

CONSUMING LIVES, CONSUMING LANDSCAPES: INTERPRETING ADVERTISEMENTS FOR CAFÉDIRECT COFFEES

CAROLINE WRIGHT*

Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

Abstract: This paper analyses newspaper advertising for the fairtrade coffee company Cafédirect, focusing particularly on the ways UK consumers are urged to transform unequal social relations with coffee producers through consumption. The paper argues that whilst producers' lives are rendered 'knowable' to potential consumers, the reverse is not true. In addition, consumer gain is privileged over producer gain, with the commodity imbued with the 'authentic' lives and landscapes of coffee production. Thus, the 'public face' of development portrayed is that UK consumers can 'make a difference'. However, attracting potential consumers may depend on representations which are embedded in unequal power relations. Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

... the pleasures of consumerism would be routinely diminished by an awareness of the productive origins of consumer goods (Billig, 1999, p. 313).

The result ... that makes me happiest, is the rise and rise of Cafédirect, no longer a charitable fair-trading concern, but a new way of doing business and the fastest growing coffee company in the UK (Smith, 2001).¹

It is commonplace to argue that contemporary constructions of the self are achieved more through the consumption of commodities than their production. Less common is Billig's argument that such constructions require a habitual forgetfulness, repression even, of the social relations underpinning commodity production and exchange (Billig, 1999).

*Correspondence to: C. Wright, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL, UK.
E-Mail: c.wright@warwick.ac.uk

¹Founding partner of the agency responsible for the campaign.

But what happens when commodities are positioned precisely to draw attention to such social relations, to the links (and inequalities) between producers and consumers? Are the pleasures of consumerism inevitably diminished? What tensions and contradictions are set up and how are they negotiated?

This paper explores such questions through the 1999–2002 newspaper advertising campaign for Cafédirect, a UK based fair-trade company, supplemented by an interview with Cafédirect's Managing Director (MD). I write as a committed consumer of Cafédirect products, invested in fair trade but nonetheless intrigued and sometimes troubled by its marketing. My concern is the configuration of links between minority world coffee drinkers and majority world coffee farmers, the wider discourses and the contribution made to the 'public faces' of development.²

The paper begins by introducing Cafédirect, fair trade and the advertising campaign. Thereafter the salient features of an advertorial at the centre of the campaign are identified and located in a discussion of commodity fetishism. This, together with brief consideration of the 'natural', provides a framework for analysis of the three subsequent adverts. My main arguments are that the advertising only partially reveals the social relations behind production, exchange and consumption, and in so doing (inadvertently?) renders the producers' lives consumption items. Much effort goes into privileging and legitimating consumption pleasures over and above the 'ethical' content, achieved in part by perpetuating commodity fetishism.³

CAFÉDIRECT AND FAIR TRADE

Conceived in the early 1980s, Cafédirect was founded in 1991 by Oxfam Trading, Traidcraft, Equal Exchange and Twin Trading. The impetus was the collapse of the International Coffee Agreement, the ensuing slump in coffee prices and poverty of coffee producers. Cafédirect is a medium-sized profit re-investment company, although often assumed to be a non-governmental organization, which buys coffee on a fairly traded basis and markets it to UK consumers. Initially available only in alternative trade outlets, in 1992 Cafédirect's ground coffee went on trial in the Co-op and Safeway and by 1994 all major supermarkets carried it and an instant coffee had been launched. Central to market access was the availability of free human capital; Cafédirect's founders mobilized supporters to persuade supermarkets to stock the products.

According to Renard, 'Although the fair coffee initiative attempts to escape the competition-driven market... it eventually finds itself obliged to negotiate its niche' (Renard, 1999, p. 498). Indeed, product differentiation and targeting of consumption sites are central to Cafédirect's establishment. Teadirect arrived in 1998, followed by four organic coffees in 1999, three specialist organic teas in 2001, '5065' instant coffee in 2002 and Cocodirect drinking chocolate in 2003. Meanwhile partnerships with Costa Coffee in 2000 and Coffee Fresh in 2002 brought the product to high-street coffee shops and to vending machines. Cafédirect's turnover by sales for the 12 months up to 30 September 2002 was £10.4 million, with premiums above the world coffee price of nearly

²The terms 'majority' and 'minority' world are used in this paper to refer to what have been called 'north' and 'south', or 'developed' or 'developing' (respectively) in other papers in this special issue.

³These are my readings and not the only readings, although they may be 'preferred'. Examining how (potential) consumers read the adverts, and what producers make of them, is the topic of a future research project.

£2 million paid to producers (Cafédirect, 2002, p. 15). Its UK market share for roast and ground coffee was 3.7 per cent in 1998 and 8.3 per cent by 2002, although it only has 1 per cent of the instant coffee market. Nescafe continues to dominate the overall market with almost 60 per cent, but Cafédirect is now the sixth largest UK coffee brand (Cafédirect, n.d.a).

The Fairtrade Foundation (FTF) was launched in 1992, to aid poor workers and producers 'by encouraging and stimulating industry and consumers to promote "fairly traded" products... [with a] strategy based on establishing authoritative, independent criteria by which to recognise and endorse fairly traded products' (Fairtrade Foundation, 1993). Companies whose products meet the criteria can be licensed to display a Fairtrade Mark on them,⁴ the first being Green and Black's Maya Gold chocolate in 1994 quickly followed by Cafédirect. Green and Black's have not extended the Mark to other lines but all Cafédirect's carry it, 24 to date, and overall there were over 180 Fairtrade foods by 2003 (Fairtrade Foundation, 2004, p. 5).

The initial criteria were modest but today the Fairtrade Standards for Coffee runs to 15 pages (FLO International, 2002). Cafédirect's criteria are actually higher than required and it would prefer 'a graded system with Bronze, Silver and Gold standards' (Cafédirect, n.d.b) to reflect this to consumers. Its mission statement is 'To be the leading brand which strengthens the influence, income and security of producer partners in the south and links them directly to the consumer' (Cafédirect, n.d.c). According to the MD, 'We have said and we've publicly said it, we want to be the number one fair trade hot beverage company' (Newman, 2001, p. 10). Advertising and marketing are central strategies: 'Our marketing's about a million [pounds sterling] and then we spend about a quarter of a million on sales budgets... for promotions' (Newman, 2001, p. 16). This is negligible for the major coffee market players, but significant in the fair trade sector.

INTRODUCING THE CAMPAIGN

On Saturday 16 October 1999 the *Guardian* carried a new and distinctive advertising campaign for Cafédirect, six of the paper's seven sections carrying adverts. The campaign stretched the boundary between advertising and print journalism, a banner at the bottom of the front page locating the adverts akin to that at the top of the page locating journalism highlights. A new tag line 'Fresh' appeared, together with a new slogan 'Think It', and a redesigned Cafédirect logo. Three adverts were for coffees and there was also a general 'advertorial'.⁵ Some adverts ran in the *Guardian* again in November, and appeared on promotional materials until 2002.

Host Universal Ltd produced the campaign and describe it as brand repositioning and communications, most notably to 're-introduce a tea and coffee company—with the most fantastic proposition—to a consumer who simply refuses to see it' (Host Universal Ltd., n.d.). The choice of advertising medium was strategic: 'we worked with the *Guardian* because its targeted audience is very similar, 'cos the target reader is similar to us' (Newman, 2001, p. 16). Parts of the campaign also featured in the women's magazine *Marie Claire* and ultimately in cinemas, not examined here.

⁴Max Havelaar was the first European 'fair' trade label.

⁵The launch also included adverts for Teadirect, not considered here.

DO YOURSELF A FAVOUR: DISCOVER WORLD FRESH COFFEES

The campaign is held together by a double-page spread comprising mostly text on the left with a photo on the right.⁶ The quantity and layout of the text resonates with a magazine, using headlines and columns; this is an advertorial, with 'Advertisement Promotion' displayed top right lest readers mistake it for a piece of news journalism.

The banner headline on the left, 'Do yourself a favour: discover world fresh coffees' suggests that my first responsibility as a potential consumer is to myself. The verb 'discover', redolent of adventure and the great colonial myth of unknown lands and unclaimed riches, evokes the rich pickings that await me and makes me the agent of their realization. This shifts my subject position from being passively 'marketed at' to being invoked to act, to take my consumption, and myself, seriously. As Judith Williamson remarked, 'In advertising it is essential to compensate for the inactivity forced on us; hence advertising's Romanticism, its emphasis on adventure and excitement' (Williamson, 1978, p. 140). The first column below the headline provides the campaign's gist: Cafédirect has the quality discerning coffee drinkers want, and this quality comes from the way it does business.

The second column introduces two new 'gourmet blends'. Their quality and freshness are asserted, explaining that they taste so good because of the 'special way' Cafédirect works with coffee producers, linking them with consumers and ensuring a good price. The Peruvian coffee grower Leonardo Navarro Bustinza is then briefly introduced, with much attention paid to the landscape he produces in—'peaks rising to over 18 000 feet', 'micro-climates in the valleys', 'just the right balance between sunshine and rainfall'. Mention of a second grower, Matthew Matoli in Tanzania, follows, again with much about landscape—'the rich volcanic soils of Mount Kilimanjaro', 'abundant seasonal rains', 'rivers flowing down from the mountain summit'. Thus far more attention is actually paid to optimal growing locations than how Cafédirect does business. The altitude, rich soils, sunshine, rainfall and river water are credited with the coffee's high quality and this emphasis on landscapes extends to their names: Machu Picchu Mountain Special and Kilimanjaro Mountain Special. The suggestion is that geography and weather do most of the work. The remainder is done by a male grower; the text and photograph opposite establish coffee producers as male, giving no hint of the women (and children?) working in the sector.

More attention is paid in the third column to the business practices of Cafédirect, contrasting partnerships and premiums with exploitation and vulnerability. However, the last sentence, 'So do yourself a favour and drink some', leaves the quality of the product and, drawing from Bourdieu (1989), the distinction offered, as the rationale for fair trade purchase. In the end a fair price is legitimated not through social justice or solidarity but through confirming the consumer's superior taste; this is the coffee that tastes so good to those who have good taste. The pre-occupation with far-flung geographical landscapes can be read as an appeal to the imagined consumer's cultural capital, whose enjoyment of travel and tourism will ensure their appreciation. Thus the price premium of fair trade in comparison with other brands is presented as having its own reward; a better product, a confirmation of social status. The L'Oreal campaign slogan 'Because I'm worth it' came to mind.

⁶Unfortunately, it has not been possible to reproduce the text element here.

PUTTING THE ETHICAL CASE (SECOND)

The first of five columns in the lower half of the page is headed by the Fairtrade logo and accompanied by text outlining the generic principles of Fairtrade and how Cafédirect goes beyond them. A column headed Value Partners follows, with an image of a (white) male at a computer and text discussing the direct relationship with producer co-ops, a minimum price and technological inputs enabling growers to 'play' the world coffee market. Third is the 'Virtuous Circle', defined as when the (high) quality of the trading relationship determines the (high) quality of the coffee, and illustrated by a circle of coffee beans. This column reiterates that fair trade makes for better coffee, not least in the last sentence: 'So everybody benefits. And that means an even better cup of coffee for you'. Fourth is Organic Growth, illustrated with the Soil Association logo and detailing expanding consumption of organic products and the benefits to coffee farmers who could never afford artificial pesticides and fertilisers anyway. Finally, Time for Tea signals another product launch.

What is striking is that whenever the ethical dimensions of fair trade come to the fore the attention of the potential consumer is quickly returned to the theme of self-reward. Thus while mutual benefit is clearly the outcome of the virtuous circle, as a (potential) consumer I have to be left imagining my own benefit, that even better cup of coffee. Better, presumably, than non-fair trade coffee from Cafédirect's competitors, and certainly better than the 'solidarity' coffee of the 1980s. What does this mean for the 'public faces' of development? There is no overt discussion of development in the advert, and it's not possible from this study to know whether or how readers associate it with development. Nonetheless, I suggest a preferred reading whereby consumers are rendered agents of development and simultaneously reassured that they can contribute to global fairness while maintaining high levels of personal consumption. While this may be commended as a pragmatic way to foster engagement, it also raises significant questions. Does it reprise an imperialist legacy whereby the (active) minority world is constructed as coming to the rescue of the (passive) majority world? Can development actually be effected without a reduction in consumption in the minority world?

THE CONSUMER'S GAZE

A head-and-shoulders photograph of Leonardo Navarro Bustinza, a coffee grower from Cocola, Peru, takes up the right-hand page of the double-spread and is reproduced as Figure 1. Immediately striking is how close-up the photo is, every line and pore of his skin visible. Leonardo's personal space is invaded by the camera/reader's gaze, inviting a scrutiny that would be considered very rude face to face. I take him to be in his early 50s, his tanned and weathered face suggesting a hard-working life. Leonardo's presence brings me, as a potential consumer, face to face with a (male) coffee producer. For an instant the advert connects us through the coffee he grows and sells 'there' and that I may buy and consume 'here'. It is a one-to-one encounter, except of course that he cannot see me.

In the first volume of *Capital*, Karl Marx expounded the concept of the fetishism of commodities (Marx, 1961). Fetishism refers to the ascription of living power to inanimate objects, and commodity fetishism involves the endowment of commodities with properties assumed to be intrinsic to them, alongside concealment of the social relations involved in the human production of the commodities. Marx held commodity fetishism to be at the heart of capitalism:

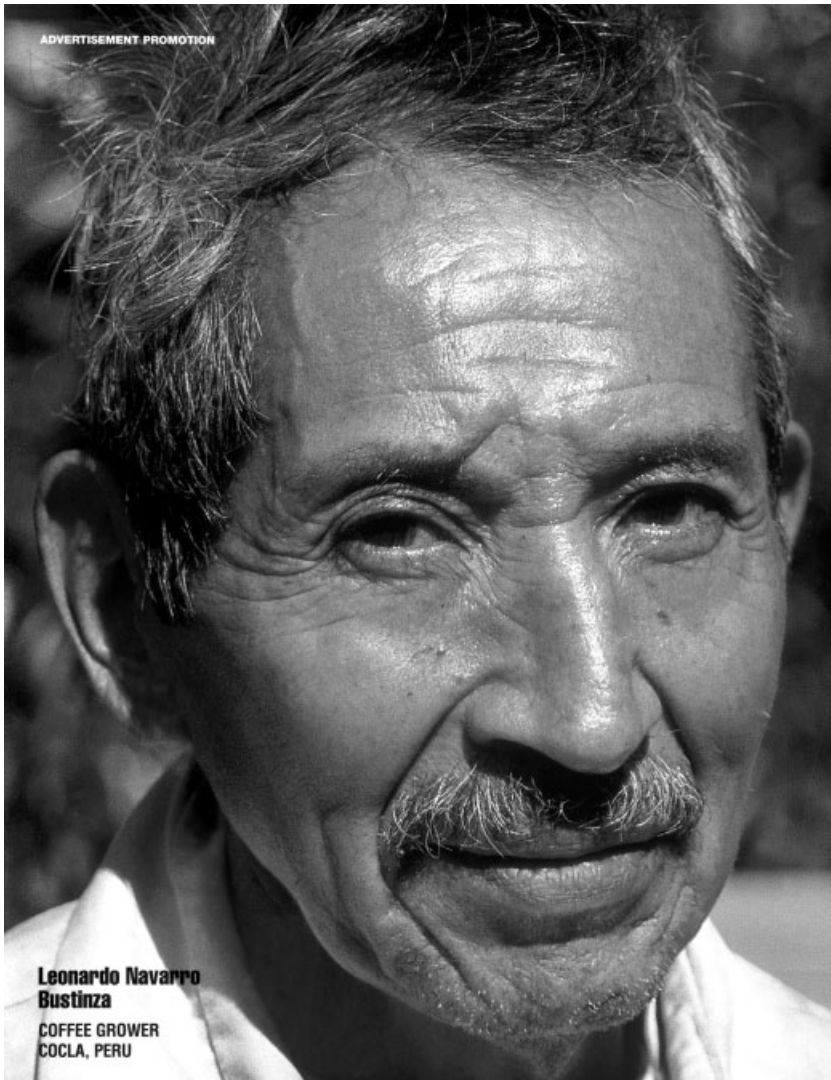


Figure 1. Right-hand page of Café Direct advertorial. Reproduced by permission of Niall McGarry.

Since the producers do not come into social contact with each other until they exchange their products, the specific social character of each producer's labour does not show itself except in the act of exchange . . . The relations connecting the labour of one individual to that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations . . . But as . . . material relations between persons and social relations between things. (Marx, 1961, p. 73)

Thus our relationship to the circulation of goods becomes a relationship with money rather than with their producers, and the value of commodities is seen as natural rather than social. Marx developed the concept of commodity fetishism in an early, phase of capitalist development, but it becomes 'even more apposite' (Billig, 1999, p. 317) in an era when identity is performed via the status meanings of commodities.

Returning to the advertorial, it could thus be understood as a deliberate attempt to undermine commodity fetishism, to make part of the potential consumer's relationship with the product, coffee, also a relationship with the coffee producer(s). Such an endeavour is, however, apparently full of risk in a consumer society:

... if the commodities are to be consumed as items of pleasure and as confirmations of the identity of the consumer, then the consumers must routinely not think about the labour relations involved in the production of what they are consuming. This means forgetting about the social relations which lie behind commodities. ... My goods, in order to be mine and to be enjoyed as such, must be separated from the bodies which have created them... My sense of possession would be diminished—as well as my good consuming self—if I took seriously those dark, busy fingers, working in conditions far removed from the life-world of my playful self (Billig, 1999, pp. 318–319).

And yet the hard-working face, if not the fingers, of the man producing the coffee are in full view here. Does this mean that the advertising will fail to 'hail' consumers successfully? In fact, social relations are but partially revealed, in ways that render them commodities in their own right. Moreover, a lot of work is done to legitimate consumer pleasure, including by (re)fetishising the commodity.

CONSUMING (PARTIAL) LIVES

The relationship between consumer and producer established by the advert is, of course, visual, virtual, and entirely one-way. I may 'know' Leonardo's face through the advert but I don't know him, and he knows nothing of me. This one-way consumption of lives is ubiquitous to fair trade marketing. 'Fair trade vignettes' are widely used, short descriptions of producers' lives stressing the hardships of the 'free' market and the benefits fair trade brings. On Cafédirect's web-site one can 'meet' several (male) producers, including Mario Hernandez in Nicaragua, who says: 'Now I have money to buy clothes for my children and to build my house. Day to day things are improving because of the better price' (Cafédirect, n.d.d). This is a typical 'once upon a time' narrative of arduousness and inequality that becomes a 'happy ever after' once consumers commit to fair trade. It is clearly a conscious marketing strategy: 'Fair Trade is a very difficult concept to get over... you've got to paint the picture. And the best way to paint a picture is to tell the story of the impact it's made' (Newman, 2001, p. 24).

These stories, offering the consumer the romance of a full and transparent relationship with the producer, are in fact necessarily partial, a caricature even. Indeed how could it be otherwise; no representation could ever be fully referential. Since whatever the potential consumer may know about producers, producers know nothing about specific consumers, this is a far cry from the 'mutual relations' envisaged by Marx (1961, p. 72). Knowing the name of a coffee producer⁷ may sustain the illusion that material relations have been transformed into social relations, but it's unlikely that the coffee I buy was grown by Leonardo Bustinza. His face and life stand for all Cafédirect producers in the consumer imagination, denying differences between producers and inviting consumption of the life

⁷The imperative to name coffee producers in advertising campaigns predates Cafédirect, the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia introducing coffee drinkers to Juan Valdez back in 1982.

of the homogenised 'other'. In so doing the potential consumer may remark on her 'superior' social, geographical and economic status. Thus I am less optimistic than Raynolds about the extent the social distance between consumers and producers can be 'shortened' (Raynolds, 2002).

PRIVILEGING THE PLEASURES OF CONSUMPTION

Content analysis confirms that privileging the pleasures of consumption is a second way the campaign recovers from the risk of consumer alienation. Throughout the text what producers gain from fair trade features sixteen times, with seven references to higher prices and nine other benefits mentioned,⁸ and the alternative is also made clear—insecure incomes and dependence on corrupt middlemen. However, there are no less than 31 references or phrases describing consumer gains. The quality of the product gets five mentions, that it's organic four and that it's new three. That it's good, special, gourmet and fresh are each mentioned twice, and a further eleven superlatives are applied.⁹ Thus the principal rationale presented to the consumer for engaging in fair trade is that of the 'better' product. Only three phrases legitimating fair trade on ethical grounds appear (better deal; decent wages; everybody benefits) and terms like justice, inequality or redistribution are absent.

The fallback position for consumers not buying fair trade coffee is much less serious than that for producers not selling via fair trade mechanisms. While producer livelihood could be at risk, all the consumer would be without is a particular coffee brand. Perhaps this discrepancy explains the exaggeration of consumer benefit, whereby drinking Cafédirect becomes part of an identity project to value oneself. It's certainly deliberate that the ethical case comes second: 'We've really made ourselves look as good, taste as good and be as good at marketing as the biggest brands such as Nescafe or Kenco . . . and we feel that's the right way to go . . . [long pause] and by the way it's fair trade (Newman, 2001, p. 6).

The third way pleasurable consumption is recuperated is by perpetuating aspects of commodity fetishism. As I described above, the landscape the coffee is produced in receives much attention, its 'naturalness' portrayed as intrinsic to the product itself. Such fetishism is even more obviously involved in the following three product adverts.

THE HIDDEN FACE OF MACHU PICCHU¹⁰

The advert reproduced in Figure 2 can be read in both portrait and landscape modes. As landscape I see an ancient and abandoned terraced settlement in a soaring mountain landscape, catching the sun's early rays. The scene looks deserted except for two specks; tourists perhaps, since the image is Machu Picchu, Peru's famous Inca monument. The colours are earthy browns and yellows, with a rich blue sky. I read the settlement as in harmony with its surroundings, integrated into the rock of the hillside, pre-industrial.

⁸Credit terms; long-term trading commitment; environmental standards; health and safety regulations; opportunities to invest in production (×4) and community investment.

⁹Freshly selected; fine; very fine; rich; excellent; great; pick of the crop; even better; full-bodied; speciality; distinct.

¹⁰As named in the contents banner at the bottom of the *Guardian's* front page.



Figure 2. Advert for Machu Picchu Mountain Special. Reproduced by permission of Cafédirect/Host.

The text provided in the landscape orientation is the ‘Fresh’ tag line. In portrait mode, on the other hand, the peaks immediately behind the settlement become a massive human face in profile, eyes closed. A cirrus cloud drifting over the ‘nose’, together with a satisfied expression, suggests the savouring of an aroma. The portrait text includes the Cafédirect logo together with ‘Think it’.

‘Fresh’ may denote the freshness of the coffee and the freshness of the idea of ethical consumption, as well as the speed the coffee travels from ‘there’ to ‘here’. The text also suggests travel by resonating with an envelope’s post-mark, the circle akin to the date stamp and the accompanying wavy text to messages like ‘Post early for Christmas’. I read the ‘Think it’ slogan on various levels. First, it invites me to think through my consumption, to be ‘wise’ to my connections with producers. Second it works as an imperative to think through the adverts, which typically don’t show coffee. Third, it hails a consumer already in the know about fair trade, evoking what is not pictured. Fourth,

its minimalism echoes the Nike campaign slogan 'Just do It', although where this privileges action over thought, here the call is to think and then act (by buying the product). Instead of realising myself through running I am to realize myself through thoughtful coffee consumption.¹¹ Cafédirect is pitching itself as the 'thinking person's' product, appealing to cultural capital through the slogan and the ad's double orientation.

Since coffee is not being produced or drunk in this advert, how does it work? The cloud becomes the steam from an early morning cup of coffee, its aroma waking the slumbering giant. Such a reading offers the promise of awakening to a day full of gratification and possibility. Also on offer is the idea of an ancient civilization, of wisdom and knowledge working in harmony with the earth, of freshness, freedom, lack of pollution. The advert invites me to consume and savour the location as well as the product; indeed the name of the location is appropriated as the name of the coffee.

CONSUMING LANDSCAPES

According to Harris, nature photography is in many ways pornographic, inhibiting our ability to enjoy the natural world immediately around us and stimulating us to invade far away locations whose eco-systems will inevitably be disturbed in the process (Harris, 2000, pp. 246–247). The appeal to nature in advertising is redolent of a particular phase of capitalism: 'the natural is the product of a society in desperate need of relaxation' (Harris, 2000, p. 250). The risk is not from the vagaries of nature that haunted our ancestors but the machines and high-pressured corporate world that characterize 21st century living. As Harris explains, 'Long ago, mankind (sic) took shelter from nature in his own manmade world. Now he takes shelter from the manmade world in nature, or at least in a simulacrum of nature' (Harris, 2000, pp. 250–251).

Through associations with nature, I read Cafédirect as imbued with qualities it cannot possess; the potential to salve the superficiality, artificiality and stresses of late capitalism. Thus it remains fetishised. The advert circulates particular meanings of the product, its landscape and those who produce it, as authentic. For Negra, writing about adverts evoking Ireland as 'authentic other', the consumption of such representations maintains and reinforces colonial power relations (Negra, 2001, p. 78). Certainly it is troubling that the landscape becomes another item to be consumed alongside the coffee, its value constructed through what it offers minority world consumers. It is not possible to know the meaning of the location (or the product) to the people living there (indeed this image suggests that nobody does). According to Baumann, this is a feature of globalization: '... localities are losing their meaning-generating and meaning-negotiating capacity and are increasingly dependent on sense-giving and interpreting actions which they do not control...' (Bauman, 1998, pp. 1–2).¹² This is not to say that the local is disappearing but that, to borrow from Hall (1997), it is being convened under a global canopy, in this case to provide pleasurable consumption of the exotic. A similar reading can be made of the third advert.

¹¹A subsequent leaflet promotion highlights that thought is but a prelude to action: 'Think it' being followed by 'Drink it'.

¹²Recognizing how few published images of the majority world are taken by indigenous photographers, Kijiji Vision aims to help such photographers gain fair access to international markets (Kijiji Vision, n.d). Thanks to Matt Smith for bringing it to my attention.

GET TO GRIPS WITH ORGANIC¹³

Figure 3 reproduces a portrait advert, a weathered right forearm and hand pushing into dark brown earth, fingers spread out. The short fingernails and cuticles are encrusted with earth; this is a working hand, and the hairiness suggests a male. The dominant colours are browns and dark oranges. There are sods of rich turned-over soil in the foreground, as though prepared for planting, but the arm and hand dominate the image. The 'Fresh' tagline and 'Think it' slogan feature again, together with the Cafédirect label for organic decaffeinated coffee.

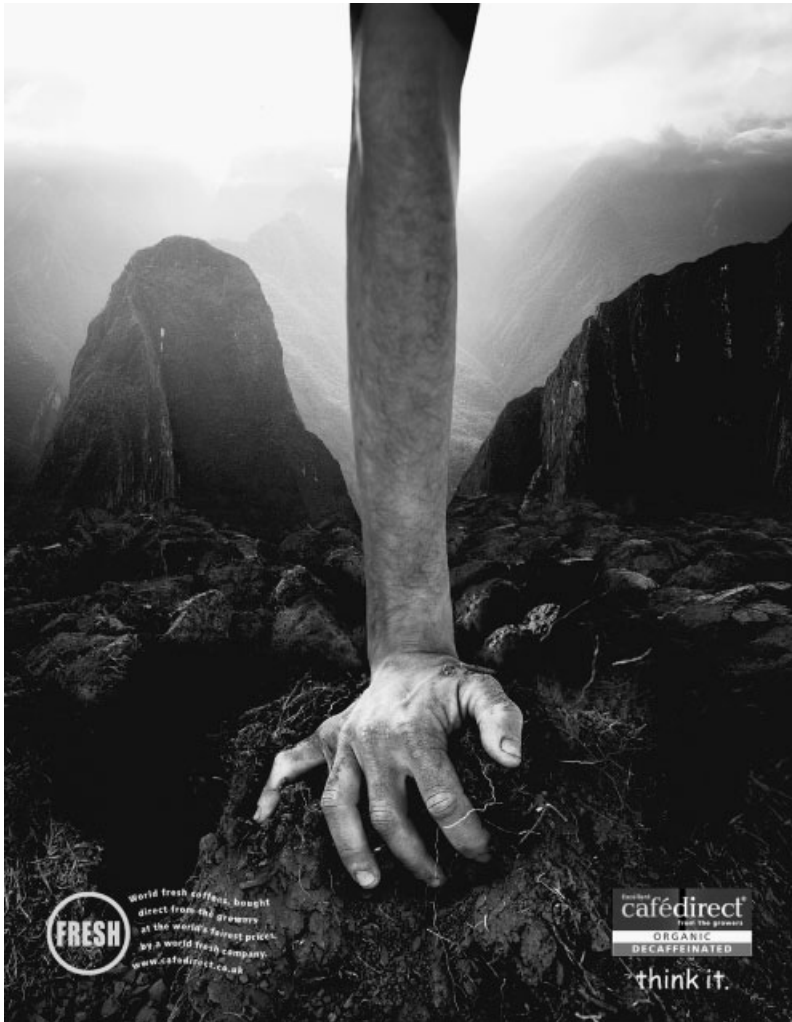


Figure 3. Advert for Organic Decaffeinated Cafédirect. Reproduced by permission of Cafédirect/Host.

¹³The contents banner description. While the Machu Picchu image went on to be a mainstay of Cafédirect advertising, this and the following advert were dropped after negative focus group response.

CONSUMING LIVES (AGAIN)

Once again, coffee is absent and the reader must think through the advert. I read the length and straightness of the arm as the stem of a plant, the position of the hand and fingers denoting its root system. Given the context now established, the location becomes the Peruvian Andes and the plant, at least symbolically, a coffee bush. Thus the arm and hand are simultaneously the (male) producers of the coffee and the coffee itself. The producer is shown to be at one with the soil, to be *of* the soil even, at one with the coffee, *of* the coffee even. The image evokes the authenticity and knowledge of the producer, the way he and the coffee 'belong' to the environment.¹⁴ The promise made is that the coffee will be rich, dark, authentic and natural, a product of the soil and human hands only; it is surely no accident that this advert is for organic coffee. In buying and drinking the coffee the suggestion is that I can also consume the authentic and unspoilt richness of an almost primeval and certainly pre-industrial landscape. Am I not also invited to consume (metaphorically) the very body of the coffee producer? In the light of the final advert, this may not seem so far-fetched.

FROM BEAN TO CUP IN AN INSTANT

Most of the portrait mode advert reproduced in Figure 4 comprises a landscape of recently ploughed earth, a large, round, golden brown shape in the centre. The upturned sods have a touch of frost and the purple tints suggest dawn, reinforced by the first warming rays of the sun catching the central image. 'Fresh' and 'Think it' feature again, alongside the label for freeze-dried medium roast coffee. My main focus was on the central shape; after a moment I identified it as a naked human, crouching down with her/his back to the camera/me, head dropped forward, arms tucked in, back and shoulders rounded. The nakedness and posture of the body suggested some trauma, yet such a reading made no sense contextually. Recognizing the particular representation of the body (the spine and the crease at the top of the buttocks are in an over-defined shadow and the upper-arm seems over-thin), I realized it represented something else, both 'really' through the posture and 'virtually' through digital enhancement. However, I couldn't see the something else until a friend pointed out the giant roasted coffee bean.

CONSUMING LIVES AND LANDSCAPES

Thus a human impersonating a roasted coffee bean becomes a seed set down to grow in a vast ploughed landscape (far removed from the reality of small-scale coffee production in the shade of bananas or maize). The colours evoke the richness of the seed/roasted coffee bean that will become the instant granules in the jar. Being dawn heralds the promise of a new day but also the coffee bean realisable in an instant, to make that first, all important, cup. The 'naturalness' of the product is suggested by juxtaposing the coffee bean/seed with the soil and through the simplicity of the image—nobody is working the land, planting, weeding, harvesting or processing the coffee. Of course instant coffee is far from natural, freeze-drying being a complex industrial process (and not one achievable through

¹⁴Coffee is not actually indigenous to Latin America, and the labourer is more likely to be mestizo—a mix of settler Spanish, indigenous South American and African slave—than indigenous.



Figure 4. Advert for Freeze Dried Medium Roast Cafédirect. Reproduced by permission of Cafédirect/Host.

nature's frost, as the image suggests).¹⁵ By inviting me to consume the landscape alongside the coffee, to consume even the people reduced to coffee, the promise is that the authenticity lost in post-industrial society can be reclaimed from the 'other' by commodity purchase.

CONCLUSION

Cafédirect is the UK's most successful fair trade company, yet the number of coffee co-operatives registered to sell far exceeds those it can buy from, and the proportion bought

¹⁵Instant coffee is not recognizable to some coffee producers; 'a lot of them don't understand freeze dried, you know, to them that's like "that's my coffee?!"' (Newman, 2001 p. 26).

from any co-op may be as little as 20 per cent of output. The imperative to increase the market for fair trade coffee is thus obvious. However, market research shows that only 1–3 per cent of UK consumers are committed buyers of fair trade products motivated primarily by ethics (Doane, 2001) so the challenge Cafédirect has set itself in going from niche to mainstream is clear. As the MD expressed it: ‘You can’t just sit there and say I’ve got a real passion for fair trade . . . You have to sell a business as well as the passion and understanding of fair trade. And you have to sell it in their terms and in their language . . .’ (Newman, 2001, p. 7).

This article has explored the careful line taken to sell fair trade ‘in their terms and their language’. Some aspects of coffee’s productive origins are made visible to the potential consumer, alongside the opportunity to transform inequalities through purchase, but the pleasures of consumerism remain intact.¹⁶ The campaign only partially exposes the social relations behind the product, not least because whatever the consumer may know of the producer there is no opportunity of a reverse gaze, and the commodity remains fetishized. The product promises an escape from the trials of a post-industrial world via an imaginary location, the Peruvian Andes, circulating as an image empty of the meanings its inhabitants might provide. To borrow from Spivak, the subaltern may talk here but cannot speak, because s/he will not be heard (Landry *et al.*, 1995, p. 292). Instead, s/he is subsumed by the product, becoming part of the ‘natural’ world consumed with it.

Privileging and legitimating consumer pleasure may be an essential strategy of going mainstream, and to my mind mass consumption of Cafédirect coffee makes for a better world than mass consumption of non-fairly traded coffee. Nonetheless, the question remains as to how much the minority world/majority world relations (re)presented through the adverts matter. Multiple ‘public faces’ of development do emerge from the campaign, with some celebration of the agency and rights of majority world producers. However a prominent reading is that minority world consumers can ‘redeem’ majority world producers by perpetuating consumer lifestyles prioritising self-gratification. Moreover, that the lives and landscapes of the majority world are consumables in their own right, alongside cash crops.

This question might also be framed by Fraser’s distinction between recognition and misrecognition, redistribution and maldistribution. While recognition involves a ‘difference friendly society’, misrecognition involves ‘institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other or simply invisible, hence as less than full partners in social interaction’ (Fraser, 2001, pp. 21, 24). While redistribution involves the quest to ‘redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor, from the north to the south, and from the owners to the workers’, maldistribution is an unjust allocation of resources and goods (Fraser, 2001, p. 21). Thus, the issue is whether redistribution of wealth to coffee producers through fair trade (as modest as it is) can be accompanied by full recognition of such coffee farmers.

My reading is that the campaign may encourage respect for difference, in the name of fairness or through invoking common human concerns, but it simultaneously invites a consumption of difference confirming the ‘superiority’ of the minority world consumer. Recall the invasion of Leonardo Bustinza’s personal space, the one-way gaze, the hailing of the consumer’s distinction and good taste, the insistence that she put herself first. Moreover, the representation of empty landscapes, or landscapes where the humans have

¹⁶The opportunity to help transform inequalities may be pleasure enough, but the campaign assumes new consumers can only be reached by legitimating and exaggerating their gratification.

become the product, contribute to invisibility and othering. In the charity sector redistribution may depend for its success on misrecognition; Eayrs and Ellis argue that images of people with learning disabilities showing them having the 'same rights, value and capability' as others were the least effective in soliciting donations (Eayrs and Ellis, 1990). Is it also a feature of fair trade that at least partial misrecognition is the price to be paid for redistribution? If so, is it a price worth paying and who decides?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank Terry Lovell, Deborah Steinberg and Gilma Madrid for productive discussion and comments on an earlier draft. Thanks too to Helen Yanacopulos, Matt Smith and the two anonymous referees.

REFERENCES

- Bauman Z. 1998. *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. Polity Press: Cambridge.
- Billig M. 1999. Commodity fetishism and repression: reflections on Marx, Freud and the psychology of consumer capitalism. *Theory & Psychology* 9(3): 313–329.
- Bourdieu P. 1989. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Routledge: London.
- Cafédirect. 2002 *Annual Report, 2001/2*. Cafédirect: London.
- Cafédirect. no date a. Achievements and milestones. Online: http://www.cafedirect.co.uk/case_study/achiev.php [accessed 8 April 2003].
- Cafédirect. no date b. Future plans, vision & aims. Online: http://www.cafedirect.co.uk/case_study/future.php [accessed 8 April 2003].
- Cafédirect. no date c. Our mission. Online: <http://www.cafedirect.co.uk/about/index.php> [accessed 9 April 2003].
- Cafédirect. no date d. Growers: South America. Online: http://www.cafedirect.co.uk/growers/c_america.php [accessed 10 April 2003].
- Doane D. 2001. *Taking Flight: The Rapid Growth of Ethical Consumerism*. New Economics Foundation: London.
- Eayrs CB, Ellis N. 1990. Charity advertising: for or against people with a mental handicap. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 29: 349–360.
- Fairtrade Foundation. 1993. Fairtrade foundation information pack. Fairtrade Foundation: London.
- Fairtrade Foundation. 2004. Fair Comment Newsletter. Fairtrade Foundation: London.
- FLO International. 2002. Fairtrade standards for coffee. Online: <http://www.fairtrade.net/sites/standards/sp.htm> [accessed 25 November 2002].
- Fraser N. 2001. Recognition without ethics? *Theory, Culture and Society* 18(2/3): 21–42.
- Hall S. 1997. The local and the global: globalization and ethnicity. In *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, McClintock A, Mufti A, Shohat E (eds). University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis; 173–187.
- Harris D. 2000. The natural. *Salmagundi* 126–127: 236–251.
- Host Universal Ltd. no date. Project [072] Cafédirect. Online: <http://www.hostuniversal.com/indexyes.htm> [Accessed 8 April 2003].
- Kijiji Vision. no date. Mission. Online: <http://www.kijiji.org/mission.html> [Accessed 4 March 2004].
- Landry D, Maclean G, Spivak GC. 1995. Subaltern talk: interview with the editors, 1993–94. In *The Spivak Reader*, Landry D, Maclean G (eds). Routledge: London, New York; 287–308.

- Marx K. 1961. *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, Vol. 1. Foreign Languages Publishing House: Moscow.
- Negra D. 2001. Consuming Ireland: lucky charms cereal, Irish spring soap and 1-800-Shamrock. *Cultural Studies* **15**(1): 76–97.
- Newman P. 2001. Transcript of interview at Cafédirect's London office, 14 December.
- Raynolds LT. 2002. Consumer/producer Links in Fair Trade Coffee Networks. *Sociologia Ruralis* **42**(4): 404–424.
- Renard MC. 1999. The interstices of globalization: the example of Fair Coffee. *Sociologia Ruralis* **39**(4): 484–500.
- Smith R. 2001. Mind your own business. Online: <http://www.fastcompany.com/fast50/profile/?smith1610> [accessed 7 April 2003].
- Williamson J. 1978. *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. Marion Boyars: London.