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Placing the Practices of Alternative Economic Geographies: Alternative Retail, the Spaces of Intention and Ethical Ambiguities

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INTRODUCTION

Many now take seriously sustainable and ethical consumption as well as its implications for how we understand contemporary spatial relations of consumer society and their bid in creating more sustainable lifestyles and alternative economic geographies (e.g. Barnett et al., 2011; Lewis and Potter, 2011). In this, Barnett et al. (2005, 25) have sought to fashion

> ...an argument about the relationships between consumption, ethics and political action that starts from the assumption that there is no good reason to suppose that spatial distance necessarily diminishes either a felt responsibility or practical capacity to care for others.

For us, though, outside of the work of very few (e.g. Malpass et al., 2007), the complex role of *place* in constructing the material and discursive bases of ethical consumption tends to be glossed over. As we have argued elsewhere (Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Goodman, 2004), the deployment of place in transnational ethical consumption networks – notably in the *'imagineered'* (Routledge, 1997) descriptions of producer-based political ecologies – is fundamental to the connection-making relational ethics underpinning them[1]. Indeed, such deployment in the form of labelling schemes and provisioning figures greatly in the flourishing ethically-inflected local and regional food movements and economies in the UK and US (e.g. Eden et al., 2008; Morgan et al., 2006; Rangnekar and Wilkinson, 2011; Selfa and Qazi, 2005). Thus, the politics of 'caring at a distance' that Barnett et al. (2005) link to ethical consumption and its processes of working to create economic alterities is often *only really realised* in producer-consumer networks that encompass and blur place(s) through connections across the everyday spaces of what Lee (2006) calls the 'ordinary economy'.

More specifically, research and writing has barely just begun to explore in any real detail the fundamentally important 'place' of retail – and that particularly of 'alternative' retail – in the creation and practices of alternative economic geographies. Here, related work has focused more diffusely on 'political shopping' and 'political consumerism' (e.g. Clarke, 2008; Clarke et al., 2007; Hawkins, 2012a, b; Micheletti, 2003; Sassatelli, 2006; see also *Cultural Studies*, 2008, Littler, 2009 and Seyfang, 2006,) which explores the politics of consumer choice and that of shopping practice in the contexts of more sustainable and ethical consumption. Others have developed a more specifically political economic focus into the ways that retailers control, shape, and

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[1] For alternative interpretations of the discourses embedded in ethical consumption fair trade networks, see Lyon (2006), Vural (2008), and Wright (2004); for the ways that celebrities are now involved in 'imagineering' and created spaces/places through development charity campaigns, see Goodman and Barnes (2011).

'discharge' – and so co-produce – alternative supply chains for more ethically-sourced goods such as organic and fair trade commodities (e.g. Barrientos and Dolan, 2006; Freidberg, 2003; Hughes, 2005; Hughes et al., 2010). Some have explored the second-hand cultures of the charity shop specifically (e.g. Gregson and Crewe, 2003) where they analyse the 'shop-talk', shopping behaviours and wider material cultures of used 'things'.[2] Still others, and particularly Josée Johnston and her colleagues (Johnston, 2008; Johnston and Szabo, 2011; Johnston et al., 2009), have interrogated and critiqued the ways that alternative retail spaces and places – through in-store discourses, performativities and environments – work to produce corporate-enabled, 'consumer-citizen' hybrid subjectivities who are then encouraged to 'shop for change'; for Johnston et al., the place of alternative, albeit highly corporate, retail in the form of Whole Foods markets tends to dampen the possibilities of a more expansive and transformative food democracy given the limited and limiting consumer-oriented politics embedded in these forms of shopping for change.

In this chapter, we wish to build on Johnston et al.'s excellent and insightful work to more extensively explore the crucial role of the retail environment, discourses and performances – what we think of as the 'place of retail' and 'retail places' – in developing relationships amongst alternative retail spaces, consumers and their choices for more sustainable and ethical consumption; yet, unlike their work on what they call the 'corporate organic foodscape', we do this in the two *specifically* 'alternative' retail locations of the understudied worldshop and charity shop. Furthermore, we work to assess the ethical/moral characteristics of these relationalities and their potential ambiguities – given the drive for more consumption, but simply of a different kind, and coincident globalisation of production/consumption networks – inherent in their material and discursive networks. Indeed, even so-called 'post-consumers' (Bryant and Brooks, forthcoming) need somewhere

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[2] For recent work on the second-hand clothing trade more specifically, see Brooks (2012; 2013) and Brooks and Simon (2012).

to shop and taking a first cut, as we do here, on two particular places of alternative retail and the sorts of (non)ambiguous ethics and behaviours they might create is one important and timely way to begin.

This chapter builds on our wider project of assessing what we call the 'spaces of intention' (Bryant and Goodman, forthcoming) that we see circulating, connecting and constructing ethical/sustainable consumption and production networks that enable alternative economic geographies to come into being through their practice. We perceive the spaces of intention containing the following elements. First, they involve *epistemic collusions* in that they involve a 'coming together' of ethically-enlivened knowledge claims, for example on climate change or social justice, that enable analytical and problem-solving sets of practices to be conceived and acted up in the first instance. Second, spaces of intention encompass *reflexivity-in-action* in that self- and otherly-awareness is heightened for debate but to also assign particular roles to the actors involved in the spaces of intention and their networked relationalities. Third, spaces of intention require *affective orderings* that work across and within difference and 'same-ness' to stitch together people and groups who have often never met and most likely will not do so. These affective orderings are often anchored in the emotions of care and responsibility that can act as the vectors to over-come and mediate social, economic, political and spatial differences and distances. Fourth, there are material and discursive *place-making activities* that 'people' the spaces of intention through the identification of specific populations through product marketing, regulatory regimes and the like, but also the 'placing' of space(s) through the identification of specific locations involved in – very often – the production and consumption of ethically-embedded commodities. Fifth and finally, we see the spaces of intention being tension-filled and politicised spaces that work to not only open up possibilities and so-called 'geographies of hope', but also those that 'bound', 'contain' and 'exclude' as much as they open up; one only has to think about the ways that fair trade or organic production standards work at the local production level to both include but also exclude to get a sense of what we

mean by this element.[3] Diffusely here then, the spaces of intention can, somewhat contentiously, be thought of as coming into being only through the drawing of borders and boundaries with some people, places and things excluded as well as others included; in essence certain opportunities are opened up for some people even as selected opportunities are closed down for other people in the spaces of intention.

What this chapter does, then, is explore the intermingling of space, place, and ethics in the constitution of a cultural economy of alternative retailing as a crucial and yet unexplored part of the spaces of intention that make up the practices of alternative economic geographies. It does so through comparative investigation of *charity shops* (specifically those of the NGO Oxfam), and *world-shops* (also labelled 'one world shops') independent stores located in the North that sell fair trade goods often produced in the South. The first concern here is to assess the role of Oxfam charity shops and world-shops as retail outlets that promote an 'expansive relational ethic' (Goodman, 2004) that creates the intentional spaces of production and consumption in an alternative economy. Importantly, that role is seen to engender material and discursive ambiguities that complicate ethical appeals – especially for Oxfam shops. The second concern is to explore the '*imagineering*' of the ethically charged sense of place in these retail settings where used and/or fair trade goods are sold. Moral geographies are here created through a complex network of connections and disconnections among spaces and places of production, consumption, and retailing. This analysis then prompts a series of reflections designed to assess the broader import of alternative retail spaces. Here, the concern is to probe whether a 'retail of moral difference' can be discerned. By specifically taking Oxfam as one instance of charity retail, we explore how its shops are sites that are ripe with material and discursive ambiguity. In constructing an alternative, sustainable consumption place, Oxfam produces moralized discourses that infuse the practice of

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[3] For more on this, see Goodman et al. (2012), Mutersbaugh (2002) and Wilson (2010).

(re)selling items (including those once produced under dubious conditions) and the sale of fair trade products. Focussing on contradictions in such *ethical fields*, we consider how the fair trade slogan 'a better deal for producers' rubs up against Oxfam's implied notion of 'a better deal for the consumer' in the provisioning of brands sometimes produced with sweatshop labour. Here, then, we contrast what we term a *second-hand ethics* of re-sell with a *first-hand ethics* of fair trade new-sell that define, at least in part, contemporary ethics in Oxfam shops. We further extend this analysis of ethical fields shaped by first- and second-hand ethics by examining previously little studied 'worldshops' – so named by the now defunct but influential Network of European Worldshops (NEWS).[4] Selling only fair trade commodities, and instrumental today as a retail vehicle of the fair trade movement, we explore the first-hand moral economies and geographies created in this retail space. We also consider how the ethical field of the worldshop compares with that of Oxfam charity shops in constituting alternative retailing. Finally, the chapter concludes by suggesting that future research ought to consider in greater depth how complex ethical fields underpinning 'alternative' retailing may lead to new challenges and opportunities for the governance of the spaces of intention that make up alternative economic geographies.

While somewhat critical at times of Oxfam charity shops and worldshops, we nonetheless firmly salute their aim of making a difference by helping the poor through equitable exchange, notably between North and South, in the construction of more sustainable lifestyles. Still, such normative agreement must not blind us to the need to explore ambiguities surrounding alternative retail, especially in today's neo-liberal commercial context. There is a critique here, then, of how the promotion of a commercial alternative can be compromised through material and discursive practices that simply legitimate the so-

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[4] NEWS, along with International Fairtrade Association (IFAT) and the European Fairtrade Association, and with the support of the Fairtrade Organisations International (FLO), merged to form the World Fairtrade Organisation (WFTO) between 2008 and 2009.

cial value of consumerism (Mulligan, 2007). And yet, when charity shops and worldshops are placed in wider social movement contexts, they might equally be seen to serve a useful 'propaganda' function for activists who need to demonstrate that 'there *is* an alternative' (however imperfect) to mainstream models promoted under neo-liberalism. Asking how charity and world-shops would construct moral geographies that differ from mainstream retailing is hence a fruitful place to start.

Locating ethics in alternative retailing

Scholars who advocate a 'new retail geography' underline that exploring inter-related spaces of retailing and consumption means taking "cultural and economic geographies seriously" (Lowe, 2002: 5). Much of this research emanating specifically from geography focuses on the UK charity shop, notably work by Gregson, Crewe, and Brooks. These scholars address the "connection between retailers and in-store geographies" in discourses of 'emplaced' talk and practice (Gregson et al., 2002a, 1663), ethnographies of shopping (Gregson et al., 2002b) and narratives of consumption and the body (Gregson et al., 2000). Such work, plus research on car-boot sales and 'retro-retailing', culminates in *Second-hand Cultures* (Gregson and Crewe, 2003) where 'marginal' and alternative spaces of the charity shop are considered in detail. Here, a clear message to emerge from such work is that the meanings that people attach to the practices of 'alternative' and 'charity' shopping are decidedly ambiguous. As Goss (2004: 374) points out, Gregson et al.'s ethnographies reveal that charity-related consumption is less about moral economies of being 'alternative' and more about everyday activities that are "structured primarily by dominant discourses of thrift and value, or taste and distinction" (see also Gregson and Crewe, 2003: 10-12).[5]

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[5] This is, however, an overly selective and essentialised reading of Gregson et al.'s work by Goss and hence fails to much more fully acknowledge the extent

Allied work in retail management and non-profit studies also contributes to the ethnography of charity retail. The focus here is on evolving organizational and managerial traits of the charity shop *qua* business: the performance of volunteering (Parsons, 2006), shop 'branding' (Girod, 2005), the changing business climate (Horne, 1998; Horne and Broadbridge, 1995; Parsons, 2002, 2004a) and 'professionalization' of the workforce (Broadbridge and Parsons, 2003, 2004; Parsons, 2004b; Parsons and Broadbridge, 2004). This research reveals how these traits generate ambiguity both in diverse day-to-day management operations and more widely with respect to the spread of upmarket goods (and hence prices) there.

If ethical concerns are not far from the surface in work on the shifting nature of *how* the 'charity business' (Lloyd, 1993) works, there is a parallel interest in the ethics of *what* this sector produces in the way of items 'fit' for consumption. Here, that business can be seen to collide with the fair-trade movement that is itself searching for new ways of getting across its products and message (Nichols, 2002). True, the charity sector and the fair-trade movement are both seeking to promote progressive moral geographies based on 'caring at a distance' (Smith, 2000). Yet we suggest these institutions are nonetheless embedded in ethical fields shaped by ambiguity – a situation occasioned by their placement in a wider context where capitalist concerns are pre-eminent and actors are differentially empowered (Bryant, 2005; Miller, 2001; Sayer and Storper, 1997; Smith, 2000). Thus, to what extent and in what ways do alternative retailing (and consumption) practices mimic those in the mainstream sector? If they do, how far is an ethic of being 'alternative' eroded? How might complex ethical negotiations in alternative retail and consumption be understood?

To address such questions, we find it helpful to distinguish here between *first-hand ethics* and *second-hand ethics* in analysing alternative retail. First-hand ethics relates to the practice of selling (new) fair

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to which they do indeed address the—at least implied—ambiguities of 'alternativeness' in charity shops in their work.

trade products and involves a holistic approach to production, sale and consumption based on normative rules of what is fair and equitable. This encompasses everything from transparent commodity chains to consumer education, from publication of codes of practice to direct co-operation with producers. In contrast, second-hand ethics relates to the practice of selling (typically) used donated goods and involves a disjointed approach to their production, sale and consumption. Here, there are no clear normative rules that unite production, sale and consumption – given that the alternative retailer does not control production. There is thus the potential for ethical vulnerability here as inconsistencies may arise between the ethics of production ('embedded' in the donations that are sold) and the ethics that the organisation may wish to promote in society generally.

On the one hand, then, there is the ethical field encompassing discourses and activities of the charity sector as a whole – geographies of care that inform each charity. Examples here include helping vulnerable children in the North (e.g. Bernardos), the poor of the South (e.g. Oxfam) or both (e.g. Save the Children). On the other hand, there is the sale in charity shops of ethically ambiguous clothes and toys, many produced under suspect labour and ecological conditions (Hale, 2000; Hale and Shaw, 2001; Klein, 2000; see also *Antipode*, 2004). While the sweat and bodily secretions of previous owners can be washed off clothes re-sold in charity shops (Gregson and Crewe, 2003: 155-163; Gregson et al., 2000), it is much harder to wash out the permanent ethical 'imprint' of the sweated labour that was instrumental in the production of such clothing in the first place.

The situation is further complicated when we look at charity shops operated by Oxfam, one of the most successful charity 'brands' in the UK and beyond. Oxfam began life as the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, a group initially dedicated to campaigning for food and medicine for civilians trapped in Greece during the Second World War. Subsequently, the organisation continued famine relief and poverty alleviation work, but has gone global working now in more than 70 countries around the world. It has also broadened the sorts of work that

it does, as even a cursory glance through the *Inside Oxfam* magazine reveals. Thus, it is notably involved in political lobbying, consumer education, high street retailing, music festivals, general fundraising, disaster relief, community development, environmental conservation, and disease treatment. It has become a leading international NGO, recognised around the world with a powerful network of national organisations. In the UK, Oxfam's net income in 2011-12 was £282 million while charitable expenditure was £286 million, the difference made up through in-kind gifts and other income; its charity shops contributed around 8% of total income in that year, but was up £4 million from the previous year with increased donations of clothes and books. More than this, though, Oxfam's charity shops are the visible 'face' of the NGO in the UK with approximately more than 800 shops staffed by 22,000 volunteers. These shops constitute a vivid reminder of Oxfam's global fight against poverty and social injustice, including steps it takes to support alternative futures for the poor through fair trade.

Given this purpose, it is hardly surprising that, prominently displayed amongst the racks of donated items, can be found an array of fair trade goods. While no longer selling own-brand fair trade products, Oxfam does sell greeting cards from Global Crafts, soccer balls from the Play Fair Sports Company, Geobars from Traidcraft, and ubiquitous coffee, tea, and cocoa from Cafédirect (a company Oxfam helped to set up). That the first-hand ethics of fair trade sit side-by-side with the second-hand ethics of used goods is not lost on Oxfam. Indeed, in an early statement about ethical sourcing and purchasing (i.e. Oxfam, 2007b), the organisation recognized that

[t]he globalisation of trade means that many of the goods on sale in the UK have been produced by people who experience dangerous or discriminatory working conditions.

How the places and spaces of production, consumption and charity play out in the discursive and material practices of Oxfam shops is treated further below.

Some of the ambiguities associated with first-hand and second-hand ethics can be seen when we contrast the ethical field of the Oxfam shop with that of the retail space of worldshops. Affiliated now with the WFTO, there are approximately some 3000 stores spread over many European countries that are exclusive retailers of fairly traded 'cultural products' (Littrell and Dickson, 1999) such as crafts and textiles, as well as fair trade staples like coffee, chocolate, tea, nuts, and dried fruits. Worldshops also have a growing presence in the US and Canada through advocacy by the Mennonite fair trade organization known as Ten Thousand Villages that has upwards of 180 stores. Overall, as NEWS (2007b) put it already a few years ago, 'worldshops are the windows of Fair Trade to the wider world, influencing the choices people make as they do their everyday shopping'.

Worldshops have been wrongly overlooked as an important focus of study in their own right as increasingly significant players in alternative retailing. As with fair trade in general, they are dedicated spaces of intention seeking to connect consumers with producers across a host of commodities. Here, and building on Lowe's (2002: 6) aphorism that '[g]oods are substantiated through [retail] place and [retail] place makes consumption meaningful', we explore how worldshops attempt to distinguish themselves as ethically-based retail practices through exclusive provisioning of fair trade goods.

We now turn to an evaluation of the processes and ambiguities associated with first-hand and second-hand ethics manifested in the retailing practices of charity shops and worldshops.

Transparency and ethics in caring at a distance

The moral geographies of Oxfam charity shops and worldshops reflect 'expansive relational ethics' (Goodman, 2004). Both retailers promote the care of distant others: Oxfam through development work and fair

trade sales, and worldshops through their exclusive stocking of fair trade items. Key here is transparency in retailing as well as copious amounts of consumer information. Yet how this process unfolds is another matter, as the two retailers reveal similarities and differences in practice.

Oxfam's ambiguous ethical fields

Walk through the door of any Oxfam charity shop and you are struck by the sheer amount of information provided to consumers. This variation on the 'network' and 'information' society (e.g. Castells, 2000; Wittel, 2001; Hughes, 2000) constructs ethically-charged connections relating consumers to the world's poor through brochures, posters, product labels and sales tags. The production of transparent and useful knowledge is different, however, for used goods and fair-trade goods. For the latter, there is an emphatic commitment to 'non-charity' and an associated crystal clear vision back along the commodity chain to producers and the political economy of production. For example, the Fairtrade Foundation's 2006 'Make Fairtrade Your Habit' campaign, not only let farmers and others speak for themselves but also provides vibrant images of (always) smiling producers engaged in fair trade practices. In another brochure, meanwhile, a 'bright future' is promised for people in the South who will be able 'to set up small businesses and work their way out of poverty'. A first-hand ethics comes shining through here in the attempt to connect places of production and consumption.

In contrast, *used* clothing (and other used items) for sale in these same shops reflects a second-hand ethics that prompts a different sort of representation by the organisation. Given that the fetish is intact in these items – production processes are hidden, after all, from consumers – Oxfam alters the direction and purpose of its moral lens. Here, the 'transparent' vision on offer is *forward* oriented – that is, towards distant and needy others who, it is stated, are the primary beneficiaries of money received as a result of consumer purchases. To this end, 'imagi-

neered' sales tags are attached to many used items. There are three things we need to note about these tags. First, they make the point that Oxfam is carefully targeting the *kinds of people* that it assists – the poorest of the poor. For example, the tag on one item of children's clothing proclaims: "£5.99 buys new clothes for a street kid in Ethiopia". There is a black and white photograph of six street children, smiling in new clothing presumably paid for out of funds generated in the shops. Second, the sales tags emphasise that Oxfam is carefully targeting the *types of assistance* it provides in order to maximise benefit to recipients. Thus, one tag suggests that "£7.99 buys cement to line a well in Mozambique", while "£1.99 helps to run a tree nursery in Bangladesh" – both practices vital to community welfare, as the accompanying photographs aim to illustrate. Third, the tags stress that Oxfam has 'global reach' in as much as it works with poor people around the world, albeit with a concentration in the poorest countries. The tags link assistance to *specific* places such as Mozambique, Ethiopia, Vietnam or Bangladesh – the better to underline the practical and tangible nature of this NGO's interventions.

In this way, consumers are invited to learn about and reflect on the plight of those less fortunate than themselves even as they are reminded that consumption in the shop is no ordinary exchange. Rather, it is an exchange (unlike in fair trade schemes) that is linked to forward-directed knowledge as to who benefits from Oxfam work – that is, of course, funded in part by the purchase of that well-worn (if 'hip') pair of jeans. Yet buying these items is simultaneously ordinary in that knowledge about the conditions of production remains sealed firmly from view, as with any conventional consumer product. As such, transparency *backwards* along the commodity chain is conspicuously absent – serving thereby to conveniently blot out ethically dubious product histories that might disrupt Oxfam's upbeat moral geographical imaginaries.

Here, then, in a shop in which both used and fair trade goods jostle for consumer attention, moral ambiguity is rife as the first-hand ethics of fair trade rub against the second-hand ethics of used goods. The

ethical fields of Oxfam retailing are thereby blurred as they are inter-woven. In the process, and given de facto product censorship surrounding used items rendered safely 'anonymous',[6] the majority of goods (which are indeed usually used) sold at Oxfam shops put a break on the expansive relational ethic of its operations. The sale of used goods in this manner enshrines a contradictory second-hand ethics at the heart of Oxfam retailing that simultaneously boosts income and ethical vulnerability – the latter relating to the charge of 'profiteering' from sweated labour.

The world(shop) of fair-trade goods

Walk into a typical worldshop and, as with Oxfam, you are struck by the large amount of educational information available. Once again, there is careful imagineering: colourful and smiling images of distant Others in the guise of fair trade growers, weavers, and farmers dance before the eyes on products and posters, all of which are accompanied by livelihood stories. Yet there are points of contrast with Oxfam too as worldshops often mark themselves out through exotic scents (notably incense) – something that is very different from Oxfam shops where the smell of used goods (clothing, books, toys) is only partly camouflaged by the presence of 'sweet-smelling' fair trade items. Before considering in more detail the contrasting retail settings of world-shops and charity shops, we need to briefly present the history[7] and practices of worldshops.

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[6] This is not to say, however, that consumers are immune to reflection on past use of items they purchase. See Gregson and Crewe (2003: 143) for a fascinating discussion of stories by consumers about former owners and uses of items that they have bought from charity shops. Still, such speculation about previous *owners and consumers* is different from 'deeper' knowledge about conditions faced by those who *produced* the items in the first place – which is our concern here.

[7] A full history including the role of worldshops in the contemporary fair trade movement has yet to be written, so this is only a partial and brief take.

Worldshops, fair trade and moral governance

While a cornerstone of the fair trade movement, the cultural economy of worldshops has received little attention. Indeed, even in-depth work on fair trade tends to focus on expansion into the mainstream, rather than on a dedicated fair trade retailer such as the worldshop (e.g. Low and Davenport, 2005; Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Raynolds et al., 2007). Such neglect obscures one of the more fascinating aspects of the fair trade movement. Self-billed as the "windows of Fair Trade" and one of the consumers' first points of contact with fairtrade, worldshops are united in their function as a key site for promoting the fair trade model, even as they are differentiated by the manner in which they express that role. Thus, while all work to the same broad remit of selling and supporting fairtrade, worldshops are nonetheless quite diverse, ranging from sophisticated high street outlets selling *haute couture* handbags from India to volunteer-run church back rooms selling basmati rice, medicinal teas, and Nepalese jewellery. At the same time, though, these diverse sites all sell fairly traded handicrafts – what Littrel and Dickson (1999) call 'cultural products' (see below).

Emerging from religiously inspired social movements that advocated a just international trading order in the 1970s and 1980s, and thereafter merging into the fair trade movement, worldshops are subject today to a series of governance regimes that purport to underpin the ethics of their retailing. Two interrelated regimes that construct, control and police are involved here. The first is that associated with the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO) which regulates the circulation of fair trade goods in worldshops (but also fairtrade goods in Oxfam shops); the FLO standards apply mainly to food commodities and once these commodities are certified as 'fair trade', they are festooned with the FLO logo. The second certification/standards regime in worldshops is that developed and maintained by the WFTO, who, by contrast, assesses textiles and handicrafts. Here, rather than certifying individual products, it designates the groups and companies that sell these products through its 'WFTO Fair Trade Standard', thereby giving these institutions the cultural cache of

'WFTO' status. Worldshops, and the handicraft cooperatives and importers/exporters of these goods, must as the WFTO Code of Practice (2013) states, share the following practices of (1) a commitment to fair trade, (2) transparency in financial dealings and product sourcing, (3) ethical issues that focus on 'justice, employment, public accountability and progressive work practices', (4) safe and humane working conditions, (5) promoting equal employment opportunities, (6) the concern for people and quality of life and the natural world, (7) a concern for the environment, (8) a respect for producers' cultural identities, and (9) the promotion of fair trade by education and advocacy with consumers and the public.

These regimes define a first-hand ethics of fair trade, with worldshops as dedicated retailers of fair trade goods. Such regulation has an impact, not least in how 'good fair trade practice' is represented to consumers in these shops – thereby raising points of comparison with the situation faced by Oxfam shops.

Worldshop retailing: Visualizing production as 'non-charity'

The first-hand ethics of fair trade assumes storewide proportions in worldshops. From logos and slogans on products and posters to ubiquitous brochures near cash registers and store entrances, these shops present themselves as spaces wholly dedicated to educating consumers "to change consumption patterns based on issues of social justice and concern for the environment" (WFTO, 2013). These materials, part of strategies Barnett et al. (2005: 31) argue govern ethical consumption more broadly, describe in detail the production and consumption of commodities for sale in worldshops. They thus help to make these spaces simultaneously ethical and political through carefully targeted knowledge dissemination. Further, and unlike ethical ambiguities noted with regard to Oxfam, worldshops seek to avoid ambiguity by *only* stocking fair trade goods, thereby conforming to the governance regimes described above. Hence, there is a distinctively comprehensive ethical vision about the production of *all* their goods that is noticeably lacking in Oxfam counterparts.

With nothing to hide, political 'shop talk' is encouraged at world-shops as part of a wider education campaign. Strategies include engaging consumers through questions and answers about fair trade, drawing attention to particular items and their ethical production, or generally serving as a meeting place for like-minded individuals who come to discuss, share ideas, and exchange views. Such talk is seemingly akin to that of the 'charity talk' that Gregson et al. (2002a, b) discuss. Yet there are important differences here too. At Oxfam, political talk is selective – comprehensive about some things (such as fair trade items and the forward-looking benefits of Oxfam development work made possible through shop purchases), but coy and evasive about other things (such as the production conditions of donated goods that may have been made with sweatshop labour). In the worldshop, in contrast, there is greater freedom to compare fair trade commodity chains (proudly proclaimed to define production and consumption for all worldshop items) with unfair trade commodity chains (which shape production and consumption in mainstream commerce). Here, having nothing to hide means that these shops (unlike Oxfam shops) have nothing to lose. Indeed, they have everything to gain, as wide-ranging political talk helps to promote business in a retail world bedevilled by ambiguity and hypocrisy.

These two retailers may also be compared on other matters. Consider, for instance, how worldshops are resolutely 'non-charity' in outlook. True, these shops vary a good deal among themselves – some more 'business-like', others more 'amateur' for example – as to how they operate. Yet, a core premise linking them is that they are *not* about charity in as much as they promote an alternative business model. 'Trade not aid' – the overarching and historical slogan of the whole fairtrade movement since it began – works to develop "...relationships within a framework of solidarity, trust and mutual respect..." that "are based on reciprocal benefits and fair exchanges" designed to "achieve commercial efficiency at the least possible cost in order to open up markets to benefit producers" (WFTO, 2013). Here, the mantra 'people before profits' becomes 'people *and* profits' – the better to support eq-

uitable *economic* relations between producers, retailers, and consumers in the marketplace. As with charity shops, then, retailing in worldshops reflects faith in the utility of the market, as well as a recognition that profit is essential to the process, albeit profit that is ploughed back into the organisation not to shareholders. Yet, whereas Oxfam shops are there notably to fund charity work, worldshops eschew charity altogether in favour of an alternative business model based on fair trade.

Spaces, Places and Charity and Worldshop Moral Geographies

Yet, in the case of both worldshops and Oxfam charity shops, issues surrounding the role of space and place in the construction of moral geographies of alternative retailing loom large. Here, recent work, notably by Barnett et al. (2005), considers inter-linkages of space and place thereby engaging with wider debates on these concepts in the context of ethical and sustainable consumption (e.g. Malpass et al., 2007) and questions of the 'responsibilities' of the North (Lawson, 2007; Massey, 2004).

In assessing ethical consumption and fair trade, these scholars challenge accounts of space and place that treat them as opposites. As they put it – echoing work on 'distanciation' and 'displacement' in commodity geographies (e.g. Cook and Crang, 1996; Crang, 1996) – "[p]lace is understood to be the location of clear-cut ethical commitments, while space serves as a shorthand for abstract, alienated relations in which distance intervenes to complicate and extend the range of moral duties" (Barnett et al., 2005: 24). In contrast, their work on the fair trade NGO Traidcraft is designed to illustrate ethical 'devices' and 'performances' that overcome spatially linked indifference thus enabling a politics of care and responsibility at a distance that complements equivalent place-based politics.

Still, in making their arguments Barnett et al. (2005) tend to lose sight of the fundamental *place* of place – both material and discursive

– in fair trade and its consumption networks.[8] In our view, these authors only relate half a story – especially when one considers moral geographies of worldshop and charity shop retailing. Thus, and pace Barnett et al. (2005), both shops work assiduously to foster ethical relations across space. On the one hand, there are ethical governance regimes of worldshops that underpin material and discursive 'outreach' in fair trade. On the other hand, there are the selective yet explicit forward-looking connections to poor 'Others' made in Oxfam charity shops. In each case, expansive ethical fields work to overcome discursive and material spatial blockages upon which conventional commodity systems thrive.

Yet in doing so discursive devices are used that 'rough up' (Cook and Crang, 1996) products in these shops so as to connect *places* of consumption to *places* where 'deserving Others' live – be they places solely of production in the case of worldshops or places of production (for fair trade goods) and development (donated goods) in the case of Oxfam charity shops. Take, for example, Cafedirect's fair trade 'Machu Picchu Mountain Special' coffee that is sold in both worldshops and Oxfam shops. This single-origin product is grown by the COCLA cooperative which is clearly *placed* on the Andean hillsides near (scenic) Machu Picchu itself – however ecologically problematic – before being moved long-distance across space to be once more *placed* and sold on the shelves of these alternative retailers – for instance at the 'One World Shop' located in a backroom of St. John's Church in Central London. There is too, as we have seen, the example of those 'imagineered' sales tags that seek to connect place of purchase to place of development.

Here, then, there is a process of *re-placement* going on that connects consumers, retailers, producers and development beneficiaries within 'alternative' retailing. Indeed, what these connections do is blur place and space in the creation of expansive ethical fields. Consump-

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[8] See also Bernstein and Campling (2006: 435) who wish to omit investigation of the semiotics of place from commodity geographies.

tion, as sustainable consumption, is thus re-placed as it finds its rightful place in the worldshop commodity chain or the Oxfam shop 'charity-chain'. Thus, it is the imagineered connections of *place* at a number of scales – shop floor to coffee field, charity shop to development project site – that are instrumental in constructing the caring at a distance that is seen to occur in Barnett et al.'s (2005) ethical consumption networks. In short, it is precisely the connection of production and consumption *places* that imbues seemingly abstract and alienating spaces between people, economic processes, and local biophysical environments with ethical content, thereby creating moral geographies of alternative retailing.

Retailing moral difference

The analysis so far has considered the ways in which ethics and place are brought strategically into play in alternative retailing. Complex material and discursive dynamics were seen to be occurring, notably in relation to the articulation of complex ethical fields (based on first-hand and/or second-hand ethics) and multi-scale imagineered places. Such dynamics raise questions, in turn, about the broader importance of a possible retailing of moral difference. We note here three points in this regard.

First, worldshops and charity shops are increasingly aiming to boost quality in the fair trade (and in Oxfam's case, also donated) goods they sell, thereby raising questions about the relationship between 'alternative' status and the social construction of taste in these outlets (cf. Goodman, 2010). True, the push for quality is being pursued in the fair trade market as a whole, as this niche sector enters the mainstream economy thanks to big retailers (e.g. Nicholls, 2002; Nicholls and Opal, 2005). In the process, fair trade has fast become a household name (Goodman et al., 2012; Low and Davenport, 2005). By quality, we certainly mean 'better' tasting and looking. Yet, there is much more at play here than that inasmuch as talk of quality is always about cultural differentiation (Bourdieu, 1984). It also involves a poli-

ticised ethics encompassing such things as 'alternative' development in the South (for example via fair trade) as well as the sense of personal 'moral selving' afforded to consumers through purchase of these commodities (Barnett et al., 2005; Harrison et al., 2005). For Oxfam in particular, the push for quality is an especially complex endeavour given the simultaneous provision of new and used goods – necessitating a campaign mindful of both new (fair trade) goods suppliers on the one hand, and donors of used goods on the other hand. And yet, to ratchet up the 'quality' of the latter has become integral to its operations.[9] For example, the 'Sorted!' campaign specifically asked donors to sort through their donations so that only 'sellable' items would be passed on.

Oxfam's promotion of specialist-cum-designer goods and even shops has taken this quest for taste to new heights. Thus, there is the Oxfam 'Originals' line of shops dedicated to selling retro and vintage fashion, as well as stand-alone book, furniture and music stores, and even dedicated bridal shops (with dresses up to £600 for designer gowns). Meanwhile, there is also the 'Valued' programme which sells high-end goods (such as antiques and paintings) and books on eBay, as well as the 'Unwrapped' programme which sells unusual gifts such as goats and alpacas for the South's poor. Indeed, the designer 'make-over' of Oxfam's clothing stock – aided and abetted by calls for donations that specifically include designer-label clothing – received an unprecedented boost from Victoria (Posh Spice) Beckham back in 2006 when she purchased a cocktail dress and fashion book from the Notting Hill Oxfam store. Thereafter, donations to that store soared by 70% even as customer visits trebled in number, giving rise to a 'Posh effect' in UK charity. All of which builds Oxfam's brand value as a leader in 'quality' provisioning as stated a few years ago:

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[9] There is here a wider story. Thus, ever fiercer competition over low-end goods from cheap clothes retailers combines with increased competition within the charity sector (itself suffering from 'charity-fatigue') to make the need to try and go up-market quite imperative – even if only to stay in business (Broadbridge and Parsons, 2003; Low and Davenport, 2005; Parsons, 2002).

Do you have a flair for fashion? Are you passionate about clothes? With over 600 shops selling clothing, Oxfam can be relied upon to provide the perfect item at an affordable price. Whether you are searching for a designer dress, stylish suit or the ultimate accessory, Oxfam shops are the place to look. At Oxfam we aim to offer our customers a wide range of choice. We stock fashion for men and women, sportswear, outdoor clothing, shoes, fancy dress and much more. If you are looking for something unusual, please ask the shop team whether they have it in stock. All the clothing, shoes and accessories donated to our shops are carefully sorted to ensure you get good quality at a fair price. Our shops only sell items that we think our customers will want to buy. (Oxfam, 2007a)

Secondly, there are differences in how Oxfam shops and worldshops go about pricing their goods reflective notably of differences in their sourcing. Thus, and its push for quality notwithstanding, most Oxfam stores still stock an array of goods sold at relatively cheap prices. Here, the fact of their reliance on *used* goods is to be noted – which means that most goods that enter their doors are virtually free to the NGO (there are small costs associated with sorting, pricing and transporting). Almost by definition, then, there is considerable profit to be made from the sale of these goods – a boon to the fortunes of a charity shop like Oxfam. That profit will depend on the prices that donated goods sell for – which is, in turn, linked to local high street market conditions and consumers' associated willingness-to-pay. In a number of cases and places, they are re-sold 'cheaply', especially where brand names are not involved and/or when stock needs to be turned over quickly (via price discounts and 'sales') to make space for newly arrived goods. In contrast, worldshops clearly do not enjoy the economic windfall that is donated goods. Instead, their goods have to be paid for – and at 'fair' (above conventional market) prices to producers at that. Hence, worldshops are not in the position that Oxfam shops are to be able to conduct alternative retailing 'on the cheap' – indeed, for worldshops to do so would even raise troubling questions

about the way in which they were conducting business with fair trade producers.

In any event, worldshops are not cheap *by design*, as the idea is to generate as much added value as possible. Thus, difference is cultivated not only in a relative ability to pay for pricey goods, but also in what is provided in return: 'quality' foods and 'ethnic' handicrafts. While thoughtfully critiqued by Johnston (2002) and Varul (2008; see also Hendrickson, 1996) as an objectification of the Other, our point here is rather that the aim of this pricing policy (excluding poorer consumers) is precisely to extract more money for 'caring at a distance'. A 'solidarity premium' is paid even as consumers are encouraged to develop a sense of ethically directed solidarity that celebrates difference (Goodman, 2004). Here in the worldshop, then, is a call to solidarity that echoes, albeit in a different fashion, the one that was noted earlier in relation to Oxfam sales tags. Increasing the quality (and hence price) of fair trade products as a means to promote equitable development and respect for difference is thus a growing concern in worldshops. For example, Ten Thousand Villages (personal communication, 2004) has redesigned goods in keeping with a fashionable fusion of Northern tastes and Southern 'traditional' styles in order to pique consumer interest. To this end, it employs style consultants to work with producers in order to enhance the quality of artisan products offered for sale to solidarity-seeking and premium-price-paying Northern consumers.

Third, the alternative retailers considered herein intersect with a growing society-wide concern to protect the biophysical environment, raising another facet to a possible retailing of moral difference. Yet, here, ambiguity and contradiction abound. Take, for instance, the first-hand ethics associated with selling fair trade goods in worldshops and Oxfam shops. Now, in purely environmental terms, such sales are decidedly ambiguous. On the one hand, fair trade goods are produced under conditions that *may* be broadly described as environmentally benign; foods are often (but not always) organic while handicrafts often rely on the re-use of materials and/or extraction from sustainable sources. Indeed, 'ecologically sound production' is included in fair

trade criteria stipulated by WFTO. On the other hand, fair trade goods are coming under fire because they entail 'excessive' food/commodity miles reflective of a large carbon footprint.[10] Indeed, the very success of fair trade compounds this problem – raising uncomfortable questions about the broader ecological wisdom of this commercial form of caring at a distance (Averill, 2007; Kelland, 2007).

Here, the Oxfam charity shop may outshine the worldshop since used goods that it sells represent ecologically commendable 'recycled consumption' – indeed, perhaps even a model for 'throw away' societies. This practice reduces the impact of consumption as shoppers substitute used for new goods, thereby giving discarded clothes, toys and books a new lease of life. True, recycled consumption is still miniscule when compared to overall consumption patterns. Yet, at least *some* consumption has been re-routed in this way – in the process providing partial relieve to overburdened landfill sites. Given growing waste disposal problems, the re-circulation of goods provides extra breathing room for policymakers as they grapple with this crisis. It drags out an otherwise rapid and damaging process (production, consumption, disposal) that is the bane of modern capitalism (Redclift, 1997; Royte, 2005).

Yet this is no radical solution. Prolonging the consumption cycle only postpones the outcome. It does not address a basic flaw in contemporary consumption-driven capitalism. Such re-circulation may simply *reinforce* wasteful consumption, as charity shops help 'marginal' and/or bargain-hungry consumers to partake in a high consump-

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[10] Food miles are the number of miles a particular food commodity travels from field to fork, the reduction of which is now the cornerstone of local food movements (Born and Purcell, 2006; Seyfang, 2006). Part of this argument is the fact that the less miles travelled, the less resources used in transportation, and thus the smaller the total carbon footprint (the amount of carbon emitted to the atmosphere) contributing to climate change. Fair trade, with its need for international travel and larger carbon footprints than local trade, is coming under scrutiny from 'food miles' critics, although the discussion is now beginning to centre on the question of 'fair miles'; see, for example, the pioneering work of Macgregor and Vorley (2006).

tion lifestyle. As one Oxfam shop leaflet observes: "We always try to price your donations attractively and fairly. Our customers often tell us: 'That's just what I've been looking for.' Sorted!"

Conclusion: Ethical Ambiguities in the spaces and practices of alternative economic geographies

This chapter has explored the mingling of space, place, and ethics in cultural economies of alternative retailing with reference to Oxfam charity shops and independent world-shops. It argued that material and discursive ambiguities surround this endeavour complicating their ethical appeal. This is especially so for Oxfam's shops where uncritical acceptance of donated goods has resulted in the propagation of a second-hand ethics. In contrast, a strict focus on fair trade at worldshops prompts a first-hand ethics where nasty conditions of original production are banished. Yet, once an environmental dimension is added, that focus became the source of a new problem: a heavy carbon footprint (linked to transporting goods from the South to the North).

The chapter also examined some of the strategic choices that alternative retailers face. The 'imagineering' of ethically charged place in these outlets prompts complex moral geographies in which connections and disconnections between places of production, consumption, and retailing are selectively emphasised. Whether via 'forward looking' sales tags at Oxfam shops or fair trade foods and handicrafts at worldshops (also to some extent at Oxfam), material and discursive choices are made that are never innocent but rather are crafted to maximise an ethically-based 'alternative' consumption experience. Yet retailing moral difference prompts ambiguities over quality and price, value for consumers, and the environmental ramifications of that experience.

Indeed, one of the key points to emerge from this chapter is that considerable ambiguity surrounds the extent and meaning of 'alternative' retailing on the landscape of alternative economic geographies.

Thus, as the environmental record of fair trade suggests, there may be a fundamental ethical contradiction at the heart of this process that will erode its appeal. Contradictions also abound, meanwhile, when alternative retailing rides on the coattails of mainstream relations of production and consumption as the Oxfam experience with donated goods sometimes produced under unethical conditions revealed. Thus, in scaling up from the everyday, micro-spaces of alternative retail to those of the complex and contentious environments of sustainability governance and policy, the ambiguities of the practices of more sustainable consumption – situated as they are in the contexts of neoliberal markets – must be front and centre. And, this involves not only understanding the retail places and spaces, which forms one of the key ways most 'post' consumers engage with sustainable consumption, but also the very ethical relations retail-scapes work to forge between shoppers, goods, and environmental and social justice.

In light of these findings, it is appropriate to suggest three ways in which future research could serve to clarify further the position of alternative retailing in the context of sustainable consumption and lifestyles. First of all, research is needed that examines the precise material and discursive relationships that link alternative retailing to *other* elements in the broader movements for sustainable lifestyles and not least, the ramifications of those links. Thus, how does such retailing – which asserts a retailing of moral difference even as it tends to use and hence legitimate many sales techniques and discourses found in the mainstream sector – fit with other strands in the cultural and economic promotion of an 'alternative' to the status quo? Much credence is given in alternative movements, for example, to the notion that 'transformed' means are as important as transformed ends – that how you pursue social justice is equally critical as attaining such an end. To what extent, though, does the rise of alternative retailing – indeed, the spread of sustainable consumption as political practice more generally (e.g. Jackson, 2006; Princen et al., 2002) – subvert and/or promote this social movement maxim?

Secondly, and in particular, work is needed on the *reciprocal* nature of the relationship between alternative retailing and its much larger mainstream counterpart, especially in the context of 'planning' for and the governance of more sustainable consumption and production. We noted how the former is not always that different from the latter. This is perhaps not surprising given the ubiquity of mainstream retailing. Tried and tested practices are bound to rub off. However, to what extent can we speak of distinctive *alternative* retail practices and if so what are the key aspects that define them? Further, how might pursuit of a retailing of moral difference and sustainable consumption behaviours afford new opportunities to mainstream retailers? This is more than simply charting the spread of fair trade into supermarkets and the like. There is the bigger question here of how the essence of 'alternative' – encompassing process and product – may be used to boost the mainstream. As the boundary between 'alternative' and 'mainstream' becomes blurred, will alternative retailing even lose its political, economic and cultural utility?

Finally, what does the rise of alternative retailing in the pursuit of sustainable lifestyles as described here reveal about the future direction of a cultural politics of economic radicalism? Are there radical alternatives to it and if so, what are they, and more importantly, how do they avoid the pitfalls of cooption? Does the answer reside in a variant on the 'small is beautiful' argument coupled to small-scale non-capitalist exchange in LETS economies for instance (see, e.g. Lee et al., 2004)? Certainly, the growing environmental predicament might suggest this course of action. And yet, would this not simply be a collapse into a reactionary politics of the local – a politics with little or no place for caring about 'distant Others' (cf. DuPuis and Goodman, 2005)? After all, part of the political attraction of alternative retailing (linked to fair trade) is precisely that it is a mechanism, however flawed, for tackling social injustice worldwide.

These are big questions that perhaps cannot ever be answered in a satisfactory manner. Yet, each in their own way point to the larger social and historical importance of the kinds of alternative retailing dis-

cussed in this chapter, as well as the possibility that the uneasy compromises and awkward ambiguities that bedevil such practices may be a small price to pay given the stark and often unpalatable features of the alternatives that can be imagined. The compromises of alternative retailing – and sustainable consumption more broadly – may thus, in the end, be a price worth paying.

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