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Consultation, Commerce and Contemporary Agri-Food Systems: Ethical Engagement of New Systems of Governance under Reflexive Modernity.

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Abstract

One pressing challenge for any process of democratic engagement or stakeholder consultation over ethical concerns is the problem of how to incorporate commercial stakeholders. This is particularly relevant in relation to issues arising from new genomic technologies and/or food. Commercial stakeholders are powerful, but also arrive at the consultation with a considerable historical of unethical conduct, conflict, opaque discourse and increasingly ineffective governmental remedies. This paper examines the 'commercial problem' in ethical consultation by examining the historical roots of concerns around food commerce in modernity; particularly in relation to the classical formulation of State, Civil Society and Economy that has broadly structured processes of governance in modernity. Under this model, it appears that the commercial problem in ethical consultation is insolvable. A pathway out of the commercial problem is suggested through examination of new theories of post-modern governance. This is particularly relevant in relation to global agri-food chains which have generated new forms of more inclusive governance through the formation of complex audit cultures. The relevance of postmodern governance, and its potential relationship with processes of ethnical engagement, is examined using the case of a new audit system in Europe called EurepGAP which is currently developing new audit standards for salmon aquaculture.

Keywords: Governance, Food, Ethics, EurepGAP, Audit, Industry

1 Introduction

At the heart of many consultation processes lie key assumptions as to the nature, and best way, of engaging with publics. Many of these approaches imply a

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potential dialogic relationship between the consultation process and a wider representative, democratically configured public which presupposes the existence of a unified nation/state, democratic processes and transparent discourse. Such assumptions run parallel to another set of assumptions about the orthodox arrangement of democratic societies: namely, that orderly government relies on a particular configuration and set of compromises in a key triad of relationships between the State, Civil Society and Economy. This article will critically engage with this latter triad with the intent of bringing new insights to bear on the approaches to public consultation that reside in the former. In particular, the question of involvement by commercial parties within public consultation will be examined in the context of agri-food industries in the development and commercialisation of new genomic technologies in food products. Such an examination is, by necessity, challenging in its breadth and complexity. For the purposes of this Special Issue, the following article engages with these issues with specific reference to both a particular set of models of ethical consultation with publics (as outlined in Tansey & Burgess (2006) the Burgess and Tansey article in this Special Issue), and the specific issue of genomic innovation in the production of salmon as a food product.

To reach this goal, a number of intermediate steps are required. First, this article will frame the longer historical context of commercial development in industrial agri-food systems—particularly in terms of the long history of controversy and mistrust around commercial stakeholders in agri-food systems. Second, this brief historical review brings us to the key 'commercial question' in agri-food conflicts; a historical legacy of presumed deceit, mistrust and mystification by commercial participants in agri-food systems. Such concerns operate across a wider terrain in late-modernity than simply food. Understanding this wider terrain is essential for unlocking the 'commercial question' in ethical consultation. By understanding contemporary social politics as involving an alternative model to that provided by the classic modernist vision of State, Civil Society and Economy, the question of commercial involvement in ethical conflicts can be reframed in terms of: the 'risk society', the shift from government to governance, and the rise of New Social Movements.

This alternative model is drawn from the work of Foucault, Beck, Giddens and Harvey which suggests that Western societies have moved from a state of government (organised around the nation/state) to governance (with more diffuse and spatially unbounded processes of governance). At the same time, a social shift has occurred from dominant modernist discourses of progress, beneficial science, and technological control towards the 'risk society' and an era of 'reflexive modernisation'. This alternative model poses key questions for how consultation processes might take place. What are the implications of a shift from government to governance? How are new systems of governance taking shape around ethical issues relating to food, and how might they be engaged in the consultation process?

One particular site of interest in the emerging governance of contemporary agri-food systems is audit culture. New mechanisms of audit are argued to have emerged out of neoliberal devolution of governance away from the nation/state.

These new governance systems have been examined and critiqued by many scholars. It can be argued, however, that some of these new food-related audit cultures are actually forming a hybrid site of governance between civil society and industry. When these kinds of audit cultures form, they provide a window for potential positive engagement with the wider ethics of commerce in agri-food systems.

In summary, the troubled history of industrial agri-food systems both creates difficult issues around the participation of commercial stakeholders in consultation processes as well as opening up new sites of hybrid commercial/public governance that may become key foci for consultation processes. Innovation in salmon genomics may create a set of challenges to the salmon agri-food system that will draw exactly these hybrid governance structures into political action around salmon. These will be discussed in relation to the emergence of a new audit alliance around salmon aquaculture in Europe.

2 Framing the Commercial Question for Food: A Brief History of Bad PR

Issues of concern over the safety of food, and various crises in the human food supply, have been strongly shaped by the history of industrialisation in the West. Prior to and through the Industrial Revolution (encompassing 1750–1900), human relations with food were irrevocably altered. During the 18th and 19th Centuries, with the depopulation of the countryside and the urbanisation of the new working classes, a new style of human/food relations became established due to the fact that large numbers of people had become increasingly distanced from sites of food production. Burnett (1989); Tannahill (1988); Braudel (1973) and Wolf (1982) all outline the process by which the British population became dependent on sources of food from not only outside the new cities, but also outside Britain itself. This new food system—involving specialised food production by ‘farmers’ (and the far-flung peasants and plantation workers of Western empires)—was always a tenuous and unstable affair.[1] The new food system led to a food supply and nutrition crisis in the industrial cities by the end of the 19th century and also created new cultural and economic issues for food safety (Tames, 2003). This was strongly related to the emergence of a new category of business—that which resided between the newly specialised producers and consumers of food—which might broadly be termed the food industry (Fraser, 1981; Fine & Leopold, 19990).[2] Tannahill (1988) and Burnett (1989) argue that by forcing the majority of the population to rely upon the uncertain honesty of

[1] And in this text, the consequences of an emerging global food order are restricted to those impinging on Western societies. Other works, like Davis (2001) detail the catastrophic consequences experienced outside the West.

[2] This was not an entirely novel category of business. Food suppliers were always part of the wider process of city-based commerce. The distinction that emerged in the Industrial Revolution was that for the first time in human history, the vast majority of a country's populace became entirely reliant on the food industry for basic provisioning. In scale alone, the change was revolutionary.

'middle men', a crisis of food adulteration emerged which erupted into a major concern for urban dwellers. Charles Dickens in Chapter 19 of The Pickwick Papers encapsulates these concerns in a soliloquy by Samuel Weller on the practice of killing and baking cats in pies to decrease costs and overcome variations in the stable supply of the usual pie meats. While the cats in pies might be mythical, more concrete historical examples of food adulteration included fine sand in sugar, watering down milk, brick dust in cocoa, alum in bread, cyanide in wine and vitriol in beer (Tannahill, 1988; Burnett, 1989). Thus from the outset, new commercial entities processing, provisioning and retailing food in the Industrial Revolution developed an ill-favoured reputation with wider publics.

Any review of the ensuing structural and economic elaboration of the world food system is, by necessity, very shallow. For the purposes of this article, a few key transitions will be highlighted which demonstrate how, even a century later, commercial parties to the food industry continue to be a source of concern for consumers.

The Industrial Revolution comprised a pivotal period in which the primary crisis around food—food supply and availability—was increasingly replaced in the Industrial West by other, less direct, concerns about the safety, quality and nutritional value of foodstuffs (Fitzgerald & Campbell, 2001). Under the emerging structures of nation/state government, the formal structures of the State took responsibility on behalf of Civil Society for the regulation and control of these risky dimensions to the food industry. Under this stable configuration, the 20th Century saw decades of high public confidence in food, dietary nutritional improvement across Western populations and slowly decreasing crises of food supply and security. Such stable patterns began to break down in the second half of the 20th Century. Friedmann & McMichael (1989) suggest that WWII formed the key breach in the stable 20th C food order with wartime food supply crises changing the policy orientation of Western governments. In the post-war period, the creation of high levels of subsidies, combined with the related emergence of food multinationals and agricultural technological conglomerates, ushered in an era of rapid intensification of agriculture and a re-emergence of crises of public confidence in the food supply. This package of new intensifying agricultural practices and business relationships was politically marketed as the 'Green Revolution' and high levels of public support of agricultural intensification throughout the 1950s and 1960s were evident across Western countries (for a review of these broad changes see Goodman & Redclift, 1991; Tansey & Worsley, 1995; Atkins & Bowler, 2001).

This strong support of commercialising and intensifying agriculture began to unravel in the late 60s. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* is credited with catalysing a crisis in confidence over the presence of new pesticide compounds in food. Emerging food surpluses in the West, coupled with the invention of Aid policies towards Third World countries saw the rapid extension of intensive agriculture to other parts of the world, increasingly emerging in tandem with food crises for peasant producers and environmental degradation where new intensive farming methods became established.

The emblematic case demonstrating some of these concerns was the Nestlé

infant formula controversy in the 1970s (Ledogar, 1975; Bader, 1980; Zelman, 1990). Capitalizing on the disposal of milk powder surpluses by the West, Nestlé initiated a significant marketing drive of infant formula into Third World countries. Food activists launched a campaign to boycott Nestlé products claiming that the use of Nestlé infant formula was highly unsuitable for Third World conditions and had led to the death of millions of babies. A subsequent court case generally substantiated these claims and the industry has since initiated decades of discussion on codes of practice in Third World countries.

The slow decline in public acceptance of the rhetoric underpinning the Green Revolution was strongly influenced by a range of emerging problems. The environmentalist critique of pesticide over-use and the Nestlé boycott were just the beginning of a wider series of claimed crises, including: destruction of rainforest to enable cattle ranching in Latin America (Edelman, 1987; Myers, 1981); catastrophic famines among peasant producers in Africa—notably in countries that had been touted as successful exemplars of green revolution-based development (Lappe & Collins, 1988; Atkins & Bowler, 2001); increasing eutrophication of waterways, destruction of wetlands and soil degradation as a result of intensifying practices (McNeill, 2000); and animal welfare activism spreading from concern over laboratory settings to include intensive production of chicken and pork (Schlosser, 2001). Additionally, there have been health crises over food in the 1990s of which BSE was the most notable case; wider crises about overnutrition in the West (while malnutrition still plagued the rest) (Nestle, 2002; Critser, 2003); and a move by anti-globalisation activists to target agri-food transnationals like Coca-Cola, Monsanto and McDonalds as exemplars of the emergence of broad economic and cultural hegemonies in global society.

While the substance of many of these claims is debated at length in many arenas, the indisputable effect is that the agri-food industry is now subject to criticism, scrutiny and contention over issues of reliability, risk and trust. Many new social movements now openly identify commercial entities in the food and agriculture industries as being the cause of major problems facing humankind (Nestle, 2002; Schlosser, 2001). Having established that agri-food industries (comprising food suppliers, retailers, processors as well as agricultural technology providers) have increasingly encountered legitimacy problems over recent decades, it is important for this discussion to contextualise this in terms of issues of government and governance.

Friedmann & McMichael (1989), in their influential analysis of the structural transformation of the global agri-food system post-WWII, clearly centre the rise of corporate involvement in agriculture inside the post-war triad of relations between State, Civil Society and Economy. In the post-war period, and in pursuit of food security in the West, all Western governments pursued high levels of productivity from agriculture. They achieved this through indirect subsidisation to convert wartime industry into peacetime agricultural technology provision alongside massive investment in agricultural science, and through direct subsidisation of agricultural producers to increase technology uptake and generate higher yields. Within this highly subsidised environment, large corporate businesses found agriculture to be a highly attractive environment for commercial

activity. No other commercial sector—aside from defence—benefited from such enormous levels of state spending. During the ensuing years of the 'Fordist compromise', high state subsidisation, high tax, high welfare and increasing wages lead to the longest period of sustained economic growth since the 19th Century. At the heart of this, the green revolution played its part in reinforcing that the post-war boom was, at heart, a humanitarian venture dedicated to 'feeding the world'. Friedmann & McMichael (1989) argue that the eventual destabilisation of the Fordist compromise came about due to the slippage of corporate regulation out from under the direct governmental activities of nation/states. Big corporations became multi-national and transnational corporations, and the established framework of State, Civil Society and Economy was undermined as economic (de)regulation slid upwards into the globalising world economy. In short, the last three decades are characterised by crises and conflicts over global agriculture and food systems that have escaped national systems of regulation. The post-war remedies of state government—subsidisation, welfare and regulation—have decreasing relevance to globalising agri-food systems and their discontents. It is in this context that the 'commercial question' in ethical disputes over food can be better understood.

3 The 'Commercial Question' in Food Ethics: 'Guaranteed not to turn Pink in the Can.'

This longer historical context provides us with three important guiding concerns in considering the contemporary issue of how to engage commercial entities in ethical discussions around foods. First, the dramatically transformed human/food relationships that emerged out of the Industrial Revolution are novel and have, throughout their history, been fraught with difficulty, conflict and public unease. Second, there is a widespread perception that commercial stakeholders in the agri-food industry are the driving force behind a range of highly undesirable outcomes for society and humankind in general. Finally, the agri-food industry has slipped out from under direct state regulation and exists in some kind of unaccountable space in the globalised world economy.

It is understandable, then, that when conflict over food emerges, many publics (and researchers) identify commercial parties in a negative light. This can be seen in the processes and positioning of research into the process of ethical consultation. To focus the discussion, the specific case of salmon will be addressed in this paper.

In an attempt to identify key stakeholders to any potential process of ethical consultation around salmon, Burgess & Tansey (2005) conducted focus groups in Canada about novel genomic technologies in salmon. The two goals of these focus groups were to identify Canadian stakeholders around novel salmon genomic technologies, and to sketch out the range of issues they raised. Burgess & Tansey (2005) chose not to include direct commercial stakeholders, but the issues of commerce were ever-present. This was a key theme of NGO partic-

ipants in focus groups as well as appearing in the responses (listed below) of members of groups representing random members of the public and representing researchers involved in salmon research:

Negatively: the profit motive, political favours, narrow interests of corporates, lower standards in risk evaluations, speed of transition between invention and commercialisation, competitive secrecy, lack of regulation (all appeared as concerns for NGOs). To these can be added foreign ownership, intellectual property problems, equitable outcomes for local commercial fishers, and overfishing.

Positively: creating economic growth, jobs, a better kind of work, underpinning threatened communities.

Clearly, the problematic role of commercial entities in ethically contested parts of the agri-food system still resonates strongly across many publics.[3] Scepticism towards commercial stakeholders, established from the outset of commercial development of agri-food systems after the Industrial Revolution, remains. However, while it is possible to identify a range of concerns and conflicts that can arise from commercial activities in ethically challenging situations, the question of how to engage, resist or simply avoid such stakeholders remains open.

The process of ethical consultation, public deliberation or wider deliberative democratic practice appears, prima facie, to be incompatible with participation by commercial stakeholders. To take this discussion forward, it is arguable that there are three immediate reasons why this taken-for-granted assumption is warranted.

1. The historical study of food industries, as they have developed since the Industrial Revolution, suggests that these industries are particularly fraught with conflicts and strong commercial self-interest that have rendered commercial food entities intrinsically worthy of suspicion not trust.

2. The fundamental nature of food commerce relies upon advertising, PR and opaque discourse. The key characteristic of food industries is invisibility and mystification, which is unlikely to be compatible with being a willing partner in a consultation process that is premised on some degree of transparency.

3. That in an era of declining government regulatory activity, increasingly globalised agri-food systems fall outside the usual mechanisms of state regulation and policy remedies and constraints.

[3] The use of salmon as the key case study in this research does raise an interesting aside. Of all commercial fisheries, salmon have a special place in the popular culture imaginary of industry and commerce. One of the best loved anecdotes of US commercial life is the almost certainly apocryphal story of how a US marketer, when faced with a batch of white fleshed salmon, branded the product as 'guaranteed not to turn pink in the can'. This anecdote, in many variant forms, has become a staple of US business lore (see http://www.snopes.com/business/market/pinkcan.asp). The key subtexts worth noting are that industry prospered through duping a gullible public, and that industry promises about food products are intrinsically untrustworthy.

The first of these impedimenta is amply demonstrated by the already undertaken brief history of the agri-food industry in the industrial era. Throughout modern history, agri-food companies, agricultural industries and their related science endeavours have been both at the forefront of the highest aspirations of modernity and also the root of declining public trust in scientific authority, the politics of development, food safety and environmental sustainability. Incidents like the DDT-crisis, BSE, dioxin contamination, environmental degradation, the rise of the fast food industry and the nutritional cheapening of the Western diet inevitably position the agri-food industry as a cause of potential problems that are subject to ethical dialogue rather than an actual stakeholder that might be invited to join in the process. In the modernist triad of State, Civil Society and Economy, the agri-food industry appears to be clearly positioned within the Economy third of the triad; exactly the kind of entity from which the State should be protecting Civil Society. Within this model, the Economy is a realm where self-interest governs all other actions and thus cannot be relied upon to act in the wider interests of society. This triad has held both popular appeal, as well as providing the tacit underpinning that has framed a considerable body of social scientific research.

The second reason for eliminating commercial stakeholders in the agri-food industry from planned deliberative democratic or ethical consultation processes, is that they are perceived as being unable to provide trustworthy and transparent discourse. Clearly, the public face of many agri-food companies is associated with deceptive branding and product advertising, designed to sway public taste and ideas in subtle and opaque ways (Klein, 2000). Large agri-food companies use the services of PR and advertising organisations to such a degree that many political activists automatically associate spreading global cultural hegemony with food brands like Coca Cola and McDonalds. Again, this kind of reputation among publics (and researchers) suggests a less than useful role for the agri-food industry in processes of public dialogue.

Finally, there is some doubt as to whether the contemporary agri-food industry actually conforms to the modernist triad of State, Civil Society and Economy. Such a triad suggests that the Economy is automatically subordinate to the State (implying the nation/state), whereas the actual reality of post-WWII change in the structure of agriculture and agri-food systems is that the corporate agri-food companies are increasingly globalised and remote from any direct state regulation. Prior to 1985, agriculture was automatically excluded from global regulatory mechanisms like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (later to become the WTO). Other global regulatory institutions, like the Codex Alimentarius Commission, are often critiqued for susceptibility to lobbying by agri-food corporates. All these examples seem to suggest that food industries have become somewhat elusive when faced with the traditional restraints of state regulation, policy and control. Freed from these constraints, there seems little to recommend the agri-food industry as a participant in deliberative democratic processes, dialogue or ethical consultation. Seen in this light, a deliberative democratic process, or a process of ethical consultation, seems perfectly justified in targeting non-commercial parties as the key group

of stakeholders to bring to a process of ethical dialogue.[4]

These accumulated impedimenta to even the contemplation of a possibility that commercial entities in agriculture and food should enter into ethical consultation processes underlie what this article refers to as the 'commercial question' in consultation processes. In slightly more expanded form, the commercial question stems from two clearly accepted lessons from modern history: first, that food and agriculture industries are highly suspect and should be treated with suspicion; and second, that food and agriculture industries are highly influential, with considerable political and economic power. The commercial question, therefore, involves an important conundrum. If we exclude agri-food industries from our ethical consultations, are we dooming our efforts to irrelevance as some of the true power-holders will continue to act unbound by any resolution that ethicists might assemble from marginalised and powerless stakeholders? Yet, how can we invite such dubious parties into ethical consultation without undermining the premises of the whole endeavour?

The rest of this article will attempt to plot a pathway through this conundrum using exactly these premises: the assumption that policy/regulation in a governmental context is the desired outcome of ethical consultation or deliberative democratic processes. It will do so by reframing our social model away from the classic triad of modernity towards the more complex (and risk-laden) terrain of reflexive-modernity. Put simply, if agri-food industries are not susceptible to government under modernity, might they be more susceptible to new forms of governance under reflexive modernity?

4 An Alternative Model: Risk, Reflexive Modernity and Food

While the 'postmodern turn' in the social sciences has taken many forms—and resulted in a bewildering array of consequences—this article will focus on three particular shifts in the way social scientists have theorised the state of Western society. These are: the shift from production politics to consumption politics in the risk society leading to the emergence of reflexive modernisation; the rise of New Social Movements; and the theorisation of the activity of governing in an era when the strict governmental activities of nation/states has been

[4] As is exemplified by Burgess & Tansey (2005, p. 4.) who in deliberately targeting the 'quieter' voices in public debate, suggest that: "*[T]his form of representation in ethics requires substantive engagement with the values and meanings that may not readily be represented in **the market** or dominant culture...*" (emphasis added). In this quote, the market appears as the dominant voice which must be temporarily muted in order to allow other, quieter voices to be heard. In accordance with this positioning of the 'loud' commercial context there was no recruiting of industry or other commercial players into the focus groups (although it could be argued that industry-funded scientists are part of the wider group of commercial stakeholders in the industry—even if they were not recruited to represent that specific point of view): "*First, recruitment must involve people who are not typically engaged in the debates related to the policy issue. Second, recruitment must involve people who may have interests, but are often excluded from voicing or promoting interests...*" (Burgess & Tansey, 2005, p. 7–8.).

significantly reduced.

Prominent theorists like Anthony Giddens, David Harvey, Ulrich Beck and Michel Foucault proposed (with some significant variations) that the traditional assumptions of how Western society is structurally configured are either in error, or no longer apply. The traditional sociological focus on nation/states, with significant structural divisions of class, gender and race, has been swept away by new models for articulating the structure and changing composition of Western society. Uncertainty replaced progress. Structure became post-structure. It was, in the terminology of Lash & Urry (1987): 'the end of Organised Capitalism'.

The work of Ulrich Beck provides a good exemplar of one part of this complex theoretical shift. Beck argues that we have left behind the classical social structures of modernity (so well characterised by the triad of State, Civil Society and Economy) and entered a new phase of social relations. This new phase is primarily characterised by a shift from the politics of class (which dominated modernity since the Industrial Revolution) to the politics of risk. Under the class politics of 'classical' modernity, social politics was characterised by struggles over unequal access to wealth, resources, political power and rights. The dominant discourse of classical modernity was progress, underpinned by unproblematic acceptance of the supremacy of science-based knowledges and the self-evident beneficial nature of new technologies. Beck proposes that this dominant style of social politics has been replaced by struggles over risk, and the control of risk (Beck, 1992; Beck et al., 1994). His term for this new phase is 'reflexive modernity' where the social consensus over the supremacy of science has broken down, the dominant discourse of progress has been replaced by uncertainty, and where the social politics of the affluent no longer adhere to class conflict, but are positioned within wider concerns about the negative impacts of modernisation (ecological, health-related, cultural, spiritual). In this phase, affluent society becomes 'reflexive' and self critical of the negative consequences of rapid economic expansion. The economic logic of the times shifts from being the logic of production efficiency and innovation to being the logic of consumption and consumer politics.[5]

The second shift in the social scientific theorisation of Western society flows directly from the first. A significant emerging sociological phenomenon, which is strongly associated with new public perceptions of risk and threat, is the formation of New Social Movements (NSMs). From the post-war period, social scientists have observed the emergence of global scale political groupings that are qualitatively different in style and focus to that which went before. Jasper (1997) and Offe (1985) describe these as New Social Movements which move beyond the industrial politics of the labour movement, and also supercede the 'citizenship' politics of the civil rights movement, second wave feminism and gay rights (Jasper, 1997). NSMs are as likely to target their activities towards the media, science or technologies as to the state itself. Often their concerns are

[5] Both Beck and Giddens have adopted this term. The basic conceptualisation of 'reflexive modernity' is articulated in Beck et al. (1994).

global in scope—like the environment or nuclear proliferation—and, characteristic of reflexive modernity, they ascribe causal blame for current problems to exactly those technologies and scientific processes which previously were held in such high esteem. In recent decades, NSMs have included agricultural technologies (DDT, persistent organic pesticides, GM) and food crises (including BSE and numerous others) in their arena of interest and concern. Combining this with Beck's wider analysis of the risk society, NSMs have contributed to, and amplified, the 'riskification' of food for many affluent consumers.[6]

The final major shift is the recognition that nation/states no longer form the logical organising template for understanding the politics of Western societies. In an era of simultaneous globalisation and localisation, the nation/state is increasingly stranded betwixt and between significant sites of political action and process. Giddens (1984) argues that this is typical of a wider 'compression of space and time' in late-modernity. The boundaries of the nation/state are penetrated and dis-organised: individuals become increasingly connected at a global level through new technologies and also alienated from traditional political processes. David Harvey sees the same shift as symptomatic of a transition from organised, state-supported and regulated, industry towards the more fluid global sprawl of multi-integrated and networked circuits of economic activity (Harvey, 1989). Economic terminology, according to Harvey, changed from the language of industry and development, to commodity systems, financial circuits, action networks, nodes and clusters; the world of hyper-economies.[7]

Within this final shift—the change from organised nation/states to disorganised global economies—social scientists have been interested in the survival or elaboration of the process of governing in an era where national governments have become a site of reduced influence. This search generally ends up with the term 'governance'. Originating with Foucault's discussion of governmentality and technologies of government, this term has become a veritable grab-bag of parallel concepts. Broadly speaking, governing involves multiple possible rationalities of governance founded upon order, discipline, organisation or authority. Sites of governance can therefore occur at a variety of social scales: from individual self-regulation and self-surveillance; through any form of ordered and organised social activities, to the traditional realm of government and out to global processes and their distant and connected ordering. Without wishing to enter the quagmire surrounding the correct definition of governance (and governmentality) for the purposes of this article it is sufficient to introduce this term as indicating the process of governing at multiple sites and scales, especially as it has developed in the aftermath of declining nation/states as the key site of government in Western societies. Despite its broad parameters, this definition provides an important context for the later discussion of emerging new systems of governance in agri-food systems.

[6]The term 'riskification' comes from Chaia Heller, and is used here in the context that Murcott provided in her analysis of the new consumer politics of Science, Policy and GM (Murcott, 2003).

[7]This shift is partly legitimated by, and partly (retrospectively) justified by, the political rhetoric of neo-liberalism.

This broad review of the postmodern turn in the social sciences is insufficiently complex to satisfy committed scholars of this pivotal period in Western social change. However, even this brief sketch provides some important insights that can be taken forward in the rest of this article. In particular, it is important to recognise that this view of contemporary Western society strongly contrasts with the assumed order of that society as it emerged after WWII. Even a brief rendition of these changes demonstrates that the classical vision of State, Civil Society and Economy has limited relevance in the world of reflexive modernity, risk, consumption politics and dispersed sites of governance. In consequence, the conundrum of commercial participation in democratic processes around the ethics of food and food production—as is so clearly framed in the classical social model—can be partially overcome by recourse to a more nuanced understanding of agri-food systems, governance and change in contemporary society. While it would be foolish to suggest that all the negative powers of agri-food corporates have been bound, restrained and vanquished in contemporary society, there are some intriguing new sites of governance that, at the very least, give some purchase on how we might engage these commercial entities without sliding into cooption, deception or power asymmetries of the kind that have characterised agri-food industries throughout modernity. This window into constructive dialogue with agri-food systems is being opened by a new form of governance called audit culture.

5 Agri-Food Systems and New Audit Cultures: Certified Organic and EurepGAP

One consequence of the breakdown in the established triad of State, Civil Society and Economy is that the production and consumption of food needs to be understood through more complex mechanisms than might otherwise be denoted by terms like the 'food industry' or 'agriculture'. Agri-Food theory examines this new complexity by articulating the way in which food systems are characterised by a mesh of relationships from paddock to plate (and from fishing ground to domestic freezer) (see Buttel, 1996). Agri-food systems often move across national boundaries, and draw together potential stakeholder groups from many different social worlds. These include: industry groups, primary producers, consumers, distribution industries and retailers, government regulators, public interest groups, NSMs, indigenous peoples, and the geographic communities that economically derive their wealth from agri-food industries. More importantly for this article, agri-food systems have become an interesting site of new forms of governance over food.

Audit culture forms an interesting subset of new forms of governance. Shore & Wright (1999) closely associate the rise of audit culture with the neo-liberal move to reduce government regulatory activity. Audit operates in a sphere of regulation, discipline and control which involves business, firm and industry internal processes rather than the agents of the nation/state. The association

with neo-liberalism has provided the opportunity for a considerable body of critique to emerge about the intended versus actual outcomes of audit cultures (see Campbell et al., 2006). While the linkage to neo-liberalism is significant, however, it is not determinative. Other social sites and groups have also been launching audit initiatives to achieve their aims in the marketplace. These are most notable in agri-food systems. While agri-food industries have been creating food standards, grades, traceability and best practice systems for a long period, the most intriguing new audit systems are hybrids; often involving relationships between commercial bodies and wider groups in society like NSMs. The first, and most high profile, hybrid audit system in food production was the creation of certified organic produce (Campbell & Stuart, 2005). It is in organic certification that the solely technical focus of food standards to that point, began to move into the measurement of ethics, values and judgements about abstract qualities like the sustainability of food production systems. These hybrids form an important, and controversial, new site of engagement between social movements and industry.

The organic agriculture movement experienced many rising and falling phases of influence throughout the first half of the 20th Century (Stuart & Campbell, 2004). In the 1940s, a cluster of ideas that strongly critiqued new forms of industrial inputs into agricultural production coalesced into formal organisations. In the UK this was the Soil Association (formed in 1946); in New Zealand, the Humic Compost Association (1941). These formal groups went into slight decline in the 1960s, but emerged with more strength within the counter-cultural political movements of the late-1960s and early-1970s. Guthman (2004) charts the rise of a strong organic agriculture movement in California during the 1970s with a markedly oppositional critique of mainstream agriculture, economy and society. By the 1980s, the multiple regional manifestations of organic philosophy around the world began to organise under a global umbrella group—the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. In the terms used by social theorists, organic agriculture had all the characteristics of an NSM. As (Guthman, 2004) cogently argues (supported by Campbell & Liepins, 2001; Campbell & Stuart, 2005; Stuart & Campbell, 2004), the philosophically oppositional nature of the organic critique of mainstream economy and agricultural practice came under increasing strain due to one key process transforming organic agriculture: it was rapidly becoming a successful mainstream industry. This posed a significant crisis for many members of the organic social movement as its core activity was rapidly adopting the values and processes of the mainstream economy: exactly what they were trying to avoid. The 'solution' proposed by the world organic movement is instructive. Systems of organic inspection and certification around careful negotiated standards of organic production were developed. These, in theory, would ensure that organic production could both participate in the wider economy, while retaining its special ethical and values base.

Organics, therefore, became the site of the first clearly identifiable hybrid system of governance overtly seeking to incorporate the values of an NSM with

the processes of the mainstream commercial economy.[8] While the organic movement has endlessly debated the consequences of this hybrid compromise (see Guthman, 2004; Stuart & Campbell, 2004), the new style of certification of food products to demonstrate particular claims of environmental sustainability, ethics and values, began to proliferate and take on new forms. These include Free Trade, Dolphin-Friendly, and also incorporated other products like wood and fibre.[9]

The initial impetus for food audit schemes may have come from NSMs, however, large multiple retailers like supermarket chains have also established their own independently certified schemes underpinning food labels that claim 'environmentally friendly' production practices (Murcott & Campbell, 2004). The parallel processes launched by NSMs from one direction, and large retailers in another, came together in the most compelling recent example of the emerging power of hybrid governance schemes; a European audit alliance called EurepGAP.

Originating from a European retailer working party in the mid-1990s, EurepGAP developed into a powerful new hybrid audit alliance (Campbell et al., 2005, 2006). Using independent audit organisations, EurepGAP placed most of its energies into the design of robust and legitimate standards for; 'safe and sustainable global agriculture'. These are constructed within the key governance mechanism behind the success of EurepGAP—that of Technical Standards Committees comprising a careful balance of food system stakeholders creating standards using consensus decision-making processes. Stakeholders were gathered from among: retailers, consumer groups, government agencies, producer organisations, agribusiness companies, and a range of NGOs. The four key elements to the EurepGAP audit that emerged from these committees were: food safety, environmental sustainability, animal welfare and worker welfare. This audit is now rapidly incorporating and superceding a wide range of sector-specific, firm-specific or chain segment audits to become an alliance of considerable power; standing as a gatekeeper to the elite food markets of Europe.

While the success of EurepGAP in achieving many of its higher goals is being debated elsewhere (see Campbell, 2005), there is no denying that both in itself, and as a signifier of wider changes in food governance, EurepGAP demonstrates that this kind of new governance system is a powerful new feature of the world food economy. Such an outcome is entirely consistent with the alternative model of Western society posed by theorists of reflexive modernity and the risk society. EurepGAP emerged as a result of new consumer power, the resultant rising power of food retailers in the agri-food chain, the anxious politics of risk in an era of food scares, and the collapse of the nation/state as a

[8] The unique quality here is its hybrid nature. There are numerous historical precursors suggesting innovative governance over commercial food products, including: halal slaughter requirements for meat exporters to Islamic countries, the regulation of kosher foods, and control of locally-unique food qualities like balsamic vinegar or new Beaujolais wine. The organic case is distinctive for the negotiated compromise between an NSM and commerce via an independent audit system.

[9] Busch & Bain (2004) also describe initiatives from the Rainforest Alliance, World Wildlife Foundation and Marine Stewardship Council.

site where adequate governance of global agri-food chains could be maintained. EurepGAP, and its kind, are arguably the most purebred progeny of reflexive modernity's search for new forms of agri-food governance.

6 Auditing Aquaculture: New Windows of Opportunity under Reflexive Modernity

Let us return now to the three key reasons that lie behind the conundrum of the commercial question in ethical consultation or deliberative democracy:

1. that the longer history of agri-food industries since the Industrial Revolution has been fraught with conflicts, and strong commercial self-interest that have rendered commercial food entities intrinsically worthy of suspicion not trust.

2. that the fundamental nature of food commerce relies upon advertising, PR and opaque discourse. It seems unlikely that, given 200 years of mystification of food production, processing and retailing practices, that the food industry will come as a willing partner into a consultation process that is premised on some degree of transparency.

3. that in an era of declining government regulatory activity, increasingly globalised agri-food systems fall outside the usual mechanisms of state regulation and policy remedies and constraints.

It is important to state quite clearly that these three processes are still the dominant mode of operation for the majority of the world's commercial trade in foodstuffs. There has been no dramatic recent paradigm shift in the fundamental structure of global food systems which might suggest that these basic impediments have been removed. What this paper suggests, however, is that there are now small sites of engagement opening up which do provide a much better opportunity for interaction between agri-food commerce and wider stakeholders in food systems. These sites are opening up, in particular, around elite markets in consumer-dominated markets like the EU, Japan and parts of the US market. In an influential review of the state of the world food economy, Busch & Bain (2004) argue that the emergence of new food audit, assurance and environmental programmes is a small, but growing, counter tendency in affluent food markets. Further, it is possible to argue that such niches are disproportionately influential. Given the tight margins and highly competitive nature of global food trading, niche markets in places like the EU provide some of the few opportunities for food companies to receive significantly above-average returns from food sales. Hence, some of the world's largest food trans-nationals—like H. J. Heinz & Co.—are strongly investing in audit and assurance systems in elite markets. This is not to say that the outcomes of new audit systems are universally positive. The evidence to date, particularly from the organic industry, suggests that while new audit systems are having a profound influence on

the structure of food industries, the outcomes are not always as the originators of the audit intended. Rather, these systems have become highly contested sites within food systems.

To conclude this paper, it is useful to apply the insights of new audit systems of governance under reflexive modernity as they apply to salmon and aquaculture. What window of opportunity might exist for constructive engagement between stakeholders in salmon agri-food systems and potential commercial stakeholders?

In the context of this Special Issue, a number of potential issues have been identified that give cause for concern over new commercial developments in salmon agri-food systems. The views of focus group participants in Burgess & Tansey (2005) have already been listed. Alongside these, Power (2003) identifies numerous commercial issues being confronted in the salmon aquaculture industry in British Columbia. Clearly, salmon, and salmon aquaculture, are confronted by a similar set of commercial issues to those experienced in a many other agri-food systems. Consequently, it is interesting to see that ethical issues in aquaculture, and issues relating to salmonids in particular, have been at the forefront of emerging new forms of governance in agri-food systems. The EurepGAP audit alliance was launched in 1999. A couple of years later, a Technical Standards Committee was formed to discuss the creation of EurepGAP protocols for aquaculture (and salmonids in particular). Retailer Ahold NL, auditing organisation SGS and Belgian seafood company Fjord Seafood Pieters drafted the initial standards, which were then refined through consultation and the addition of Stolt Sea Farm (to provide input on aquaculture operations), Nutreco (a fish feed manufacturer), Panfish (a specialist salmon producer) and Scottish Quality Salmon (a quality assurance alliance with numerous partnerships in industry, government and NGOs) to the committee. Based around the auditing of food safety, occupational health and safety, and environmental sustainability (and including specific provisions around auditing the non-GMO status of fish), the EurepGAP Integrated Aquaculture Assurance Standard (IAA) was launched in October 2004.

In the European context, the EurepGAP IAA opens up an important site of governance for dialogue over ethical issues in salmon production. EurepGAP's commitment to bringing as wide a group of stakeholders as is possible into the design and refinement of standards has strongly contributed to the alliance's legitimacy in the minds of many NGO groups. Likewise, the strict linkage of audit standards to lucrative quality retail outlets makes the adoption of EurepGAP standards highly desirable for commercial participants. While the IAA standards have only just been launched, it will be interesting to see if they move down the same path as EurepGAP's fruit and vegetable standards (see Campbell et al., 2005) and become the minimum European standard for supplying large retailers.

The conclusion of this article is that, while the classic configuration of food industry governance under high modernity created significant impediments for the successful engagement and regulation of ethical conduct by food industries, the transition to reflexive modernity, and opening up of new sites of agri-

food governance, provide important new opportunities for engaging commercial stakeholders in food industries (including salmon). The emergence of NSMs and the consumer politics of risk under reflexive modernity have created an entirely new site of potential discipline over food industries. Likewise, the new audit systems effectively confront much of the mystification of food systems which previously enabled commercial entities to conduct their main dialogue with consumers via the medium of advertising. Audit culture undermines any contemporary attempts to make claims about the pinkness of canned salmon. Finally, audit culture provides an important new site of hybrid governance negotiated and contested between civil society and economy. Even if the state has declined as the key site of government over agriculture and food, these new sites of hybrid governance provide an important locale where ethical engagement with agri-food systems can potentially take place.

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