problems like climate change; and it is via widespread adoption of the changes they ask people to make in their personal consumption habits that those changes become relevant to global-scale environmental issues. Steven Hopp, for instance, imagines the impact of personal consumption changes by calculating how many barrels of oil would be saved if everyone in the U.S. were to eat one meal each week from locally sourced ingredients. These memoirs convey a sense that their own publications represent a tipping point in our cultural response to environmental crisis. If the reader responds to the memoir appropriately in the author’s view (that is, by embracing the consumption practices she models), that response becomes the indicator of the memoir’s successful intervention into environmental crisis on a large scale. These memoirs end with a sense of resolution as a result. On the personal scale, the memoirs are able to represent this resolution directly because it has already happened. On the global scale, the resolution is projected onto a future shaped by reader response to the memoir. If the memoir does not achieve its heroic aims, the implicit suggestion is that the fault will lie not with the memoir or the project

it describes but with some dysfunction in the reader's response. Early audience engagement helps authors imagine a global impact for their project, moreover, both by providing a model for the right kind of reader response and by enabling them to depict their projects as already gaining momentum with readers. Their encouragement of and provision of a space for spinoff projects suggests that those spinoff projects are a continuation of the work of each memoir, allowing the consumption project to break from the memoir's traditional concern with individual history and aspire to represent instead a possible collective future.

Declining to be as spokesperson: *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* as a Counterexample

A counterexample, Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* does not leverage reader response to push the scale of its intervention from the personal back out to the global and societal to the extent that *The 100-Mile Diet* and *No Impact Man* do. The difference begins to be apparent within the memoir's narrative arc itself. Although Kingsolver sees her own project as a part of a larger cultural movement toward valuing sustainability in food, she does not appear to view her role as one of actively growing a movement in the way that Smith, MacKinnon and Beavan do. Smith, MacKinnon and Beavan all document their projects extensively and engage with their audiences online and in other media before the publication of their eco-consumption memoirs; this helps them to imagine reader response (including readers' own spinoff projects) as an intrinsic part of their projects, and they go on to document that response within the memoirs. Kingsolver's eco-consumption memoir, although co-written with her daughter Camille and husband Steven L. Hopp, is a much more private undertaking. Like Kingsolver's novels, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* did not have a significant online presence prior to its publication, and

accordingly she did not share the other authors' early experience of their own projects as a catalyst for change among their readers.

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle does share some of the other key characteristics I have identified with eco-consumption memoirs. Like *The 100-Mile Diet* and *No Impact Man*, Kingsolver's project in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* responds to environmental problems that are global and societal in their scope. Also like the other two memoirs, the focus of the transformations inspired by those problems that Kingsolver documents in her memoir are intensely personal and familial. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* lingers on transformations in the Kingsolver family's tastes and their growing connection to and appreciation of seasonality during their first year of trying to sustain themselves on produce and other foods that they produce themselves or procure from their immediate community. Also like them, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* contains pedagogical content that implies that readers will respond to the text with changes in their own consumption. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* also rehearses some of the now familiar tropes about taste and food knowledge that we see in eco-consumption memoirs. Where *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* differs from the other memoirs is that it does not make the jump that they do from narrative resolution on this intimate scale back out to the global scale.

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle incorporates recipes, practical advice and additional resources that suggest its reader is meant to respond to the text with changes in her own consumption. However, closer examination reveals that these elements appear only in the contributions by Camille Kingsolver and Steven Hopp, which suggests some tension between their aspirations for the project and Barbara's. Camille Kingsolvers' contributions to *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* consist mainly of recipes. Like the recipes in *The 100-Mile Diet*, Camille's recipes emphasize local, in-season ingredients. A short introduction accompanying each recipe

locates it in its season and interprets it as an expression of commitment to local eating. In her introductory remarks for “Asparagus and Morel Bread Pudding,” for instance, Camille Kingsolver reflects, “Two things that are impossible to get tired of are asparagus and morels, because neither one stays around long enough. If you have them on the same day in April, you’ll forget all about peaches and can make this dish from *Local Flavors*, by Deborah Madison.” Here, the recipe’s appeal (that you will not “get tired” of it and that it will make you “forget all about peaches”) is built on the assumption that the user embraces a local diet. In addition to celebrating the pleasures of seasonal foods, Camille’s recipes also provide solutions for some of the challenges of local eating. During “squash season” (which Garrison Keillor says is the only time when country people lock their cars in the church parking lot “so people won’t put squash on the front seat”), Camille recommends two recipes (“Disappearing Zucchini Orzo” and “Zucchini Chocolate Chip Cookies”) that hide the presence of the over-abundant squash.

Camille’s seasonal meal plans are similarly designed to push the reader toward choosing entirely seasonal diets. Her “Late Winter Meal Plan” emphasizes meats (chicken, lamb), hardy root vegetables (potatoes, beets, carrots), preserved foods (dried tomatoes), and fresh vegetables that appear early in the growing season (green onion, asparagus, rhubarb).⁵⁰ She names other seasons (like squash season above) and their meal plans after the foodstuffs that are most abundantly available. The meal plan for squash season relies heavily on squash, sometimes playfully disguising it as in the recipes above. The meal plan for tomato season incorporates tomatoes into dinner every single day with salads, gazpacho, ratatouille, chutney, stir-fry, pizza, and of course, pasta. In both her individual recipes and her seasonal meal plans, Camille addresses the needs and concerns of a reader who she presumes to be eating a local diet; her

⁵⁰ Camille Kingsolver, “Late Winter Meal Plan,” *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, 41-42.

instructions take the unique challenges and rewards of that diet for granted as she guides her readers in how to extract the best taste and most nutritional value from seasonal foods.

In addition to the instruction provided in recipes, *Animal Vegetable, Miracle* also includes extensive information about and instruction in how to choose local foods via call-outs written by Kingsolver's husband, Steven L. Hopp. Some of these mini-essays present accessible discussions of the problems that Hopp associates with eating from the global industrial food chain, including fossil fuel usage, animal abuse, rainforest destruction and excessive pesticide use. Others are explicitly pedagogical, offering detailed guidance on finding farmer's markets, building relationships with farmers, growing produce at home⁵¹, and balancing ethical decisions about food when shopping in the grocery store.⁵²

Most of the more pedagogical elements are contributions by Kingsolver's co-authors. It seems likely that what is clearly a project in helping others to reform their consumption for Camille and Steven may be a more traditional life-writing project for Barbara. Unlike Alisa Smith, J.B. MacKinnon and Colin Beavan, Kingsolver does not seem especially interested in a continued public role advocating for locavorism and sustainable lifestyles. If self-consciously modeling ethical consumption and instructing readers in how to consume more sustainably is a form of activism as I argue for *The 100-Mile Diet* and *No Impact Man*, then the activism of *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* inheres in those kinds of contributions that Kingsolver's co-authors make to the memoir. Without these pedagogical elements, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* would not be an activist text in the sense that I describe in this chapter.

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle certainly rehearses some of the tropes that will be familiar from *The 100-Mile Diet* and *No Impact Man*. Like Smith and MacKinnon, Kingsolver describes

⁵¹ Steven L. Hopp, "Home Grown," *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, 180.

⁵² Steven L. Hopp, "Looking for Mr. Goodvegetable," *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, 348.

a transformation in taste that accompanies the transformation in her family's consumption. The family's changing tastes are most evident in the resolution of fears about scarcity that they have going into the project. Kingsolver presents her daughter Camille's craving for out-of-season produce ("block letters in Camille's hand underlined: FRESH FRUIT, PLEASE???"") as one of the major barriers to starting their year of local eating. Like Smith and MacKinnon, Kingsolver goes on to describe how fear of scarcity gives way as the family develops a new taste for local produce and an appreciation of its variety. The family begins learning to crave new tastes almost immediately when they go to the year's first farmer's market and, in an oft-repeated move in locavore memoirs, discovers rhubarb "all full of itself there on the table, loaded with vitamin C and tart sweetness and just about screaming, 'Hey, look at me, I'm fruit!'"⁵³ Camille's seasonal meal plans and recipes in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* attest to her embrace of new tastes shaped by seasonal patterns of scarcity and abundance.

Kingsolver also reports a familiar transformation in her family's knowledge about food and about natural processes as a result of their consumption project. This is one of her explicit goals for the project – "My husband and I decided our children would not grow up without knowing a potato has a plant part"⁵⁴ – and the project does fulfill her expectation in this way. Kingsolver's daughter Lily displays her knowledge of food production in an exchange with a farmer's market vendor that Kingsolver recounts in her final chapter.

I'd noticed the kids had changed too. One day at the farmer's market a vendor had warned us there might be some earworms in the corn because it was unsprayed. He pointed out a big one wriggling in the silks of one of the ears in our bag, and reached out to pluck it off. Lily politely held out her hand: that was our worm, and we'd paid for it. She would take that protein to her chickens, and in time it would be eggs."⁵⁵

⁵³ Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, 38.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 336.

The Kingsolver's livestock animals also undergo re-education about natural processes over the course of the project. When they first start raising turkeys, Kingsolver expresses concern that the birds will be unable to reproduce because of all that industrial farming has done to disrupt once-instinctive behaviors like breeding and roosting. Just as Lily displays her own growing understanding of the natural processes of food production, Kingsolver proudly announces an awakened understanding of reproduction among her turkeys as well. "At the end of March, one of my turkey mothers found her calling. She sat down on the platform nest and didn't get up . . . something inside the downy breast of Number One had switched on."⁵⁶ This shared growth in understanding between the humans and the animals on Kingsolver's farm demonstrates some of the supposed benefits of a commitment to local eating and sets the stage for the family's continued success in their local eating project.

Despite many similarities, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* is ultimately much less ambitious than *The 100-Mile Diet* and *No Impact Man* in its aspirations for galvanizing a movement, and its project does not inspire Kingsolver to push the boundaries of the memoir form as Smith, MacKinnon and Beavan do from printed page to public spaces. Where Smith, MacKinnon and Beavan explicitly understand their projects as catalysts helping to grow ethical consumption movements, Kingsolver appears to view her relationship to the larger growth of locavorism as one of happy coincidence. The final chapter of *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* locates her project in a larger context of growing interest in locavorism as surprising:

It wasn't just our family, either, that had changed in a year. Food was now very much a subject of public conversation When we'd first dreamed up our project, we'd expected our hardest task would be to explain in the most basic terms what we were doing, and why on earth we'd bother. Now our local newspaper and national ones

⁵⁶ Ibid., 340.

frequently had local-food feature stories on the same day What a shock. We were trendy.⁵⁷

Although pleased that many people seem to share her interests, Kingsolver here does not appear particularly interested in any role she might have in contributing to the growth of that interest in locavorism. Smith, MacKinnon and Beavan's projects are ultimately oriented toward an imagined social collective; Kingsolver's, on the other hand, remains centered on the nuclear family without imagining that outward expansion.

Although initially welcoming of feedback from her readers about their own locavore projects, Kingsolver has since attempted to distance herself from the spokesperson role that an activist memoir would imply for her. Like 100MileDiet.org and NoImpactProject.org, the website for *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* also attempted for a while to nurture other local eating projects by highlighting the locavore experiences of Kingsolver's readers. The request for submissions read: "If you're celebrating local foods somewhere in the world, growing your own garden, raising heritage breeds, or have helpful tips for other locavores, we'd love to hear about it. Send your name, location, a brief explanation and no more than one photo to:

Adventures@animalvegetablemiracle.com."⁵⁸ Submissions covered everything from farmers' market shopping in Madison, WI to raising Highlander cows in rural Belgium, and while most simply celebrated the pleasures of local food the website did for a time serve as a kind of forum for thinking through challenges that readers encountered in their attempts to eat local. The Kingsolvers explain for instance:

Jean Trachta of Council Bluffs, Iowa, wrote to ask our advice on mustering the courage to plant vegetables in the front yard, in a neighborhood where this sort of thing just isn't done. (Her back yard is too shady and sloped for a garden.) We invited readers to send

⁵⁷ Ibid., 336-7.

⁵⁸ "NEW— Readers' ideas for gardening in the front yard ..." *Animal Vegetable Miracle*.

their suggestions on Vegetable Yardscaping, and were so impressed with the response we created an all new web page to post some terrific ideas and extraordinary photographs.⁵⁹

However, documenting these spinoff projects and facilitating an ongoing conversation about locavorism appears to have become too much work for Kingsolver. After the “Share Your Local Food Adventure” section of the website became defunct, a note was posted to that part of the page explaining that:

As always, each new book carries [Barbara] into a completely new area of research and fascination. While readers may continue to identify [her] particularly with the subject matter of one or more of her previous books, she will always devote herself mainly to the next one, whatever it may be. And so, while fully supporting the local-food movement on her family’s table, she declines to be as spokesperson for it in the world.⁶⁰

Thus, while on the surface *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* bears a striking similarity to *The 100-Mile Diet*, Kingsolver’s decision to back away from such an active engagement with her project’s reception points to some fundamental differences between her project and those of Smith, MacKinnon and Beavan. Most obviously, Kingsolver here is imagining a much different place for *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* in her own oeuvre and life trajectory than do Smith, MacKinnon and Beavan. Since the publication of their memoir, Smith and MacKinnon have embraced their role as spokespeople for locavorism. Beavan, who undertook his consumption project in part because he lacked the credentials to write an expert book about environmental crisis, narrated his way to expert status and still strongly identifies with his character in the memoir to the point that his website ColinBeavan.com identifies him as “aka no impact man.” Kingsolver, by contrast, resists the spokesperson role and public locavore identity, preferring to understand the memoir like “one . . . of her previous books” as an “area of research and fascination” that can claim her only until it is published at which point “she will always devote

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ “Changes in Our Lives, and in Our Website,” *Animal Vegetable Miracle*.

herself mainly to the next one.” In underlining her allegiance to her current writing project, Kingsolver thus claims her primary identity as a storyteller/writer rather than as an activist or local food advocate.

Conclusion

For Smith, MacKinnon and Beavan, eco-consumption memoirs initiate ongoing projects to imagine and encourage what Kate Soper calls “a seductive alternative conception of what it is to flourish and enjoy a high standard of living.”⁶¹ Their interactive multimedia approaches and their sustained engagement with spinoff projects that galvanize and archive reader response continues to push the scale of their projects from the personal back out to the societal and the global and seems to represent a formal innovation that expands the scope of the traditional memoir. With their eco-consumption memoirs, Smith, MacKinnon and Beavan are thus adapting the memoir form to imagine both (a) the relationship between personal taste/pleasure and the public problem of how our consumption impacts the environment and (b) an activist role for the eco-consumption memoir in growing ethical consumption movements. *No Impact Man* and *The 100-Mile Diet* hence develop a new hedonist imaginary that explicitly understands this rhetorical and narrative work as personally, socially and ecologically transformative. In the absence of a similar commitment or engagement with her reader response from Kingsolver, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* remains a more traditional piece of life writing. It responds to similar anxieties to the ones that inspire Smith, MacKinnon and Beavan, and it describes a similar transformation in Kingsolver’s personal and family life, but although parts of it share their aspiration to model changing consumption patterns among its readers, the project as a whole

⁶¹ Kate Soper, *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, 4.

does not imagine or create a lasting space for the cultivation of that project in the way that the other two projects do.

Considered on the personal scale, Smith, MacKinnon and Beavan's projects are arguably successes. Through their project, Smith and MacKinnon grow both in their understanding of their local biome and their relationship with one another. As a result of the lifestyle changes he makes during the project, Beavan reports being happier, healthier, and more fulfilled. Whether either project will be as successful on the global scale to which it ultimately aspires is more doubtful. Beavan's project has inspired others to undertake similar efforts, but not as of yet on anything like the scale that would be necessary to help the polar bears, address the Great Pacific garbage patch, restore aquatic life to Canadian lakes, reverse deforestation, or even measurably reduce the waste produced in his own home city. *The 100-Mile Diet* has contributed to the growth of locavorism, but it is not clear that this movement has had a significant impact on the environmental crises they cite. Both *The 100-Mile Diet* and *No Impact Man* neglect other movements, like the environmental justice movement, that will ultimately need to be a part of any effective response to these environmental crises.

As I will discuss in Chapter Six, adoption of the lifestyle changes that Smith, MacKinnon and Beavan advocate is constrained by socioeconomic class in ways that their heroic vision of their own impact does not acknowledge. These constraints limit the availability of ethical consumption as a personal coping strategy for many people, and also limit the momentum that this movement can achieve. *The 100-Mile Diet* and *No Impact Man* ask their readers to imagine the changes they depict in their authors' personal lives as analogues to global-scale changes that will happen as more people learn of the projects and embrace the lifestyles they advocate. The success of either project as an intervention into environmental crises demands a critical mass of

people undertaking similar projects, but unacknowledged barriers to access present a major obstacle to either project ever achieving anything like this level of participation.

Chapter Six

Resisting Responsibility Transfer in Consumption Project Memoirs:

Constrained Consumption in *On a Dollar a Day*

Early in her eco-consumption memoir *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (2007), Barbara Kingsolver draws on a memory of one of her family's last moments in Arizona to illustrate a gap she perceives between, on the one hand, the desires that increasingly drive our decisions as consumers and, on the other, those desires that would support sustainable and nurturing relationships with our natural environment and local communities. In this scene, Kingsolver draws a connection between an ongoing drought in the U.S. Southwest and a Tucson gas station attendant's dismay at the possibility that it might rain on her day off:

The cashier frowned toward the plate-glass window.

“*Dang*,” she said, “it’s going to rain.”

“I hope so,” Steven said.

She turned her scowl from the window to Steven. This bleached-blond guardian of the gas pumps and snack food was not amused. “It better not, is all I can say.”

“But we need it,” I pointed out. I am not one to argue with cashiers, but the desert was dying, and this was my very last minute as a Tucsonan. I hated to jinx it with bad precipitation-karma.

“I know what they’re saying, but I don’t care. Tomorrow’s my first day off in two weeks, and I want to wash my car.”

For three hundred miles we drove that day through desperately parched Sonoran badlands, chewing on our salty cashews with a peculiar guilt. We had all shared this wish, in some way or another: that it wouldn’t rain on our day off. Thunderheads dissolved ahead of us, as if honoring our compatriot’s desire to wash her car as the final benediction pronounced on a dying land. In our desert, we would not see rain again.¹

¹ Barbara Kingsolver, Camille Kingsolver and Steven L. Hopp, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, 7.

Kingsolver certainly understands (and demonstrates in her book) that the causes for the long-standing² drought in Tucson are more complex than this one woman's wish for clear skies on her day off. Within the first four pages of the book, she cites as causes for that drought both climate change ("people elsewhere debated how seriously they should take global warming. We were staring it in the face"³) and the pressure of a ballooning population on both the Colorado River and "a fossil aquifer that is dropping so fast, sometimes the ground crumbles."⁴ And yet despite this awareness and despite several more plausible targets for blame in this passage like the gas station/convenience store itself, car culture and dependence on fossil fuel-powered industrial agriculture, Kingsolver chooses to blame this rainless day on the personal desire of someone with limited political and economic power: a woman who has just worked two consecutive weeks in a dangerous⁵ low-wage⁶ job.

The gas station attendant's curse of drought lifts five days later in an encounter with a more environmentally attuned, to Kingsolver's mind, West Virginia waitress who "said she was looking forward to the weekend, but smiled broadly nonetheless at the clouds gathering over the hills outside." The waitress's embrace of rain on her weekend pays off almost immediately: "A good crack of thunder boomed, and the rain let loose just as the waitress came back to clear our plates. 'Listen at that,' she chuckled, 'Don't

² In 2007 when *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* was published, Arizona had already been in drought for at least a decade. See Greg Garfin, "Arizona drought coming back into focus."

³ Barbara Kingsolver, Camille Kingsolver, and Steven L. Hopp, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, 2-3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵ Convenience store clerks are more likely to die on the job than firefighters. See John Stossel and Frank Mastropolo, "Enough is Enough: Clerks Fight Back."

⁶ Indeed.com estimates the annual salary of a gas station attendant in Tucson, AZ at \$17,000/year. See "Station Attendant Salary in Tucson, AZ." *Indeed. One Search. All Jobs.*

we need it!”⁷ Although Kingsolver knows that weather does not take its cues direct from the wishes of gas station attendants and waitresses, these passages nonetheless suggest that desire rules the line between drought and rain. She writes, “a gas pump cashier’s curse of drought was lifted by a waitress’s simple, agricultural craving for rain.”⁸ These paired images of thunderclouds responding directly to the desires of first the Tucson gas station attendant and then the West Virginia waitress literalizes a fundamental premise of the way the literature of ethical consumption has imagined its intervention into environmental crisis: that our individual desires, expressed in our decisions as consumers, do have the power to shape forces as large as the weather.

I have argued that the imaginative literature of ethical consumption, including the emerging genre of eco-consumption memoirs with their spin-off projects and explicitly pedagogical content, assumes an activist role within ethical consumption social movements. Desire is where these texts stage their intervention as cultural objects: they attempt to intervene in environmental crises by encouraging more sustainable consumption, and they encourage sustainable consumption modeling alternative forms of consumer desire. It is crucial to their projects that desire matters – that it have real material consequences. The passage above, in which the ecologically out-of-step desires of a gas station clerk symbolically bear responsibility for drought, climate change, and overpopulation, illustrates one danger of placing this much weight on desire. The gas station clerk’s desire to wash her car is modest and ultimately of little consequence to the natural, political and economic forces that drive ongoing drought in the American Southwest, and yet in order to set up the waitress’s desire as a model and a source of

⁷ Barbara Kingsolver, Camille Kingsolver, and Steven L. Hopp, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

hope (and to set up her own project similarly) Kingsolver must first introduce the contrary desires of the gas station attendant as problematic. If the right kind of desire can drive sustainability, as ethical consumption literature would suggest, it follows that the wrong kind of desire can also bear responsibility for environmental crisis. The memoir form engages an individualist subject, and the eco-consumption memoir in particular works from the premise that individual actions and the desires that drive them have material consequences at the ecosystem level. This premise would seem to be an important part of the eco-consumption memoir's self-conscious attempt to enlist readers in their own eco-consumption projects, which as I argue in Chapter Five is essential to the way these memoirs imagine pushing the scale of their own interventions from the personal to the global. Although individual material behaviors like car-washing are non-trivial in aggregate, I want to suggest in this chapter that in problematizing the desires associated with the unsustainable material behaviors of individual consumers, eco-consumption memoirs may overemphasize individual responsibility at the cost of a more nuanced critique of the larger systems that both condition those desires and limit the availability of alternatives for many consumers.

In Chapter Five, I show how eco-consumption memoirs re-imagine the pleasures of consumption in line with Kate Soper's concept of alternative hedonism. I argue that the experiences these authors describe of pleasure and escape from modern risks and stressors facilitate narrative resolution on a personal scale that stands in for the larger change that they seek as the eco-friendly consumption patterns and alternative desires they advocate become widespread. Imagining their intervention in this way means that eco-consumption memoirs tend to see desire itself as both the fundamental problem with

and primary driver of the dominant mode of consumption. Because they stage their interventions via reforms of consumer desire, they are understandably less interested in how consumption is conditioned and often constrained by other factors like geography, government regulations and subsidies, and consumers' economic class. One result of this framework is that in imagining their lessons as universally relevant, these writers tend to minimize the privilege that underwrites their own projects.

The eco-consumption memoirs I discuss in Chapter Five are all environmentally-motivated: their authors seek to minimize their own contribution to environmental crises by making their own consumption less resource-intensive. In this chapter, I draw on two social justice-oriented consumption project memoirs in order to form a critique of the eco-consumption memoir genre and the literature of ethical consumption more generally. In the memoir I primarily discuss in this chapter, *On a Dollar a Day*, the authors artificially limit their food budget to a dollar a day (Part I) and, subsequently, to the average monthly food stamp allowance in the U.S. (Part II) in order to understand how constrained access affects their consumption. This chapter's argument also draws on my reading of Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*, a memoir describing Ehrenreich's attempt to live for a month each in a series of U.S. cities where she attempts to find work, housing and food without the aid of her education, professional experience and social network—a project that aims to understand the impact of the 1996 welfare reform act on women returning to work. Whereas the memoirs in Chapter Five are all environmentally-oriented, *On a Dollar a Day* and *Nickel and Dimed* are oriented toward social justice both in the problems that motivate them and in the effects they hope to have on their readers.

In Chapter Five, I argue that ethical consumption acts as both a personal lifestyle strategy and an avenue of activism in eco-consumption memoirs. In this chapter, I draw on *On a Dollar a Day* in order to demonstrate the barriers to access that constrain the availability of ethical consumption toward either of these ends for those who are most exposed to the social and environmental harms that ethical consumption would seek to mitigate, from stress and obesity to pesticide contamination and climate change. I argue that ethical consumption's rhetorical emphasis on desire and individual consumer choice as sites for activism minimizes the systemic and institutional forces that constrain consumer action, and that in doing so it risks transferring responsibility to individual consumers for state and structural forces. While eco-consumption memoirs tend to imagine their own middle and upper class perspectives as somewhat universal, *On a Dollar a Day* and *Nickel and Dimed* are fundamentally projects in understanding how low income consumers live. Although the authors' approach has its pitfalls – for instance, that it can become a kind of poverty tourism—I argue that the literature of ethical consumption does have something to learn from such earnest attempts to confront one's own privilege as it manifests in consumption. Leonard, Greenslate and Ehrenreich develop a sense of the barriers to access for low-income consumers that, if shared by some advocates of ethical consumption, might make them hesitate to abandon traditional political action so quickly in favor of voting with dollars.

Eco-consumption memoirs and guides imagine ethical consumption both as a mode of activism and a mechanism for personal escape from the environmental and social harms of modern life, and they respond to critiques of ethical consumption as elitist by imagining ethical consumption as available to everyone. Social justice memoirs

like *On a Dollar a Day* and *Nickel and Dimed* attune to factors like economic class, geography and state subsidies and regulations that condition consumer choice, and so do not tend to imagine the benefits of ethical consumption (including its offer of personal escape from the risks and stressors of modernity) as universally available or as equally effective across class lines. This is a critical intervention into the literature of ethical consumption because it resists that literature's tacit acceptance of the state's retreat from responsibility for managing the social, environmental and health risks of modernization and for ensuring the welfare of citizens. *On a Dollar a Day* in particular clarifies the continuing relevance of traditional political action and state intervention by demonstrating that although ethical consumption offers some consumers a space for activism and a cushion from social, health and environmental risks, it remains well out of reach as either a mode of activism or of personal escape for those who remain most exposed to these intersecting risks.

Responsibility Transfer in The Literature of Ethical Consumption

One of the most substantive concerns that critics have raised about ethical consumption and its literary expressions is that it shifts responsibility for systemic problems away from states and onto individual citizens in their roles as consumers. Julie Guthman has argued, for instance, that in Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and other recent food books, "food politics has become a progenitor of a neoliberal anti-politics that devolves regulatory responsibility to consumers' [sic] via their dietary

choices.”⁹ For her, the emphasis on transparency in how-to-eat books, whether achieved via labeling (eg. organic) or by “looking the farmer in the eye” (a common theme in locavore texts), tends to “reproduc[e] a neoliberal climate where broad and substantive public regulation is shunned for the ‘culture of audit,’ corporate social responsibility, and individual consumption choices.” This process of shifting responsibility from states to individual consumers has been called responsabilization,¹⁰ a term which describes “the process whereby subjects are rendered individually responsible for a task which previously would have been the duty of another—usually a state agency—or would not have been recognized as a responsibility at all.”¹¹ The gas station passage from *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* and similar scenes in other eco-consumption memoirs engage with mainstream consumer desires and behaviors in ways that suggest that individual consumers (via their choices as consumers and the disordered desires that inform those choices) bear responsibility for social, economic and environmental phenomena that in a welfare state would be the responsibility of the government. As a social justice memoir, *On a Dollar a Day* resists this transfer of responsibility and its implicit adherence to neoliberal ideology by emphasizing how economic class conditions and constrains consumer choice.

In her work on political consumerism, Michelle Micheletti offers an optimistic account of how ethical consumption discourse embraces the notion of consumer responsibility. Micheletti describes the kind of individual responsibility-taking that ethical consumption schemes embrace as a response to perceptions of states as

⁹ Julie Guthman, “Commentary on teaching food: Why I am fed up with Michael Pollan et. al.,” 264.

¹⁰ See Nicholas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*. See also Ronen Shamir, “The Age of Responsibilization: On Market-Embedded Morality.”

¹¹ P. O’Malley, “Responsibilization,” in *The Sage dictionary of policing*, 277-279.

unresponsive and state intervention as ineffective. For Micheletti, political consumerism is ideally suited to influence entities like transnational corporations whose global nature makes effective state-based regulation difficult.¹² Political consumerism for Micheletti may also be particularly suited to address transboundary issues (most relevantly for ethical consumption literature: climate change, pollution, biodiversity, global poverty) that require cooperation between states or between state and non-state actors or that require beyond-compliance measures.¹³ For example, although government regulations have mitigated the harms of industrial farming by banning the use of DDT in the U.S., it would be difficult to mandate complex experiments in permaculture farming like those Michael Pollan has praised on Joel Salatin's Polyface Farm. (And in fact, Salatin himself is explicitly critical of government regulation, including food safety regulations, which he sees as unduly influenced by the interests of industrial agriculture and as hampering his ability to innovate in delivering sustainably produced food to his customers.) For Micheletti and others, ethical consumption offers a way for consumers to step in and fill the gaps where conflicting interests, the unresponsiveness of the state to citizens' needs, the inherently trans-boundary nature of the problems, or the complexity of the solutions required limit the effectiveness of state intervention.

Micheletti's tacit endorsement of individual responsibility-taking seems consistent with the way that eco-consumption authors understand their own projects. For instance, Kelly Coyne and Erik Knutzen (authors of the radical homemaking guide *Making It*) write that, "The larger forces of politics and industry may be beyond our

¹² See Michele Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping: Individuals, Consumerism, and Collective Action*.

¹³ Beyond-compliance refers to policies that are more stringent than required by extant laws. See Aseem Prakash, "Why Do Firms Adopt 'Beyond-Compliance' Environmental Policies?"

control, but the cumulative effects of our everyday choices have the power to transform the world.”¹⁴ Like Micheletti, Coyne and Knutzen see their own embrace of ethical consumption as filling in gaps in the context of a government and industry they see as unresponsive.

Ronen Shamir articulates a more skeptical view of this kind of responsibility-taking in his essay “The age of responsabilization: on market-embedded morality.” Where for Micheletti ethical consumption fills in gaps in the state’s ability to regulate effectively, for Shamir it enables the state’s further retreat from both its traditional responsibilities (eg. to manage health and poverty) and new responsibility for emerging problems like climate change. In Shamir’s account, “politics via markets” is replacing and not, as Micheletti would argue, merely supplementing “democratic politics, addressing structural conditions and redistributive arrangements.”¹⁵ The qualities that Micheletti presents as strengths of political consumerism are for Shamir more troubling: “The governance-based logic of the market . . . works to defuse regulatory threats by suggesting that such external intervention would ‘stifle innovation’ and . . . push compliance ‘to the lowest common denominator’” While Micheletti contends that ethical consumption offers a level of innovation and responsiveness that government regulation sometimes cannot, Shamir thus concludes that it accepts the state’s retreat from responsibility. In the literature of ethical consumption, that responsibility shifts onto individual citizens in their role as consumers. This responsibility transfer places a particular burden on disadvantaged consumers, who lack access to ethical consumption and yet find their consumption stigmatized.

¹⁴ Kelly Coyne and Erik Knutzen, *Making It*, 2.

¹⁵ Ronen Shamir, “The age of responsabilization: on market-embedded morality,” 13-14.

Kingsolver displaces responsibility onto the individual in this way when she invokes the frustrated gas station attendant (rather than, for instance, the military-industrial complex) as the “guardian of the gas pumps and snack foods” whose agency dissolves thunderheads and brings historic drought. In *The 100-Mile Diet*, we might see this same transfer of responsibility from the state and industrial interests onto an individual in the person of the peak oiler’s wife who refuses to “go bush,” preferring instead “everyday life in a society where carbonated soda is the leading source of calories in the diet of the average teenager.”¹⁶ The dust jacket of their book transfers responsibility onto Smith and MacKinnon themselves, arguing that before they undertook their 100-mile diet, “their ‘SUV diet’ was producing greenhouse gases and smog at an unparalleled rate.”¹⁷ Here the conventions of the memoir form with its individualist subject work to augment the responsibility transfer that I have argued is already taking place in the neoliberal state. Smith and MacKinnon’s “SUV diet” represents a path of least resistance in a political and economic system that prices oil and distributes agricultural subsidies in such a way that eating food produced 1,500 miles away is significantly cheaper and easier than alternatives. To say that “their ‘SUV diet’” produced the harms of that system severely underplays the importance of the larger political and economic situation that makes that diet possible. We see this process again in Steven Hopp’s informational call-outs in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* where he writes, for instance, that “If every U.S. citizen ate just one meal a week (any meal) composed of locally and organically raised meats and produce, we would reduce our country’s oil consumption by over 1.1 million barrels of oil *every week* Becoming a less energy-

¹⁶ Smith and MacKinnon, *Plenty*, 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, dust jacket front flap.

dependent nation may just need to start with a good breakfast.”¹⁸ The U.S. diet—with its dependence on fossil fuels, its contribution to obesity and its relationship to climate change—could as easily be seen as an effect of dominant political and economic forces in the U.S. By defining the U.S. diet as a cause rather than a symptom, the literature of ethical consumption opens up consumption (and with it consumer desire) as a site of activism, but it also responsabilizes individuals for these phenomena via their dietary choices. The memoir form is an apt one for ethical consumption writers in that it allows them to model ethical consumption practices and describe the concrete benefits that these practices offer, but as a form focused on the individual memoir also encourages these writers to frame environmental problems in terms of individual consumption choices (i.e. climate change as an effect of Smith and MacKinnon’s “SUV diet”) which elides their more systemic causes and transfers responsibility for them from the state onto the individual. This transfer of responsibility onto the individual implicitly buys into neoliberalism, further enabling the state’s retreat from responsibility to manage environmental and health risks and ensure the basic welfare of citizens.

Greenslate and Leonard’s *On a Dollar a Day* and Erenreich’s popular *Nickel and Dimed* are in a sense consumption project texts like locavore and other eco-consumption memoirs: their authors set up restraints on their own consumption, and they write about their experience living through these constraints as a form of activism. *On a Dollar a Day* in particular is similar to the other ethical consumption memoirs in that the restraints its authors place on their consumption respond to a statistic. But where *The 100-Mile Diet*

¹⁸ Barbara Kingsolver, Camille Kingsolver, and Steven L. Hopp, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, 5.

responds to statistics about food miles,¹⁹ *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* responds to statistics about food miles²⁰ and water usage²¹ and *No Impact Man* responds to statistics about waste (all environmentally-oriented), *On a Dollar a Day* responds to two social justice-oriented statistics: that 1/6 of the people on the planet live on less than a dollar a day (Part I - The One Dollar Diet Project), and that the average food stamp benefit in the U.S. equals \$4.13 per day (Part II – The Thrifty Food Plan). This social justice orientation sets *On a Dollar a Day* apart from the bulk of contemporary consumption project memoirs and ethical eating guides, which, as Julie Guthman has observed critically, have not engaged deeply with “the implications of local and/or organic in terms of social justice.”²² Greenslate and Leonard do have environmentalist reasons for undertaking their project, but unlike other ethical consumption project memoirs that explore the environmental impact of consumption with minimal regard for class contexts, Leonard and Greenslate conceive of their project in a way that consistently foregrounds the interactions between class, access to different modes of consumption, and exposure to environmental and health risks. This prevents them from identifying changes in individual consumption alone as a potential answer to any social or environmental problem. The resolution that Leonard and Greenslate offer for their memoir is also

¹⁹ Smith and MacKinnon cite a study from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, which found that “the food we eat now typically travels between 1,500 and 3,000 miles from farm to plate.” See Smith and MacKinnon, *Plenty*, 3.

²⁰ Kingsolver notes that “the average food item on a U.S. grocery shelf has travelled farther than most families go on their annual vacations.” Co-author Steven L. Hopp is more explicit in his bump-out “Oily Food,” noting that “each food item in a typical U.S. meal has traveled an average of 1,500 miles.” See Barbara Kingsolver, Camille Kingsolver, and Steven L. Hopp, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, 4, 5.

²¹ Kingsolver rainfall in Tucson between Thanksgiving and her family’s departure in May at one inch, and also notes that all of Tucson’s water comes to consumers from a nonrenewable and rapidly depleting fossil aquifer or a 300-mile open canal from the Colorado River, which “owing to our thirsts – is a river that no longer reaches the ocean, but peters out in a sand flat near the Mexican border.” See *ibid.*, 3-4.

²² Julie Guthman, “Commentary on teaching food: Why I am fed up with Michael Pollan et. al.,” 261.

decidedly less pronounced than those in the eco-consumption memoirs that I have identified as encouraging responsibility transfer, as perhaps befits a text that is generally oriented toward uncovering the problematic aspects of modern consumption rather than resolving them.

Their social justice orientation and their engagement with the experience of constrained consumption make both *On a Dollar a Day* and *Nickel and Dimed* aware of the constraints that social, economic and regulatory conditions place on individual consumption choices. As a result, they are slower than environmentalist kindred texts to read the problematic consumption of individuals as a matter of choice; in fact, they tend to view the kinds of consumption patterns that eco-consumption memoirs would consider problematic in terms of how they respond adaptively to a problematic system. Leonard and Greenslate also have a different attitude toward matters of desire and taste. Eco-consumption memoirs and the thinking of Soper, Wendell Berry (in “The Pleasures of Eating”) and David Mas Masumoto politicize taste and imagine it as a site for intervention: if consumers are not choosing the foods that are most healthful and supportive of environmental sustainability, they suggest, this reflects a dysfunction in their consumer desires. These authors stage their intervention into food politics largely through their engagement with taste. As Kerri Leonard makes clear very early in *On a Dollar a Day*, though, a taste for sustainability may not be a particularly relevant consideration in the consumption of the poor. Anticipating the start of her own food

project with some trepidation she writes, “No longer would we be able to eat based on taste; our guts would be governed by our pocketbooks.”²³

In their experiments with budget-constrained consumption, Greenslate and Leonard tend instead to understand taste first in terms of its fulfillment of physiological and emotional needs. Their thinking about taste in *On a Dollar a Day* reflects something less like Soper’s alternative hedonism and more like dietician Ellyn Satter’s hierarchy of food needs. Adapted from Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Satter’s hierarchy orders food needs by order of importance as follows: enough food, acceptable food, reliable and ongoing access to food, good-tasting food, novel food, and instrumental food. Satter would categorize the meanings and functions around which Soper et. al. redefine taste and pleasure as falling under “instrumental food,” a category that becomes relevant only after all of the other needs (including physiological taste) have been met. If, as Greenslate and Leonard and Ehrenreich all suggest, disadvantaged consumers routinely struggle to meet these needs with the resources available to them, then an activism and form of self-care that inheres in the instrumental function of food remains out of reach for this whole class of consumers.

In the context of my project, *On a Dollar a Day* provides a useful model of how to critique responsibility transfer as it manifests in eco-consumption memoirs. *On a Dollar a Day* is fundamentally a project about understanding what it means (socially, economically, gastronomically, and healthwise) to live with a constrained food budget. For eco-consumption projects, by contrast, the ubiquitous refrain of voting with your fork takes access and choice for granted. A project like Greenslate and Leonard’s *On a Dollar*

²³ Christopher Greenslate and Kerri Leonard, *On a Dollar a Day: One Couple’s Unlikely Adventures in Eating in America*, 8.

a Day points to the privilege that enables projects like Pollan's in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Kingsolver's in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Beavan's in *No Impact Man* and Smith and MacKinnon's in *The 100-Mile Diet*, and to and the dangers of ignoring that privilege. My reading of eco-consumption memoirs like *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* and *The 100-Mile Diet* as well as how-to guides like *Making It: Radical Home Ec for a Post-Consumer World* suggests that these texts run a particular risk of shifting responsibility for systemic problems away from governments and corporations and onto citizens as consumers with regard to poverty and the related problem of exposure to health and environmental risks.

Countering Charges of Elitism and Transferring Responsibility in Ethical Consumption

Literature

Mainstream discussions of welfare and food aid hold the poor responsible for their poverty in familiar ways. A 2014 poll found, for instance, that 51% of Republicans and 29% of Democrats agreed that the primary reason why a person would find himself in poverty was “lack of effort.”²⁴ Popular conservative political commentator Bill O'Reilly has said that, “True poverty is being driven by personal behavior, not an unfair economic system,” and that, “Poverty will not change until personal behavior does.”²⁵ A piece of legislation proposed in Missouri recently made national headlines when it suggested, by proposing to ban the purchase of steak and seafood with Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, that many SNAP recipients do not

²⁴ Morgan Whitaker, “Most Republicans think poverty caused by laziness, new poll finds.”

²⁵ O'Reilly, Bill. “True Poverty is Being Driven By Personal Behavior’: O'Reilly Talks War on Poverty.”

struggle with food security or that if they do it is because they make poor choices as consumers. Although more subtly than Fox News, eco-consumption memoirs and guides transfer responsibility for poverty onto the poor in ways that might not be immediately obvious. Ethical consumption memoirs and how-to guides counter charges of elitism and lend themselves to responsibility transfer by presenting ethical consumption as always accessible to consumers who prioritize it, by imagining ethical consumption as frugal, and by recasting labor (especially the domestic labor of the poor and labor associated with subsistence) as a form of leisure.

Authors of ethical consumption memoirs are well aware that the forms of consumption they advocate have been criticized for elitism, and have moved to deflect this criticism by imagining ethical consumption as universally accessible. One rhetorical strategy that authors of ethical consumption texts have used to resist charges of elitism is shifting the debate so that choices about how much to spend on food become a question of priorities. Pollan himself suggests that for many people if organic food seems too expensive it is because our expectations about what food should cost are unreasonably low. He observes, for instance, that spending on food as a percentage of income has halved since the 1960s and that more than half the U.S. population now owns cell phones. For Pollan, the ability to afford to participate in ethical consumption is strictly a matter of prioritization. He writes, “I think that we could arrange our priorities if we wanted to. The challenge is to convince people it’s worth it: worth it for the environment, worth it for their health, and worth it for their pleasure.”²⁶ Cell phones appear to be a favorite target for ethical consumption advocates answering charges of elitism—*Chez Panisse* owner

²⁶ David Roberts, “Eat the Press.”

Alice Waters reportedly suggested that consumers who struggle to find room in their budgets for quality ethically-sourced food should, "Make a sacrifice on the cellphone or the third pair of Nike shoes."²⁷ Recent thinking about the importance of cellular phone access for the poor suggests that cellular phones are not the luxury item that Pollan and Waters seem to suggest. Some observers have argued that cell phones have become a virtual necessity for the poor, who use them to "follow up on job and housing leads . . . keep in touch with public assistance agencies [and] stay in touch with family and friends."²⁸ Increasing recognition of the vital role that cellphones play in improving the lives of the poor is reflected in the emergence of nonprofits that use this technology as a tool for empowering low-income people, and so Pollan's and Waters's targeting of cell phones in particular as an optional spending category points to a failure to understand what motivates the budget priorities of low income people. This failure of imagination leads Pollan to transfer responsibility onto low-income consumers not only for their poverty but for their disproportionate exposure to health and environmental risks as well when he suggests that if consumers do not choose ethically produced food it is because they don't believe that it is "worth it for the environment, worth it for their health." Ethical consumption thus becomes one of the strategies of self-care and consumption whereby the responsabilized individual is meant to assume intersecting risks (poverty and exposure to environmental and health risks) that were previously seen as a responsibility of the state.

A second way in which advocates of ethical consumption have responded to charges of elitism is by presenting ethical consumption as frugal. In *Making It*, Coyne

²⁷ Kim Severson "Some Good News on Food Prices."

²⁸ Radhika Marya, "Cellphones are now essentials for the poor."

and Knutzen emphasize the cost savings to be found in radical urban homemaking: “The impetus behind this slow change was pleasure—and a dose of common sense. We figured out that what we could grow or make was inevitably better and usually less expensive than what we could buy.”²⁹ It is a familiar move in these books to gesture toward the ways in which various forms of ethical consumption are also available to the poor, the busy, and those living in urban areas. But changes on the order these texts extol often require substantial initial investment or access to resources like land and credit. Although Coyne and Knutzen see their participation in production as cost-saving and describe starting “reasonably enough” with potted tomatoes and “herbs in pots” and although their book emphasizes materials that can be purchased cheaply and reused across several different projects,³⁰ they figure their move into a house with a yard as a part of an inevitable progression in their DIY savvy, downplaying the substantial capital investment that makes such a move unavailable to consumers with less access to capital. “We figured out that what we could grow or make was inevitably better than what we could buy. This gave us ample incentive to expand our knowledge base. We moved into a house and planted a vegetable garden. Once we had a little space, things started to snowball.”³¹ This passage again underplays the financial significance of a move into a house with a yard in expensive neighborhood of Silverlake, Los Angeles, figuring it instead as a part of the progression of Coyne and Knutzen’s increasing DIY abilities and awareness of the rewards of a DIY lifestyle. The key point here though is that things do not “start to

²⁹ Kelly Coyne and Erik Knutzen, *Making It*, 2.

³⁰ “Throughout the book, we use the same basic tools and ingredients as much as possible, not only to save you money and trips to the store but also to show how the basics can be stretched in many different directions.” *Ibid.*, 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

snowball” until the couple “had a little space”: although proponents tout the money-saving virtues of DIY lifestyles, the reality is that DIY to this degree requires access to space and resources that many people just do not have. Being a “backyard revolutionar[y]”³² has its charms, but rhetorical gestures toward inclusiveness notwithstanding, full participation does seem to require a backyard.

Berry similarly suggests in “The Pleasures of Eating” that eating as an extensive pleasure is “pretty accessible to the urban consumer who will make the necessary effort.”³³ Although for wealthy consumers in urban areas this is probably true, Berry offers a list of steps to take that would be out of reach if we read his “urban consumer” as low-income. Item one, “participate in food production” requires at least a “pot in a sunny window” and the time and budget for initial investment that this implies. “Prepare your own food” promises to enable consumers to “eat more cheaply,” but also implies free time, stable housing and access to food storage and cooking facilities. Suggestions to “buy food that it produced closest to your home” and “deal directly with a local farmer” imply either access to a farmers’ market or the time and transportation to reach one. Property ownership is more available to a wider demographic in rural Kentucky (Berry’s home), and so the strategies he suggests may be pretty widely accessible in his local context, but he runs into trouble when he argues the universal availability of these strategies without pausing to imagine the multiple barriers to access for urban consumers.

Alissa Smith in *The 100-Mile Diet* and Kingsolver in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* both use food stamp allowances as a benchmark to argue for the accessibility and frugality of locavorism. In *The 100-Mile Diet*, Smith cites the experience of Sunny

³² Ibid., 2.

³³ Wendell Berry, *Bringing it to the Table*, 234.

Johnson, a Minnesota college teacher whose log of food costs for her year-long local eating project puts her consumption at an average of \$66 per week: “‘That’s the same as the budget you get on welfare,’ Sunny said proudly . . . Sunny doesn’t need any help from the government—she eats like a queen.”³⁴ The observation that Sunny “eats like a queen” recalls the familiar trope of the welfare queen, a favorite target for critics of welfare. Experts have argued that increases in welfare provisions are needed to ensure adequate access to healthy diets; Sunny’s experience eating “like a queen” on an amount equal to the current allowance diffuses charges of elitism in ethical consumption at the cost of suggesting that anyone who does not “eat like a queen” on welfare is doing it wrong. Sunny’s pride in her frugality and other moments like Smith and MacKinnon picking through rat-infested local wheat flour do offer a refreshing image of a locavore project not focused on expensive artisanal foods, but the invocation of welfare spending as a benchmark stigmatizes the consumption of welfare recipients who struggle to feed themselves well or even adequately on a welfare allowance. In *The 100-Mile Diet*, Sunny’s frugal locavorism is underwritten by both access to ready funds and the time that she as a college teacher is able to invest in finding and preserving local foods. Sunny and the rest of her seven-person group spend the summer foraging and preserving foods in anticipation of the September start of their locavore diet, and as Smith observes dried beans alone had taken Sunny three months to find. The time and the money to forage or purchase foods in season and preserve them for use throughout the year is unavailable to low-income people who work full time or are seeking full-time employment.

³⁴ Alissa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon, *Plenty*, 241.

The frugality of ethical consumption is also a major subtext throughout *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* where it comes up both in Kingsolver's self-identification as "congenitally frugal" and in her calculation of what her family had saved by buying locally and growing their own food. Like Smith, Kingsolver uses the welfare benefit as a benchmark to demonstrate the frugality of her own project. "We'd fed ourselves organically, and pretty splendidly we thought, on about fifty cents per family member per meal—probably less than I spent in the years when I qualified for food stamps."³⁵ Kingsolver's way of dealing with the privilege that enables her project is to present herself and her family as unprivileged. Repeated references to her own former poverty (while in graduate school) along with her aggressively folksy tone seem to belie an anxiety about the unacknowledged class-specificity of her project.

However, just because eating local for a year only cost Johnson \$66 per week or Kingsolver and her family fifty cents per meal does not mean that it would have been affordable for someone who did still qualify for food stamps. As Siobhan Phillips reflects in an article for Salon, "[Kingsolver's] recommendations included a plot of land and a second freezer that I didn't own."³⁶ In addition to the mere ownership of land, Kingsolver's local food project also begins with what must have been an expensive move for her family of four from Tucson, AZ to West Virginia. In his memoir *Farewell, My Subaru* Doug Fine's frugal low-impact life in New Mexico similarly begins with the significant purchase of his "Funky Butte Ranch" and a few basic necessities that include a biodiesel truck, a solar-heated water system, a wind energy generator and two pygmy goats. So while there clearly are situations in which locavorism and direct participation in

³⁵ Barbara Kingsolver, Camille Kingsolver, and Steven L. Hopp, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, 343.

³⁶ Siobhan Phillips, "Can we afford to eat ethically?"

food production can reduce living costs, in ethical consumption memoirs the potential savings often follow a substantial initial investment of time and money that place this particular form of frugality well out of reach for the welfare recipients whose food budgets these authors invoke to demonstrate how accessible and non-elitist their projects are.

The invocations of locavore frugality I describe invoke the topic of welfare to argue that ethical consumption can be frugal but without acknowledging the intersecting structural inequalities that characterize the experience of food insecurity and that leave the pleasures, health benefits and even cost savings of ethical consumption out of reach for the poor. In these passages, the constrained consumption of the poor functions as a yardstick to measure the potential savings that are only fully available to wealthy consumers. This use of comparisons to welfare spending to counter charges of elitism is either disingenuous or reflects a profound failure to imagine how the consumption of the poor is constrained by more than just average monthly food budget. As I suggest above, the use of welfare spending as a benchmark in particular risks responsabilizing the poor for their poverty and exposure to environmental and health risks by suggesting that the welfare allowance is adequate when in fact research shows that it is not. The target audience for these memoirs include people who have both the disposable income to consider undertaking ethical consumption projects and the leisure time to read memoirs. This population is unlikely to have the experience with low-income consumption that might push them to question the memoirs' assertions, and so when these authors invoke welfare spending as a benchmark to demonstrate the affordability of ethical consumption they also risk undermining support for vital social programs among their readers.

A final way in which ethical consumption literature presents ethical consumption as available to anyone is by recasting the labor of ethical consumption (which can be significant and is often remarkably similar to the subsistence labor of the poor) as pleasurable or as a form of leisure. In *Making It*, Coyne and Knutzen describe the labor of their DIY lifestyle as a source of pleasure, remarking for instance that, “Once we discovered the pleasure of making things by hand and the enchantment of living close to the natural world (even though we lived in the heart of Los Angeles), there was no going back to our old ways”³⁷ For them, recognition of this pleasure has the remarkable capacity to make time constraints disappear: “When you are passionate about something, the time you need will appear.”³⁸ Many of the projects that Coyne and Knutzen describe (for instance, making lye for soap) are both time-consuming and complex, requiring considerable thought and preparation to do well or even safely. As a part of their overall emphasis on the accessibility of radical homemaking, they minimize the difficulty of these tasks, suggesting again that the work is not hard or that it is not work. They write of making soap, for instance, that “Rather than worry about potential chemical exposure, it’s *easier* to disengage and make your own cleaning products.”³⁹ In *The 100-Mile Diet*, Alisa Smith, reflecting on an afternoon spent preserving blackberries, writes, “The hours passed pleasantly . . . Making jam had taken all afternoon and evening, but the last thing I’d call it was work.”⁴⁰ Pollan similarly describes the labor of home production as a source of pleasure and even as a form of leisure in *Cooked: A Natural History of*

³⁷ Kelly Coyne and Erik Knutzen, *Making It*, 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁹ My emphasis. *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁰ Alissa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon, *Plenty*, 158.

Transformation. Pollan writes that his Sundays spent prepping meals for the week have become “a pastime I look forward to most weekends.” He writes of his time spent learning to cook that it has been “great fun, probably the most fun I’ve ever had while ostensibly ‘working’” and describes the labor of home food production as occupying “that sweet spot where the frontier between work and play disappears in a cloud of bread flour or fragrant steam rising from a boiling kettle of water.”⁴¹ By imagining this subsistence labor as a pastime and a source of leisure and renewal these texts minimize the time and energy costs of productive labor in the home.

Developing a taste for the pleasures of home production in these texts occupies a similar role to developing a taste for seasonal, organic or certified fair trade produce: it politicizes pleasure and puts taste along with self-sufficiency at the center of a vision of environmental sustainability. It also tends to transfer responsibility for poverty onto the poor in their role as consumers by underplaying the time, energy and money costs of in-home production and by making the leisure time of low-income individuals open to scrutiny. The leisure activities of the poor have already come under scrutiny through initiatives like the Kansas law known as “the Hope, Opportunity and Prosperity for Everyone Act,” which seeks to ban Kansas welfare recipients from using their benefits to see movies or go swimming. By presenting home production as a leisure activity available to anyone, eco-consumption memoirs and guides risk stigmatizing the leisure activities of the poor even further: the Kansas law suggests that the poor should not spend money on entertainment and leisure, while these environmental texts might suggest that

⁴¹ Michael Pollan, *Cooked*, 18.

the poor should take their leisure and find their entertainment in money-saving subsistence labor in the home.

Ethical consumption is empowering in that it opens up consumption as a new space for activism. But if ethical consumption is not as universally accessible as its rhetoric would suggest, and especially if it is complicit in imagining disadvantaged consumers as responsible for their poverty and disproportionate exposure to environmental and health risks, then the empowerment (voting with your dollar/fork) and the cushion from risks that it offers for wealthier consumers may come at the cost of disenfranchising poor consumers and threatening political support for those few protections which they still enjoy. In this context, responsabilization is occurring without sufficient structural change and social mobilization, which means that ethical consumption risks becoming merely a way of explaining away the negative effects of the modern U.S. food system as a result of the purportedly poor choice-making of low-income consumers who fail to prioritize healthful and ethically-sourced foods, do not consume frugally, and opt out of money-saving domestic labor that (according to this rhetoric) is pleasurable and for which there is always plenty of time.

Pushing Back Against Responsibility Transfer: *On a Dollar a Day* as a Social-Justice
Oriented Consumption Project

Like eco-consumption memoirs, *On a Dollar a Day* and *Nickel and Dimed* both respond to statistics. However, they do so in much different ways. Eco-consumption projects try

to forge a personal path around these statistics, like Smith and MacKinnon do when they reject the average meal's 1,500 food miles and choose to eat from a 100-mile radius of their home. The social justice consumption projects, on the other hand, relate to the statistics that inspire them as a constraint on the consumption choices of a part of the population and strive to understand what it means to be similarly constrained. As a result they are much less likely to see consumption as always a choice, and they provide a useful space from which to critique the transfer of responsibility for environmental, health and social risks from the state onto the individual consumer in both mainstream political discourse and eco-consumption memoirs.

This is not to say that projects like *On a Dollar a Day* and *Nickel and Dime* are without their problems. Both are exploring issues of inequality and uneven access to food in an increasingly popular form (the memoir, and especially the year-long consumption project memoir) that readers may find approachable and engaging. But in both cases, as the authors readily acknowledge, their experience cannot approach anything like the ongoing lived experience of poverty. Leonard and Greenslate enter their project with the understanding that they will stop if they find themselves out of money and unable to feed themselves. Ehrenreich plans to pull out her credit card the moment that sticking to the project would mean being homeless or going hungry. This is the same fundamental security that led some to criticize Gweneth Paltrow for poverty tourism when she publicized her attempt to live on the food stamp allowance for one week as a part of the Food Stamp Challenge. Darlena Cunha wrote for Time.com in response to that project,

“The thing about poverty . . . is that people do not choose it. There is nothing about poverty that one week can teach anyone with a safety net in place.”⁴²

There is also the risk that these authors might supplant other voices and experiences of poverty in U.S. culture. Although the reception of *On a Dollar a Day* as been mostly positive, reviewer Alexis Davis Miller did wonder why people actually living in poverty did not have more of a voice: “While they are visiting the local stores, why not ask the store owner (or a cashier), ‘what are some of the more popular items here?’ And ask a few customers what they wish the store would carry.”⁴³ Interestingly, the most meaningful exchange that Greenslate has with someone living in poverty is with a student who learns of his project and approaches him for tips about where to get the best deals on food. Already at the very start of his project, Greenslate in this telling has assumed a position of knowledge such that this young woman approaches him for information about how to live her reality. When this same student offers Greenslate a tip on where to find oranges growing on local trees, Greenslate questions the accuracy of her knowledge: attempting unsuccessfully to find the community orange trees that his student marks for him on a map, he asks, “I had seen plenty of lemons, but no oranges. Had my student mislead me? Did she know the difference between oranges and lemons?”⁴⁴ Ehrenreich has much more contact with low income people through co-working with them and living in the same housing as they do, but she forges her relationships in her community under false pretenses, and as the author of her own memoir she chooses what of their lives and conversations are relevant and worth sharing with her readers.

⁴² Darlena Cunha, “Sorry, Gwyneth Paltrow, Poverty Tourism Is Gross.”

⁴³ Alexis Davis Miller, “On a Dollar a Day: One Couple’s Unlikely Adventures in Eating in America.”

⁴⁴ Christopher Greenslate and Kate Leonard, *On a Dollar a Day*, Kindle Edition.

Despite these concerns and the gut feeling that as Cunha puts it “poverty tourism is gross,”⁴⁵ the experimental approach that Leonard, Greenslate and Ehrenreich take provides a critique of the literature of ethical consumption precisely because these authors share a genre, a class background and a set of tastes with ethical consumption authors. Leonard and Greenslate are white professional-class vegans. Prior to the start of their project, they were shopping at natural food stores and enjoying the good feelings and relative safety from environmental and health risks that Smith, MacKinnon, Beavan and Kingsolver all associate with ethical consumption. Leonard and Greenslate’s embrace of high fructose corn syrup and instant ramen during their project however suggests that their foodie tastes and virtuous diet are not a simple matter of choice or taste but rather a product of their privilege. In *Nickel and Dimed*, Ehrenreich describes a tacit assumption among her acquaintances that she is intrinsically different from the people who would normally work the jobs, eat the foods and occupy the housing she experiences during her project. “Several times since completing this project I have been asked by acquaintances whether the people I worked with couldn’t, uh, *tell*—the supposition being that an educated person is ineradicably different, and in a superior direction, from your workaday drones.”⁴⁶ *On a Dollar a Day* and *Nickel and Dimed* push back against the idea that ethical consumption is simply a matter of taste by showing how quickly self-styled middle class ethical consumers must abandon their tastes and convictions when faced with just some of the economic and time pressures that low income consumers face every day.

⁴⁵ Darlena Cunha, “Sorry, Gwyneth Paltrow, Poverty Tourism Is Gross.”

⁴⁶ Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 7.

Social justice memoirs thus offer a perspective on consumption that can challenge the transfer of responsibility for poverty and its related consequences in eco-consumption memoirs. Take, for instance, Pollan's and Waters' assertions that the affordability of ethical consumption is a matter of prioritization and their attendant singling out of cellular phones as an optional spending category. This is an area where the perspective of an experiment in constrained consumption can be instructive. In her *Nickel and Dimed*, Ehrenreich repeatedly describes inconveniences, risks and missed opportunities introduced by her lack of access to a cellular phone during her project. She describes, for instance, finding herself "marooned" in her room at a Portland Motel 6 while she waits for callbacks about her job applications. "This takes more effort than you might think, because the room is too small for pacing and too dingy for daydreaming, should I have been calm enough to give it a try . . . more out of claustrophobia than any serious economic calculation—I accept the first two jobs that are offered."⁴⁷ Cellular phones, because they are a relatively new technology and because they can also function as status symbols, make an attractive target for ethical consumption advocates who want to paint access to ethical consumption as a matter of prioritization. But as Ehrenreich learns through her own lifestyle experiment, the money she saves by not maintaining a cellular phone comes at a significant cost to her ability to find and make optimal decisions about employment, housing and access to social services. Pollan's and Waters' invocation of cell phones as an optional spending category achieves its purpose of making ethical consumption appear accessible, but does so at the cost of stigmatizing a perfectly rational spending choice by low income consumers and imagining those

⁴⁷ Ibid., 60.

consumers as personally responsible for the societal causes of their lack of access to healthful foods.

Greenslate and Leonard's experience with constrained consumption in *On a Dollar a Day* leads them to a conception of food needs in line with Satter's hierarchy of food needs in which instrumental food (including food that expresses one's values) becomes relevant only after all other criteria (enough food, acceptable food, reliable and ongoing access to food, good-tasting food, and novel food) have been met. In their memoir, Greenslate and Leonard describe struggling with each of these categories during their dollar-a-day and Thrifty Food Plan projects. As a result of not getting enough food during their dollar-a-day project the pair reports experiencing light-headedness,⁴⁸ irritability,⁴⁹ inability to focus on things other than food,⁵⁰ social isolation,⁵¹ and weight loss. Leonard also describes how the experience of the project shifted her own notion (one shaped by sell-by dates) of the line between "acceptable food" and waste. Where once she "thought nothing of . . . tossing some item out because it might be bad"⁵² she realizes during the project that her "concept of 'good' and 'bad' food had to evolve if we were going to make it . . . on a dollar each a day."⁵³

Third in Satter's hierarchy is "reliable, ongoing access to food," and this is an area where Greenslate, Leonard and Ehrenreich all readily admit that their projects cannot come close to replicating the experiences of people actually living in poverty. Ehrenreich enters her project with the understanding that if she ever finds herself with nothing to eat

⁴⁸ *On a Dollar a Day*, 25.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 30, 31.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 35.

or nowhere to sleep, she will pull out her credit card. Greenslate and Leonard similarly live with the knowledge that because their constrained consumption is a part of a voluntary project they still do have access to food (it is available both in their pantry and at a variety of local stores and restaurants the moment they decide to end their project) and with the sense that they will end the project early if not doing so means that they will not eat. As Leonard puts it, “My situation was artificial; I could have quit anytime, and the foods I wanted were in reach.”⁵⁴ All three authors understand ultimately that this fundamental security separates their experience from those of the consumers whose experience they are trying to understand.

Leonard offers a clear example of how instrumental food loses out to physiological taste in the context of scarcity in her account of the couple’s changing attitude toward multivitamins. Before they begin their project, Greenslate and Leonard consult a doctor who predicts that they will lose weight during the project but does not foresee any serious health risks as long as they take a multivitamin. In the face of deprivation, the couple’s adherence to even this expert advice falls away almost immediately:

For the first day of our project we took multivitamin supplements, but then we realized that purchasing vitamins was not within our daily budget. We talked about calculating the cost, but we didn’t want to sacrifice the extra few cents’ worth of food that supplementing our diets might have taken away from us. We were more concerned about full bellies than checking whether or not we met the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of nutrients every day. Whether or not this was nutritionally the right choice, we weren’t sure.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid., 59.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 55.

Greenslate and Leonard enter their project with the idea that a daily multivitamin (an instrumental food meant to ensure their health) will be one constant in their diet. As the project unfolds, this place of honor is taken by a much different food: one that satisfies Satter's fourth food need for good taste. Greenslate describes the inauguration of the couple's nightly peanut butter ritual: "We sat looking at each other. It was clear that we both needed just a little more to eat. It could have been psychological, but we were itching for something to top off our first day . . . As I stared into the open cupboards, wondering where to expend these last few pennies, it dawned on me: peanut butter. For six cents a tablespoon, this plastic tub of high-fructose corn syrup-sweetened goodness was the shining light in the darkness of our barren pantry."⁵⁶ The mention of corn syrup, one of the most derided ingredients in contemporary foodie discourse, clearly signals the distance between the need for good taste that motivates this choice and the very different category of need that motivates the consumption choices in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, *The 100-Mile Diet*, or *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* or the definition of good taste in Masumoto and Berry. This is far from good taste as an "extensive pleasure" (Berry) or a "pleasure of consuming differently" (Soper): faced with deprivation, Greenslate and Leonard seek out good taste in its purely physiological sense.

We see this same scenario playing out again with Satter's fifth food need (novel food) late in the dollar-a-day portion of Greenslate and Leonard's project when the health-conscious authors describe choosing instant ramen for dinner. Leonard writes:

I thought back to . . . how proud I was that I made it through my first year [of college] without ever buying a package . . . Now here I was at twenty-nine years old, waiting for the water to boil so I could let my noodles cook for the requisite

⁵⁶ Ibid., 18-19

two minutes before I could sprinkle in the salty, MSG-laden contents of the little silver packet. I never thought I would be so thrilled by such a meal, but I was almost giddy with excitement after my first bite. . . . the noodles were such a wonderfully different texture and taste from the white rice and potatoes that had been so prevalent in our diet . . . I worried about what toll it would take on Christopher, who had been battling stomach issues for the past twenty-four hours. But I didn't regret it. It was the new flavor I needed.⁵⁷

Like the high-fructose corn syrup in the peanut butter passage, MSG here (so very far from the “umami” qualities that Masumoto identifies in his heirloom peaches) marks the enjoyment of this ramen as a self-conscious break from both “good taste” as it appears in contemporary foodie discourse and from Leonard’s usual emphasis on fresh food and healthful ingredients. Once again, Leonard and Greenslate’s consumption under the pressure of a severely constrained budget reflects Satter’s hierarchy: here at the tail end of their dollar-a-day project, a novel taste is more important than one that reflects the couple’s values or health goals.

What are the implications for ethical consumption if instrumental food (food that helps the consumer to achieve “a desired physical, cognitive, or spiritual outcome”) loses out when the other levels on Satter’s hierarchy are not met? It includes “eating – or avoiding – certain food items to resist disease, prolong life, or enhance mental and emotional functioning.”⁵⁸ This category would include the realms of “pleasure and self-realization” where Soper imagines her alternative hedonism staging its intervention into dominant modes of consumption.⁵⁹ It would also encompass the various health, social and environmental benefits that authors of eco-consumption memoirs attribute to their consumption projects. Where ethical consumption discourse tends to represent access to

⁵⁷ Ibid., 59

⁵⁸ Ellyn Satter, “Hierarchy of Food Needs,” S188.

⁵⁹ Kate Soper, “Alternative Hedonism: Cultural Theory and the Role of Aesthetic Revisioning.”

ethical consumption as a matter of prioritization, Leonard and Greenslate's project supports Satter's analysis: until other basic food needs are being met, ethical consumption does not enter into the equation.

Above, I show how eco-consumption memoirs counter charges of elitism by characterizing ethical consumption as frugal, even using comparisons of their average food expenses to average welfare benefits to bolster claims about the accessibility of ethical consumption. Unfortunately, these invocations of the average welfare allowance represent a particularly shallow form of engagement with the consumption realities of low-income households; these authors invoke the welfare allowance as a benchmark without acknowledging the privileges (for example, ready access to transportation, food storage and preparation facilities, varied and inexpensive grocery outlets, land and credit) that underwrite their own cost savings. As a result, eco-consumption memoirs again risk responsabilizing the poor for their poverty and related environmental and health risks by overlooking the ways in which socioeconomic status constrains choice for low-income consumers.

Greenslate and Leonard display a much greater awareness of their own privilege, examining in detail the ways in which even their ability to live on a dollar a day is underwritten by their access to resources that are not universally available. Almost immediately upon starting the project, they become aware of the advantage afforded by their mobility and access to a variety of grocery outlets, including one (Costco) that offers much cheaper produce than other outlets but where annual membership fees mean that shopping there would have been out of reach for anyone eating on the dollar-a-day

diet out of necessity.⁶⁰ Greenslate and Leonard also consider how other strategies they use to survive on a dollar a day are not available to many low-income people, who may be affected by constraints on their time, limited access to shopping outlets and transportation, and lack of access to credit. One of the books that Greenslate and Leonard turn to in preparation for the first phase of their project, Bill and Ruth Kaysing's *Eat Well on a Dollar a Day*, outlines key strategies that include buying in bulk (which requires adequate storage, cooking facilities, and access to savings or credit⁶¹) and comparison shopping (which is time consuming⁶² and requires transportation⁶³). These become key aspects of Greenslate and Leonard's overall strategy. However, as they note, these tactics/practices are not available in the same way to poor and working class consumers. Through their thinking about their own experience and how it resembles but also departs from that of a person actually living in poverty, they become aware of several additional hurdles that low-income consumers face in attempting to meet their basic food needs. Even during the relatively more abundant Thrifty Food Plan experiment, Leonard observes that she and Greenslate enjoy the privilege of being able to "go through a grocery line without the stigma attached to paying with food stamps or an EBT card. We didn't have to fear that people were looking at how we were paying and then scrutinizing

⁶⁰ Leonard and Greenslate, *On a Dollar a Day*, 42.

⁶¹ Leonard reports spending eighty-five dollars during their first day of shopping for the dollar-a-day project – an amount that she notes is greater than what they intended to spend on food for the whole month. This is allowable within the rules that Leonard and Greenslate set for themselves for their project ("our idea was to calculate what we ate, not to eat every ounce we bought), but does not reflect the lived reality of a person living below the poverty line. *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶² Leonard notes of their initial shopping trip for the dollar-a-day phase of their project that it "lasted much longer than our weekly visits to the store." *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶³ Leonard describes spending most of the weekend and "a few gallons of gas" looking at different stores for the best prices. *Ibid.*, 11.

our choices.”⁶⁴ Leonard and Greenslate see the scrutiny that the choices of low-income consumers are subject to as one more obstacle they face in the daily task of feeding themselves. Ethical consumption does nothing to mitigate this problem, and may exacerbate it by stigmatizing the consumption choices of the poor.

For the second part of their project, “Part 2: Thrifty Food Plan,” Leonard and Greenslate draw on some of their realizations about extra-budgetary constraints on the purchasing power of food aid recipients in order to create an experience that more accurately reflects the challenges of feeding oneself from the program. In their dollar-a-day experiment, Leonard and Greenslate stretch their purchasing power by buying in bulk and calculating only the cost of what they actually use—a strategy that they quickly realize (as Kingsolver and Smith and MacKinnon never do when they invoke welfare spending as a benchmark) is not available to someone living paycheck-to-paycheck without access to savings and credit. They adjust the rules for the second part of their project (their Thrifty Food Plan experiment) accordingly, limiting their spending to \$247 total for the 30-day experiment.⁶⁵ The ironies and additional difficulties introduced by this constraint become immediately apparent, as Greenslate observes, “It made little sense for us to buy things in such small quantities if the next size up offered more value per ounce, but we had no choice. Buying in bulk wasn’t an option.”⁶⁶

I argue above that ethical consumption authors counter charges of elitism and present ethical consumption as accessible by re-imagine the labor of ethical consumption as pleasurable or as a form of leisure. Greenslate and Leonard’s project in *On a Dollar a*

⁶⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 81.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 89.

Day paints a different picture of domestic production, seeing it as a money-saving strategy but one that is not without its own costs. As Greenslate and Leonard learn, home production takes both time and mental energy away from other tasks. “Having been accustomed to picking up a loaf of bread at the store, or dropping a couple cans of refried beans into the cart, we were experiencing this loss of convenience on a daily basis.”⁶⁷ In some instances, the cost savings (although necessitated by strict budget limitations) do not seem to justify the time cost. Greenslate recalls, “I rolled out tortillas by hand – tortillas which would have cost just a couple dollars at the grocery store.”⁶⁸ Rather than emerging as a new source of leisure, Greenslate finds that the labor of home production cuts into the couple’s leisure time. “On the weekends I watched Kerri prepare several different types of meals to eat during the week. While we could have spent that time at the beach instead, that would have meant that we would spend most of our evenings working in the kitchen after getting home from working all day.”⁶⁹ Far from providing a respite from work, the labor of home production (“working in the kitchen”) appears as an additional burden on top of labor performed in the marketplace (“working all day”). This points to an advantage that Greenslate and Leonard have over the other memoirists in terms of their ability to imagine what ethical consumption looks like for most people. When Kingsolver, Pollan, Smith and MacKinnon wax poetic about the pleasures of domestic production, they are doing so as professional writers working on books for which that labor counts as research. Leonard and Greenslate are high school teachers.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

Like the vast majority of U.S. consumers, they are engaging in domestic production on top of also working a demanding day job with fixed hours.

Ironically, all their time spent in the money-saving labor of home production, far from becoming a form of leisure itself as eco-consumption texts would lead us to expect, actually leads Greenslate and Leonard to seek out a relatively expensive leisure activity that they would not normally partake in. Greenslate writes:

By that third Friday, we needed a change. For three weeks we had been going nonstop. Long workdays, and weekends spent preparing foods and cleaning the house, left little time for us to relax together. We decided to go to the movies. In general, Kerri and I don't spend very much money entertaining ourselves. For the most part, we spend our free time reading, watching a movie at home, or taking the dogs to the park. Kerri likes to crochet, and I like to think up new things to do, like trying to eat on a dollar a day. But that night we would eat our small bowl of broccoli-potato soup with a side salad and then head out for a night on the town.⁷⁰

Greenslate readily acknowledges that this expenditure, which (like the novelty-satisfying bowl of instant ramen) feels to them so necessary to cope with the monotony and constant labor of eating on a dollar a day, would not have been an option for a couple truly living “in a situation where we couldn't afford to eat more than a dollar's worth of food.”⁷¹ Still, this incident suggests that although household production may save money, the energy it draws on does not “appear” in the form of passion as Coyne and Knutzen suggest nor does it blur the line between work and play as Pollan asserts. Instead, it comes out of a finite supply of laboring time that for the working poor starts out low and is disproportionately taxed by tasks like shopping that wealthier consumers find relatively less burdensome. Greenslate explicitly experiences shopping on a constrained budget in

⁷⁰ Ibid., 47.

⁷¹ Ibid., 48.

terms of its toll on his productivity: “my mind began to fog as the arduous task of counting pennies unfolded before us once again. I could have been doing a ton of other things at this moment that would have been far more productive, and thinking about them only increased my frustration.”⁷²

In *Cooked*, Pollan describes the pleasure of the labor of home food production, and particularly home brewing, as an opportunity to bond with his teenage son.⁷³ In *On a Dollar a Day*, the same labor undertaken out of necessity to stay within a strict budget becomes instead a source of tension in Greenslate and Leonard’s relationship. Especially during the Thrifty Food Plan portion of their experiment, Kerri expresses resentment at doing more of the household meal planning and preparation than Christopher does. This frustration is only heightened by the fact that as she quickly realizes the Thrifty Food Plan often calls for levels of in-home food production that are difficult to maintain with a full-time work schedule. She observes, “Some of the meals that were planned for lunches seemed challenging for people who worked. For example, Friday’s lunch is potato soup, which appears nowhere else in the week’s menu. It isn’t a leftover from another meal, so it needs to be made the day before.”⁷⁴

Eco-consumption memoirs see ethical consumption as offering an immediate personal solution to the social, health and environmental risks associated with the dominant mode of consumption. They also see themselves as contributing to a larger scale societal shift that addresses these risks, but that larger shift is deferred onto a future time when the particular form of ethical consumption they advocate has become

⁷² Ibid., 89.

⁷³ Michael Pollan, *Cooked*, 18.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 86.

widespread (Hopp, for instance, in his call-outs in *Animal Vegetable Miracle*, cites positive environment impacts that would occur if every person in the U.S. were to eat one locally sourced meal each week). However, Leonard and Greenslate's experience in *On a Dollar a Day* would suggest that ethical consumption is functionally unavailable for those low-income consumers who are most at risk from the problems that ethical consumption seeks to address. The problem this presents for ethical consumption is twofold: it means that ethical consumption is *not* readily available as an individualized solution for the population most exposed to social, health and environmental risks, and it also means that the wider effects of ethical consumption that these texts imagine when they see it ushering in large-scale change is unlikely to happen unless low-income consumers gain significantly improved access to such modes of consumption *first*. If as I argue above the literature of ethical consumption participates in a responsibility transfer from the state onto the individual consumer for environmental and health risks and poverty, then this literature potentially undermines the changed social conditions that ethical consumption would need in order to achieve its environmental goals.

Conclusion

Although it would appear that some forms of ethical consumption certainly can be frugal, this turns out to be very different than saying that they are available to low-income people. I do not mean to suggest that ethical consumption is not worthwhile if it is not accessible to low income people, but when ethical consumption responds to charges of elitism by imagining itself as universally accessible and even as a potential solution to the problem of how to live on a low income (“eat more cheaply”; “less expensive”; “less than

I spent . . . when I qualified for food stamps”) it enters into a troubling realm of both stigmatizing the consumption of the poor and responsabilizing them for their poverty.

Exaggerated claims about the accessibility of ethical consumption are particularly troubling when we imagine ethical consumption as successful when it offers individualized solutions to societal problems like obesity and exposure to environmental risks. The environmental justice movement has shown us that the poor are particularly exposed to these risks, and if ethical consumption literature exaggerates the accessibility of ethical consumption as a mode of activism and a strategy for self-care it also risks transferring responsibility onto the poor for their increased exposure to these environmental risks. Micheletti sees ethical consumption as filling in the gaps where government intervention falters. But if readers see ethical consumption as offering a personal escape from the risks and stressors of modern life while also believing that ethical consumption is “pretty accessible to the urban consumer who will make the necessary effort” (Berry), it’s easy to see how both exposure and contributions to social, environmental and health risk might start to seem like *only* a matter of personal choice. When such personal choice is available to everyone (when, for instance, feeding oneself “organically and pretty splendidly” on less than a food stamp allowance is always an option) political action to address structural inequalities and the uneven distribution of resources and risks loses its urgency.

This is where social justice memoirs like *On a Dollar a Day* and similar projects like *Nickel and Dimed* or the increasingly popular Food Stamp Challenge offer an important intervention in eco-consumption literature. Greenslate and Leonard are explicitly critical of responsibility transfer, calling out the conservative think tank

Heritage Foundation in particular for its position that “it is up to the consumer to make the nutritional choices that are best for them.” In turn they implicitly take to task the assumptions and recommendations of books like *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. In contrast to such discourses, their project problematizes the very notion of consumer choice, with Greenslate observing that “the less money you have, the less choice you have.”⁷⁵ This insight, articulated in *On a Dollar a Day* and *Nickel and Dimed* and readily available to participants in the Food Stamp Challenge and similar projects, raises serious doubts about the availability of ethical consumption as a form of either self-care or political empowerment for those who need it most. Recognizing the barriers to participation in ethical consumption also presents a problem for the imagined outcomes of ethical consumption literature. Ethical consumption authors imagine large-scale change happening as the practices they advocate become widespread, and they suggest that this can be accomplished through a simple transformation in consumer tastes and behaviors. Social justice memoirs, by reminding us of the limits to choice for many consumers, underscore, conversely, the need for continued activism outside of consumption and for an intervention that goes beyond just taste.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 21.

Conclusion

During the time of writing this dissertation, ethical consumption became increasingly pervasive in the U.S. as seen in both material and discursive instantiations of the movement—from table tents in San Francisco Bay Area restaurants¹ to a national Lincoln hybrid car commercial featuring Mathew McConaughey.² As smartphones have become commonplace, mobile applications geared toward enabling ethical consumption have also emerged. Environmental Working Group Food Scores, Choco-locate, Buycott, Locavore, Free2Work, Ethical Bean, Ethical Barcode, Good Guide and Social Impact are just a few examples of smartphone apps designed to help users make more ethical consumption choices by facilitating access to information about production. Ethical Barcode, for instance, allows users to scan product barcodes as they shop to see how the manufacturer’s practices have been graded in a variety of categories including environmental and labor practices. The app bases these scores on ratings it sources from activist organizations including Oxfam, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, and the Human Rights Campaign. As these and other products and services rush to provide the “information fix” that Daniel Goleman argues “has been the missing piece in the free market system all along,” it becomes easier for those with the means to participate in ethical consumption by choosing organic, local, fair trade, sweatshop-free and other

¹ As a part of its response to severe drought across the state, San Francisco Water Power Sewer has rolled out its “It’s a Drought” campaign to encourage water conservation. For restaurants, the campaign provides table tents explaining in response to the drought water will only be served upon request. “Drought Resources and Publications,” *San Francisco Water Power Sewer*.

² McConaughey in the commercial muses, ““It’s not about hugging trees; it’s not about being wasteful either. You’ve just got to find that balance where taking care of yourself takes care of more than just yourself.” Hughes, Jason, “Matthew McConaughey Talks Down Tree-Hugging in Lincoln Hybrid Commercials (Video).”

ethically distinguished goods.³ In this context of technological tools to facilitate ethical consumption for some consumers, it becomes even more important to be cognizant of the tensions and contradictions involved in the way we imagine such “information fix[es]” to “the eternal tension between profit and public welfare” inherent to our capitalist system.⁴ My project has addressed these tensions and contradictions as they manifest in an emerging body of nonfiction and fictional literature that imagines how U.S. consumers might use ethical consumption to address social and environmental crisis. Ironically, as I have shown, the same choices that consumers understand as helping the world also often work to shore up the consumer’s own social status and to secure her personal safety from exposure to social and environmental risks.

As I have argued, the imaginative literature of ethical consumption tends to assume an activist role with regards to ethical consumption movements. In *A Cafecito Story*, Julia Alvarez’s narrator suggests that the fictional parable will inspire consumption of fair trade coffee. For David Mas Masumoto, his description of “umami” as a taste that communicates embodied knowledge about multi-generational local farming practices challenges industrial farming in the marketplace by re-socializing his readers to seek out fresh, in-season, tree-ripened fruit and to develop their knowledge about farming and felt social relationships with farmers. The UFW published its *Wrath of Grapes* documentary and *Food and Justice* magazine explicitly as a part of their efforts to enlist consumers in supporting the 1980s-2000 Wrath of Grapes boycott. And in eco-consumption memoirs, pedagogical elements like recipes, instructions and references to further resources

³ Daniel Goleman, *Ecological Intelligence*, 245.

⁴ Daniel Goleman, *Ecological Intelligence*, 245.

function as instruments of activism by (the memoirs imply) shaping the consumption practices of readers.

As I have argued, these groups of text vary widely in their political commitments and in the populations they seek to empower through ethical consumption. The *Wrath of Grapes* boycott materials, informed by the UFW's institutional commitment to labor rights and by the Chicano movement and environmental justice movements' critique of environmental racism, developed an analysis of risk that it hoped would convince consumers to support empowering Chicano farm workers. Eco-consumption memoirs, by contrast, engage global environmental issues in ways that prioritize (both temporally and in terms of representation) personal security from social and environmental risks for affluent and implicitly white consumers. Ethical consumption texts like Masumoto's *Epitaph for a Peach* and Berry's "The Pleasures of Eating" that imagine ethical consumption as a matter of taste similarly prioritize affluent consumers and fail to recognize the material conditions limiting access to ethical consumption for low income consumers.

This literature of ethical consumption conceives of reading and sharing ethical consumption stories as a form of activism that activates pedagogical and socializing work vis-à-vis consumers qua readers. In his "Fair Trade Primer" that closes *A Cafecito Story*, EqualExchange co-founder David Rosenthal suggests that his reader has already become an integral part of the fair trade movement by reading *A Cafecito Story*. Rosenthal's conception of reading as a form of activism assumes that reading will necessarily be transformative of the reader's own consumption choices and of her relationship to fair trade. In this context, the narrator's instruction to her reader to "pass [this story] on"

becomes a way of asking the reader to be an activist for fair trade by consuming fair trade stories and products and by sharing them with others. Even in imagining the reader's potential activism, though, *A Cafecito Story* (like *Epitaph* and "Pleasures") emphasizes the sensory experience of consumption, which it suggests can stand in for direct knowledge about the conditions of production. To "pass [this story] on" might mean as little as sharing a taste for premium ethical products. The UFW, in its distribution strategy for both *Food and Justice* magazine and the *Wrath of Grapes* documentary, similarly encouraged readers to view consuming and sharing media about the Wrath of Grapes boycott as a form of activism, but with the significant difference that the UFW story always includes workers' perspectives on the material conditions of production and analysis of how those conditions manifest environmental racism. Articles about the documentary encouraged would-be activists to order a free VHS copy of the documentary to share with church groups and in other venues, while tear-outs in *Food and Justice* encouraged readers to help the movement by providing the names and addresses of friends who might be sympathetic to the UFW cause. Although directed like *Cafecito*, *Epitaph* and "Pleasures" toward an audience of consumers, the UFW materials consistently foreground farmworkers' experience of environmental racism, which it links to consumers not through taste but through its theory of knowledge as emerging through encounters with risk. Colin Beavan's No Impact Project similarly positions viewing and sharing his *No Impact Man* documentary as activism, inviting visitors to the website to organize their own "action-oriented screening of No Impact Man."⁵ No Impact Project and other contemporary eco-consumption blogs are more focused on consumers' knowledge and experiences but they share in the UFW's tactic of sparking larger-scale,

⁵ "Screening Toolkit," *No Impact Project*.

collective action on the part of readers. Perhaps because they stage their intervention so much in taste, *Cafecito*, *Epitaph* and “Pleasures” seem to consider reading itself as transformative of the individual and do not envision a need or provide a space for more traditional forms of consciousness raising and collective action.

The imaginative literature of ethical consumption conceives of its readers’ participation in ethical consumption movements as an extension of its own activism; this explicit incorporation of reader response into each text’s project has implications for the way these texts relate to their form. *No Impact Man* and *The 100-Mile Diet* both refer readers to companion websites that were maintained for several years as a space for nurturing and documenting readers’ spinoff projects, and these spinoff projects have emerged as extensions of the author’s individual consumption project that each book documents. In Chapter Five, I argued that such attention on readers’ spinoff projects allows eco-consumption memoirs to push the scale of their intervention imaginatively from the personal back out to the global. In doing so, I argued that eco-consumption memoirs also push the generic boundaries of the memoir, which traditionally conveys personal histories, in order to imagine a collective future instead. In *A Cafecito Story*, Rosenthal’s assertion that, “Miguel, Joe, and you, yourself – have turned decades of hard work and dreams into a powerful international movement called *fair trade*” also expands the fable form; *A Cafecito Story* becomes both a story with a moral (traditional fable) and a self-reflexive representation of what happens when readers learn and act according to that moral. In *Epitaph for a Peach*, Masumoto pushes the generic boundaries of epitaph through his attention to reader response. In the *LA Times* article that initiates the project to save his heirloom Sun Crest peaches that Masumoto documents in *Epitaph*, Masumoto

goes through lament, praise and consolation – the three stages of traditional elegy that mirror the stages of grief. As I argue in Chapter Two, though, Masumoto undermines the movement toward emotional closure in a traditional elegy in the book when he uses the article as a prologue—that is just a jumping off point—in *Epitaph*. This text is ultimately not an epitaph but a demonstration of how the affective power of a literary genre can generate a desired effect on Masumoto’s readers, whom he also imagines as the eaters of his peaches. In each of these cases, the literature’s conception of itself acting on the world through its readers generates an expansion of its form beyond its traditional boundaries and concerns.

The activist dimension of these literary engagements with ethical consumption shows the centrality of cultural production and aesthetics in this movement, which some working in political theory and environmental philosophy have imagined as critical to the paths toward environmental sustainability and social justice. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett observes that, “there will be no greening of the economy, no redistribution of wealth, no enforcement or extension of rights without human dispositions, moods, and cultural ensembles hospitable to those effects.”⁶ Political and economic change, in other words, require corresponding cultural change. I have argued that writers attuned to ethical consumption—and whose works show its strengths and limits—seek to stage interventions into the dominant mode of consumption precisely by addressing this realm of “human dispositions, moods, and cultural ensembles.” They stage these interventions by re-imagining taste to incorporate awareness of the conditions of production as Alvarez does in *A Cafecito Story*, Masumoto does in *Epitaph for a Peach* and *Four Seasons in Five Senses* and Berry does in “The Pleasures of Eating.” Kate Soper has been a

⁶ See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xii.

touchstone for my investigation of such narratives with her call for the development and communication of a “new erotics of consumption or hedonist ‘imaginary’”⁷ that would attend to the self-interested motives for choosing sustainable lifestyles. I have considered U.S. imaginative literature—defined to include nonfiction and print culture—as attempting to answer this call by re-imagining ethical consumption through the lenses of storytelling, consumer desire and aesthetic pleasure.

If Bennett is right that cultural change must come before progress toward environmental sustainability and social justice, this claim suggests a clear role for humanities scholarship in understanding and framing those changes. In this dissertation, I read the literature of ethical consumption as as employing narrative in its many guises to engage with consumer culture so as to effect political and economic change. The literature of ethical consumption is much more overt in its intention to effect change than most of the literature that preoccupies literary critics, and this presents an interesting opportunity for literary criticism and particularly environmental literary criticism to consider its own role. The body of literature that this project has considered tends to expository and declamatory modes that are often given short shrift in literary criticism. They are accessible in prose style, and they have concrete social calls to action intermixed with uses of symbolism, allegory, and other literary devices. While these texts may seem formally simple, their engagement with a contemporary social movement focused on sustainability and place-based community mean that they speak to ecocriticism and offer a rich archive for that field.

My project has examined how the realist stories, political desires and aesthetic pleasures that ethical consumption texts deploy to generate demand for goods produced

⁷ Kate Soper, *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, 4.

accordingly to particular ethical frameworks relate to the political and moral commitments of various ethical consumption movements including organic agriculture, local food and fair trade. Although spinoff consumption projects and anecdotal evidence from reviews of some of the primary texts I've examined suggest that ethical consumption discourse does inspire more sustainable consumption choices in some readers, the imaginative literature of ethical consumption ultimately does not offer a clear answer to Soper's call for a truly "*new* erotics of consumption or hedonist 'imaginary.'" In Chapter Three, I showed how *A Cafecito Story* and ads for Divine fair trade chocolate both draw on an imperial imaginative vocabulary that exoticizes producers in order to imagine desire for fair trade coffee and chocolate. In doing so, the story and the ads invoke a desire for luxury on the part of affluent white consumers that appears to be in fundamental contradiction with the progressive politics of fair trade's project of empowering producers and ensuring living wages and humane labor conditions. In Chapter Two, I showed how David Mas Masumoto's expanded notion of taste and his attempt to imagine a social relationship between eater and producer similarly fails to include migrant labor in its re-imagination of consumer-producer relationships, drawing its energy instead from the figure of the singular farmer familiar from Romanticist and early American pastoral traditions. For all its focus on re-valuing agricultural labor, Masumoto's work struggles (as has organic agriculture as a movement) to imagine a mode of producing fruit that would include a living wage for migrant agricultural laborers. In Chapter Five, I argue that authors of eco-consumption memoirs have re-imagined the memoir form in ways that allow them to represent the pleasures of individual consumption choices as transformative on a personal and global scale; in

Chapter Six, however, I argue that the consumption choices that eco-consumption memoirs model for readers are only available to relatively wealthy consumers and that eco-consumption memoirs stigmatize the consumption of low-income consumers by suggesting otherwise. One of the driving desires in eco-consumption memoirs turns out to be the desire for a personal cushion from risk. Another, as Kingsolver's encounter with the gas station clerk in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* suggests, is the necessarily scarce pleasure of class distinction. If these texts inspire desire for ethical consumption, the kinds of desire that they draw to do so on appears in stark contrast to the politics of the ethical consumption movements that they promote.

Is alternative hedonism any system of fulfilling desires that encourages incremental shifts toward more sustainable consumption practices, or must the forms of desire that inspire a shift toward sustainable consumption be founded on entirely new imaginative vocabularies and social structures? As I have developed my critiques of the desires that ethical consumption authors invoke in their texts, I have found that they correspond to others' critiques of the various consumption movements that these texts represent. Masumoto's "umami" and his imagined commensality between producer and consumer falter in addressing migrant labor; meanwhile, critiques of organic agriculture point out that this wider movement that Masumoto's work embodies also fails to address the exploitation of migrant laborers on farms of all sizes and structures. Alvarez and fair trade advertising struggle to imagine desire for fair trade in a way that is consistent with empowering producers, and meanwhile critics of this movement point out that the location of most fair trade certifying organizations in the United States and Europe limits the sense in which fair trade can empower producers. My reading of *Animal, Vegetable,*

Miracle shows how Kingsolver's valorization of her own alternative consumption is built on her stigmatization of the consumption of a gas station clerk, and critics of locavorism have argued that it is available only to relatively affluent consumers. This pattern suggests to me that if something like an "erotics of consumption" or "hedonist imaginary" is to transform consumption practices and attendant production structures in the twenty-first century, such a framework will need to imagine a form of desire that fundamentally values equality and sustainability. The desires I have identified in these texts, which often boil down to a desire for luxury, distinction or even domination, may generate some demand for ethical goods, but they ultimately work against the progressive goals of ethical consumption movements. However, I've shown that critiques of ethical consumption are also present within these literary representations of the movement via narrative ambiguities and tensions. This suggests that the rhetorical tensions that emerge through close reading of ethical consumption literature correspond to sociopolitical tensions in the ethical consumption movements themselves and that literary critical analysis can therefore serve as one entry point for thinking through real-life ethical consumption practices.

In reflecting on this project as a whole, I see the most radical critique of consumer desire as the organizing principle for ethical consumption emerging out of the chapters that deal most directly with risk. In the UFW's Wrath of Grapes campaign, Chicano farmworkers argued that their greater exposure to pesticide risk (itself a manifestation of environmental racism) means that they possess knowledge unavailable to the wealthier white consumers whom the campaign addresses as potential boycott supporters. The UFW is explicitly critical of the notion central to much ethical consumption rhetoric that

a product's aesthetic qualities can speak to its conditions of production; the Wrath of Grapes campaign, then, also offers a model for critiquing the primacy of consumer knowledge, consumer desire and consumer empowerment in ethical consumption discourse. For the United Farm Workers, knowledge about the conditions of production emerges through encounters with risk and is not available to consumers in the same way that it is for farmworkers who encounter this risk in the workplace and in their communities. The campaign therefore affirms the continuing need for non-market interventions and particularly for political support for unions. Although the Wrath of Grapes campaign uses consumption as a lever to wield political influence, it certainly does not imagine the pleasure of consumption as a source of knowledge informing political action.

In *On a Dollar a Day*, Greenslate and Leonard accept the premise in eco-consumption memoirs (the subject of Chapter Five) that ethical consumption offers personal protection from some of the social and health risks of modern society, and in fact they would likely have identified as eco-consumers in their everyday life prior to the project. However, their project seriously challenges the assertion in eco-consumption memoirs and other ethical consumption discourse that ethical consumption is universally available as a form of activism and self-care to anyone who might wish to access it. If as Leonard and Greenslate suggest ethical consumption is functionally unavailable to low-income consumers, this presents serious problems for any attempt to intervene in ecological crisis by seeking to reshape consumer desire. Leonard and Greenslate suggest that at a certain level, the consumption choices of low-income consumers are not responsive to desire but rather to socioeconomic constraints and inequities. If ethical

consumption is unavailable to a large segment of the population, this also presents a problem for the idea in eco-consumption memoirs that the consumption projects they describe will act as models for a widespread change that takes on global significance as it is more and more widely adopted. If the potential pool of participants is limited to the relatively affluent, then these consumption strategies seem more a means of personal escape from the risks and stressors of modern life and do not deliver on their more global promises. As a voice in the literature of ethical consumption, social justice memoirs like *On a Dollar a Day* have the effect of tempering the literature's embrace of consumption as political activism, affirming the continuing need for traditional political action to preserve and expand social programs like welfare.

Texts like *A Cafecito Story*, *Epitaph for a Peach* and eco-consumption memoirs push the boundaries of the way we understand consumer pleasure, imagining how it might be politically productive and how we might leverage pleasure to effect change in the direction of environmental sustainability and social justice. Imagining pleasure in this way also carves out a significant role for cultural work in advocating for change. *On a Dollar a Day* and the Wrath of Grapes boycott temper the enthusiastic embrace of pleasure as a guiding principle in much ethical consumption discourse by clarifying the limits of the empowerment that ethical consumption offers consumers as well as by highlighting the perspectives that such an emphasis on pleasure excludes.

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